

Stefanie Knauss | Daria Pezzoli-Olgati [Eds.]

# Religion in Representations of Europe

Shared and Contested Practices



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Europe a Prophecy, William Blake, 1794 (printed in 1821), relief etching, colour printing, hand colouring, watercolour, pen and red ink, touched with gold, on paper, 23.4 x 16.9 cm, The Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge (P.127-1950)

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In memory of  
Prof. Dr. Gerhard Larcher (1946–2022)  
Wonderful mentor and supporter of the study  
of the arts, media and religion



# Table of Contents

<b>Acknowledgements</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Introduction</b>	
<b>Religion in Representations of Europe</b>	
Daria Pezzoli-Olgiate and Stefanie Knauss	11
<b>Part I</b>	
<b>Representations of Europe through the Centuries</b>	
<b>Mapping Britain's View of Europe</b>	
The Theological Cartography of the Anglo-Saxon <i>Mappa Mundi</i>	
Sean Michael Ryan	37
<b>The Road to Nowhere?</b>	
A Critique and a Re-imagining of Religion in Europe in Sir Thomas More's <i>Utopia</i>	
Ann Jeffers	65
<b>Pieter Bruegel's <i>Tower of Babel</i></b>	
A Multivalent Symbol of Europe and the EU	
Natasha O'Hear	85
<b>Eating What We Are, Being What We Eat</b>	
Visualisations of Food Regulations in Europe through Time	
Natalie Fritz and Paola von Wyss-Giacosa	111
<b>Part II</b>	
<b>Imagining Europe from the Outside</b>	
<b>European Matter and Mughal Spirit</b>	
Imaging Europe in Early Modern Mughal Painting	
Alberto Saviello	145

## Table of Contents

<b>The »Buddhisation« of Europe</b>	
<b>A Tibetan Account of Europe in the Early 19th Century</b>	
Dolores Zoé Bertschinger	167
<b>An American Religion in Europe</b>	
<b>How Latter-day Saints' Temples Communicate a Worldview of Sublimity and Separation</b>	
Marie-Therese Mäder	195
 <b>Part III</b>	
<b>Contemporary Practices of Representing Europe</b>	
<b>Imagining Europe across Borders</b>	
<b>A Religious Studies Approach</b>	
Alexander Darius Ornella	221
<b>Public Memory under Construction</b>	
<b>Exploring Religion in the House of European History in Brussels</b>	
Carla Danani and Daria Pezzoli-Olgati	251
<b>»To Be the Soul of Europe«</b>	
<b>Images and Metaphors in Pope Francis's Vision of Europe</b>	
Baldassare Scolari	289
<b>Representing Europe in a Children's Book</b>	
<b>Values between Commonalities and Demarcation</b>	
Verena Marie Eberhardt	313
<b>The Band Lordi as Rock 'n' Roll Angels</b>	
<b>Staging Religion in the Eurovision Song Contest</b>	
Anna-Katharina Höpflinger	335
<b>Festivals of European Film and Their Image of Europe</b>	
<b>Religious Complications</b>	
Stefanie Knauss	351
<b>Authors</b>	389

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# Introduction

## Religion in Representations of Europe

Daria Pezzoli-Olgiaiti and Stefanie Knauss

The cover of this book shows the frontispiece of *Europe, a Prophecy* by William Blake. This complex image highlights the themes on which we reflect in this volume. In the illuminated etching, Urizen, the demiurgic character of Blake's mythological repertoire, designs the world. He is depicted as a mighty figure, his grey hair and beard blown by an invisible wind. On his knee bending forward, brows furrowed in concentration, the powerful man stretches his left, oversized arm in a vigorous effort to measure or create something placed below the frame of the image. This divine force is placed in front of a star, perhaps the sun, surrounded by heavy clouds, with the figure nearly blocking out its light. In this primordial scenario of cosmological proportions, the compasses, a human geometrical and architectural instrument, appear somehow alien to the act of divine creation. They evoke rational planning, measuring, drawing a perfect circle. According to Blake's visual representation, the demiurge does not create a dimension of life, he *constructs* Earth. The frontispiece introduces a book in which »prophecy« is understood as a deep, creative interpretation of what has already happened and as an invitation to take a position in relation to it. Prophecy in Blake's understanding relates to the hermeneutical effort of interpreting the society one lives in.<sup>1</sup>

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1 For an introduction to the hermeneutic work of William Blake see Rowland 2022. Rowland describes prophecy as follows: »Part of the way in which Blake wanted to get people to understand things differently was through prophecy. That did not mean predicting what would happen, but understanding more deeply what was going on and telling the truth as one saw it. ›Every honest man [and woman] is a prophet‹, he wrote. Blake prophesied about the nations, about America and Europe in particular. In both cases he was writing after the event. Prophecy meant helping people to understand the deeper mean-

Created in 1794, in the aftermath of the French Revolution with its political, cultural and religious repercussions that echoed far beyond France and Europe, this powerful, both challenging and enigmatic image invites reflection on the role of religion in shaping images and promoting ideas of Europe as a common ground for the people who inhabit this part of the world. Blake's image challenges us to think about Europe as a material place, an idea and a construction. Europe, as we experience it in our present, requires continued – perhaps »prophetic« – interpretation to understand it and to imagine its future.

The case studies collected in this volume are the result of a research project undertaken in the context of the International Exchange on Media and Religion, an interdisciplinary network of scholars established in 2006 which focuses on questions of visual and material communication in studying religion.<sup>2</sup> Since 2019, we have collaborated on this project on religion in representations of Europe and met regularly to present our individual studies, to pursue collaborative studies, and discuss our conceptual premises, theoretical frameworks, and methodological approaches. The authors work in Germany, the United Kingdom, Italy, Switzerland, and the US, and from a range of disciplinary perspectives, including the study of religion, theology, the history of art, media and film studies, anthropology, classics, and philosophy. As a group we bring together not only various disciplinary fields and academic traditions, but, most importantly with regard to this specific topic, different political positions and identities in relation to Europe and the European Union which also shape our approach to the topic of this volume.

Our project was conceived and realised during a phase when the idea of Europe was challenged in various ways: the tormented process of Brexit questioned the sense of the stability of the European Union, as do the still unresolved controversies about the framework agreement between the EU and Switzerland. As we write this introduction, the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine have fundamentally impacted our understand-

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ing of history, the repressive reaction of the nascent British empire to the American colonies, in *America*, on the one hand, and the resistance of the *ancient regime* in Europe to change, on the other, which was in fact being overtaken by revolutionary events in France after 1789 when Blake produced *Europe*» (686–687).

2 See <https://media-religion.net>. The results of the network's research projects have been published in Pezzoli-Olgati/Rowland 2011; Pezzoli-Olgati 2015a; Mäder/Saviello/Scolari 2021.

ing of Europe as a geographical area, as the result of political planning, and as a symbolic dimension. Today, borders, nations and their political choices, transnational relationships, and the values considered fundamental to Europe are more than ever under discussion, and these experiences will shape our imagination of Europe's past, present and future.

These current political and social crises and developments show that the terms we engage with in our case studies are contested. What is Europe? How are ideas of Europe represented? What do we think of when we speak about religion in such representations of Europe? And how does religion shape these imaginations, and what are their effects? These questions cannot be addressed in a general way, and there is no single answer to them because there are too many different ideas and concepts of what Europe and religion are, could or should be in the past, present and future. Instead, our project focuses on a selection of case studies where these ideas and concepts crystallise in a particular source: a text, a work of art, a place, a map. In each case, »Europe« stands for a different discursive formation: the Europe of our sources is what each researcher is pointing to when they use the term.<sup>3</sup>

In this sense, Europe appears to be more an expression of a relationship than a well-defined or stable entity. Yet, even if there is a broad range of representations of Europe, and often, these ideas and ideals of what it means are contested and challenge each other, they all impact ways of thinking of and living in Europe as shared reference points. Thus, this volume offers a panorama of different ways of imagining across time and space. It discusses the presence (or conspicuous absence) and function of religion in designed, described, desired, or contested representations of Europe as a common ground – something that is both a (perhaps imagined) foundation and a future project – drawing on symbols, narratives or practices that we perceive as inspired by or associated with a religious tradition or community.

A shared conceptual framework of this volume is our understanding of representations (here in particular of Europe) as the materialisation of mental ideas, expectations, imaginations, or ideals in different media. In relating material objects to mental images (and vice versa), representations are per-

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<sup>3</sup> We draw in this formulation on Damon Knight's (1956, 33) insight that there is no definition of »science fiction« that all users of this term would agree on but »that it means what we point to when we say it.« Something very similar is true with regard to the term »Europe«.

formative practices that include numerous agents in complex processes of communication through specific practices of production (like filmmaking, engraving, or designing buildings) and interpretation in academic or popular discourses, through quotations or transformations of other representations. Moreover, representations actively shape processes of meaning making and negotiation surrounding ideas of Europe as an entity, of European identity, of the values that characterise Europe, and the boundaries that delimit it. In this »work of representation«,<sup>4</sup> myths and metaphors play a crucial role as shared resources of representational strategies and possibilities which do not only express ideas of Europe but also contest and renew them.

In this introduction, we attempt to map out the discursive territory in which the idea of »Europe« is constructed and in which our case studies are situated. We then draw together some threads from the multiplicity of approaches and insights of the various chapters to highlight some significant aspects in the presence and function of religion in representations of Europe.

## 1. What is Europe?

One of the major issues in thinking about Europe arises from the very term itself. »Europe« is a polysemic, ambivalent word that resists any attempt to define it in a univocal way. Europe is not simply a reality that we can refer to when we talk about it. Instead, it stands for discursive negotiations that assume different meanings for different people. »Europe« may reference a geographical entity, or a civilisation rooted in classical antiquity,<sup>5</sup> Christendom<sup>6</sup> and the Enlightenment.<sup>7</sup> Or it can be understood as a way of life or a

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4 Hall 1997, 13.

5 For a discussion of the values derived from Greek Antiquity (such as individualism, participation in the public sphere, or the importance of property) and the impact of the Roman legal system on contemporary Europe, see Meier 2008.

6 For the identification of Christendom with »Europe« in the Middle Ages, see Delanty 1995; Huber 2008 discusses values derived from the Jewish-Christian tradition still formative today, such as human dignity, tolerance, freedom and responsibility, and neighbourly love.

7 The Enlightenment has impacted European self-understanding both in terms of a particular form of rationality, political organization, and a secularist worldview (see for example Delanty 1995).

specific tradition in the arts, architecture, fashion or food. Europe is often associated with a community characterised by shared values, united by its experience of trauma and remembrance of conflict, war and genocide. Europe also stands for a political entity, and it is often linked to a certain way of conceiving knowledge and science.<sup>8</sup>

This plurality of understandings is complicated even further by the fact that each of them is in itself ambiguous, extending or delimiting what Europe encompasses. A geographical understanding of Europe might be the most immediate and straight-forward approach, yet the continent of Europe is difficult to delineate. The current war in Ukraine is the latest reminder of the historically constructed character of Europe's boundaries, in particular towards the east where Europe merges apparently seamlessly into Asia. Furthermore, the continent's western oceanic boundaries are also less clearly defined than one might think, with »Europe« reaching towards islands such as Iceland or overseas territories remaining from colonial times. While the geographic understanding can, thus, be quite expansive, Europe's definition as an aesthetic-stylistic unity tends to be more reductive, limiting what is considered »European« to the artistic production and traditions of western Europe. And even as a political entity, the European Union, Europe is unstable, because of continuing expansions and struggles about power and commitments between individual member states and the EU.

Further ambivalences emerge when looking closely at the implication of these different ideas of Europe and their functions: while aiming at internal integration, the idea of Europe also reinforces external boundaries and differences. Defining itself via a shared culture, it neglects the fact of its own cultural plurality resulting from exchanges throughout the centuries: Europe's identity is eccentric and achieved through integrating others.<sup>9</sup> In addition, whilst the »Fortress Europe« might be closed to migrants, it remains open for cheap labour and goods,<sup>10</sup> and ideals of mobility and freedom lead to a sense of unsettledness and insecurity.<sup>11</sup> Emphasis on peace and a shared past down-

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<sup>8</sup> See for example Quenzel 2005, 98–134, who identifies eleven different positions in discourses around Europe in the feuilletons, social sciences and humanities.

<sup>9</sup> Fornäs 2012, 16, with reference to Rémi Brague's notion of »eccentric culture«.

<sup>10</sup> Bauman 2004, 21.

<sup>11</sup> Fornäs 2012, 15; Bauman 2004, 95–96.

play Europe's history and contemporary experiences of conflicts,<sup>12</sup> while the desire for a collective European identity is met by scepticism with regard to its normative implications.<sup>13</sup> The vision of Europe as transnational openness is counteracted by the emphasis on regional cultural and political identities.

These ambivalences also extend to the regulative dimension of the idea of Europe. Labelling something as »Europe« or »European« references hegemonic discourses, in a positive and/or negative sense. It may be a statement that associates a quest for a common ground linked to positive values such as solidarity or democracy, modernity or progress. Or »Europe« might be used as a strategy of demarcation against what is considered ideologically constraining or as an »other« from which to distinguish the »self«. The hegemonic power of »Europe« also expresses itself in its often implicit limitation to the western part of the continent as the »true« Europe, perhaps a heritage of the Cold War, with central and eastern regions remaining at the edges of attention.

Given the impossibility of defining »Europe« unambiguously, myths, metaphors and symbols are even more important to provide a common ground and a connection among those who relate to Europe, and »to appreciate our shared past and tentative future«.<sup>14</sup> Luisa Passerini outlines several functions of myths as they establish a range of relationships between self and nature (mystical function), with previous generations (chronological), among members of a community (sociological) and with future generations (pedagogical).<sup>15</sup> Ancient Greek myths provide elements to imagine Europe's origins (the myth of Europa and the Bull), its tenacious reconstitutions after conflicts, catastrophes and destruction (the myth of the Phoenix who rises from the ashes) and its focus on technological development (the myth of Prometheus). Jewish mythological narratives such as the Tower of Babel offer ways to understand the tension between linguistic and cultural diversity and unity as a risky but attractive challenge. These and other mythological narratives make plausible the idea of a common ground beyond historical contingency.

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12 Delanty 1995, 2; Bottici/Challand 2013, 61.

13 Delanty 1995, 1.

14 Soskice/Melloni 2004, 9.

15 Passerini 2003, 22.

However, as Stuart Hall points out, the recurrent myths might also represent Europe as a uniform, closed entity which curiously contradicts the founding myth of Europa and the Bull: the figure of Europa is not »European« but a stranger who is forcefully carried to what is now considered Europe. To counteract these delimiting tendencies of the formative myths, Hall thus proposes to broaden the »canon« of myths to include other narratives, such as the Wandering Jew, that emphasise liminality, openness and otherness as positive values.<sup>16</sup>

Equally, metaphors play an important role in discursive formations of Europe since they offer a shared visual and linguistic vocabulary and an interpretative frame that enables integration and understanding at the same time as allowing for polysemy and creativity. Leading metaphors referring to the semantic sphere of a family or a shared house are particular widespread. They represent Europe as a community sharing a common home, linked by strong relationships and characterised by solidarity and mutual care or, alternatively, by the tensions that may shape family relationships. Also, plant metaphors recur frequently with images of Europe as a flourishing field or a growing tree conveying ideals of unity and prosperity. These myths and metaphors express varying ideas of Europe that go beyond the mere intellectual understanding of what Europe is or should be and enable emotional and rational identification.

Without being able to fully exhaust the wide-ranging, complex debates about Europe with its conceptual history, political dimensions and symbolic valences, we highlight here three aspects that shape Europe and that seem of particular relevance in the context of our project: the question of shared European values; the dialectic between integration and fragmentation, and the related tension between identity and difference or otherness. A brief look at the role of religion in discourses on Europe will conclude this section.

The question of values is, of course, an important one. Roman Siebenrock notes that, paradoxically, »Europe is a continent only because Europe is more than a geographical designation.«<sup>17</sup> If Europe is understood as something »more« than a geographical entity, if it is a community, a culture or even just a common project not yet fully realised, then shared values are one important element that ties this community together, provides a sense of identi-

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16 Hall 2003, 42–44.

17 Siebenrock 2004, 11.

ty and informs its future goals. However, in the case of Europe, these values are only vaguely defined and, even if they become norms on the EU level, they are hard to realise, as ongoing controversies with Poland, Hungary and Germany over the value of the rule of law and the normativity of national vs. European court decisions show. Nevertheless, there seems to be a common sense understanding – or perhaps a shared imaginary – of certain values, rooted in different traditions, that shape European politics, culture and societies: freedom, equality, democracy, rationality, peace, solidarity, the rule of law, secularism, integration, tolerance, prosperity.<sup>18</sup> While these values are proposed as universally valid, Hall critically notes that they are limited in their traditional as well as current scope:<sup>19</sup> until quite recently, freedom was limited to white, male citizens and excluded colonial subjects and slaves, values of solidarity or mobility apply today to citizens of European states but not to migrants or refugees from outside of the continent. Just like Europe as a whole, its values, too, are in constant negotiation in response to geo-political and cultural developments and yet provide a common reference point – perhaps more as ideals than as formal guidelines of concrete political or individual practice.

As already mentioned, European integration and unity are a central concern which is, however, counteracted by Europe's cultural and political heterogeneity, its values of mobility and diversity, and its history of conflict. This dialectic between unity and diversity is mirrored, on a political level, in the EU's motto, »United in diversity«, and the circle of stars on the European flag expressing unity and harmony.<sup>20</sup> The heterogeneity of Europe as a metaphorical »family of cultures«<sup>21</sup> may be taken as enriching, as intended by the motto, or as a threat to the intended unity of the political or cultural entity, as experienced in past conflicts, an ambivalence that at times is also expressed through reference to the myth of the Tower of Babel. Integration may be seen as the way to the peace and solidarity envisioned for Europe, or vice versa as the totalising homogenisation of diverse traditions. Thus, for Johan Fornäs, »European integration policies must link transnational uni-

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18 Baschiera/Di Chiara 2018, 244–245; Bottici/Challand 2013, 127; Quenzel 2005, 128.

19 Hall 2003.

20 Fornäs 2012, 105, 117.

21 Bondebjerg 2012, 650, with reference to Anthony D. Smith.

fication to issues of multicultural citizenship and polysemic identification« as experienced in internal and external migration and mobility.<sup>22</sup>

This dialectic between unity and diversity is, of course, connected to the relationship between identity and difference or otherness. While the concept of »identity« associates sameness and the identification with what is perceived as similar, Hall reminds us that instead, identity is »constructed *through* difference«.<sup>23</sup> That is, self-understanding and identity depend on the other as a necessary reference point. Attempts to shore up one's precarious self-identity against its dependency on the other might then develop into dynamics of exclusion or division given the power dynamics that influence the processes of identity formation on the individual and collective level. Through these dynamics, the self-understanding of Europe and European identity has been profoundly shaped by its »others« across history, from Germanic »barbarians« to Muslims, the »savages« of the Americas, the communist threat of the Cold War, and – again today – Islam as the paradigmatic »other«.<sup>24</sup> In contemporary Europe, Turkey and – in an even more evident fashion since the invasion of Ukraine – Russia represent for different reasons the otherness over against which Europe defines itself in geographical, political, cultural, social and religious terms. The construction of these external others suggests a unified European identity, which, however, is challenged by the experience of internal otherness, the heterogeneity of European cultures and languages. As the development of identitarian and populist movements across Europe shows, diversity is not always experienced as enriching. Constructively dealing with otherness as a part of identity is a necessary practice to avoid exclusion and racism.<sup>25</sup>

What then might be the role of religion in these complex processes of defining Europe, its values and the dialectics of identity and diversity shaping its community? Again, ambivalences emerge: while Christianity is usually named as one of the roots of Europe (together with ancient Greek and

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22 Fornäs 2012, 16.

23 Hall 2003, 38 (emphasis in the original).

24 See Delanty 1995, who traces these developments from antiquity to the present; for a discussion of Islam, and the consequent emergence of religion as an issue in European identity discourses, as the contemporary other of Europe, see Bottici/Challand 2013, 145–165 and Fuess 2022.

25 Delanty 1995, 98–99, notes that historically, racism has been a core element of the idea of Europe through violence, colonialism and othering.

Roman culture and the Enlightenment tradition), this construct of a Christian Europe renders invisible both the presence of other religions within Europe throughout history, and the internal plurality within Christianity with its different denominations. Another ambivalence can be noted with regard to the role and presence of religion in Europe which is, on the one hand, recognised as formative of Europe given the historical identification of Europe as a religious, political and cultural entity with »Christendom« in the Middle Ages. Furthermore, religious traditions continue to play a foundational role in the lived experience of many Europeans. Yet, on the other hand, this complex religious constellation has been downplayed in favour of a secularised discourse of Europe, as is visible for instance in the controversies about the mention of Christianity in the draft of the European constitution and limited mentions of religion in the significant European treaties.<sup>26</sup>

Perhaps, given Europe's history of violent conflicts over religion, secularism is seen as the »safer« option, reflecting an understanding of religion – notably both the tradition considered »European«, Christianity, and its religious »other«, Islam – as a source of conflict and best limited to the private sphere. Bottici and Challand note »the biased and selective use that can be made of religion as a *positive* marker of an alleged European community by stressing a *negative* view of an other«<sup>27</sup> and call for the recognition of religion as a bridge among different groups and their existential questions.

## 2. »Religion« in representing Europe

The case studies presented in this volume show that religion continues to play an important role as a frame of understanding, in the legitimisation of norms and values, and as a resource of myths, metaphors, and symbols through which to make sense of this precarious, amorphous reality that is Europe. With the concept of »religion«, we do not only address institutions; rather, we encompass also practices of the transmission and diffusion of religious symbols, narratives and practices in societies and cultures. These religious

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26 Bottici/Challand 2013, 151–153.

27 Bottici/Challand 2013, 163 (emphasis in the original).

aspects of the shared cultural imaginary may be fragmented and/or diluted, but still, as we will see, they convey worldviews and values.<sup>28</sup>

The various chapters of this volume illustrate the ways in which metaphors, symbols and myths are used to imagine Europe as a community of shared values and traditions and/or as a future project by using more or less explicit references to the European history of religion and contemporary traditions and communities. The chapters are organised according to the different processes of the transmission of religious knowledge and worldviews, practices and institutions expressed in them.

The first part, *Representations of Europe through the Centuries*, draws a diachronic line with selected examples from the Middle Ages to Early Modernity, establishing a (religious-)historical frame to better understand contemporary practices of imagining and representing Europe, highlighting both ruptures and continuities.

Sean Michael Ryan's article arises out of an observation of the ways in which Britain (or, the United Kingdom) has been situated ambivalently in relationship to the European continent in discourses prior to Brexit. Ryan draws on maps, perhaps the most obvious representations of Europe, specifically an Anglo-Saxon *mappa mundi*, to show that this ambivalent positioning of England at the edge of Europe as both connected and separate, has a long tradition. His analysis of the map, its sources and associated geographical texts as well as monastic and theological discourses results in rich insights into the imaginaries that have informed Britain's self-perception and views of its relationship with Europe throughout the centuries. The tendencies to relegate Britain to the margins of the known world are counteracted in this map by drawing the island in closer to the continent, allied with Scandinavian trading partners and even asserting claims over territories to the south. For the monastic viewers of the map, Britain's peripheral status is re-valued when viewed from the perspective of eternity as integral to the missionary goal of the divine plan that the gospel be preached »to the ends of the earth«.

In the same geographical context, but drawing on a different source, Ann Jeffers provides an analysis of the role of religion and religious tolerance in Thomas More's *Utopia*. She approaches the text by highlighting its paratexts, in particular maps and translations. A comparison between different visual-

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28 See Pezzoli-Olgiati 2015b.

isations of Utopia in maps emphasises different appropriations of the complex religious constitution of this imaginary island. Similarly, translations into vernacular European languages adapt Thomas More's ambiguous text to the different religious-political contexts, re-interpreting the depiction of the religions (plural!) of Utopia according to current debates in the various countries. Jeffers concludes that *Utopia*'s (self-)deconstructive mode of engaging with the social and religious discourses of its time opens new possibilities for European societies today.

Natasha O'Hear's contribution begins with two artworks originating from roughly the same period as More's *Utopia*, Pieter Bruegel's paintings, *The Tower of Babel*. In the context of the ongoing search for European identity, she analyses Bruegel's visual interpretations of the biblical myth, as well as its afterlife in 20th century visual representations of the EU, particularly in posters and architecture. *The Tower of Babel* informs both representations aiming at strengthening the EU as a political project as well as anti-EU propaganda. O'Hear's analysis provides insights into how supporters of the EU project imagine Europe, perhaps as a sort of quasi-religious community, and conversely, how some of the opponents of the EU were able to take this imaginary of Europe and turn it into anti-secularist polemic.

Natalie Fritz and Paola von Wyss-Giacosa also trace a line from Early Modernity to contemporary times in their discussion of visual representations of norms regulating food consumption. Their analysis of historical and contemporary sources, all of which originate from a European context, shows how visual representations regulate food consumption in the combination of economic, health and strongly religious-moral discourses. Following a diachronic approach, they note persistent motifs and lines of argumentation in normative discourses of food consumption in Europe. In this context, Europe functions as an imaginary normative power which has historically regulated – and still does – the life of its population in different ways, with its authority based on historically and religiously legitimised common values and norms that guide the coexistence and collaboration of different countries and the lives of individuals in this region.

In the second section, *Imagining Europe from the Outside*, perspectives on Europe from other continents and/or their religious traditions are collected, offering striking perspectives on processes of othering. It is noteworthy that in these outside perspectives on Europe, religious frames of refer-

ence play an important role in trying to access the European »other«. Alberto Saviello heeds Dipesh Chakrabarty's call to »provincialise Europe« and to challenge the humanities' Eurocentrism in the reversal of perspective in academic studies of cultural contacts. In his examination of visual representations of Europeans in Mughal painting at the turn of the 16th and 17th centuries, he asks what image of Europe these paintings evoke and how this image was related to the culture and the moral and religious norms of the Mughal court. He observes that the Mughal court's enthusiasm for the natural and technological »wonders« that Europeans brought with them, including visual arts that aimed at the mimetic representation of the visible world, was countered by an abiding scepticism about supposed European materialism. Saviello's analysis shows that in a kind of dialectical process, Sunni Mughal artists synthesised the mimetic approach of European art with the traditional idealising style of Persian painting to create a more sophisticated practice of representation that would be able to merge the external material world and inner truth.

Centring on a Tibetan perspective on Europe, Dolores Zoé Bertschinger analyses the little-known early 19th-century Tibetan geographical compendium by the 4th Tsenpo Nomon Hen Jampel Chökyi Tenzin Thrinley, focusing on his geographical representation of Europe and specifically, the Tsenpo's reassessment of Christianity. Through its identification of Spain with the mythical place of Shambhala, the text presents a »Buddhisation« of Europe. Bertschinger concludes that looking at Europe from an early-19th century Tibetan perspective opens up new approaches to its spatial order, its cultural practices and mythical dimensions in which Europe appears as a figure of never-ending layers of meaning and imaginations. In light of the Tsenpo's depiction of Europe, European readers might ask how their understanding of European histories, politics, economies, cultures, and religions would change were they to be reassessed through a Tibetan and Buddhist lens?

Applying a different perspective, Marie-Therese Mäder focuses on the exterior and interior design of the Latter-day Saints temples built in Europe to reflect on how these buildings represent the worldview of a religious community established outside of Europe. She concludes that these temples, which do not adapt to European architectural conventions, function ambivalently. On the one hand, they highlight this religious community's origins in the United States (especially Utah) by reproducing the same monumen-

tal design of their temples in the US all over the world. On the other hand, the impressive architecture of Latter-day Saints' temples expresses a separation from the outside world, a celestial purity and perfection that can also be achieved by members attending temples in their European cities.

Finally, the third part collects studies on *Contemporary Practices of Representing Europe*, focusing on the manifold occurrences of religious references in different media. Alexander D. Ornella begins with his childhood memories of crossing the Austrian border into Italy or Slovenia (Yugoslavia at the time) to reflect on the meaning of borders, in particular in the image of Europe as a fragmented whole, and their religious dimension. Drawing on his own experience and a photographic project tracing the border between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, he shows how borders impose their power by materialising imaginations of the functions of borders as both connecting and dividing different entities. Although borders are human-made, they disguise their artificiality. Critically addressing borders and border territories, and observing human behaviour in these places, makes visible their human createdness as well as their paradoxical function in the imagination of a Europe without borders.

Carla Danani and Daria Pezzoli-Olgati analyse the House of European History, a museum located in the EU quarter in Brussels aiming at developing a common historical knowledge of European history. The museum was designed to promote a common memory and, consequently, a common European identity. The authors analyse the museum as a place where visitors may engage in the process of thinking about what Europe means for them, what it is now, and how it could develop. The continent is represented as a uniform entity with roots in Antiquity and Christianity and characterised by secularisation since Early Modernity. The permanent exhibition focuses on the 20th and 21st century and stages historical events that characterise, according to the promoters and curators, European identity. While religion plays a marginal role in the museum, the plurality of languages receives great attention as an enriching trait of Europe.

Baldassare Scolari turns to verbal representations of Europe in his analysis of the metaphors used in Pope Francis's speeches about Europe. After tracing the continuities in the Catholic Church's statements concerning the European project, he analyses the main semantic fields from which metaphors are taken (especially the family, plants and construction) and the rhe-

torical strategies adopted by the Pope. Scolari underlines the fundamental role that metaphors play in discursive and imaginative practices aimed at giving a normative foundation to the project of the European community.

Drawing on a medium not commonly considered in discourses on Europe, Verena Eberhardt's contribution analyses an illustrated children's book and CD that take readers on a journey through Europe in stories, songs and dances. She explores the book's visual and textual representations of peoples, nations, and an imagined European community, arguing that Europe is understood as a very complex concept that is characterised by multiple cultural, geographical and political ruptures. At the same time, the book seeks to overcome these ruptures in the representation of Europe as united in a common canon of values.

A similar argument is developed by Anna-Katharina Höpflinger who analyses the role of religious motifs in the Europe represented in the Eurovision Song Contest. This music competition is held among the members of the European Broadcasting Union, which includes European nations and other countries from different parts of the word. In her chapter, Höpflinger focuses on performances using explicit religious symbolism. She argues that as part of an internationally received popular culture, the references to religion in the Eurovision Song Contest, which are not tied to specific religious traditions, convey values like diversity, democracy and commercialism.

Finally, Stefanie Knauss's contribution focuses on festivals of European film to reflect on how they imagine Europe through their mission and programming, and what role religion plays in these constructions. She argues that the festivals imagine Europe as marked by inclusivity and diversity, with an emphasis on Europe's geographical and cultural dimensions, as well as a focus on an ethics of social justice and concern for those at the margins. While religion is not a predominant theme in the festivals' profiles and films screened, it is nonetheless one of the voices heard in the public sphere of the festivals, and its presence and contributions challenge the secularisation narrative of Enlightenment Europe as well as dualistic perceptions of religious traditions as markers of belonging and difference, and thus sources of conflict.

The chapters collected in this book study a broad range of practices of representation in various media – often those that do not usually garner the attention of discourses on Europe or on religion. They privilege sources that address Europe as a – realized, imagined, desirable, contested, or impossi-

ble – whole entity. All in all, the book covers a broad territory, both literally in terms of the geographical European areas investigated, and metaphorically in the range of ways to imagine Europe, the roles that religion plays in them, and the theories and methods used to investigate them. Still, it is noticeable that a western and central European perspective is predominant in the volume, mirroring the authors' research focus, their linguistic, cultural and religious-historical expertise, as well as personal background. Studies focusing specifically on eastern Europe with its particular challenges in developing their identity as part of Europe after the Cold War and their particular religious configurations are missing here, as are those with a focus on northern Europe/Scandinavia. And thus, this field of investigation offers itself to future research, to compare and confront with the tendencies in representing Europe, and the roles and functions of religion in them, developed in this volume and traced, in an indicative fashion, in the following last section of this introduction.

### 3. Leitmotifs in representing Europe

Various ways to imagine Europe emerge from the studies collected here, thinking of Europe as a shared place, a common ground for living together on a continent whose borders are fluid and subject to frequent transformations.<sup>29</sup> These imaginations of Europe are moulded by the logic of the media and material representations we analyse, each with their own specific features.<sup>30</sup> As mentioned above, our case studies emphasise an understanding of representation as a practice in which material culture and mental images interact.<sup>31</sup> This tension between the materialisation of idea(l)s and expectations and their representation in different media is essential to understand the ways in which diverse imaginaries of Europe coexist while also being rooted in different places, times, and societal spheres. In fact, Stuart Hall argues that this »work of representation«<sup>32</sup> is fundamental for the reality of an entity such as Europe:

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29 For an introduction to Europe as a continent see Flannery 2018.

30 See Hall 2003, 39.

31 See Hall 1997.

32 Hall 1997, 13.

So nations and supra-national communities – if they are to hang together, and construct a sense of belongingness among their members – cannot simply be political, economic or geographical entities. They depend on how they are represented and imagined; they exist within, not outside, representation, the imaginary. Stories, symbols, images, rituals, monuments, historic events, typical landscapes, and above all myths, told and retold, lend significance to our humdrum existence by connecting our banal, everyday, lives with a larger, more poetic destiny which predates and will outlive us.<sup>33</sup>

The case studies draw on a broad range of media, such as maps, texts, engravings, posters, architecture, photographs, museums and their exhibits, verbal images such as metaphors, paintings, children's books, folk and pop music, television, internet sites, film and food. These very different media materialise a vast range of ideas of Europe and of the role that religion plays in its imagination. In spite of this diversity, it is possible to identify several recurrent topics and aspects that appear to be crucial in understanding how Europe is imagined, and the way in which religion functions in these representations.

First, spatiality appears to be a central, if complex concept that allows us to think of Europe as a common, shared territory, even if the precise boundaries of this territory remain somewhat fuzzy. The category of place plays a fundamental role as the ground on which to situate an imagined Europe. From a theoretical perspective Europe is understood as a physical extension, as the result of planning and construction (remember Blake's demiurge discussed at the beginning of this introduction), and as a »third space«, a symbolic expanse in which meaning-making processes arise, are negotiated and challenged.<sup>34</sup> This spatial approach promotes the analysis of representations of Europe as dynamic processes of construction through media. Still, representations do not depict what Europe *is*. Depending on the contexts in which they are produced and received, the images of Europe studied here represent this common ground as a movement, an intention, a changing dimen-

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33 Hall 2003, 39.

34 About the different qualities of space see e.g. Lefebvre 2000, Casey 1996, Soja 1996 and Löw 2001. For an overview on different approaches to spatiality in a cultural studies key see e.g. Döring/Thielmann 2008.

sion or a relationship with others or otherness.<sup>35</sup> This is especially obvious in maps whose visual representations of Europe's geography are influenced by the significance attributed to Europe (or parts of it) by their creators. In these spatial dynamics, religion plays an important role as it provides a lens for understanding the spatial expanse, giving it meaning and significance. It helps to establish, legitimise and challenge borders, and to articulate relationships, even in cases where religion plays a rather marginal role.<sup>36</sup>

As a second central theme, the diachronic temporal axis emerges: Europe is both a place and a time. Imaginations of Europe rely on a tentative historical and/or mythological foundation and legitimisation, a remembered common past that, at the same time, allows a projection into the future, shaping the idea of what Europe could or should become. In tracing diachronic developments, both continuities and discontinuities become apparent, in particular with regard to the continued presence and role of religious traditions by means of transformed, adapted or fragmented references. In the reflection on the chronological dimensions of imaginations of Europe, memory and remembrance are paramount. By shaping common memories, and associating them with feelings and emotions,<sup>37</sup> processes of inclusion and exclusion are formed. Memory is performed as a means of involving individuals and collectives into a process of establishing a common ground by projecting it on a diachronic dimension. Remembrance and memory are always a dialectical process of including and forgetting: some traditions are considered as an integral part of the performance of memory, others are excluded.<sup>38</sup> An example for this dialectic is the way in which representations of Europe consider linguistic and cultural traditions as constitutive of its shared memory, but omit religious traditions since they are associated with conflicts and divisions that no longer have a place in Europe's peaceful present.<sup>39</sup>

In these processes of remembrance, the collected case studies highlight three different strategies of dealing with religion. Religion can be identified with a specific tradition: references to mythical fragments from Antiquity, in particular the myth of Europa and the Bull, significant narratives such

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35 Hall 2003, particularly 37.

36 Nexon 2006, 279.

37 See Passerini 2003, 27.

38 See François 2011.

39 On this aspect see e.g. Byrnes 2006 and Nexon 2006, 279.

as the biblical story of the Tower of Babel, or Christianity as formative of Europe's past, associate religion with a limited corpus of texts, narratives, and practices tied to a particular canon or institution. In this clearly delimited form, religion remains a relevant reference point. The second strategy considers religion as something that historically contributed to creating a common ground and shared values but has been overcome in secular modernity. Hence, imagining Europe diachronically describes a process of emancipation from religious institutions, particularly Christianity.<sup>40</sup> The onset of secularism is seen as the premise for building a strong, unified European identity in the present, especially in debates concerning the political structure of the EU. However, even if values or norms (such as those relating to food and eating) have been »secularised« over time, their religious groundings are not completely lost and may reappear even in a secular context. The third strategy becomes apparent in some sources which use symbols, narratives and practices that originated in religious traditions but are now recombined into new forms or transposed beyond religious communities and traditions. Here, remembrance is not a process of repeating and reproducing what came before but of the creative development of new forms that reference past traditions but also free themselves from them.

A third theme that emerges from the representations of Europe studied here is the tension between the two poles of diversity and unity. On the one hand, narratives emphasise the importance of diversity and plurality, on the other hand, they reflect a genuine interest in sustaining processes of identification with Europe as a common territory and community. In addition, the poles of unity and diversity each bear ambivalent values. Diversity may be understood as richness or as a motive for conflict; unity as community or uniformity. The case studies note a broad range of strategies to articulate the negotiation of identities and identification in the interplay between inside and outside perspectives, between processes of belonging and exclusion. European identity and unity may be grounded in a sense of a shared territory or a political entity, even if both are precarious foundations of identity given the fragility of this geo-political project. Identity processes may also be enhanced by media promoting the idea of a shared European culture which can designate both a tradition of (mostly western European) »high culture«

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40 On the role of religion and secularism in the EU there is a long standing and broad debate. See e.g. Foret 2015 and an analysis of Foret's position by Nardella 2017.

or commercially successful popular culture, often produced with substantial economic support and taken to communicate shared values in a diversity of stories, sounds and images. In addition, European identity is often linked with multilingualism: Europe's many languages highlight its diversity as a gift and emphasise the possibility of mutual understanding through common languages and translation. Following a cultural studies approach, language here is understood in a very broad sense: music and visual representations are forms of communication and are presented as offering a possibility to »translate« among cultures and overcome differences. While space, politics, culture and languages may be seen as promoting the integration of diverse elements in the quest for Europe as a common ground, religion is understood, more often than not, as an element that creates division and conflict.

This last point shows that religion plays a peculiar role in these representations of Europe and the imaginations they materialise. We notice that in our sources, religions (especially Christianity, Judaism and Islam) are often addressed as homogenous entities and linked to generalising assumptions that neglect the complexity of religious traditions and communities, both diachronically and synchronically. Christianity is generally identified with the origins of Europe in medieval »Christendom« or represented as a promoter of values that are compatible with secular visions of Europe as a common ground and project. In addition, we find fragmented references to religious symbols that may occur in different religious traditions such as angels and demons, and specific references to Jewish-Christian scriptures or the mythological traditions of Antiquity that are now loosened from their original context and combined or rearranged. While in these instances, religious traditions provide resources for imagining Europe as a common project, at other times, religion is also represented as a source of conflict and as such, a threat to the project of European identity and unity, especially with regard to Europe's past of religious divisions that is considered to be overcome in secular modernity or by marking Europe's contemporary other as a religious other.<sup>41</sup>

Representations through the centuries, representations from other continents, and contemporary representations in various media: with these three perspectives on historical developments, different geographical and cultural

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41 On the role and problems of religion in the construction of a »sense of common Self« see Bottici/Challand 2013, 146.

perspectives, as well as on different media we do not pretend to present an exhaustive selection, even if our case studies comprise a broad range of issues, media and contexts. Rather, our approach consciously privileges the in-depth analysis of the single case. Addressing imaginations of Europe through this inductive procedure presents us with the variety and diversity of attempts of conceiving of Europe as a whole. There is no common mode of dealing with Europe. In different cultural fields, times and media, Europe is associated with different traits and delimitated by means of various strategies. If Europe is a common ground – in terms of territory, values, goals or identity – it is, in a way, a shifting, unstable ground that moves beneath our feet. Imaginations of Europe are projections into the future with a utopian character. Imagining and representing Europe as a common ground is therefore more of a forward-projected attitude which may be understood as a strategy to overcome the fragility of Europe as a real common ground in the present.

In these diverse visual and material representations and imaginaries of Europe, religion is a multi-faceted phenomenon that cannot be reduced to a univocal meaning-making process. »Religion« appears to be a contested element of European diversity and is used in contradictory ways, as already noted: on the one hand, religious references play a role in delineating a general sense of existential orientation that contributes to constructing a sense of belonging, inspiring values, promoting peaceful coexistence and flourishing; on the other hand, religion is understood as a potential cause of conflicts and divisions. While religion appears to be a contested issue when attempting to represent Europe as united in its diversity, the discourse of common values is dominant: whenever Europe is depicted as a whole, values are presented as the glue that keeps all the pieces together. Yet the (implicit) consensus focuses on the necessity of shared values but not on the definition of them. This reinforces the quality of representations of Europe as a utopian endeavour, not so much a project to be realised in a historical future but as an idea that points towards an eschatological future. And perhaps, this is the way in which religion is most present in imaginations of Europe, as a framework that allows us to think beyond history.

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# Part I

## Representations of Europe through the Centuries



# Mapping Britain's View of Europe

## The Theological Cartography of the Anglo-Saxon *Mappa Mundi*

Sean Michael Ryan

### 1. Introduction

Competing verbal and visual »imaginaries« of Britain have contributed to the acrimonious political debates among the populace preceding and following Britain's referendum decision in 2016 to withdraw from EU-membership.<sup>1</sup> Nationalist imaginaries of sovereign Britain as this »sceptred isle«, »this precious stone set in a silver sea« (*Richard II*, Act 2, scene 1),<sup>2</sup> an island set-apart, bounded by the white cliffs of Dover, have sharply contrasted with federalist imaginaries of Britain adorned in the EU stars, conjoined to its continental neighbours by the Channel Tunnel.<sup>3</sup>

This paper will reflect on the deep historical roots of this debate by considering the oldest extant map of Britain and Europe produced in the British Isles. The Anglo-Saxon map is an 11th-century AD depiction of the inhabited world (*oecumene*), often referred to as the Anglo-Saxon *mappa mundi* (British Library Cotton Tiberius B.V.1, folio 56v).<sup>4</sup> In line with the monastic

1 For critical definitions of the imaginary, see Pezzoli-Olgati 2015, 18–27. This article is informed by Charles Taylor's definition of the »social imaginary« as »the way ordinary people imagine their social surroundings [...] carried in images, stories, and legends«; Taylor 2002, 106.

2 Shakespeare/Forker 2002 (1595), 245–248.

3 See Küng 2020, 199–204.

4 [http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/FullDisplay.aspx?ref=Cotton\\_MS\\_Tiberius\\_B\\_V1](http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/FullDisplay.aspx?ref=Cotton_MS_Tiberius_B_V1) (accessed August 23, 2021).

provenance of this map, to be discussed in more detail below, the reading strategy that will be used in this paper seeks to tease out multiple layers of meaning, analogous to a form of *lectio divina*, particularly attentive to the »letter« and the »spirit« of this graphic text.<sup>5</sup>

Our analysis will begin with a description of the map's pictorial design, focusing on the depiction of the island of Britannia and its spatial relationship with the continent of Europe. What insights might this provide into its Anglo-Saxon designer's ideological perspective on Britannia's relationships with Europe? The second layer of meaning builds upon the first, and centres on how an 11th-century AD Anglo-Saxon monk might have been taught to read this map. How did the map's pairing with a geographical text in this codex, Priscian's Latin translation of Dionysius of Alexandria's *Periēgēsis* (folios 57r–73r), inform how a monk was taught to read the surface level of this map (*historia*), and so interpret Britannia's spatial relationship with Europe? The third and culminating layer of meaning will centre on the »spirit« of this map, specifically its anagogical sense. We will consider how this map offered its monastic reader/viewer a privileged God's-eye perspective on the created order, sensitive to Benedictine traditions of *mappae mundi* and contemplative vision, that afforded a normative, divine status to the spatial depiction of Britannia and Europe on this map.

A sensitive engagement with these multiple layers of meaning will provide insights into the rich »theological cartography« of the Anglo-Saxon *mappa mundi*.<sup>6</sup> To what extent might this map's imaginary of the relationships between Britain and Europe continue to carry normative significance in contemporary political debate?

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5 For an overview of multiple layers of meaning in patristic and medieval scriptural interpretation see de Lubac 2010 (1959); Robertson 2011, and more specifically for Anglo-Saxon exegesis, exemplified by Bede, see DeGregorio 2010, 133; Ward 1998, 41–87.

6 The term »theological cartography« is adopted from Terkla 2013, 162 (who abbreviates it to »theography«). Terkla uses the term to refer to Hugh of St Victor's pedagogical approach (12th century AD). Attentive study of the *historia* of a drawn map could serve as a starting point for a monastic student's inner mapping of the soul's ascent through succeeding layers of allegorical, topological and anagogical meaning, and ultimately to know Christ, as true wisdom (*sapientia*). In the present study »theological cartography« denotes the rich layers of theological meaning communicated by a drawn *mappa mundi* interpreted according to the letter and the spirit, *historia* and *anagogia*.

## 2. The ideology of the Anglo-Saxon *mappa mundi*

### 2.1. Date and provenance of the map

Patrick McGurk's palaeographical study of the Latin and Old English insular script in this manuscript concludes that »Tiberius [Codex Tiberius B.V.1] was written at one scriptorium and mostly by one scribe« (c. 1025–1050 AD).<sup>7</sup> Although the *mappa mundi* (folio 56v) was one of the last items to be added to the codex, he concludes that it was also likely produced by the codex's main scribe, albeit in a smaller font, so as to fit the legends onto the map.<sup>8</sup> An early-11th century date is consistent with the latest dateable portions of annalistic sections contained in the codex (e.g. the itinerary of Archbishop Sigeric's journey from Canterbury to Rome in 990 AD). In all probability this richly illustrated, deluxe codex was produced at a scriptorium in one of the prominent cathedral minsters in the south of England (Canterbury, Glastonbury, or Winchester) for use in the monastic community residing there.<sup>9</sup> The date and provenance of the map, plausibly originating from a medieval (Benedictine) monastic community, cohere closely with the reading strategies applied to the map in this paper.<sup>10</sup>

### 2.2. Drawn and written sources of the Anglo-Saxon *mappa mundi*

Dan Terkla reminds interpreters that medieval »drawn and painted maps were based on earlier drawn and painted maps and, like those earlier maps, on written texts.«<sup>11</sup> It is plausible, as suggested by Evelyn Edson, that the scribe who produced this map utilised a larger and more detailed wall map as a model, given the large amount of detail (ghostly traces of Roman provinces, rivers and islands) that are included but remain unlabelled.<sup>12</sup> Most likely

7 McGurk/Dumville/Godden/Knock 1983, 30.

8 McGurk/Dumville/Godden/Knock 1983, 25–30.

9 See Edson 1997, 74 and Barber 2006, 4, who opt for Christ Church Canterbury, as more tentatively do McGurk/Dumville/Godden/Knock 1983, 7; Howe 2008, 157; Appleton 2018, 276–277 and Terkla 2019, 58–62.

10 Ford 2016, 60, 62–70. Ford discusses the »semiotics of reading« of Codex Tiberius B.V.1, and how monks in an 11th-century Benedictine monastic community might read its text and illustrations as »an object of non-liturgical contemplation« (67).

11 Terkla 2019, 45.

12 Edson 1997, 77.

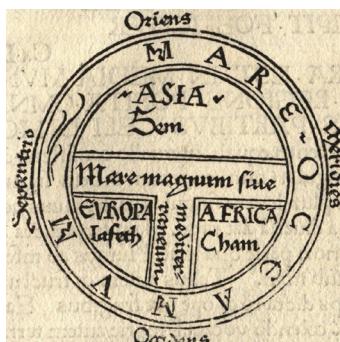
the exemplar used by the scribe of the Anglo-Saxon map originated from a classical Roman map of the *oecumene* copied and revised by Carolingian scribes during the 9th or 10th century AD.<sup>13</sup>

One of the principal literary sources for the majority of the place names and their spatial positioning on the Anglo-Saxon map is Orosius's *Seven Books of History Against the Pagans* (c. 416–417 AD), its traces even detected in the duplication of some landmarks (e.g. the Taurus mountains on either side of Noah's ark) that Orosius referred to more than once.<sup>14</sup> Orosius's apologetic history opened with a written survey of the geography of the *oecumene* (Asia, Europe, and Africa), viewed »as if from a watchtower«, to orientate the reader.<sup>15</sup> Another key literary source is the Bible, with the Anglo-Saxon map depicting a gap in the Red Sea where the Israelites crossed during the Exodus (Ex 14:15), and paying particular attention to place names in the Holy Land as well as an array of Mesopotamian toponyms, including the evocatively apocalyptic Gog and Magog (Revelation 20:7–9 echoing Ezekiel 38–39).

### 2.3. The map's ideology illustrated by its depiction of Britannia and Europe

The Anglo-Saxon map of the *oecumene* is oriented with east at the top, and depicts the continents of Asia, Europe, and Africa surrounded by the Ocean, in the orientation of a simple T-O schematic map, familiar from illustrations in Isidore of Seville's *Etymologies* (fig. 1).<sup>16</sup>

Fig. 1: T-O map. Schematic diagram (map) of the *oecumene* depicting Asia, Europe and Africa and the encircling Ocean.<sup>17</sup>



13 See Barber 2006, 5; Terkla 2019, 58–62 and Harvey 1991, 21.

14 See Fear 2010; Bateley 1980; Foys 2007 and Kupfer 2019, 22–23, fig. 2.

15 Fear 2010, 35.

16 See Harley/Woodward 1987, 296–297, who refer to T-O maps as a tripartite type of *mapa mundi*; Pinto 2016, 122 counts in excess of seven hundred T-O maps extant in medieval manuscripts, often used to illustrate relevant sections in Isidore of Seville's *Etymologies* and *De natura rerum*.

17 See Harley/Woodward 1987, 297. The image is taken from a printed version of Isidore of

## Mapping Britain's View of Europe



Fig. 2: The Anglo-Saxon *mappa mundi*, British Library Codex Tiberius B.V.1, folio 56v, c. 1025–1050 AD, Canterbury?, 21 × 17 cm. © British Library Board, Cotton Tiberius B.V. Part 1, folio 56v.

On the Anglo-Saxon map, the spherical *oecumene* has been distorted by fitting it into a rectangular frame, which has also greatly reduced the depiction of the encircling Ocean. Mountains are shown in green, the Red Sea, the Persian Gulf, and the Nile are drawn in red, whilst cities are named and often sketched with symbols of fortresses or castles (fig. 2).<sup>18</sup>

Seville's work; for the source see [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:T\\_and\\_O\\_map\\_Guntherus\\_Ziner\\_1472.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:T_and_O_map_Guntherus_Ziner_1472.jpg) (accessed August 23, 2021).

18 See McGurk/Dumville/Godden/Knock 1983, 79–87.

Four aspects of this map's layout and inscriptions are particularly illuminating for an understanding of the Anglo-Saxon scribe's (implicit) ideological perspective on the relationships between Britannia and Europe.<sup>19</sup> First, despite being drawn in Britain in the 11th century AD, the spatial location of Britannia is assimilated to a Roman imperial perspective on the island, copied over from the map's exemplar. Nicholas Howe has traced this same ideological perspective in Bede (*Ecclesiastical History* I.1.14–15, c. 731 AD),<sup>20</sup> who shares this cartographic orientation of locating Britannia at the »north-west«. Howe explains:

Placing the island of Britain in the northwest – rather than referring to Rome as standing in the southeast – follows from the practice of Roman writers who used the vantage of their capital city to orient themselves in the world. Bede looks at his homeland not as the center of the world, as is so often the case with nationalist or protonationalist writers, but as the far periphery of a region mapped from Rome.<sup>21</sup>

Secondly, despite adopting a Roman-imperial perspective on Britannia's north-western peripheral location, the island's marginal status at the edges of the *oecumene* is tempered somewhat in comparison with other medieval *mappae mundi*. In particular, Britannia is enfolded closer to the continent of Europe on the Anglo-Saxon map, in part by stretching the corners of a circular map to fit a rectangular frame. This layout lessens the sense that Britannia, like »furthest Thule« (*ultima Thule*, Vergil, *Georgics* 1.25–31), is adrift from the continent in the frame of the encircling Ocean, in contrast to the depictions of the Albi and Silos Beatus maps (figs. 3–5).<sup>22</sup>

19 See Harley 2001, 53, on reading the ideological perspective and power dynamics of maps: »Maps are never value-free images [...]. Both in the selectivity of their content and in their signs and styles of representation maps are a way of conceiving, articulating, and structuring the human world which is biased towards, promoted by, and exerts influence upon particular sets of social relations.«

20 Colgrave/Mynors 1969, 14–15.

21 Howe 2008, 105.

22 For a discussion of Greek and Roman sources on the island of Thule, often glimpsed but unreachable, as the proverbial northern limit of the *oecumene* in Greek and Roman authors since Pytheas (c. 320 BC), see Romm 1992, 156–171 and Cunliffe 2001, 116–133.

## Mapping Britain's View of Europe



Fig 3: *Mappa mundi d'Albi*, Médiathèque Pierre-Amalric, Rés. MS 115 (29), folio 57v, 8th century, Spain/France. Britannia is situated as a circular island cut-off from Europe in the Ocean (bottom left).<sup>23</sup>

23 Source: [https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/1/18/Mappa\\_mundi\\_dAlbi.png/624px-Mappa\\_mundi\\_dAlbi.png](https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/1/18/Mappa_mundi_dAlbi.png/624px-Mappa_mundi_dAlbi.png) (accessed August 23, 2021).

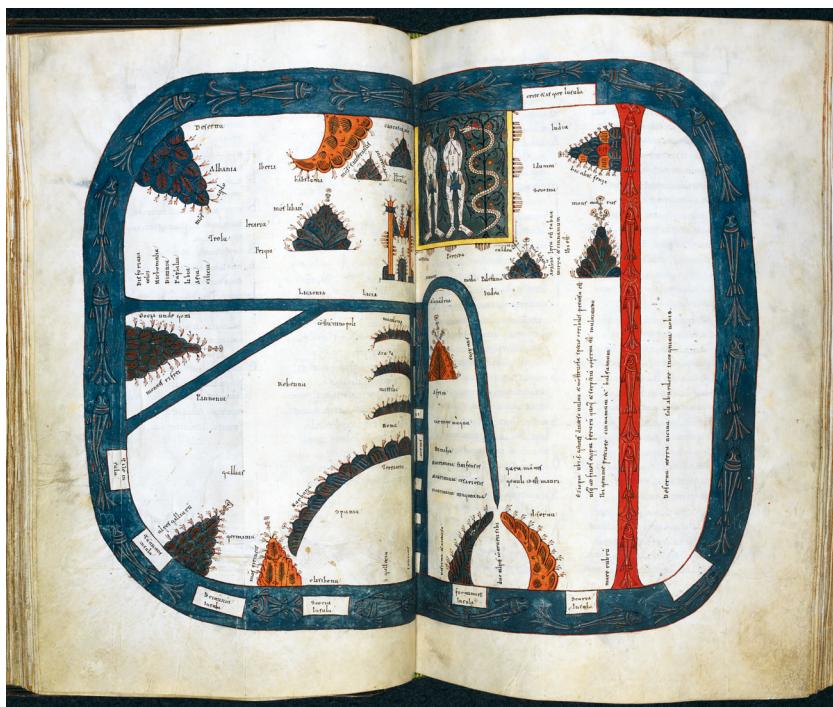


Fig. 4: Silos Beatus world map, BL Additional MS. 11695, folios 39v-40r, 1106 AD, Spain. Britannia is a schematised rectangle in the encircling frame of Ocean (bottom left). © British Library Board, Add MS 11695, folios 39v–40r.<sup>24</sup>

Thirdly, the implicit ideological perspective of the map's scribe can be glimpsed by the choices made in the inclusion and omission of topographical details selected from the exemplar (wall) map. Whilst a significant amount of topographical information is included on the island of Britannia, including regions (*Cantia*, *Britannia*, *Camri*, *Morenpergas*), cities (*Lundona*, *Wintonia*) and adjoining islands (*Orcades*), by contrast great swathes of European territory in Gaul, Germany and Spain are ignored, leaving glaring blank spaces and omissions in the record of named cities and geographical features (fig. 6).

24 The full, digitised manuscript of the Silos Beatus codex is accessible at [http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/FullDisplay.aspx?ref=Add\\_MS\\_11695](http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/FullDisplay.aspx?ref=Add_MS_11695).

## Mapping Britain's View of Europe



Fig. 5: Anglo-Saxon *mappa mundi* (detail), British Library Codex Tiberius B.V.1, folio 56v, 1025–50 AD, Canterbury?. Britannia is more accurately sketched and positioned closer to the continent of Europe. © British Library Board, Cotton Tiberius B.V. Part 1, folio 56v.



Fig. 6: Anglo-Saxon *mappa mundi* (detail), British Library Codex Tiberius B.V.1, folio 56v, 1025–50 AD, Canterbury? Topographical details are sparser on the continent of Europe. © British Library Board, Cotton Tiberius B.V. Part 1, folio 56v.

Furthermore, one of the few geographical indicators that is present in this region is an imperialistic reference to territory in northern Gaul (i. e. Brittany) named as *sudbryttas* or south-Britain. Martin Foys insightfully comments:

The very form of the inscription reveals much about the Anglo-Saxon attitudes behind it; *sudbryttas* contains a unique use of the Anglo-Saxon P [thorn], one of the only distinctive Old English characters in the text of the map. The literal meaning of the inscription »south Britain« assumes a somewhat colonialist attitude towards Brittany, and onomastically centres the perspective of the region squarely on England. [...] In this sense, the *mappamundi* eerily refuses to recognize the very regions that will directly enable the Norman conquest of Anglo-Saxon England, only decades (perhaps less) after the map was made.<sup>25</sup>

The increased scale of Britannia on the Anglo-Saxon map signals this island's importance for its scribal designer, even to the extent of denoting its territorial claims over European regions to the south under the ambit of its reign (*sudbryttas*).

Fourthly, by contrast, the richly detailed depiction of Scandinavia on the Anglo-Saxon *mappa mundi*, notably the inlets of the coastline and the shape of Jutland, plausibly reflect the political and mercantile importance of Britain's trade with Scandinavia in the 11th century AD (fig. 6).<sup>26</sup> The striking topographical detail of Britannia and Scandinavia suggest that the exemplar map may even have been supplemented by contemporary maritime knowledge based on trading routes (sea charts?),<sup>27</sup> in line with the updating of Orosius's geographical section on northern Europe in the Old English Orosius (c. 900 AD), which included additional extracts from seafaring accounts by two sailors Othere and Wulfstan, known to the English court of King Alfred (c. 890s AD).<sup>28</sup>

This initial pictorial analysis reveals tensions and ambiguities in the Anglo-Saxon scribe's ideological perspective. Whilst accepting as normative

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25 Foys 2003, 8–9.

26 See Appleton 2018, 287–305.

27 On extant sea/portolan charts of the 12th/13th centuries AD see Hiatt 2011, 146–157.

28 See Appleton 2018; Bately 1980.

the peripheral location of Britannia at the north-western edge of the *oecumene*, copied over from Roman-imperial ideology expressed in the exemplar map and imbibed from Anglo-Saxon transmission of classical geographies and histories, such marginality and insignificance is also protested against in the finer details. Britannia is not adrift in the frame of the Ocean but nestled closer to the continent where rival kingdoms in Gaul, *Germania* and *Spania* are airbrushed out of history, as Britannia asserts cartographic claim to the southern region of Brittany (*subryttas*), whilst simultaneously turning its gaze outwards, and northwards, to contemporary trading partners in Scandinavia.

### 3. *Historia*: Reading the Anglo-Saxon *mappa mundi* with an accompanying text

#### 3.1. The genre and contents of Codex Tiberius B.V.1

The Anglo-Saxon *mappa mundi* does not exist in isolation, but rather is an integral component of a rich and complex codex, whose contents were chosen to educate a monastic audience. Codex Tiberius B.V.1 is most helpfully classified as a type of *computus* manuscript.<sup>29</sup> Evelyn Edson traces the origins and development of this genre, centred on the calculation (*computus*) of time, specifically the calculation of the future dates of Easter and the moveable Christian feasts dependent upon this date.<sup>30</sup> Medieval *computus* manuscripts tend to contain a core of relevant calendrical and astronomical data, notably Easter (or *Paschal*) tables based on the alignment of solar and lunar calendars across a series of 19-year cycles, and tables relevant to this task and its correct calculation to ensure that Easter and all the Christian festivals were celebrated on the correct date and in harmony with the wider Roman Church. The calculations and tables tended to be supplemented by extracts from leading calendrical scholars, notably the Anglo-Saxon polymath Bede and his seminal works on time, »On Time« (*De temporibus*, c. 703 AD) and »On the Reckoning of Time« (*De temporum ratione*, 725 AD).<sup>31</sup>

29 See Ford 2016, 60–62.

30 Edson 1997, 52–71.

31 Kendall/Wallis, 2010; Wallis 2004, lxxi, notes that in Bede's *The Reckoning of Time* »[t]he calculation of Easter merges into a meditation upon the last things, a spiritual exercise

Codex Tiberius B.V.1 contains an anthology of *computus* documents, including a metrical calendar illustrated with the labours of each month (folios 3r–8v), tables with various lunar and solar calculations (folios 9r–11v; 12v–13r), tables for calculating Christian feast-days including Easter over a 19-year cycle (folios 14v–15r), extracts from Bede's *De temporibus* (folios 16v–17r), and another Anglo-Saxon treatise on chronology, astronomy and other natural phenomena by Aelfric (*De temporibus anni*, c. 995 AD, folios 24r–28v).<sup>32</sup>

This core of computistical texts has been expanded in Codex Tiberius B.V.1, in what Faith Wallis has described as a »centripetal« model of a *computus* manuscript,<sup>33</sup> which has attracted to this core of texts a wider body of texts and tables on related calendrical, astronomical, geographical, and annalistic material, also concerned with a fuller understanding of space and time in the Christian order of creation. Two of the notable additions to this codex are classic school-texts recounting astronomical knowledge in verse, with the inclusion of a Latin translation of Aratus's *Phaenomena* (c. 276–274 BCE, folios 32v–49v), and a classic school-text of geographical knowledge in verse, a Latin translation of Dionysius's *Periēgēsis* (c. 117–138 AD, folios 57r–73r).<sup>34</sup>

Aratus's epic poem on the constellations had become the standard school-text for the study of astronomy since the Hellenistic and Roman eras. Codex Tiberius B.V.1 includes a richly illustrated version of Cicero's Latin translation, with colour figures of the constellations and *scholia* (fig. 7). The codex had even originally contained a constellational star map to accompany this text, sadly lost in the transmission history of the codex.

Dionysius's *Periēgēsis* was a similarly popular school-text depiction of the *oecumene* in verse, replete with allusions to classical literature evoking a richly literary account of the known world. Strikingly, for the purposes of our study, Priscian's Latin version of the *Periēgēsis* included in this codex is

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whose purpose was to rise through the contemplation of time to the perception of eternity.«

32 Consult [http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/Viewer.aspx?ref=cotton\\_ms\\_tiberius\\_b\\_v1\\_f002r](http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/Viewer.aspx?ref=cotton_ms_tiberius_b_v1_f002r) (accessed 23 August 2021) to view the relevant folios in the drop-down menu of the digitised copy of Cotton MS Tiberius B V.1.

33 Wallis 1985, 18; Ford 2016, 60–62.

34 Critical editions: Greek: Aratus' *Phaenomena* see Kidd 1997; Dionysius's *Periēgēsis* see Lightfoot 2014; Latin versions: Cicero's *Aratea* see Pellacani 2015; Priscian's *Periēgēsis* see van de Woestijne 1953.

## Mapping Britain's View of Europe



Fig. 7: British Library Codex Tiberius B.V.1, folio 38v, 1025–50 AD, Canterbury?, text and illustration of the constellation Delphinus, from Cicero's Latin translation of Aratus's *Phaenomena*. © British Library Board, Cotton Tiberius B.V. Part 1, folio 38v.

explicitly prefaced, in red ink, with a paragraph that encourages the monastic students to read the text in tandem with the accompanying map of the *oecumene* contained in this codex, the *mappa mundi* on folio 56v:<sup>35</sup>

35 See the digitised image of folio 56v at: [http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/Viewer.aspx?ref=cotton\\_ms\\_tiberius\\_b\\_v1\\_f002r](http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/Viewer.aspx?ref=cotton_ms_tiberius_b_v1_f002r) (accessed 23 August, 2021).

Here begins the book, »Periegesis« by Priscian, grammarian of the city of Rome, professor of Caesarea [Africa], that is about the situation of the earth, gathered by him from the writings on ancient world maps; and to this work of three parts, that is to say, Asia, Africa, and Europe, there is painted a suitable (*aptam*) map in which the location of nations, mountains, rivers, islands and also wonders are accurately arranged.<sup>36</sup>

Although the map was not produced on the basis of the verbal description of the *oecumene* set out in Dionysius's *Periēgēsis* (or Priscian's Latin version of it), but rather shows closer affinities with the content of Orosius's *History*, nonetheless, the editor(s) of the *computus* codex selected this drawn map as a suitable (*aptam*) accompaniment to the study of the *Periēgēsis* for its monastic students. This mode of teaching geography/cosmography is in line with known Christian monastic pedagogy since the time of Cassiodorus who in his *Institutes of Divine and Secular Learning* (c. 530s–550s AD) set out guidelines for theological study enriched by classical scholarship for monks at his school in Vivarium, a manual which proved hugely influential in shaping medieval monastic curricula (*Institutes* I, xxv).<sup>37</sup> The principal impetus for the monks' study of geography is as an enhancement to their study of the scriptures: »I urge you [...] that it is useful to read through geographical writings so that you know the location of each place you read of in holy books.«<sup>38</sup> Some of the resources that Cassiodorus recommends to the monks for this purpose are a short text (*libellus*) by Julius Honorius entitled the *Cosmographia* and Dionysius of Alexandria's *Periēgēsis* and an associated map (*pinax*): »learn from Dionysius' briefly sketched *Map* where you may almost see with your own eyes what you heard of in the book mentioned above [by Julius Honorius].«<sup>39</sup> Students fired with an intense zeal for the subject are encouraged to progress to the detailed book (*codex*) of Ptolemy's *Geographia* whose vivid descriptions leave the impression that he was an inhabitant of all regions. The resultant geographical studies permit monastic students to undertake »virtual travel« of the *oecumene* in their minds: »Thus although you are in

36 Translated by Edson 1997, 75–76.

37 See Kupfer 2019, 18–19; Terkla 2019, 217.

38 Halporn/Vessey 2004, 157.

39 Halporn/Vessey 2004, 157.

one place (as monks ought to be) you may traverse mentally (*animo percur-ratis*) what others in their travels have collected with a great deal of effort«.<sup>40</sup>

The 11th-century AD Anglo-Saxon editor(s) of Codex Tiberius B.V.1 follow, in part, the pedagogical guidelines of Cassiodorus by including as a key geographical textbook in their *computus* codex a Latin version of Dionysius's *Periēgēsis* recounting the inhabited world in verse, accompanied by a suitable drawn map (folio 56v) to be read and studied in tandem with this text. This pairing of text and image sought to enable the monastic students to visualise their own »mental map« of the inhabited world, so as to orientate their reading of scripture through virtual travel whilst stable in their monastery.

### 3.2. *Historia*: Reading the *mappa mundi* guided by Priscian's version of the *Periēgēsis*

How might an Anglo-Saxon monastic student approach a reading of the *mappa mundi* in this codex? Where might such a monk begin to traverse this densely illustrated map, and how might this impact upon his understanding of the relationship between Britannia and Europe?

On the basis of Cassiodorus's recommendation, and developed further in the 12th century AD, we have firm evidence that medieval monastic students were taught geography with the aid of written descriptions of the *oecumene* in prose or verse complemented by drawn maps, often large wall-mounted maps, copies of which have largely survived in miniaturised reproductions in codices (as is the case for the Anglo-Saxon map). Hugh of St Victor's lectures entitled *Descriptio mappa mundi* (c. 1130 AD) were taught to his monastic students in the abbey school of St Victor, near Paris, complemented by a drawn wall map, the nearest extant example of which survives in a codex miniature in a 12th-century copy of Isidore's *Etymologies*.<sup>41</sup>

A crucial aspect of such a pedagogical approach was the creation of a *ductus* or »reading road« to guide the monastic students to traverse their

40 Halporn/Vessey 2004, 158.

41 For more detail see the text of Hugh of St Victor's *Descriptio mappa mundi* with introduction and commentary by Gautier-Dalché 1988; see also Kupfer 2019, 24–30; Terkla 2013. For a colour reproduction of the *mappa mundi* in Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Clm 10058, fol. 154, see Gautier-Dalché 1988, plate 1; Kupfer 2019, 25.

route through the depicted *oecumene* in manageable excursions.<sup>42</sup> In Hugh of St Victor's classes, the *magister* begins the virtual tour of the inhabited world with the encircling Ocean, before shifting to the interior, the centre of the map and the boundaries between the three continents (Asia, Africa, Europe), and from there to ordered sections within each of these continents.<sup>43</sup> The broad parameters of Hugh of St Victor's approach has affinities with earlier Hellenistic and Roman geographies in prose or verse form, including Strabo's sketch of the *oecumene* at the opening of his *Geographia*, and Dionysius's *Periēgēsis*. Dionysius begins his account by circumnavigating the Ocean and the seas, with a description of the four gulfs (26–168), before tracing his movements across each of the continents: Libya and Egypt (174–269), Europe (270–446) and Asia (620–1165), often returning to a fixed point, principally the Pillars of Hercules, from which to begin new circuits.<sup>44</sup>

How might the »reading road« (*ductus*) transmitted by Priscian's Latin verse description of the *oecumene*, shape an Anglo-Saxon monk's understanding of the relative spatial positions of Britannia and Europe on the accompanying *mappa mundi*? The first point to note is the ambiguous relationship between Britannia and the continent of Europe in the structural organisation of the »reading road« set out in the *Periēgēsis*. Although Britannia is discussed in a section positioned in-between the description of Libya and Egypt (i. e. Africa, 174–269) and Asia (620–1165), it is nonetheless disconnected from the section on the continent of Europe proper (270–446), situated as it is in the passages recounting the islands (447–619): first islands of the sea/Mediterranean (447–554) and then the islands of the Ocean (555–611). Accordingly, even before Britannia's description is read, we can see that structurally it is grouped with islands of the encircling Ocean, distinct from the continent of Europe.

The description of Britain in the *Periēgēsis* highlights the scale and liminality of the territory:

42 On the concept of a *ductus* (from the verb *duco*, to lead or conduct on a way or road) as a key medieval approach to reading works of written or visual art see Carruthers 2010, 200: »*Ductus* is the way(s) that a composition, realizing the plan set within its arrangement, guides a person to its various goals, both in its parts and overall.«

43 See Kupfer 2019, 26–27.

44 See Lightfoot 2014, 13–22.

**Dionysius, *Periēgēsis*, 565–569**

(Greek) (trans. Lightfoot)

By the ocean's northern fringes  
other isles –

The twin Bretanides (δισσαί  
νῆσοι ἔσσι Βρετανίδες)

– face the Rhine's mouth.

For its last eddies issue in that sea.

Enormous is their size: of all the isles,  
None could with the Bretanides  
compare.<sup>45</sup>

**Priscian, *Periēgēsis*, 577–581**

(Latin) (trans. author)

But there are other [isles], twins  
(*geminae*),

near the northern shores of the  
Ocean,

the Britannides (*Britannides*),  
see the mouths of the Rhine.

Here Tethys breaks through with  
a weary flow.

Scarcely an island in the world  
(*orbem*) could surpass these in  
expanse.<sup>46</sup>

Britain is described, strikingly, as a *pair* of islands (*geminae* [...] *Britannides*), comparatively vast in scale (among the islands of the Ocean). For a monastic viewer of our *mappa mundi* these twin islands are identifiable as Britannia and Hibernia (fig. 5), although on the drawn map the former dwarfs the latter.<sup>47</sup> The lack of identifying labels in *Germania* on the *mappa mundi* hampers the viewer's attempt to pinpoint the relative position of Kent (*Cantia*) at the base of the triangle of Britain, as lying directly opposite the mouth of the Rhine on the continent (see Strabo, *Geographia* 1.4.3).<sup>48</sup> The verse description of the *Periēgēsis* encourages the monastic reader to simultaneously locate the British isles (plural) with reference both to the continent of Europe – the mouth of the Rhine – and to the northern periphery of the encircling Ocean. The British isles are related to, yet distinct from, the continent of Europe as islands of the encircling Ocean.

The twin isles of the Britannides are distinguished from the ultimate peripheral territory of *Thule*, however, unlike in some of the *Periēgēsis*'s own sources, notably Pytheas, which treat the British isles as a plurality of

45 Lightfoot 2014, 228–229.

46 Van de Woestijne 1953, 70.

47 Whilst the comparatively large size of Britannia as an island in the Ocean is frequently noted by patristic and medieval authors, other Anglo-Saxon writers, notably Bede, were influenced by Irish monastic traditions of the vast scale and paradisiacal nature of Ireland, as a land of »milk and honey«, extending far beyond the limits of Britain to the south. See Bede, *Ecclesiastical History*, I.1; Colgrave/Mynors, 1969, 18–19.

48 Lightfoot 2014, 391.

islands more closely associated with and perhaps even including *Thule*.<sup>49</sup> Instead, Dionysius separates the isles of the Britains (565–569) from *Thule* (580–586), both in terms of nautical distance (»Cleaving the ocean's path *much further on*/Your well-made ship would cross to Thule's isle«) and by the insertion of a reference to another group of islands, closer to the mainland of Gaul, between the two sections (570–579). This section alludes to Strabo's description (*Geographia* 4.4.6) of a small island in the estuary of the Loire, inhabited by devotees of Dionysius (the *Periēgēsis* author's patron deity).<sup>50</sup> The result is that Dionysius's account, like the *mappa mundi* itself, connects the island(s) of the Britains with Brittany (a location that the *mappa mundi* describes as *sudbryttas*).

An Anglo-Saxon monastic student, traversing the »reading road« of Priscian's Latin version of the *Periēgēsis*, assisted by the visual aid of the *mappa mundi*, is left with a sense of the ambiguities of Britannia's spatial relationship to Europe. The isles of the Britains (notably effacing Hibernia's name and identity) are both a peripheral northern landmass of the encircling chaos waters of the Ocean, yet also pinpointed geographically with reference to *Germania* (the mouth of the Rhine) and Gaul (islands in Brittany). The British isles are located in the poet's verse description of Europe (and not Asia or Africa) but grouped more closely with the islands of the Ocean than the continent. In sum, Britannia is both related to continental Europe, yet distinct from it, as a twin-island of the Ocean.

#### 4. *Anagogia*: Reading the Anglo-Saxon *mappa mundi* from a Benedictine theological perspective

The final layer of reading will focus on an Anglo-Saxon monastic reader's interpretation of the »spiritual sense« of the *mappa mundi*, and more specifically its anagogical sense as affording a momentary glimpse of eternity, a God's-eye perspective on the created order, ordinarily privileged as the height of a soul's contemplative ascent.<sup>51</sup>

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49 Lightfoot 2014, 391.

50 Lightfoot 2014, 392; see Roller 2020.

51 De Lubac 2000 (1959), 180–181: »The anagogical sense is that which leads the thought of

Panoramic views of the whole created order had been linked with visions of heavenly ascent since the classical tradition (e. g. Plato's *Myth of Er* [*Republic* 614a–621d]; Cicero's *Dream of Scipio* [*De re publica* VI.9–26]; Macrobius's *Commentary on the Dream of Scipio*).<sup>52</sup> These perspectives informed their readers of the limited and transitory extent of the earthly sphere of human sovereignty. Cicero, for example, writes (*De re publica* VI, 16):

When I gazed in every direction from that point [the Milky Way (Circle)], all else appeared wonderfully beautiful. [...] The starry spheres were much larger than the earth (*globus terrae*); indeed the earth itself seemed to me so small that I was scornful of our empire, which covers only a single point, as it were, upon its surface.<sup>53</sup>

Such visions were also among the most influential in shaping the cartographic imagination of antiquity and came to function, in part, as geographical and cosmological textbooks.<sup>54</sup>

In western Christian monastic tradition this God's-eye perspective, in which the whole created order could be seen in a single moment of time, was famously ascribed to the contemplative vision of St Benedict, in Gregory the Great's *Dialogues* (II, 35, c. 593/4 AD).<sup>55</sup> From the abbot's spatial position at the top of a tower (*specula*), his vision was raised still higher to contemplate the whole created order in a moment of time. Whilst praying during the dead of night, prior to the night office, Benedict saw a flood of light more brilliant than the noonday sun, followed by an even more wonderful thing (*mira res*): »[...] the whole world (*omnis mundus*) was gathered up before his eyes in what appeared to be a single ray of light (*velut sub uno solis radio collectus*).«<sup>56</sup> The theological significance of this account (*narratio*) is then teased out more fully in the dialogue (*explanatio*) that follows between Gregory and his deacon, Peter, who asks for an explanation as to

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the exegete ›upwards‹ [...] anagogic, i. e. upward leading, namely, toward heavenly things [...] pertains to the state of the life to come.«

52 See Emlyn-Jones/Preddy 2013, 462–489; Keyes 1928, 260–283; Stahl 1990.

53 Keyes 1928, 268–269.

54 See Eastwood 2007, 31–94 on the reception of Macrobius's *Commentary of the Dream of Scipio* as an astronomical text in the Carolingian renaissance.

55 See Courcelle 1967.

56 Zimmermann 1959, 105; McGinn 1994, 451, footnote 265.

how anyone could see the whole created world at a glance. Gregory (*Dialogue* II, 35) explains that the soul or mind (*anima/mens*) which sees even a little of the light of the Creator is expanded (*expanditur in Deo*), standing above herself and above the world (*mundus*):

That the world (*mundus*) is said to have been gathered together before his eyes is not because heaven and earth was contracted (*non caelum et terra contracta est*) but because the intellectual soul (*animus*) of the one who saw was enlarged (*dilatatus*). He who is rapt in God can see everything that is beneath God without difficulty.<sup>57</sup>

The raptured soul can perceive the created world (*mundus*) from a God's-eye perspective, in all its limitations and transience, and more significantly catch a momentary glimpse of eternity.<sup>58</sup> De Vogüé notes the similarities and differences between Benedict's vision and that of Scipio's dream-vision.<sup>59</sup> Scipio was afforded a dream-vision of the Ptolemaic cosmos, perceived from the vantage-point of the ninth sphere of the fixed stars, from which to gaze down upon the lowly position of the earth amidst the planets and the attendant political limitations of Roman imperial pretensions. By contrast, Benedict is raised far beyond this, above himself, above the whole created order – heaven and earth – to glimpse »the uncircumscribed or unencircled Light« (*lumen incircumspectum*) of the transcendent God.<sup>60</sup>

The monastic student's glimpse of the terrestrial *oecumene* in a single moment of time, afforded by the Anglo-Saxon *mappa mundi*, places the viewer in a partially analogous position to St Benedict and other contemplatives, privileged to receive a momentary glimpse of the whole created order

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57 McGinn 1994, 72, 451, footnote 268.

58 This image of the soul dilated/enlarged in the contemplative vision of God is also developed in Gregory's exegetical homilies on Ezekiel, notably on Ezekiel 40:16, interpreting the splayed windows in the Temple that admit a chink of light; see McGinn 1995, 154; Tomkinson 2008, 346–347.

59 De Vogüé 1993, 164–173.

60 On God as the boundless or unencompassed Light (*Lumen incircumspectum*) in Gregory's theology see Butler 2003 (1926), 77–78: »The infinite divine Light is the figure under which he conceives God's Essence: man cannot look directly on It, but may see Its ray, subdued and indistinct, as a sunbeam passing through a chink into a darkened room« (77).



Fig. 8: Giovanni del Biondo, *Vision of Saint Benedict*, c. 1360, tempera and gold leaf on panel, 35.8 x 39.3 cm, Benedict's vision of the world depicted as a T-O map, Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto.<sup>61</sup>

(*mundus*), heaven and earth, in the divine light of the Creator, at the height of contemplative ascent (fig. 8). This anagogical layer of meaning of medieval *mappae mundi* is glimpsed in a variety of medieval texts and images, from the use of a *mappa mundi* in Beatus's manuscripts to depict John, the seer's vision from the heavenly throne room (Rev 4–5),<sup>62</sup> to Hugh of St Victor's use of *mappae mundi* as a complex and multifaceted pedagogical tool in the 12th century, notably in his complex visual treatises on the ark of Noah.<sup>63</sup>

61 Source: [https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/9/94/Vision\\_of\\_St.\\_Benedict.jpg](https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/9/94/Vision_of_St._Benedict.jpg) (accessed August 23, 2021). See Kupfer 2016, 159–161.

62 See Kupfer 2016, 55–66.

63 See Sicard 1993; Gautier Dalché 2009; Terkla 2013; Rudolph 2014.

This anagogical layer of meaning bestows a privileged weight of divine authority on the Anglo-Saxon *mappa mundi* for monastic viewers who are richly familiar with this account of contemplative ascent, especially if they are themselves Benedictine monks of Christ Church Canterbury. The cartographic depiction of the continents on our *mappa mundi* including the spatial relationships between Britannia and Europe, would accordingly be afforded a »normative« weight, seen as offering a privileged glimpse of the divinely created order, from a God's-eye perspective.

The monastic viewer is reminded that the map offers a privileged glimpse of the *oecumene* akin to how it is perceived by the Creator, an eternal gaze encompassing space and time. As a consequence, read anagogically this map portrays the history of salvation synchronically, presented before the monastic viewer's eyes in a single moment of time. All is spatially present: Noah's ark aground on Mount Ararat, the Exodus of the Israelites from Egypt across the divinely separated waters of the Red Sea, the conquest of the land of Israel, the exile in Babylon, the ministry of Jesus in Galilee and Judea, culminating in Christ's Passion in Jerusalem at Easter – the central calendrical point for this *computus* manuscript. Necessarily, therefore, the *mappa mundi* does not stop with the resurrection at Easter, but its vision flows outward from this point to include the cycles of liturgical years that have followed down the centuries, enabling its monastic viewers to chart the spread of the gospel, continuing onwards, and outwards, and westwards in the missions of the apostles in whose footsteps the Latin monks tread, from Jerusalem to »the ends of the earth« (*ad ultimum terrae*; Acts 1:8), making disciples of »all nations« (*omnes gentes*; Mt 28:19–20).<sup>64</sup>

In this way, an Anglo-Saxon monk's spatial location in Britain is re-orientated by this map. A Benedictine monastery in Canterbury is not understood to be situated in an inconsequential peripheral location but rather in a culminating eschatological position of triumph, demonstrating the missionary success of the western Church, at the impetus of Pope Gregory, at having reached the north-western goal of »the ends of the earth«.

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<sup>64</sup> See Terkla 2019, 62–67 on monastic readers tracing the missionary activities of the apostles in Acts with the aid of a *mappa mundi*, as well as following in their footsteps through »virtual travel«.

## 5. Conclusion: The »Theological Cartography« of the Anglo-Saxon *mappa mundi*

The »theological cartography« of the Anglo-Saxon *mappa mundi* offers rich layers of interpretative insight into imaginaries that over the centuries have informed Britain's self-perception as well as views of its relationship with Europe. The ideology of the Anglo-Saxon scribe who produced it in the 11th century AD resonates with familiar tensions: there is a concerted attempt to react against normative (Roman-imperial) cartography which has relegated Britannia to the north-western margins of the *oecumene* for a millennium, adrift in the frame of the Ocean. Instead, concerted attempts are made by this map designer to draw the island in closer, literally, to the continent, allied with Scandinavian trading partners and even asserting sovereign claims over Gaulish territories to the south. Its Benedictine monastic audience, guided by the »reading road« (*ductus*) afforded by the map's paired written text, Priscian's version of the *Periēgēsis*, is led structurally and textually to maintain a familiar tension and ambiguity in its surface level reading (*historia*) of the map. Britannia is aligned with Europe, yet spatially distinct from it, as an island of the Ocean. Yet viewed from the perspective of eternity, informed by the map's anagogical sense, Britannia's peripheral status is re-valued. In the map's privileged God's-eye view, Britannia is no longer perceived to have received a demeaning position on the terrestrial globe, but rather to have been afforded a culminating vocation prior to the eschaton, as integral to the missionary goal of the divine plan for all creation, for all eternity, that the gospel is preached »to the ends of the earth«.

Britain's contested contemporary relationship with Europe in the early decades of the 21st century continues to resonate with imaginaries already inscribed on this Anglo-Saxon map: an inherent sense of ambiguity and exceptionalism, with Britain both related to continental Europe yet distinct from it as an island of the (Atlantic) Ocean; assertive demonstrations of sovereignty reacting against perceived marginalisation; realignments of its priorities in seeking trading partners beyond the European continent. Yet, the Anglo-Saxon map can offer more than a cartographic origin-story for the historical roots of »Brexit«. Nobler insights can be gained by reflecting further upon the *mappa mundi*'s anagogical sense, and the snapshot it provides of a divine perspective on the whole created order (*mundus*) – Europe and

Britain included – beheld in a single gaze. Bathed in the light of eternity, the transience and mutability of the continents and islands and their political pretensions are re-ordered as they were for Scipio. Miniaturised on a single folio leaf, the viewer is encouraged to place the *oecumene* in its true, divine, perspective, and to strive for the higher virtues so as to attain to the presence of the *Lumen incircumscriptum*.

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# The Road to Nowhere?

## A Critique and a Re-imagining of Religion in Europe in Sir Thomas More's *Utopia*

Ann Jeffers

A map of the world that does not include Utopia is not worth even glancing at, for it leaves out the country at which Humanity is always landing. And when Humanity lands there, it looks out, and seeing a better country, sets sail. Progress is the realisation of Utopias.<sup>1</sup>

Thomas More's *Utopia*,<sup>2</sup> a work grounded in the political and religious life of early 16th-century Europe has greatly influenced a host of literature in the 506 years since its publication. My contribution to this project on discourses on religion in Europe as they occur in different media across time focuses, in the first instance, on three maps of Utopia produced in the course of the 16th century. I will argue in a first section that these maps of Utopia are not so much an accurate cartographic representation of the island of Utopia as described in More's second book of *Utopia*, as an entry point into its ambiguous, elusive and ludic intellectual landscape. The second section will

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- 1 The quote is taken from Oscar Wilde's 1891 essay *The Soul of Man under Socialism* (1911, 28–29) and expresses two ideas: one, that the pursuit of a better world is an enduring human aspiration and two, that the notion of what that world should look like is forever evolving.
- 2 More's Latin title was *Nusquama*, in English »Nowhere«. The full title of the first Latin edition is *Libellus vere aureus nec minus salutaris quam festivus de optimo reip. statu, deq; nova insula Utopia authore clarissimo viro Thoma Moro inlytae civitatis Londinensis cive et vice-comite cura M. Petri Aegidii Antverpiensis, et arte Theodorici Martini Alustensis, Typographi almae Lovaniensium Academiae nunc primum accuratissime editus. Cum gratis et privilegio*. The title *Utopia* was used in November 1516 in a letter to Erasmus announcing its publication in Louvain (Baker-Smith 2012, xvi).

explore the religious landscape of More's *Utopia*, while a third section will examine how this landscape was shifting through the process of translations of the work in a number of European countries.

As is well-known, More coined the term »utopia« in 1516 and made it famous as a book title. The etymology of the word comes from the Greek *ou-topos* meaning »no place«, a pun on *eu-topos*, »good place«, introducing an ambiguity at the outset: was More proposing a blueprint of an ideal society or was he satirising the self-interest, greed and military exploits of the hereditary monarchies of his time? Is it a serious treatise or is it a joke? Can it be both, as some scholars have suggested?<sup>3</sup> This »slippery text«<sup>4</sup> makes it nearly impossible to determine its authorial intent with any degree of certainty. Indeed, More's persona was also paradoxical and has given rise to many unresolved questions: was he a »medieval nationalist« or a »modern reformist«?<sup>5</sup> In other words, was *Utopia* a text addressed to fellow Catholics in a call to reform? Furthermore, what are we to make of his commitment to the humanism flourishing in Europe in the early 16th century and of his statement on religious tolerance when we know of his zeal in persecuting Protestants?

So it is with great caution that we approach this most »mischievous« of books, as the Victorian critic John Ruskin so aptly said.<sup>6</sup> While More's depiction of a perfect society defined by the equality between its citizens, the abolition of property, its lack of money and what appears at first to be a form of communism has fired the imagination of social and political writers for centuries, it is More's depiction of a society based on religious tolerance which is going to be our focus in this article. In fact, More himself is a Christian humanist and it can be safely said that the idea of a Christian Europe, and whether it is ever possible to achieve it, lies at the heart of *Utopia*.<sup>7</sup>

I will approach More's ideas of religion in Europe in *Utopia* through theory of space, drawing on the three categories delineated by Soja's analysis of space as a physical, conceptual and experienced entity.<sup>8</sup> Therefore, the con-

3 See Baker-Smith 2012, xv, following Marin 1993, 411–417.

4 Baker-Smith 2012, xix.

5 Baker-Smith 2012, xviii.

6 Ruskin 1909, 12.

7 Solz 1957, is to my knowledge the only extended commentary on the religion of the Utopians. See also Fenlon 1975, 125, and Kessler 2002.

8 Soja (1996, 11) speaks of a trialectics of spatiality. The three spaces he distinguishes and analyses are spatiality, historicality and sociality.

cept of first (physical) space is used to approach selected maps which have accompanied the text of *Utopia*. The concept of second (conceptual) space leads the examination of *Utopia* in its classical and humanist contexts and debates on religious toleration in More's own time. Finally, the concept of third (experienced) space is applied to understand the symbolic significance of *Utopia* through its transmission in a number of translations throughout Europe.

## 1. First space: The physical space of the maps of *Utopia*

Since *Utopia* is an imagined island, its maps can be considered as a first space: they are the physical representations of *Utopia*. They give details about the dimensions of the island, the position of the cities and the harbour, and the general accessibility (or non-accessibility) of the island of *Utopia*.

*Utopia*'s second book opens with a description of the physical features of the island:

At the central point where it is widest the island of the Utopians extends out for two hundred miles, and nowhere does it get much narrower except where it tapers at the two ends. These ends, as if they enclosed a circle five hundred miles in circumference, give to the island the appearance of a crescent moon, the horns of which are some eleven miles apart. The sea flows between these into a huge bay protected from the wind by the encircling land, which is mostly not rough but calm, like a huge lake.<sup>9</sup>

More's readers would have recognised some elements of the description of the island of *Utopia* as a thin disguise for Henry VIII's England, when England and Wales comprised 53 counties plus London, making it 54 city-states. Furthermore, *Utopia*'s fifteen-mile channel is suggestive of the English Channel.<sup>10</sup> However, other features, for instance the crescent shape of the island, have no direct correspondence to England's territory. It has also been argued that the description might refer to European cities.<sup>11</sup>

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9 More 2012, 57.

10 For a full description of the maps and a detailed analysis see Bishop 2005; Goodey 1970, 18–23.

11 According to Surtz 1952, 165, the map of the island both represents England (54 cities) and European cities. See also Yoran 2010, 165; Goodey 1970.

There have been many attempts to map out the island of Utopia, starting with the anonymous map which accompanies More's first publication of *Utopia* in 1516, but I will confine myself to three maps produced in the course of the 16th century: the anonymous map of the first edition from 1516, the map by Ambrosius Holbein from the edition of 1518 published by Froben in Basel, and the *Map of Utopia*, a copper engraving by Abraham Ortelius (1595).

Maps can be considered »parergon«, or »paratext«,<sup>12</sup> a term which includes further aspects of a book beside the main, original text. Here, they function as a »threshold«, an entry point into the world evoked by More's *Utopia*.

The first map of the island of Utopia published in 1516 is a simple anonymous woodcut which is entitled *VTOPIAE INSULAE FIGURA* and corresponds only schematically with the text (fig. 1). A few features may be noted: it has no indication of orientation nor scale and neither the lands beyond the island nor the body of water are named. It is also clear that there are very few landmarks, falling short of the textual account of Utopia's 54 cities. For our discussion it is significant that the monuments marked on the map have spires but none bear a Christian symbol.

The placement of a map at the beginning of More's first edition of *Utopia* plays an important role in that it suggests to his readers that it is a »real« place, especially when read in conjunction with Hythloday's claim to have accompanied Amerigo Vespucci on three of his journeys to America.<sup>13</sup> According to Marina Leslie, maps were quite rare at the time of the publication of More's *Utopia*, and had close antecedents in the tradition of *mappa mundi* and Italian navigation maps.<sup>14</sup> However, the closest inspiration may come from the sketches and plans used in judicial disputes over property and land which More had seen and used in the course of his work as a lawyer.<sup>15</sup>

In the third edition of *Utopia* from 1518, a new map was printed, designed by Ambrosius Holbein with the title: *VTOPIAE INSULAE TABULA*.<sup>16</sup> Close examination shows that it is a mirror image of the map of 1516 but with some significant differences (fig. 2).<sup>17</sup> In the foreground are three men, Hythloday

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12 The term »paratext« as »threshold« is coined by the literary critic Genette 1997.

13 More 2012, 25.

14 Leslie 1998, 33.

15 Leslie 1998, 37.

16 This print by Johann Froben was published in Basel alongside some of Erasmus's and More's works in 1518.

17 Bishop 2005, see also Leslie 1998, 41.

speaking with (probably) More in the left-hand corner and the figure of a soldier (Gilles?) in the right-hand corner, thus continuing to mix the real and the unreal. The ships sail away from the island and converge towards the two characters in the bottom left corner. While Holbein retains the captions from the first map, the buildings are now Germanic in character and close examination shows a tiny cross on top of two buildings.<sup>18</sup>

It is worthy of comment that Holbein's 1518 map includes a number of labels. The traveller, »Hythloday« (»purveyor of nonsense«), speaks to More (»the fool«) of a river, »Anyder« (»waterless«), running through the island of »Utopia« (»nowhere« or »the good place«), whose main city is called »Amaurot« (»spectral« city or »shadowy« city or »dim« city).<sup>19</sup> The latter city holds a central position in Holbein's map despite More's comment that all cities are alike. Two further captions refer to the source and the mouth of the river Anyder reversing their connection to the picture.<sup>20</sup> The choice of the names adopted by More to describe his interlocutor and the island with its features further deepens the sense of an unattainable world. Also striking are two garlands hanging from the top corners,<sup>21</sup> perhaps, as Leslie suggests, to emphasise the distance between Europe and Utopia and to introduce a sense of »dislocation«: Utopia is both close and distant, real and unreal.<sup>22</sup>

A final remark will highlight the slippery character of the two maps we have discussed. The broad shape of the first map (fig. 1) shows the outline of a human skull; this was refined by Holbein in 1518 to rework the island's shape more clearly as a skull with the ship representing the teeth (fig. 2). The departure from a realistic depiction of the island may point the way to metaphorical meanings. If this is the case, it is possible to identify the map as a »visual pun«, a *memento mori* (»remember death« or, in this context, »remember More«<sup>23</sup>), possibly suggesting that Utopia is the product of man's

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18 Leslie 1998, 55, suggests that the island drawn by Holbein has already been »christianised«.

19 Goodey 1970, 25–28.

20 Leslie 1998, 40.

21 The garlands might also indicate the horned shape of the crescent moon, evoking the island's textual description. With thanks to my colleague Sean Ryan for this suggestion.

22 Leslie 1998, 45.

23 *Mori* means both »death« and »More«. More and Erasmus were known for their puns as Erasmus's previously published *Encomium moriae* (»In Praise of Folly« or »In Praise of More«) demonstrates. For a critical edition in English see e.g. Screech 1988.

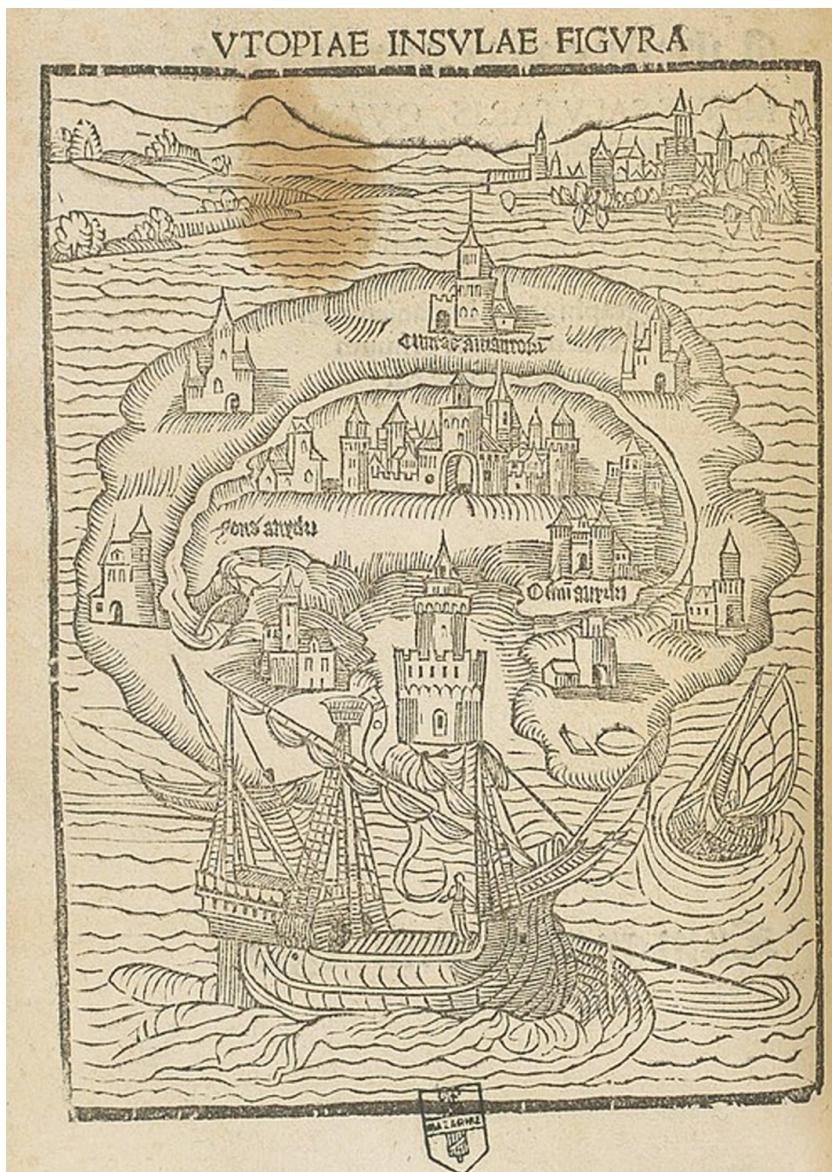


Fig. 1: Anonymous map of the 1516 edition of Thomas More's *Utopia*.<sup>24</sup>

24 Source: [https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/e/ed/Thomas\\_More\\_Utopia\\_1516\\_VTOPIAE\\_INSVLAE FIGVRA\\_%28Biblioth%C3%A8que\\_Mazarine%29.jpg](https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/e/ed/Thomas_More_Utopia_1516_VTOPIAE_INSVLAE FIGVRA_%28Biblioth%C3%A8que_Mazarine%29.jpg) (accessed June 16, 2022).



Fig. 2: Map of Utopia by Ambrosius Holbein in the edition of 1518 by Froben in Basel. It is printed on page 16 of the book entitled *De optimo reip. statu deque nova insula Utopia libellus vere aureus, nec minus salutaris quam festivus, clarissimi disertissimique viri Thomae Mori inlytae civitatis Londinensis civis & vicecomitis. Epigrammata clarissimi disertissimique viri Thomae Mori, pleraque e Graecis versa. Epigrammata/Des. Erasmi Roterdami.*<sup>25</sup>

25 Source: [https://www.e-rara.ch/bau\\_1/content/zoom/9931536](https://www.e-rara.ch/bau_1/content/zoom/9931536) (accessed June 16, 2022).

mortal mind and not of God's eternal mind. The idea of the map as *memento mori* could also be a hint that the book contains ideas which could lead to persecution and death.<sup>26</sup>

The third map (fig. 3), designed by Abraham Ortelius in the latter part of the 16th century, introduces a radically different shape as well as a number of new features, omitting the crescent shape of the island but including the 54 cities described by More. His humorous design adds his own whimsical names for the towns not titled by More.

To sum up, it is striking that none of the three maps from 1516, 1518 and 1595 illustrates all the details set out in Hythloday's description of the island: in the words of Goodey, »Utopia was not written as geography«,<sup>27</sup> it is a »Nowhere« that cannot be mapped.<sup>28</sup> Both the physical description of the island of Utopia and the drawing-up of the maps highlight inherent tensions and contradictions undermining the reality of the island: representations of the island of Utopia through maps constitute a threshold and can function as a rhetorical device to examine the conceptual world of religion which lies behind it.

## 2. Second space: The conceptual world behind the maps of Utopia

Second space is a concept that encompasses the mental dimensions of space. The conceptual world behind More's *Utopia* is complex, and whether one sees it as contradictory or dialectical, it remains true that it is a multi-layered book which does not easily lend itself to reductionism. In this section, I focus on the conceptual world of the religious ideas expressed in the second book of *Utopia* and on the debates on the place of religion in society in the humanist context within which More's *Utopia* historically belongs. While More's *Utopia* reflects the general social and political situation that he experienced in England and in particular in London, his interest in religion specifically is paramount. As a Christian humanist one of the key questions for

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26 It was banned by the Catholic Church. See below the section on the transmission of the book in Spain.

27 Goodey 1970, 18.

28 Goodey 1970, 21.



Fig. 3: Abraham Ortelius, *Map of Utopia*, copper engraving, 380 × 475 mm, 1595, Plantin-Moretus-Museum, Antwerp. The map follows contemporary geographical conventions.<sup>29</sup>

him is whether a political state can be Christian and to what extent Christian virtues can be exercised in the world of politics. More's commitment to a *res publica christiana*, a Christian state, is crucial and underlies his political discourse.

As many scholars have noted, there are various intellectual influences behind More's religious world in *Utopia*, from Plato's *Republic*, Aristotle's *Politics*, Augustine's *On the Happy Life* and *City of God*, to Thomas Aquinas's *Commentary on Aristotle's Politics*.<sup>30</sup> Another important influence are the works of Lucian of Samosata which More and Erasmus had translated which showed how the playful use of satire, irony, puns as well as the evo-

29 Source: [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Kaart\\_van\\_Utopia\\_\(1595-96\\_kopergravure\)\\_Abraham\\_Ortelius\\_KBS\\_Brafa\\_2019.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Kaart_van_Utopia_(1595-96_kopergravure)_Abraham_Ortelius_KBS_Brafa_2019.jpg) (accessed June 16, 2022).

30 See Fenlon 1975, 119. Plato 2007; Aristotle 2000; Augustine 1939 and 2003; Thomas Aquinas 2007.

cation of imaginary worlds could be used in pursuit of civic and religious critique.<sup>31</sup> In adopting the ancient genre of »paradoxography«,<sup>32</sup> which dates back to the age of Homer and early Hellenistic writers, More conveys a sense that not all is what it seems, which may function as a key to reading *Utopia*'s second book and the section on the religion of the Utopians in particular.

While Locke's *A Letter Concerning Toleration* (1689) constitutes a landmark in the history of religious toleration,<sup>33</sup> More is in fact the first thinker in the western world to offer a defence of religious freedom on both political and religious grounds. Many of the ideas regarding the exercise of religion in the fictional setting of *Utopia* have their roots in the Christian humanism of More's time, and in particular in his relationship with Erasmus: More's friendship and collaboration with Erasmus is well documented.<sup>34</sup> Indeed, Erasmus's *Praise to Folly* is dedicated to More and formulates questions about the political order as well as a reconsideration of the status of Christianity.<sup>35</sup> In *Utopia*, More continues to engage with Erasmus's ideas about the reforming and upholding of a European Christian society, »the Humanist Republic of Letters«.<sup>36</sup> In some way it can be said that *Utopia* embodies and supplements the Erasmian reformist religious programme.<sup>37</sup> Even though Utopian society is not Christian by the time Hythloday arrives there, this does not mean that it does not model Erasmian humanistic values: in *Utopia*, religion is a »social institution«<sup>38</sup> contributing to maintaining equality among people while promoting the good and happiness of the many. More endorsed Erasmus's belief that salvation depends on virtuous conduct rather than beliefs in overly complex theological systems.<sup>39</sup>

Features of the religion of the Utopians as described by Hythloday in his conversation with More, include plurality of religions and the right for every-

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31 Baker-Smith 2012, xii–xiii.

32 Paradoxographies are stories about faraway, isolated places, most often islands, where authors envision contained environments within which they can construct exemplary societies, both good and bad. The history of this genre is firmly intertwined with that of the genre of utopian literature.

33 For a critical edition in English see Walters 2013.

34 See Kessler 2002; Yoran 2010 and Solz 1957.

35 See above footnote 25.

36 Yoran 2010, 1.

37 Yoran 2010, 13.

38 Yoran 2010, 98.

39 Kessler 2002, 216. This humanist view is a reaction against medieval scholasticism.

one to hold their faith while respecting each other's beliefs.<sup>40</sup> The rationale for this is the state in which their King Utopus had found Abraxas, the original name of the island: the constant squabbling of the people made them politically vulnerable and enabled Utopus to take control. As a result, he established religious toleration as a means to uphold social order: the new statutes respected »the rights of conscience« and »prohibited coercion in matters of faith.«<sup>41</sup> Hythloday shows how religious freedom promotes civic peace. »Pride« is the main obstacle to peace: it produces theological certainty, and leads to zealousness, intolerance and violence. The only tenets of faith held by everyone are the belief in a supreme being,<sup>42</sup> the immortality of the soul and belief in the after-life, including the belief in rewards and punishment since these promote a virtuous life.<sup>43</sup> The priesthood holds a position of great power, but they are few in number.<sup>44</sup> Their main responsibility is to oversee the education of the people.

Hythloday introduces Christianity among the Utopians: he mentions biblical passages citing Christ as promoting communal life and the sharing of goods. Interesting is the inclusion of an example of a Utopian, converted to Christianity, who then turns into a zealot and disrupts the civil order. Despite this example of disruptive religion, the commonwealth depicted by Hythloday possesses Christian characteristics: the opportunity for a contemplative or active life in service to others, the communal bond, and the strong discouragement of personal vice all reflect aspects of the monastic life that More embraced prior to his marriage. In addition, the contempt for gold and jewels, respect for humility, meekness, patience and dignity in labour can all be classified as ideal Christian concepts. While at first glance this looks like an ideal society, radical uniformity and the lack of individuality is disturbing. The static, totalitarian social order is governed by total control and supervision of every aspect of life with no room for dialectical engagement.<sup>45</sup> What started as a humanist venture ends in an »anti-humanist« society.

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40 Kessler 2002, 207.

41 More 2012, 121.

42 Solz 1957, 49. The name of the deity is Mithras (More 2012, 107) although the Utopians may disagree as to his identity. They also believe in providence.

43 More 2012, 109–111. Immortality of the soul is a tenet of faith re-affirmed by the Lateran Council in 1513.

44 More 2012, 114; both men and women can become priests.

45 For a review of the »dark side« of *Utopia* and the main interpretative positions held by recent scholarship and a proposal see Yoran 2010, 166–168 and 171–185.

All these features of religion in *Utopia* may be seen through the lens of the humanist response to the corruption of religious leaders and to the rise of secularism with its emphasis on material prosperity and capitalism.<sup>46</sup> The emphasis on learning, asceticism and action (as opposed to dogma) also reflects the humanistic values of the time. The question as to whether More designed Utopian religious freedom as a model for Christians in Europe has been much debated. Within *Utopia* his position was ambiguous: at the end of the chapter on the religion of the Utopians, Hythloday declares that »not a few of the practices which arose from Utopian laws and customs were patently absurd.«<sup>47</sup> More's position on religious toleration<sup>48</sup> was challenged by the events leading to the Reformation as witnessed by his public persecution of the nascent Protestant faith and his eventual demise under Henry VIII in 1535.

### 3. Third space: The social space of *Utopia* in European translations

Through the lens of third space as experience, I focus now on the lived experience of the religious conceptual world of More's *Utopia* expressed through its various translations in Europe. From the outset *Utopia* was a markedly cosmopolitan text, and one could think of it as »England's best-seller in Renaissance Europe.«<sup>49</sup> The multiplicity of translations of More's *Utopia* by humanists in a range of vernacular European languages including English, Italian, French, German, Dutch and Spanish is a testimony to its enduring appeal. A number of humanists like Ralph Robinson, Guillaume Budé, Francesco Sansovino, Hieronymus van Busleyden all embraced *Utopia* and

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46 Kessler 2002, 213.

47 More 2012, 122.

48 It is important to note here that 16th-century ideas of religious toleration are markedly different from a 21st-century context; see Pepperney 2009, ii; see More's statement: »the clergy doth no wrong in leuing heretykes to the seculer hand [...] that prynces be bounded to punysh heretykes, and that the burnyng of heretykes [...] yt is well done« (cited in Pepperney 2009, 48). More limits toleration to those he considers to be »heretykes« and associates them with fanatics.

49 Fenlon 1975, 115.

promoted its ideas, albeit in a continuing work of re-contextualisation and re-conceptualisation.<sup>50</sup>

The history of the translations of More's *Utopia* has been widely discussed, so I will only comment here on how the translations have impacted the perception of religious toleration in the respective European contexts of each translation. Most vernacular translations of More's *Utopia* – which was originally published in Latin – in Europe comprise the second book only, which includes the chapter *Of the Religions of the Utopians*. Leaving out the first book allows for a de-contextualisation from the English context and a re-actualisation and a re-contextualisation in a diversity of European political, social and religious situations without any ludic overtones; it also allows the various audiences to concentrate on practical advice pertinent to their context.

I shall focus here on three trends illustrated in the translations of *Utopia* in various European countries to demonstrate that the ambiguity and instability of More's text have been marshalled through the translations to clearly support political and religious factions in their respective contexts. Firstly, *Utopia*'s translations have been used in support of the Catholic Church by introducing strategic revisions of the text. In England, for instance, Ralph Robinson's second translation of *Utopia* in 1556 alters the two marginal notes in the original Latin text of the chapter *Of the Religions in Utopia* relating to the excessive number of priests to one single sentence: »the majestie and preeminence of priestes«.<sup>51</sup> In doing so he repurposes his earlier translation to fit in with the religious landscape of the Catholic Queen Mary in 1556.<sup>52</sup> In Italy, Francesco Sansovino's paraphrase of *Utopia* from 1561 opens with the praise of More's martyrdom and offers support for the Counter-Reformation.<sup>53</sup> The French translation of the second book by Gabriel Chappuys,<sup>54</sup>

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50 Surtz 1952, 165.

51 Cave 2008, 97.

52 The subsequent change to the Protestant Elizabethan regime after the death of Queen Mary sees More's demonisation and it is not until the end of Elizabeth I's reign that Robinson's translation is reprinted. There will be yet another reprint under the Stuarts in 1598, thus exemplifying its enduring power. See Cave 2008, 96.

53 Sansovino's paraphrase of *Utopia*'s second book in 1561 was reprinted in 1567, 1578 and 1607. It re-contextualises *Utopia* by placing it in his treatise on different forms of government, *Del governo de regni et delle repubbliche antiche et moderne*. In such a context *Utopia* can be read as an ideal but fictional model for best governance where theological debates have outlived their usefulness.

54 Chappuys 1585.

published in Paris in 1585, also adapts and reinvents *Utopia*'s message to fit its religious agenda to the polemics of the political and religious context of his day in order to present Henry III as a defender of the Catholic faith against heretical innovations.<sup>55</sup> Chappuys's version cuts down the chapter on the religions of the Utopians by 20 lines thus reducing the plurality of religions described in More's *Utopia* to one only.<sup>56</sup> Another example of this first strategy, of support for the Catholic Church, can be found in the Spanish translation of 1637 by Geronimo Antonio de Medinilla i Porres, a government official from Córdoba.<sup>57</sup> He takes away the paradoxical elements of the text to present *Utopia* as a perfect model of governance and »normalises« (and censures) More's account of the variety of religions in *Utopia* by modifying the relevant passage to include the variety of practices and monastic orders within the Catholic Church.<sup>58</sup>

Secondly, *Utopia*'s translations have been used to support a reformist agenda: Robinson's first translation of 1551 for instance was dedicated to William Cecil, one of the secretaries to the Protestant King Edward VI.<sup>59</sup> The first Italian translation of 1548 by Ortensio Lando, published by Anton Francesco Doni, also advocates and supports a »reformist« agenda.<sup>60</sup> It expresses the »genuine evangelical spirit where the radical foolishness of Christ outdoes ciceronian stoicism.«<sup>61</sup>

However, the most developed support of a reformist agenda arises from the emergence of *Utopia* in the translation of 1630 in the Calvinist Northern United Provinces of the Low Countries. The addition of a short title, *To the Christian Reader Who Is Eager for Knowledge*, heading a new preface illus-

55 The book was entitled *De la republique d'Utopie* and was part of the book *L'estat, description et gouvernement des royaumes et republiques du monde*. For more details on this translation into French see Hosington 1984, 118, 131–133.

56 See Sellevold 2008, 80.

57 Medinilla y Porres 1637.

58 Davenport/Cabanillas Cárdenas 2008, 119.

59 Robinson 1551.

60 More's *Utopia* generated a lot of interest in Italy. The translation by Lando of 1548 was printed in Venice, the European capital of printing in early modern times, without the names of the publisher and translator, and with the title *La repubblica nuovamente ritrovata, del governo dell'isola Eutopia, nella qual si vede de nuovi modi di governare Stati, reggier Popoli, dar leggi a i senatori, con molta profondita di sapienza, storia non meno utile che necessaria. Opera di Thomaso Moro cittadino di Londra*. See Grendler 1965, 491.

61 Gjerpe 2008, 55.

trates this re-contextualisation.<sup>62</sup> The content and style of the preface, with its quotations of Old Testament texts, its biblical phrasing, its admonishment to subject oneself to the service of God and its dire warnings of apocalyptic retribution on those nations who do not follow such guidelines, culminating in a call to prayer, all firmly direct the reader towards a Christian reformist reading. Religious toleration was affirmed here as other Protestant groups were permitted freedom of worship and Catholics were tolerated.<sup>63</sup>

Thirdly, some translations support a moderate agenda, as the German translation of 1524<sup>64</sup> and the English translation of 1685 show.<sup>65</sup> The former is authored by Claude Chansonette and published in Basel. Its new dedication to the town councillors of Basel is written in support of the moderate party: by highlighting the »fridsamme einhelligkeit burgerlicher bywonung«, which stands for »the peaceful unity among the citizens living together«,<sup>66</sup> it clearly functions as a »warning«<sup>67</sup> in the face of confessional strife.<sup>68</sup> Further comparisons between the government of Basel and that of Utopia highlight the moderate values of both models of governance and »their distaste for extreme reform.«<sup>69</sup>

To sum up, through its multiple translations, »*Utopia* becomes a package of transportable goods«<sup>70</sup> whose meaning depends on the vehicles by which they are transported, and the situation into which they are transferred. *Utopia*'s popularity in Europe and its translations into vernacular languages shows a great dynamism: it is »a text constantly rewinding its spring, renewing its forces as it passes from one cultural moment to the next.«<sup>71</sup> The adaptability of More's *Utopia* to changing political and religious fortunes enabled politicians to seek new solutions and new models to the complex question of good governance and, not least, the role of religion in such projects of government.

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62 Beeck 1630, 1.

63 Spaans/Cave 2008, 106. It may be noted here that despite affirming religious toleration only Calvinists could obtain positions of power.

64 Chansonette 1524.

65 Burnet 1685.

66 Kruke Salberg 2008, 35.

67 Kruke Salberg 2008, 36.

68 Kruke Salberg 2008, 35.

69 Kruke Salberg 2008, 37. According to Kruke Salberg, the prefatory letter refers to the Predigtmandat of 1523 which admonishes preachers to »follow the Gospel«.

70 Boutcher 2008, 131.

71 Cave 2008, 13.

#### 4. Concluding thoughts

More's *Utopia* heralded centuries of dynamic re-interpretation and re-shaping, and most importantly re-contextualisation and re-appropriation, thus giving rise to a rich literary tradition of utopian, dystopian and counter-utopian works. As Carla Danani has pointed out, More's *Utopia* allows us an external glance on our reality.<sup>72</sup> The 16th century was a time of profound social, political and religious changes, a time when the normativity of the feudal system was called into question. In such times it may be that *Utopia*'s main task, in response to these shifting multiple contexts, was to deconstruct itself and in so doing, to offer a horizon to imagine the good place which is not there, yet performs reality.<sup>73</sup>

Today, living in a post-modern world where the grand narrative of western religion is called into question, we need Thomas More's *Utopia* more than ever. Some of the most impressive fictional narratives of the 20th century referencing *Utopia* might be Ursula K. Le Guin's *The Dispossessed: An Ambiguous Utopia*, a novel which disrupts the utopian future, and Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake*, which imagines a post-apocalyptic, genetically engineered new race, pacifist and tolerant, a perfect mirror to the inhabitants of Thomas More's *Utopia*.<sup>74</sup> If *Utopia*'s ontological disclosure functions as interference, it allows new possibilities and continues to inspire, half a millennium after More shared it with the world. Now disengaged from its original context, the principle outlined in the chapter on the religions of the Utopians that »no one should suffer for religion« has become a hallmark of free societies in Europe and elsewhere.<sup>75</sup>

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72 Danani 2022, 2.

73 Danani 2022.

74 Le Guin 1974; Atwood 2003.

75 More 2012, 109.

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# Pieter Bruegel's *Tower of Babel*

## A Multivalent Symbol of Europe and the EU

Natasha O'Hear

Pieter Bruegel's larger extant painting of the *Tower of Babel* of 1563 (the Vienna *Tower of Babel*) is a key part of the visual reception history of Genesis 11:1–9, the famous passage in which the Tower of Babel narrative appears. The painting has been analysed on many levels. It can be viewed most straightforwardly as an ambiguous evocation of the biblical narrative of the Tower of Babel prior to its collapse. More metaphorical interpretations have ranged from a warning to the tyrannical ruler of the Low Countries, Philip II of Spain, to a reflection on the challenges faced by one of the first European metropolises, Antwerp.<sup>1</sup> Within these more metaphorical readings, Antwerp can be read as a symbol of Europe as a whole, which was also undergoing rapid development at this time.<sup>2</sup> The notion of the search for a European identity provides the context for the 20th and 21st century afterlife of Bruegel's image, in which the *Tower of Babel* today in Vienna unmistakably appears in both the authorised iconography of the EU as well as in anti-EU propaganda. In this contribution I'll discuss examples for both uses looking at different posters and an architectural form. The painting is therefore a fascinating example of how the reception history of a text like Genesis 11:1–9 can serve to highlight both its own multivalence and its ability to generate a multiplicity of readings.

The 20th-century images and media explored in this contribution are those which, generated by Bruegel's initial image, offer representations of Europe from a range of perspectives including secular and religious rep-

1 See Mansbach 1982 and Kaminska 2014 for differing interpretations.

2 See Oberthaler/Pénot 2019, 181.

resentations. The artists, satirists and polemicists who are featured all use Bruegel's image as a lens through which to channel their own conception of Europe, and more specifically the EU. Interestingly, the artists featured who have created imagery in *support* of the EU, a self-consciously secular organisation, have chosen a religious image (of Babel) through which to explore their ideas about the EU. Thus, in a somewhat complex example of a strand of reception history, Genesis 11:1–9 has inspired Bruegel's *Tower of Babel* which gave a »snapshot« of a rapidly changing Europe in the late 16th century and in turn has played a not insignificant role in the EU's symbolic self-legitimation as well as in negative representations of the EU.

## 1. From Babel to Strasbourg

In this contribution I will first explore what is sometimes referred to in reception history as the source text, in this case, Genesis 11:1–9. The main themes and interpretative points of interest within the text will be highlighted. This provides the biblical context for Bruegel's Vienna *Tower of Babel*, which is itself the hinge point of the chapter, in that it represents an important visualisation of Babel according to Genesis which has itself enjoyed a lively reception history. There are of course many other contexts which have informed this image, including Bruegel's own political, religious and geographical influences, as well as what is known about his patronage background. Possible influences on Bruegel and the creation of this image will be explored, as well as an alternative *Tower of Babel* that Bruegel painted in c. 1563–1568, known as the Rotterdam *Tower of Babel*. Following this, consideration will be given to some key contrasting interpretations of Bruegel's *Tower of Babel* by the art historians Steven Mansbach, Joanne Morra, Barbara Kaminska, Koenraad Jonckheere, Elke Oberthaler and Sabine Pénot.<sup>3</sup> Whilst a multiplicity of readings exists, all interpreters broadly agree that Bruegel was involved in using the *Genesis* story of Babel to present an image of 16th century Antwerp as a thriving yet complex and flawed European city, perhaps even as the archetypal European city of the time. Throughout this section, I will use the methodology of visual reception history in order to better understand

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<sup>3</sup> See Mansbach 1982; Morra 2007; Kaminska 2014; Jonckheere 2014; Oberthaler/Pénot 2019.

the ways in which Bruegel functions as a sophisticated interpreter of the biblical text via his juxtaposition of his own, resolutely European, context with elements of the biblical narrative.<sup>4</sup> He may be understood as a visual exegete who has created new meaning from the source text, which in turn may help to illuminate facets of the Genesis story that are not immediately obvious.<sup>5</sup>

With Bruegel's image thus established as a key part of the visual reception history of the biblical Babel narrative, as well as representing a particular conception of European identity in the late 16th century, we will turn, in the second half of the paper, to an exploration of four 20th-century representations of European identity which have been inspired in different ways by Bruegel's Vienna *Tower of Babel*. These representations all relate to the EU, an organisation that in some ways may be regarded as synonymous with Europe by many, but which is in fact a relatively new institution, born (as the EEC) in the 1950s as an economic and political community, which arose for pragmatic reasons after the carnage of World War II.<sup>6</sup> Thus throughout its short and complex history, attempts have often been made by those working for the institution to create and shape an EU brand to which its members can feel an emotional attachment, of which more below. The first representation explored in the second section of this chapter is thus the Strasbourg Parliament building, whose form has undeniably been influenced by Bruegel's image. This will be followed by an exploration of two posters promoting the ideals of the EU from 1983 and 1992 respectively, which are now housed in the Historical Archives of the European Union. Both posters use the iconography of Bruegel's Vienna *Tower of Babel* to convey broadly positive messages about the EU.

Conversely, those who have opposed the EU on political and/or religious grounds have used these attempts at EU brand-building to highlight the institution's flaws. Finally therefore, we will explore a polemical anti-EU poster, whose artist and provenance is unknown but which has been widely

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4 See O'Hear 2011 and O'Hear/O'Hear 2015 for other examples of my work in this field, which usually focuses on the visual reception history of the book of Revelation. See also Berdini 1997; O'Kane 2010 and Exum 2019 for more on this particular approach to art inspired by biblical texts.

5 See O'Hear 2018, 205–206 for a consideration of some of the complexities of this approach.

6 Usherwood/Pinder 2018, 1–8.

disseminated on anti-EU websites and platforms, and uses Bruegel's *Tower of Babel* as a lens through which to critique the EU.

## 2. The biblical *Tower of Babel*: Genesis 11:1–9

Now the whole earth had one language and the same words. 2 And as they migrated from the east, they came upon a plain in the land of Shinar and settled there. 3 And they said to one another, »Come, let us make bricks, and burn them thoroughly.« And they had brick for stone, and bitumen for mortar. 4 Then they said, »Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves; otherwise we shall be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth.« 5 The Lord came down to see the city and the tower, which mortals had built. 6 And the Lord said, »Look, they are one people, and they have all one language; and this is only the beginning of what they will do; nothing that they propose to do will now be impossible for them. 7 Come, let us go down, and confuse their language there, so that they will not understand one another's speech.« 8 So the Lord scattered them abroad from there over the face of all the earth, and they left off building the city. 9 Therefore it was called Babel, because there the Lord confused the language of all the earth; and from there the Lord scattered them abroad over the face of all the earth.<sup>7</sup>

While a huge amount has been written on this passage, exegesis of the source text is not the focus of this paper.<sup>8</sup> An overview of the text's main themes will suffice. The first theme that runs through the passage is an acknowledgement of the ever-growing abilities and ambition of humankind, mediated here through the language of building (vv. 4, 8). This is presented, in the context of the primeval narrative of *Genesis* as a whole, as something that is a timeless characteristic of humankind. Certainly, this was a fear in some cir-

<sup>7</sup> NRSV. Babel appears ambiguous in this passage of *Genesis*: the root of the ancient Hebrew word alludes also to confusion or confused. As a name of the ancient Babylonian city, in Akkadian it means »gate of God«.

<sup>8</sup> See Kidner 2008, 118–121.

cles regarding some of the great building projects of the Renaissance, which forms the contextual backdrop to Bruegel's *Tower of Babel*.<sup>9</sup> Had humankind simply become too capable and what might the consequences of that be?

Secondly, everything human is revealed to be finite, and God's hand decisive and eternal. The builders of Babel are punished by God for their over-ambition and separated from each other (v. 9). In the face of this divine force, the builders of Babel show themselves to be meekly accepting (v. 8). Interestingly, particularly in terms of the Bruegel Vienna *Tower of Babel*, the Genesis narrative doesn't mention the destruction of the tower, although this is perhaps implied. The representation of God in this passage, to a modern reader at least, is unflattering. He appears almost jealous of what his created people have achieved. Some of the attempts to reverse the Babel narrative that we will explore below are perhaps consciously or unconsciously resisting this representation of the God of the Hebrew Bible.

Thirdly, the importance of communication and some sort of shared language is shown to be important. The language of the earth, which we may presume had been one shared language, is confused by God so that the builders can no longer understand each other and work together on their tower. In terms of the Genesis narrative, this is presented as a divinely ordained necessity and a fitting punishment but many readers and interpreters of the Bible have returned to this passage, not least those in the 16th century who, against the background of the Reformation, produced editions like the Antwerp Polyglot Bible (*Biblia Polyglotta*, 1569–1572). This Bible translation collated multiple languages (Hebrew, Greek, Latin and Aramaic for the Old Testament, Greek, Syriac and Latin for the New Testament), and was supplemented by dictionaries and grammar study tools, such that it encapsulated the humanist ideal of »remedying Babel«.<sup>10</sup> The Polyglot Bible's creator and printer, Christoph Plantin, was also a friend of Bruegel, with both moving within the same humanist circles, such as the »Four Winds« group convened by Hieronymous Cock.<sup>11</sup> Thus humanists, as well as more »orthodox« Catholics and Protestants cited the Babel narrative frequently post-Refor-

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9 See Harris and Zucker at: <https://www.khanacademy.org/humanities/renaissance-reformation/northern/antwerp-bruges/v/pieter-bruegel-the-elder-the-tower-of-babel-1563> (accessed May 1, 2022).

10 Mansbach 1982, 52–56. See also <https://scholarly editions.brill.com/bpbo/polyglot/>

11 Mansbach 1982, 51–2.

mation. Both sides saw sharp echoes of their own predicament in the narrative of the destruction of a united people into warring factions and the humanists especially considered ways in which harmony could be restored.<sup>12</sup>

### 3. Pieter Bruegel's *Tower of Babel*: A multivalent vision of Europe in the late 16th century

Pieter Bruegel produced three versions of the *Tower of Babel*, two on panel and one on ivory that has now been lost.<sup>13</sup> It is the Vienna version of 1563 that is most well-known and has been most imitated, and which will be the focus of the ensuing discussion (fig. 1).

However, mention will also be made of the Rotterdam version (also c. 1563–1568?) in which Bruegel approaches the same subject matter in a contrasting way. Commentators have interpreted the painting variously as speaking to the legacy of the Reformation and the continued Catholic and Protestant tensions in 16th-century Antwerp, in part exacerbated by the rule of Philip II of Spain; as grappling with the impact of the translation of the Bible into the vernacular (see the Polyglot Bible of 1569–72) and humanist ideas in general, and as a reflection of the growth of the international European city (the metropolis), such as Antwerp, and the issues that this precipitated.<sup>14</sup>

Bruegel painted the Vienna *Tower of Babel* in 1563 for his most important patron, the Flemish merchant Nicolaes Jonghelinck. Jonghelinck owned sixteen of Bruegel's paintings and the Vienna *Tower of Babel* hung in his dining room, before being donated to the city of Antwerp after his death.<sup>15</sup> Kaminska argues that the placement of this painting in the convivial setting of the Jonghelinck dining room, as well as the subject matter, the Genesis 11 Babel narrative of pride punished, would have been intended to facilitate learned conversation.<sup>16</sup> Antwerp, where Bruegel lived for the most productive eight years of his life, between 1555 and 1563, had recently undergone a period of

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12 See Morra 2007, 202.

13 See Oberthaler/Pénot 2019, 179.

14 See Mansbach 1982; Morra 2007; Kaminska 2014; Jonckheere 2014; Oberthaler/Pénot 2019.

15 Kaminska 2014, 1; Orenstein 2001, 21.

16 Kaminska 2014, 1.

## Pieter Bruegel's *Tower of Babel*



Fig. 1: Pieter Bruegel the Elder, *The (Great) Tower of Babel*, oil on wood, 114 × 155 cm, c. 1563, Kunsthistorisches Museum Vienna.<sup>17</sup>

rapid and unprecedented economic and demographic growth.<sup>18</sup> This in turn had led to geographic expansion and architectural transformation. As a result of this economic, demographic and architectural expansion, Antwerp was one of modern Europe's first metropolises, full of diversity of nationalities and languages and ambition. There are nods to Antwerp in Bruegel's Vienna *Tower of Babel*, in the busy harbour, some of the tower's architecture and the surrounding countryside. The geographical context to Bruegel's Vienna *Tower of Babel* cannot therefore be underestimated. Bruegel has re-cast the biblical Tower of Babel as contemporary Antwerp. Whether that implies a negative or a positive appraisal of developments in Antwerp depends on the commentator. The political context is also key. Since 1555, Flanders had been under the harsh Catholic rule of Philip II of Spain. Philip sought to suppress Protestantism in the region and in 1556 had enhanced the powers

<sup>17</sup> Soure: Wikimedia Commons, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Brueghel-tower-of-babel.jpg> (accessed May 8, 2022).

<sup>18</sup> Kaminska 2014, 2.

of the Inquisitors, led by the Duke of Alva who referred to Antwerp as »a Babylon, confusion and receptacle of all sects.«<sup>19</sup> Philip II himself was deeply unpopular in the region owing in part to the fact that he spoke only Castilian and needed a translator on his visits to the Low Countries. As will be discussed below, there has been speculation that the kingly figure in the bottom left-hand corner of the Vienna *Tower of Babel* is in fact Philip II of Spain. Bruegel himself was sympathetic to both Protestantism and humanism, as is evidenced in many of his paintings.

In Bruegel's *Tower of Babel*, the tower itself undeniably dominates the image, a huge leaning structure that dwarfs the surrounding towns on the left and casts a shadow over the city and harbour on the right. Oberthaler and Pénot remark on the two contrasting scales used by Bruegel in painting: the huge dimensions of the tower are at odds with the tiny scale used for its environs.<sup>20</sup> The traditional landscape of the Low Countries is thus literally and metaphorically overshadowed by the tower. In the bottom left-hand corner of the image a regal figure and his entourage are shown the tower, while several workmen prostrate themselves before him, barely pausing in their work. All around and over the tower, workmen toil like ants, giving the impression of frenetic activity. The tower itself is full of contradictions in an architectural sense. Loosely based on the architecture of the Coliseum (which Bruegel had almost certainly seen on his trip to Rome in 1552–1553), the tower is in at least three states of completion.<sup>21</sup> The lower central section of the tower (as well as some sections on the far right) consists of unhewn rock, while many of the porticos on the left look almost complete. Elsewhere the tower is covered in scaffolding and other Renaissance building machines, suggesting a liminal state: the work has begun but is far from complete. Indeed, as Harris and Zucker point out, as a result of the tower's precarious angle, it almost seems to be growing and falling down at the same time.<sup>22</sup> In the Genesis narrative, the tower is also suspended in a liminal, unfinished state, after the workers left off building the tower (Genesis 11:8), an idea that Bruegel is surely reflecting in the many different stages of completion depicted in the painting.

19 Mansbach 1982, 45; Morra 2007, 207.

20 Oberthaler/Pénot 2019, 177–178.

21 Mansbach 1982, 45.

22 See Harris and Zucker, see above footnote 9.

Turning now to some of the contrasting interpretations of Bruegel's *Tower of Babel*, Mansbach argues that it was intended as a critique of the autocratic rule of Philip II. In his view, Bruegel's image is only loosely based on the Genesis narrative, arguing that it was a point of departure for Bruegel rather than a straightforward source text.<sup>23</sup> Thus the usual interpretation of the image as a traditional biblical parable of pride punished is insufficient. Overlaid onto the biblical story is a »pictorial metaphor of the political and religious state of affairs in contemporary Flanders as seen by the humanist circle«.<sup>24</sup> Thus the kingly figure in the bottom left hand corner, traditionally identified with the Jewish king Nimrod (following Josephus) is identified by Mansbach as Philip II.<sup>25</sup> As above, the harbour resembles Antwerp and the tower itself the Coliseum, a well-known symbol of Roman imperial might. In this interpretation, Philip II is therefore surveying his Flemish empire, its failure foreshadowed by the leaning, half-finished tower, which seems destined to collapse or to fall into decay (like Rome before it) in its half-finished, liminal state. It is therefore Philip II's hubris that is being lampooned here, rather than the hubris of humankind in general (as in Genesis 11). Mansbach's political interpretation of Bruegel's Vienna *Tower of Babel*, relies in part on his interpretation of Bruegel's Rotterdam *Tower of Babel* (c. 1563), which he presents as the positive counterpart to the slightly earlier Vienna version. He interprets the Rotterdam *Tower of Babel* as an image of Babel redeemed or remedied (fig. 2).

The Rotterdam *Tower of Babel* is much more architectural in focus. Although there are tiny worker figures climbing on the different levels, they are unfinished, almost ghostly in appearance and much fewer in number than the teams of tiny yet well-defined workers in the Vienna version. The structure itself is much more complete and has a much more solid air. Although it is unfinished at the top, where tower meets cloud (see Genesis 11:4), the structure is not an architectural failure in the same way that the Vienna tower undoubtedly is. Crucially, the kingly figure and his entourage is missing from this version. Mansbach argues, drawing upon Bruegel's links with the humanists, that the Rotterdam *Tower of Babel* represents an »ideal state in the absence of the tyrant's hubristic will« whereby unity can be found in diver-

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23 Mansbach 1982, 43.

24 Mansbach 1982, 43.

25 See Oberthaler/Pénot 2019, 176 for an overview of the textual and architectural context.



Fig. 2: Pieter Bruegel the Elder, *The (Little) Tower of Babel*, oil on panel, 60 × 74 cm, c. 1563–1568, Rotterdam, Museum Boijmans van Beuningen.<sup>26</sup>

sity.<sup>27</sup> As already mentioned above, the Polyglot Bible of c. 1569–1572 was an ambitious humanist project also endorsed by Pope Gregory XIII (although later opposed by some Spanish Theologians and denounced to the Inquisition).<sup>28</sup> In the main, however, the Polyglot Bible represents a prominent exercise in diversity and unity (drawing upon the work of Catholic, Protestant and even Jewish theologians in its creation), which is seen by Mansbach as crucial context to the Rotterdam *Tower of Babel*. Mansbach therefore encourages us to see the two paintings as representing two sides of Babel, the first a critique of personal and universal hubris (as in the Genesis narrative) and the second

26 Source: Wikimedia Commons, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:The\\_Tower\\_of\\_Babel\\_by\\_Pieter\\_Bruegel\\_the\\_Elder\\_\(Rotterdam\)](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:The_Tower_of_Babel_by_Pieter_Bruegel_the_Elder_(Rotterdam))#/media/File:Pieter\_Bruegel\_the\_Elder\_-\_The\_Tower\_of\_Babel\_(Rotterdam)\_-\_Google\_Art\_Project\_-\_edited.jpg

(accessed May 8, 2022).

27 Mansbach 1982, 49.

28 Mansbach 1982, 53.

a representation of utopic future hope or Babel remedied. While the second side of Babel is certainly not found in the Genesis narrative, it is a notion that held currency in late 16th-century Europe, as the humanists and thinkers on both sides of the Reformation grappled with the linguistic (and other) consequences of the schism, the rise of the metropolis and increasing population diversity. Interestingly, the motto of the EU, which came into use in 2000 is »united in diversity«. Thus Mansbach's interpretation of Bruegel's Rotterdam *Tower of Babel* suggests that the notion of a united yet diverse Europe, far from emerging in the late 20th century, was prefigured by Bruegel, or at least existed within the context he was operating, at the end of the 16th century.

Morra agrees that in 16th-century Antwerp Babel was viewed as a »symbol or reflection of the linguistic and cultural challenges faced by an economically prosperous, cosmopolitan, multicultural centre.«<sup>29</sup> However, she rejects the concrete juxtaposition of Mansbach's position on the two Bruegel paintings in favour of a more nuanced reading. She argues that there is not enough evidence to identify the kingly figure in the Vienna version as King Philip II of Spain, preferring instead to view this figure as an allegory of sovereignty more generally. Oberthaler and Pénöt also argue that, given that Jongelinck was almost certainly the painting's patron, combined with the fact that he was close to the holders of power in Antwerp, suggests that Bruegel's Vienna *Tower of Babel* was in fact *not* intended as a direct attack on King Philip II (*pace* Mansbach).<sup>30</sup> Rather, sovereign power, of which Philip was one example, is presented as ailing and contradictory, just like the tower in this image. In a reversal of Mansbach's position, Morra views Bruegel's Rotterdam *Tower of Babel* not as an example of Babel remedied but rather as a representation of the linguistic, epistemological and genealogical challenges to traditional authority that were taking place in late 16th-century Europe.<sup>31</sup> She dates this image to 1568, a year after the Inquisition arrived in the Low Countries, led by the aforementioned Duke of Alva.<sup>32</sup> Alva executed thousands for heresies, which included Bible translation. In this reading, Bruegel's second *Tower of Babel* therefore represents the impossibility of linguistic and religious unification. This is not Babel remedied but the ruins

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29 Morra 2007, 203.

30 Oberthaler/Pénöt 2019, 180.

31 Morra 2007, 212.

32 Morra 2007, 210.

of Babel, symbolic of a moment of historical crisis in the Church's authority. Thus, the visual reference to the Church in the form of a tiny Catholic procession on the third level of the tower, is uniformly negative, binding the Church in its conservatism and repression to the failure of Babel.<sup>33</sup>

Meanwhile, Kaminska argues that the Vienna *Tower of Babel* is more stable than other scholars have argued.<sup>34</sup> This more positive reading of the painting is supported by Oberthaler's and Pénôt's contextualisation of the painting within Bruegel's wider oeuvre. While Bruegel is well known for his inclusion of motifs of torture and death in his work, such visual references are totally absent from this painting.<sup>35</sup> Indeed, apart from the dark cloud floating in from the left, which can be interpreted as a *memento mori* motif, almost all of the imagery is harmonious: the builders work in harmony, there are even two tiny couples holding hands!<sup>36</sup> This observation adds weight to Kaminska's contention that, in this work, Bruegel paints in praise of the collective efforts of the many tower builders. And further, that when the finished painting hung in its convivial context, in Jonghelinck's dining room, it represented an answer to the problem posed by the Babel narrative: namely, how to create a harmonious and prosperous community founded upon Christian and humanistic values.<sup>37</sup> This is, of course, a question that continues to challenge those who work for and with the EU, although the EU's values today are founded on secular and not Christian values. In both *his* extant images of Babel Bruegel implies that a successful metropolis must be founded upon good communication, primarily in the linguistic sense. The harmonious working of the builders across the painting, and even their physical contact, imply that the building of this impressive and ambitious tower was only possible because of their ability to communicate effectively. In its original context, therefore, the Vienna *Tower of Babel*, in its architectural solidity, both reverses the biblical narrative, as well as providing a reminder, for those who knew the ending of the Babel story, of the disastrous effects of the lack of communication. The visual references to Antwerp in Bruegel's Vienna *Tower of Babel* (the harbour and the recognisably Brabant city on the left) serve to

33 Morra 2007, 213.

34 Jonckheere (2014, 189) agrees that Bruegel's Vienna *Tower of Babel* is more than anything the depiction of an ambitious building project.

35 Oberthaler/Pénôt 2019, 179.

36 Oberthaler/Pénôt 2019, 179.

37 Kaminska 2014, 13–15.

sharpen the painting's message. It is not communication in a general sense that is important but rather good communication in the service of their collective project, the international metropolis of Antwerp. Like Antwerp in this period of rapid development, Bruegel's Babel is conditional and unsecured.<sup>38</sup>

Jonckheere also argues that Bruegel's Vienna *Tower of Babel* was intended as a prompt to humanist discourse, although in a different vein to that proposed by Kaminska. He points to the frequency of the Babel metaphor in religious discourse on the art and architecture of the time, and in particular in disputes about iconoclasm.<sup>39</sup> When viewed from within this specific cultural context, Bruegel's Babel can be interpreted as a warning against idolatry. He cites the materiality and splendour of the tower and the amount of human labour involved in its construction in support of this idea. The viewer knows that the tower is doomed to failure and so the painting as a whole appears to sit in judgement on the grandeur of both Europe's classical and Catholic past, with its temples and great cathedrals. The Reformers, it is implied, offer a different way forward, one which will return the Church to its spiritual and humble beginnings, and rid it of »idolatrous edifice[s]«.<sup>40</sup>

While all of these interpretations have their merits and drawbacks, they all speak to some of the main themes from the original Genesis narrative (the ubiquity of human ambition, God's ultimate control and the importance of communication), as well as to the project that Bruegel was wittingly or unwittingly involved in, that of helping to tease out and define the shape of Europe's post-Reformation identity, crystallised here in the form of the city of Antwerp. The representation of Europe that emerges in his two Babel paintings is one of a multicultural, religiously observant city (Antwerp), invested in cutting-edge and ambitious architectural and engineering projects, but whose future hangs precariously in the balance if hubristic leadership and/or lack of effective communication.

We will now explore how Bruegel's Vienna *Tower of Babel*, and thus by association the Babel narrative, reappears in a very different 20th-century European context. As will be seen, however, many of the same concerns, such as those pertaining to questions of how to create unity from diversity and the importance of effective communication amongst multilingual groups, remain the same.

38 Kaminska, 2014, 15.

39 Jonckheere 2014, 199–200.

40 Jonckheere 2014, 199–200.

#### 4. Exploring Bruegel's *Tower of Babel* iconography in EU architecture and poster art

Although the Tower of Babel has been visualised by many other artists (e.g. Lucas van Valkenborch, Gustav Doré, and M.C. Escher to name but three well-known examples), it is the Bruegel image that has had the furthest reach. It is an image to which both artists and architects working for the EU itself, as well as its detractors, have returned several times as post-World War II Europe has grappled with its identity again and again. As Salgó argues, European integration in the form of the EEC and then the EU was a special act of unification which required its own imaginary.<sup>41</sup> The task of building a European identity has always been a difficult one as the pull of the national imaginary and its associated visual culture will likely always be stronger. Those involved in the EU brand-building project had to find ways to draw people into the European family. Such symbolic legitimisation has been found (to name but a few examples) via the European flag, money (on banknotes and on coins), stamps, architecture, the euro-lottery advertisement, posters, and more recently digital imagery.<sup>42</sup> The idea of broken unity followed by renewal, Europe conceived as an epic phoenix if you will, has been a central strand of European thinking throughout its history and one that those involved in the EU brand-building project have embraced.<sup>43</sup> Hence the attraction of the symbolism of Babel. Although the biblical narrative starts with renewal and ends with the dispersal of the peoples and the implied destruction of the tower, the chronology of the source text has perhaps become less important than the ideas that it evokes, of human ambition and progress, of diverse peoples and of the importance of communication.

The first example of official EU iconography which draws upon the iconography of Bruegel's 1563 Vienna *Tower of Babel*, in order to provide positive symbolic legitimisation for the EU, is the Strasbourg Parliament building. In 1991 the Parisian firm Architecture Studio won a competition to design the Strasbourg Parliament building, also known as the Louise Weiss building (fig. 3).

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41 Salgó 2017, 98.

42 Salgó 2017, 40.

43 Salgó 2017, 23–25.



Fig. 3: European Parliament Building, 1999, Strasbourg.<sup>44</sup>

The description given on the firm's website is tantalisingly vague. They talk of expressing the »culture of Europe and its history« through the building, of embodying the foundations of western civilisation and the Baroque, whilst demonstrating the progression from geometric to elliptical thinking.<sup>45</sup> However, many other commentators, including the aforementioned Salgó, have commented on the similarities not only between the Strasbourg Parliament building and the Coliseum but also between the Strasbourg Parliament building and Bruegel's Vienna *Tower of Babel*.<sup>46</sup> It is the unfinished aspect of the top of the building that is so striking. While this may be intended to evoke an ideological transition from the nation state to one Europe, which is a work in progress (indeed it may now be in reverse after the UK's recent exit from the EU in January 2020), it also gives the building an unfinished quality that immediately evokes Bruegel's tower. While the architects who

44 Wikimedia Commons, [https://en.wikinews.org/wiki/Wiki\\_loves\\_the\\_European\\_Parliament\\_in\\_Strasbourg#/media/File:14-02-04-Parlement-européen-Strasbourg-RalfR-046.jpg](https://en.wikinews.org/wiki/Wiki_loves_the_European_Parliament_in_Strasbourg#/media/File:14-02-04-Parlement-européen-Strasbourg-RalfR-046.jpg) (accessed May 8, 2022).

45 See <https://architecturestudio.fr/en/projets/str2-parlement-europeen/> (accessed May 1, 2022).

46 Salgó 2017, 198.

designed the Strasbourg Parliament building may not have formally named Bruegel as an inspiration, can we read into their re-appropriation of Bruegel's tower a conviction that Babel could be remedied or reversed via the EU project? They have turned the ambiguity of the Bruegel image, inherent in the tower's unfinished and potentially precarious nature, into something to be celebrated, by leaving it intentionally unfinished. The design of the building thus suggests that the hubris of the original Babel might thus be overturned by the democratic *communitas* of the EU.<sup>47</sup>

The idea of the EU offering some sort of reversal of the Babel narrative and of Bruegel's Vienna *Tower of Babel* had been foreshadowed in some of the EU's promotional posters, such as this one, produced in West Germany by Klaus Staech in 1983 (fig. 4).<sup>48</sup> In this image, Bruegel's Vienna *Tower of Babel* has been fully reproduced. However, out of the top of the tower grows an enormous red-wine bottle and to the left of the bottle is written »Europa ist mehr als die Weinschwemme« (Europe is more than a wine glut). Since the 1960s, Europe has had too many vineyards producing too much wine. In 1978, the EU banned the planting of additional vineyards and began the process of distilling surplus wine into industrial alcohol. By the late 1980s, with the growth of other wine markets, the EU was paying vineyard owners to remove grapes (known as »grubbing up payments«).<sup>49</sup> The surplus wine began to be referred to in the late 1970s or 1980s as a glut. Although little is known about Klaus Staech, given his context (as someone living and working in West Germany, a country whose government had always enthusiastically championed the EU brand) as well as the fact that he had taken an EU commission in producing this poster, it seems reasonable to suggest that *Europa ist mehr als die Weinschwemme* is using the Bruegel *Tower of Babel* iconography to promote a positive view of the EU. The poster invites the viewer to look past the issues that Europe was facing at that time, with regard to wine (and other agricultural) surpluses, and embrace the positive aspects that closer European economic and political unity had to offer. Whether Bruegel's *Tower of Babel* is being presented as part of the negative aspect of the

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47 Salgó 2017, 199.

48 See the Historical Archives of the European Union, [www.eui.eu](http://www.eui.eu) (accessed May 1, 2022). With many thanks to Archivist Juan Alonso for his help with my research on these two posters.

49 See <https://migration.ucdavis.edu/rmn/more.php?id=1593> (accessed May 1, 2022).



Fig. 4: Klaus Staech, *Europa ist mehr als die Weinschwemme*, poster on paper, 1983.  
© Historical Archives of the European Union.

EU (the wine glut etc.) that needs to be put to one side or whether it represents the positive side of the EU (unity in diversity etc.) is unclear. Either way, the notion of the positive aspects of the EU somehow representing the idea of reversing or remedying the Babel narrative is clearly conveyed here.

The second poster we will explore dates from 1992 and is part of a series of fourteen posters which offer reflections on the themes of diversity and unity in Europe (fig. 5).<sup>50</sup> Dutch in origin (the creator, »Nagel« cannot be traced), the poster series is part of the Nicola Di Gioia Poster Collection, which is now housed in the Historical Archives of the European Union. Di Gioia was a former European Commission Officer for the Directorate-General for Education and Culture of the European Commission in Rome from 1962 to 2003 and during his career, he collected over one thousand posters that had been

50 See <https://archives.eui.eu/en/fonds/472636?item=NDG-302> (accessed May 1, 2022).



Fig. 5: Nagel, *Waar ligt de taalgrens?*, poster on paper, 1992.

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commissioned by the EU from 1957–2003. The posters span a range of topics from cultural and identity policy to economic policy to education and technology. His collection was donated to the Historical Archives of the European Union upon his death. The Dutch poster series entitled *Hoe vliegen we door de Europese Unie?* (meaning roughly »How do we navigate the EU?«), ranges from the serious (how to heal the scars of past wars and of the partitioning of Europe under communism) to the comical (how to deal with the many different speed limits that exist in the EU). The archivists of the Historical Archives of the European Union categorise the posters as »positive« or »negative« in terms of their representation of the EU, and this series has been categorised as »positive«.<sup>51</sup>

In the poster entitled *Waar ligt de taalgrens?* (roughly: »Where is the language border?«), the twelfth poster in the series, a cartoon figure stands before a replica image of Bruegel's *Tower of Babel*. The tower has been superimposed onto a cartoon landscape. Behind the tower, instead of sky, there is

51 See <https://archives.eui.eu/en/fonds/460416?item=NDG> (accessed May 8, 2022).

a montage of texts in excess of fifteen European languages which discuss the plurality of languages that exist within the EU and the necessity of respecting minority languages. The poster's title *Waar ligt de taalgrens?* helps to elucidate the image. A language border is a boundary that can be drawn between two language areas that may exist in the same country, such as between the French and Flemish speaking areas of Belgium. Although the two language areas are part of the same country, there are often tensions between the two areas, due to the dominance of one language in economic, political and/or social terms. The EU had recognised the need for linguistic fairness early on in the process and mandated that all legislation must be published in all languages spoken in the EU.<sup>52</sup> Indeed, there is a section on the European Parliament site devoted to the idea of »Many tongues, one union« and their attempts to respect linguistic diversity.<sup>53</sup> However, in reality English and French have been the dominant common languages of the EU, with German coming in third. Thus, achieving effective communication strategies within the EU that please all member states, proved, and no doubt still proves, a complex task.<sup>54</sup>

Why then has the designer of the poster chosen to juxtapose these reflections about language borders with Bruegel's Vienna *Tower of Babel*? In the European imagination, or perhaps more specifically the imaginary of the EU, as evidenced in the preceding discussion, Bruegel's Vienna *Tower of Babel* represents both the biblical Babel narrative and the notion of the creation of all the languages of the earth *as well as* in some sense being a symbol of the EU and its attempts to bring unity from diversity. In fact, in all three examples discussed in this section (the Strasbourg Parliament building and the two EU-commissioned posters) the artists' use of the Bruegel *Tower of Babel* iconography tends much more strongly towards the latter understanding. Indeed, the religious significance of the Bruegel image seems all but forgotten. While these observations are based on a small collection of examples, the fact that the Bruegel Babel iconography appears across a range of media and across several decades strongly suggests that it had become a sort

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52 Caviedes 2003, 252.

53 <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//TEXT+IM-PRESS+20071017FCS11816+0+DOC+XML+V0//EN> (accessed May 1, 2022).

54 See also the movement to establish Esperanto as the official language of the EU in a move to break the dominance of English within the union, which is perceived by many as politically and financially unjust.

of visual shorthand for the ongoing efforts to create political, economic and linguistic unity across the EU.

However, reading such images is rarely straightforward. While the poster is categorised as »positive« by the archivists of the EU's Historical Archives, it would seem to be more nuanced. The cartoon everyman figure on the left (who has replaced the kingly figure in the Bruegel painting) gazes up at Bruegel's tower. He is gazing at an edifice that seems to be falling down at the same time as being built, as in the original of which it is a copy (although it is notable that the designer has considerably straightened Bruegel's tower), and which represents human progress and human failure simultaneously. In many ways the tower is therefore an appropriate metaphor for the EU's attempts to establish linguistic fairness and unity across the fifty-something languages spoken in the union. It is no doubt a flawed project, but one which, like the tiny builders in Bruegel's image, gives rise to ingenuity and pockets of hope and progress, and which will continue as long as the EU itself exists. Given that the EU is a self-consciously secular organisation, God and his eventual judgement of the tower is of course absent from this visual metaphor but it must be said that neither is there a strongly felt divine presence in the Bruegel image. This is perhaps why it is such an apposite source image for the secular strand of reception that it has given rise to. A more overtly religious image could not have been appropriated in the service of EU brand-building in the same way.

## 5. Uses of Bruegel's *Tower of Babel* iconography in anti-EU propaganda

The perceived rebellion against Christianity inherent in the brand-building of the EU is the subject of the last poster we will explore. This image, which is fraught with questions surrounding its provenance and authenticity, needs to be situated against a background of Christian internet fundamentalism, of the sort espoused by British Pentecostal, David Hathaway, who has a large YouTube following (around 200,000). Hathaway's articles and videos depict the EU as Babel and as Babylon, which are both under the control of Satan (also identified with Islam).<sup>55</sup> Hathaway provides a plethora of scriptural

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<sup>55</sup> See David Hathaway, 00:25:00–00:49:32, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=66uCnNwLJtM> (accessed May 1, 2022). See also Capper 2014, 6.



Fig. 6: EU Parliament,  
*Construction Site Poster*,  
1992, unverified source.

support for his position, as well as visual and material examples produced by the EU. The fact that the Strasbourg EU Parliament building seems in some way based on Bruegel's Vienna *Tower of Babel*, is used as evidence of the EU's satanic impulses and rebellion against the divine will.<sup>56</sup> As is a curious poster apparently produced by the Council of Europe in 1992 (fig. 6).

This poster, known as the *Construction Site Poster* is captioned with the phrase: »Europe: Many Tongues, One Voice«. At the centre of the image, the EU Parliament building, designed in the unmistakable likeness of Bruegel's Vienna *Tower of Babel* stands unfinished, a crane on the right-hand side signifying the ongoing works. In the bottom left-hand corner of the image, in place of the Renaissance craftsmen of Bruegel's painting, are a small army of modernist, almost cubist figures, including a mother and her baby, a work-

56 See Capper 2014.

man and a businessman with a briefcase. These figures are variously embracing, watched over by a pair of slightly sinister technocrats situated in the middle ground of the poster. In many ways this poster encapsulates many of the facets of European brand-building, as mediated through the symbolism of Bruegel's Vienna *Tower of Babel*, that have already been discussed. There was also a big push towards greater European integration after the signing of the Maastricht treaty of 1992. As above, the Parliament building was designed between 1991–1992, building work began in 1995 and it was officially opened in 1999. Thus, the timings of the poster, produced apparently in 1992, which looks forward in hope to the as yet unfinished building, also makes sense. In which case, this poster, with its innovative design and high production values, would represent the ultimate reclaiming or remedying of the Babel narrative by the Council of Europe, in the service of the EU ideology of »unity in diversity« and of successful intra-European dialogue. The Judeo-Christian God had destroyed Babel but the EU can re-build it!

However, there are other aspects of the poster which raise concerns as to its authenticity. First, the Historical Archives of the European Union have no record of the poster and I can find no evidence of it having been produced by the Council of Europe. It mostly appears on anti-EU and fundamentalist Christian websites. Second, as pointed out by Brian Capper, an expert in the symbolism of UK and European Christian fundamentalism, the ring of EU stars above the Parliament Building are inverted.<sup>57</sup> Inverted stars or pentagrams are traditionally a symbol of Antichrist and would suggest that the creators of the poster were not after all the Council of Europe but in fact anti-EU propagandists who sought to convey the idea that the EU was in some way an agent of Antichrist.<sup>58</sup> In a sense the true provenance of the *Construction Site Poster* is not important. It has been accepted as authentic by those in anti-EU movements and discussed by Glenn Beck on Fox News<sup>59</sup> and also appears on two Christian fundamentalist sites with large followings,<sup>60</sup> as well

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<sup>57</sup> This information arises from an email conversation with Dr. Brian Capper, Reader in Christian Origins, Canterbury Christchurch University, August 26, 2019.

<sup>58</sup> Jasper 1992, 254. See »Pentagram«, *New World Encyclopedia*, <https://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/p/index.php?title=Pentagram&oldid=1017792> (accessed May 8, 2022).

<sup>59</sup> See <https://www.mediamatters.org/glenn-beck/beck-compares-photo-eu-building-illustration-tower-babel-amazing> (accessed June 13, 2022).

<sup>60</sup> [http://www.khouse.org/eneews\\_article/2003/515/print](http://www.khouse.org/eneews_article/2003/515/print); <https://www.mediamatters.org/glenn-beck/beck-eu-tower-babel> (both accessed May 1, 2022).

as being reproduced and discussed in William F. Jasper's *Global Tyranny... Step by Step: The United Nations and the Emerging New World Order*.<sup>61</sup> All of the aforementioned journalists and outlets use the 1992 *Construction Site Poster* as evidence of the EU's pride and rebellion against God. In their view, via constructing a Parliament Building and creating further iconography about it that connects it directly with the Tower of Babel, the EU had issued a direct challenge to divine authority, for which it could expect serious punishment. While this may seem preposterous to those steeped in the secular European imaginary, without the fact that the EU and the EEC before it had, in various media, purposely used imagery of Babel, mediated through Bruegel's Vienna *Tower of Babel*, to help to shape and express the new European identity, such conspiracy theories would not have been possible and certainly would not have gained such traction amongst fundamentalist circles. It is undeniably strange that this resolutely secular institution should have returned to this rather negative biblical image in pursuit of a new (positive) image for Europe. But as with Bruegel, some three hundred-odd years earlier, the challenge of attempting to reverse Babel remains an intoxicating one.

## 6. The *Tower of Babel* in the European imagination: Revived, redeemed and rejected

In the foregoing analysis we have explored the source text of Genesis 11:1–9, otherwise known as the Babel narrative, and a key element of its visual reception history, Bruegel's Vienna *Tower of Babel* of 1563. As well as being a multifaceted interpretation of the source text in its own right, the painting was also part of a wider project of European identity-building in the wake of the Reformation and European economic and demographic expansion in cities such as Antwerp. While commentators have not agreed on an interpretation of Bruegel's image, one possible interpretation, put forward by Mansbach, is that in his second Babel painting, the Rotterdam version, Bruegel was pointing forwards to a utopian future in which the destruction of Babel might be remedied via a reunified Europe. Whilst it is very unlikely that the late 20th-century architects responsible for the design of the Stras-

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61 See Jasper 1992, 254–255.

bourg Parliament building or the designers of the EU-commissioned posters that we explored were familiar with this strand of art-historical interpretation, it seems credible that such ideas had entered the European imaginary in a more amorphous way. In any case, all three artists (and architects) seem to be suggesting much the same idea, that Babel can be redeemed via the EU, via their appropriation of Bruegel's Babel imagery. Of particular interest is these artists' and architects' use of well-known biblical imagery, mediated via Bruegel's *Tower of Babel* iconography, in their search for a visual language with which to communicate some of the positive aspects of the self-consciously secular EU project. We are thus given a direct insight into how some of those at the heart of the EU project desire us to imagine Europe, perhaps as a sort of quasi-religious community, and conversely, how some of the most strident opponents of the EU were able to take this imaginary of Europe and turn it into anti-secularist polemic.

And finally, as a reception historian, one is bound to ask how (if at all) the selected visual history of Genesis 11:1–9, which has been explored herein, helps to illuminate or elucidate the source text. I would argue that all of the visual media explored in this paper, to varying degrees, represent a critique of the source text. Even the Bruegel images, and particularly the earlier Vienna *Tower of Babel* invite us to see the positive aspects of the tower-building and the strongly-felt sense of positive communication amongst the builders and tradesmen which exist alongside the undoubted hubris of the project. The jealous, capricious God of the Babel narrative in Genesis is rejected in favour of a more conciliatory interpretation in which it is unclear whether the tower will fall or not and in which, as mentioned above, God is strangely absent. The 20th-century examples go further still in suggesting that the divine destruction of Babel can and should be reversed and that the Tower of Babel, here a metaphor for the EU, can and should be rebuilt. These representations therefore present an outright challenge to the narrative of Genesis, which it would be interesting to bear in mind for future exegesis of the text. And of course, this rebellious challenge to the Genesis 11 narrative is exactly what is rejected by Christian fundamentalist opponents of the EU, who find therein the proof of the EU's alignment with Satan.

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# Eating What We Are, Being What We Eat

## Visualisations of Food Regulations in Europe through Time

Natalie Fritz and Paola von Wyss-Giacosa

### 1. Fat and doomed?

A long roasting pole is ready, on which poultry has been skewered. A large hare hangs in front of the window. A huge fish lies on the counter, behind it a few more in a casserole. The kitchen is well equipped with plates, cooking utensils and vessels, with onion braids and spices. A large pot hangs over the fire, likely with a fat soup simmering in it. The sight of these gastronomic delicacies is, however, severely disturbed by a tangible confrontation between two figures: it is Death, in the form of a scrawny man draped in a shroud, who has come to take the cook in the middle of his work. The fat man turns away to continue gazing at the food, especially the hare, in a vain attempt to resist the creepy embrace (fig. 1).

The dialogue accompanying the print sheds light on the events. Talking to himself the chef says that he has cooked from morning till night for rich guests and has successfully fattened them and himself up with ever new treats. Promoting the desire to eat was his business, from which he earned good money. He would gladly continue to live his »fat life« in this way for much longer.<sup>1</sup> Death, however, replies that, with his fat belly, the cook has

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1 »Der Koch zu sich selbst/Niedlich kochen reichen Gästen;/Und mich selbst mit ihnen  
mästen,/War mein Denken spät und früh./Neu erfundne Leckerbissen,/Seltsames Kunst-  
Gemisch vom Bittern, Sauern, Süßen,/Dis Geschäft vergass ich nie./Die Sattheit wieder  
zu erfrischen,/Und Essens-Lust dem Ekel aufzutischen;/War meine liebste Müh./Wie gut



Fig. 1: *Death and the Cook*, engraving, Rudolf and Conrad Meyer, *Die menschliche Sterblichkeit unter dem Titel Todten-Tanz*, Hamburg/Leipzig 1759 (1650), ETH-Bibliothek Zürich, Rar 6745.<sup>2</sup>

bezahlt man sie!/O könnt' ich länger so mein feistes Leben fristen!/ Mir will der Tod ein  
bittres Essen rüsten.« Meyer/Meyer 1759, 74.

2 Source: <https://doi.org/10.3931/e-rara-26757>, 75.

sought his heaven in the kitchen and that such excessive gluttony leads to an early death. The cook should now put down his roasting spit and learn to »fast in the realm of shadows«.<sup>3</sup>

The origins of the iconography of the *Danse Macabre* or *Dance of Death*, to which this image belongs, can be traced back to the 14th century. Over time, although still strongly typified, the individual moment of the encounter with death was emphasised more strongly, and the characteristic vices of the different social classes and professions were denounced in a more targeted manner. This type of edifying literature was, at the same time, a warning of the punishment to be expected in the hereafter and a call to remember Christian values and to take responsibility for earthly offences in good time. The figure of the cook, more specifically, is found time and again in the iconographic tradition of the *Danse Macabre*, as one of the »subject figures« representing a prominent member of domestic service within the order of the estates.<sup>4</sup> The illustration stems from a remarkable series of sixty-one individual scenes engraved in copper by the hands of the Zurich brothers Rudolf and Conrad Meyer. It first appeared with the title *Totentanz* or *Sterbensspiegel* in 1650.<sup>5</sup> The image and text described here are taken from the third edition of the Meyers' work, which, expanded with new »moral« verses (as stated on the title page) appeared in 1759, a little more than a hundred years after the first edition.

As a visual medium, this copperplate engraving immediately conveys a *Lebenswelt* in a critical, almost caricatural manner. The living or working space depicted in the detailed representation, the physical appearance of the man, the food that is visible – all these communicate meaning on multiple levels. The verbal interchange between Death and the cook further clarifies

3 »Des Todes Antwort/Ja, ja; du findest den Tod im Hafen;/Ergieb dich mir, und leg dich schlafen,/Mit deinem dicken Wanst./Du suchtest Ruh in dem Getümmel,/Und in der Küche deinen Himmel;/Behalt' ihn, wenn du kanst./O nein, des Fleisches Lust, zu streng geübt, nimmt ab/Und rüstet dich dem frühen Grab./Komm, lass jetzt deinen Bratspiss rasten,/Und lern im Reich der Schatten fasten!« Meyer/Meyer 1759, 74.

4 In our picture, Death asks the cook to put down his roasting pole. In the Basle *Dance of Death*, one of the most famous versions of this moralising genre, dating from the 15th century, Death mockingly carries it over his shoulder. The cook in the Basle version holds a jug in his hand whose contents pour out on the floor – a clear *vanitas* symbol. The Meyers' depiction, too, includes such a jug. It lies on the floor and has fallen over, behind the cook's legs.

5 Ströle 1995.

the avowedly moralising intention: Death explicitly addresses the cook as »fat«. In his kitchen, an array of gastronomic delicacies come together that only the rich could afford in the early modern period, particularly in such abundance. Our chef cooked for the rich and he ate the same food as them. Such cooking and eating – thus a key message of the image – is to be condemned. It was not carried out to fulfil a bodily need, but out of gluttony, in recurrent acts of excessive consumption. In fact, the double page opens with a quotation from Ecclesiasticus: »Be not unsatiable in any dainty thing, nor too greedy upon meats; For excess of meats bringeth sickness, and surfeiting will turn into cholera. By surfeiting have many perished; but he that taketh heed prolongeth his life.«<sup>6</sup> Though counted among the apocrypha by Luther and others, the book of Sirach, a collection of ethical teachings, was often quoted and referred to in the early modern age beyond confessional borders. Indeed, as Natalie Zemon Davis has noted (albeit more specifically in relation to Holbein's *Dance of Death*), the iconography presented in such series of images was *a priori* neither Catholic nor Protestant but could be and was used in its own way by different traditions, with adaptations in the text as appropriate. Both sides, however, and this is the essential point, wanted these images to be understood as preparation for a good death.<sup>7</sup> A good death had a lot to do with a good life, and eating as an essential part of human society was not only a physical but a moral minefield, one that contributed significantly to creating and reproducing culture and identity.<sup>8</sup> Against this background, the copper engraving representing the fat cook in the Meyers' *Danse Macabre* may be perceived as a historical document and visual medium of communication regarding its normative contents, implications, and intentions – about nutrition, the body, health, and the social and religious order in early modern Europe.

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6 Sirach 37:29–31 (KJV). The German original reads: »Überfülle dich nicht mit allerley Schlecken, und friss nicht so begierig. Denn viel Fressen macht krank; und ein unersättlicher Frass kriegt das Grimmen. Viel haben sich zu tode gefressen: wer aber mässig ist, der lebt desto länger.«

7 Zemon Davis 1956.

8 Wilson 2006.

## 2. Food consumption and body mass as a communicative and normative practice

In the following study we will pursue the question of which collective ideas and resulting practices about food, and more specifically eating behaviour and its effect on people, on their physical and spiritual health, can be gleaned from a consideration of a few selected sources. We ask through which visual conventions such notions are constructed and represented, carried on and conveyed. The analysis of both historical and contemporary material, all of which originates from a European context, aims at investigating a few remarkable points of intersection: while economic considerations clearly always played an important role, our case studies also document the targeted use of visual material to regulate society with regard to physical health, and this with a very strong moral component. The chosen diachronic approach traces a continuity or the resumption of certain lines of argumentation and thus – we postulate – the ongoing presence, in different media, of specific normative tendencies and aspirations concerning practices of eating (and drinking) in the European cultural space. In this context, we therefore conceive of Europe as an imaginary normative power, which once regulated and still regulates the life of its population in manifold ways. Its authority is based on historically legitimised, common values and norms that guide the coexistence and collaboration of different countries in this region, and ultimately, the life of the individual. Regulations concerning food habits and nutritional behaviour apply to the public as well as to the individual sphere. Questions like »what is eaten and drunk, when, where and by whom?« or »what is permissible and good for you and why?« may highlight how different authorities (political, economic, social, religious) use the same normative guidelines to achieve diverse objectives such as stable agriculture and markets, food security and health, or religious commitment. These values mostly derive from a »Christian self-conception« – for Christianity provided a guideline for Europe's political, social, and moral construction, and its impact has endured down the centuries.<sup>9</sup> Christianity was crucial for European self-conceptions in the past and still is today, as we will see in the fol-

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<sup>9</sup> Delgado 2008.

lowing investigation of visual examples from both avowedly »Christian« and »un-avowedly Christian« periods.

Our historical focus is primarily on an extraordinarily well-known pair of images, Pieter Bruegel's *The Fat Kitchen* and *The Thin Kitchen*, two copperplate engravings that are dense with signs, forms, and ideas about eating and food. They achieved quite remarkable circulation in various versions and remained part of the collective imaginary for a long time.<sup>10</sup> The approach proposed here places this pair of images in the broader iconographic context of a genre representing communal meals, known as »Tables« which were very popular in the early modern period. Shifting to the contemporary context, our attention moves from the pictorial metaphor satirising social and moral issues to norm-producing and norm-influencing entities that seek to regulate the relationship between eating and health in Europe for our time: we will discuss the food pyramids and »Nutri-Score«, a system for labelling food in terms of its nutritional value which was developed by the French health authorities in 2017 and is now used in large parts of the European Union, before examining the »Ministry of Food« campaign conceived by the famous British chef, Jamie Oliver.

Which method do we use, which questions do we ask? Some central keywords deserve mention, such as production, regulation, and representation, which situate our analysis in the field of cultural studies.<sup>11</sup> Additionally, we consider approaches from communication studies, which raise interesting sets of questions. Communication studies have so far received less attention in the context of eating and prove useful when asking about the *longue durée* of food's symbolic function and power as a communicative practice.<sup>12</sup>

Concerning our analysis and diachronic comparisons, we must certainly pose the question about the relationship between past and present, regarding observed continuities and discontinuities alike. Taking up Jan Assmann's definition of mnemohistory, we argue that rather than being received by the present, the past is »modelled, invented, reinvented, and reconstructed by the present«.<sup>13</sup> The same might be true for what may be labelled as »norms«. It becomes clear from these considerations that we do not use the terms

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10 Cf. Schama 1988, 152–153.

11 Du Gay/Hall/James/Madsen/MacKay/Negus 1997; see Ashley/Hollows/Jones/Taylor 2004.

12 Stajcic 2013; Parasecoli 2021 (for a bibliography on this topic).

13 Assmann 1998, 9.

»norm« and »normativity« as a stable concept but understand them as designations for a dynamic process and concept, aiming at circumscribing certain socio-religious phenomena. In the creation, construction, and mediation of these phenomena, artefacts and visual representations of various kinds play an essential role.<sup>14</sup> Normativity thus, in the context of the present diachronic investigation, is used, more precisely, to describe a culturally dominant process within Europe that shapes and regulates ideas about food consumption, notions of lifestyle, social order, physical appearance, and the health of body and soul. The media considered here have served and continue to serve as effective instruments for conveying and influencing such values and norms.

### 3. A table full of norms

In the year 1563 the Flemish editor Hieronymus Cock published two engravings by Pieter van der Heyden (fig. 2 and 3). These masterly compositions known as *The Fat Kitchen* and *The Thin Kitchen* were executed after two (lost) drawings by Pieter Bruegel. It seems likely that Cock, who was Bruegel's Antwerp editor and one of the most prominent and influential publishers of prints in northern Europe at the time, commissioned the pair of images.<sup>15</sup> Whether Bruegel »invented« this iconography or not, his pictorial conception thereof significantly contributed to the distribution and reception of a motif addressing the issue of food consumption and body size in a critical manner, caricaturing and ridiculing both fat and thin people, and by this challenging the viewers. The two compositions were conceived dialectically, as counterparts. In both cases we see an interior, a kitchen, where the action takes place. In both cases, several people are gathered in the room, some sitting on the floor, others around a table. In both rooms, various foodstuffs can be seen, and in both a spatial reference to an outside world is visualised through an open door. The two images are pictorially linked through a fat and a thin person respectively disturbing the homogeneity of the other group. The differences between the two representations are just as clear as the similarities: in *The Fat Kitchen*, people are excessively fat – women, men, children, an infant, even the dogs. They prepare and consume incredible quan-

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14 Cf. Henriksen 2011.

15 On Bruegel and his graphic world see Orenstein 2001.



Fig. 2: Pieter van der Heyden (after Pieter Bruegel), *The Fat Kitchen*, engraving, 1563, New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, Harris Brisbane Dick Fund, 1926.<sup>16</sup>



Fig. 3: Pieter van der Heyden (after Pieter Bruegel), *The Thin Kitchen*, engraving, 1563, New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, Harris Brisbane Dick Fund, 1928.<sup>17</sup>

16 Source: The Met's Open Access Program, <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/410912>.

17 Source: The Met's Open Access Program, <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/392426>.

tities of food. And what food! Fatty pork, sausages, bread, and cakes. There are three (!) pots hanging over the fire. The only thin man in the room, holding a bagpipe (a common symbol of laziness and a dissolute lifestyle), is forcibly pushed out the door.<sup>18</sup> In contrast, there is hardly anything to eat in *The Thin Kitchen*. There is probably just water in the only small pot over the fire. A bowl of mussels sits on the table, some bread, dried fish, onions, root vegetables. The people and animals in this kitchen are frighteningly gaunt and haggard. The fat man in the doorway is not driven away, it is he himself who takes flight from this place.<sup>19</sup>

Various aspects of the two images have been highlighted: different foods stand for different socio-economic classes; as Roland Barthes argued, food functions as a sign, it is part and parcel of a whole system of meaning.<sup>20</sup> Food thus communicates something beyond and distinct from its nutritional value: true, fish and mussels, onions and turnips are what poor people would have eaten at the time, while the rich consumed meat and sausages. At the same time though, and beyond this documentary dimension and the references to economic classes of society, the consumption of these foods was regulated by religious prescriptions, too, such as the prohibition to eat meat and dairy products during Lent, and their visual representation had various socio-religious implications and associations for the early modern public.<sup>21</sup> Also worth mentioning are the scholarly medical tracts about an adequate and healthy life style that circulated widely in the early modern period.<sup>22</sup> A central point when discussing the Bruegel pair of images is of course invariably the physical appearance of the actors. »Vetman« and »Magherman« are understood as an expression of social criticism; through them, the consequences of wealth and poverty are embodied. Their respective body sizes have a lot to do with morally based norms and standardisations of different aspects of food: excess and gluttony as well as stinginess on the one

18 The caption, in French, reads: »Hors dici Maigre-dos à eune hideuse mine/Tu nas que' faire ici Car c'est Grasse-Cuisine« (Be off with you, you skinny little man, you may be hungry but this is a fat kitchen, and you do not belong here).

19 The French caption reads: »Ou Maigre-os Le pot mouve est un pouvre Convive/Pource, à Grasse-cuisine iray, tant que je Vive« (Where thin-as-bones stirs the pot, the family meal is always poor, and I will go to the fat kitchen, for as long as I live).

20 Barthes 1964.

21 Cf. Kissane 2018, 53–104, on breaking the fast in Reformation Zürich.

22 Cf. Gentilcore 2015.

hand, and laziness and sloth on the other, leading to a self-inflicted lack of good food. The iconographic convention of fat and thin thus more generally refers to different paths of transgression, which in all cases amount to a failed observance of rules.

It is worth briefly mentioning here the nexus to a related iconographic complex of the early modern period, the struggle between Carnival and Lent, offering a satirical visual commentary on a moment of transition in Christian liturgy. In a well-known painting by Bruegel the prescribed restraint of Lent is personified by a gaunt woman and the opulence of Carnival by a fat man. While he is armed with a roasting spit on which a large piece of meat is stuck (and we remember here the representation of the cook in the Meyers' *Dance of Death*), it is fish that are balanced on her baker's paddle.<sup>23</sup> »The Fat Kitchen and The Thin Kitchen«, as Nicoud observes, »clearly illustrate the system of binary oppositions at work between Carnival and Lent. Their conflict presupposes that the ideal order of the Golden Age – that is to say the harmony of the contraries or *Concordia discors* – has been disrupted and that the world has become chaotic.«<sup>24</sup>

This quotation provides an important cue for our discussion with the term »Concordia«. A very popular late mannerist engraving by the renowned Antwerp artist Marten de Vos bears this title (fig. 4). The notion of human harmony is allegorically conveyed by showing a family assembled around a round table for a common meal in a hospitable room warmed by a fire. Georg Simmel opened his 1910 newspaper article »The Sociology of the Meal« with the truism that the fact that people must eat and drink is the »most common« of all the things they have in common and thus becomes the substance of common actions.<sup>25</sup> Indeed and interestingly, as we will discuss below, the British chef Jamie Oliver uses the iconography of the common meal with a purposefully positive connotation. Taking this observation by the German sociologist back in time to early modern visual media, we find that the so-called »Tables« genre, of families harmoniously sharing a meal, was already very popular in the 16th and 17th centuries.

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23 Cf. Raupp 2002; Büttner/Wimböck 2004; Andringa 2017.

24 Nicoud 2018. Cf. also Grinberg/Kinser 1983; Cloutier-Blazzard 2009, 101–106.

25 Simmel 1910.



Fig. 4: Crispijn van de Passe (after Marten de Vos), *Concordia or A Family Gathered around the Dining Table*, engraving, 1589, London, Wellcome Library, No. 38954i.<sup>26</sup>

We might therefore fruitfully add to the analyses of Bruegel's *The Fat Kitchen* and *The Thin Kitchen* by comparing this pair of images with the popular iconographic *topos* of the common meal. Jesus's blessing and breaking the bread at the table with his disciples, the Last Supper, the supper at Emmaus, the marriage feast at Cana – these biblical scenes certainly inspired and influenced the »Tables« genre.<sup>27</sup> In these compositions, more broadly circulated through the print medium, a set of implicit and explicit norms was visually conveyed: the regulation of eating through seating order, with the *pater familias* presiding at the head of the table and the various members seated around him according to a precise order, the discipline of prayers before and after the meal, the *be-*

26 Source: <https://wellcomecollection.org/works/ztj6rc3p> (accessed May 25, 2022).

27 It is interesting that in Jan Bruegel I and Peter Paul Rubens' painting *Taste* (1618, oil on panel, Museo del Prado, Madrid) both *The Fat Kitchen* and *The Marriage at Cana* are represented as paintings within the painting.

*nedictio mensae* and the *gratiarum actio*, all standards of propriety and decorum – values that are considered crucial for a shared ritual and for the shared meal of »daily bread«, be it that of a well-off family with rich quantities of food or that of a peasant family around a single shared plate of soup.<sup>28</sup> Against the background of such a popular iconography of harmonious domestic scenes, demonstratively depicting the observation of traditions and norms, Bruegel's intentionally disruptive dialectics appear to be additionally augmented. In a pictorial game with the visual conventions of his time the different instances and levels of social and moral disorder in both, *The Fat Kitchen* and *The Thin Kitchen*, are emphasised further, and by the same token the extreme consequences of these missed or intentionally avoided opportunities to adhere to standards are demonstrated.

The study of the above-mentioned pictorial sources documents, in the example of food practices, the interactions between religious concepts and prescriptions for a good life as mandatory precondition for the afterlife. At the same time, these broadly circulated engravings showing contrasting iconographies of right and wrong preparation and consumption of food highlight the importance of visual media for conveying values and guidelines, and thus fostering social stability within early modern Europe.

#### 4. Of pyramids and scales: Contemporary representations of food regulations

Even today the consequences of food habits that do not follow the norms of a specific cultural context play a crucial role in our everyday lives. Usually, these consequences are not connected to the prospect of a possibly negative afterlife in a religious sense, but to the human condition in the here and now. Nutrition, the »correct« preparation of meals and the use of the »right« products are part of popular ideas of health, efficiency, and physical resilience with a significant impact on the individual's development and their position within a community. Also today, the problem of deviant food habits – as in the example of *The Thin Kitchen* and *The Fat Kitchen* discussed above – is still significant, for these aberrations challenge the norms of a »good« lifestyle

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28 Cf. Avery/Calaresu 2019, 191–195; Franits 1986; van Thiel 1987.

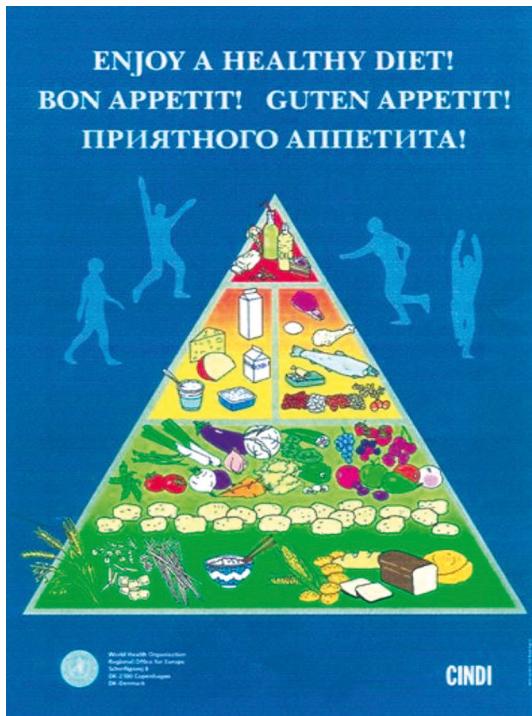


Fig. 5: The CINDI (Countrywide Integrated Noncommunicable Disease Intervention) food pyramid, established by the WHO Region Office for Europe.<sup>29</sup>

and possibly endanger society's welfare by producing costs. Even though religious rules concerning the preparation and consumption of food have become less important in European countries today, normative food guidance has not vanished. At first sight it may seem that the »moral« attributes of contemporary nutritional standards have been erased, or at least the rules referring to the »right« preparation and consumption of appropriate products seem to be less mandatory. But maybe it is just the way in which normative instructions about food are represented today that makes us think of them as a »moral-free« issue.

While at first glance the contemporary food pyramids<sup>30</sup> – such as the one above, established by the WHO (fig. 5) and the following two national examples (figs. 6 and 7) – seem to have little in common with the symbolic

29 Source: <https://www.eufic.org/en/healthy-living/article/food-based-dietary-guidelines-in-europe> (accessed July 10, 2021).

30 It is important to note that buildings with explicit religious or ritual connotation in diverse cultures are often constructed in the shape of a pyramid.



Fig. 6: The Austrian food pyramid, screenshot.<sup>31</sup>

abundance of the Meyers' *Danse Macabre* or the van der Heyden engravings after Bruegel, they also represent a specific normative concept of what »good« – now in the sense of »healthy« – or »bad« – hence »unhealthy« – food means. Visually the pyramids are absolutely clear about the ideal quantities of different food categories, communicating them by geometrical form or the use of colours.

Though the concepts of healthy nutrition vary enormously and depend on various factors, most of them aim to promote physical strength or resilience, and consequently, also mental efficiency. In this sense, one could say healthy food habits come along with a specific idea of (economic) produc-

<sup>31</sup> Source: <https://www.eufic.org/en/healthy-living/article/food-based-dietary-guidelines-in-europe> (accessed July 7, 2021).

## Eating What We Are, Being What We Eat

Pirámide de la Alimentación Saludable (SENC, 2004)

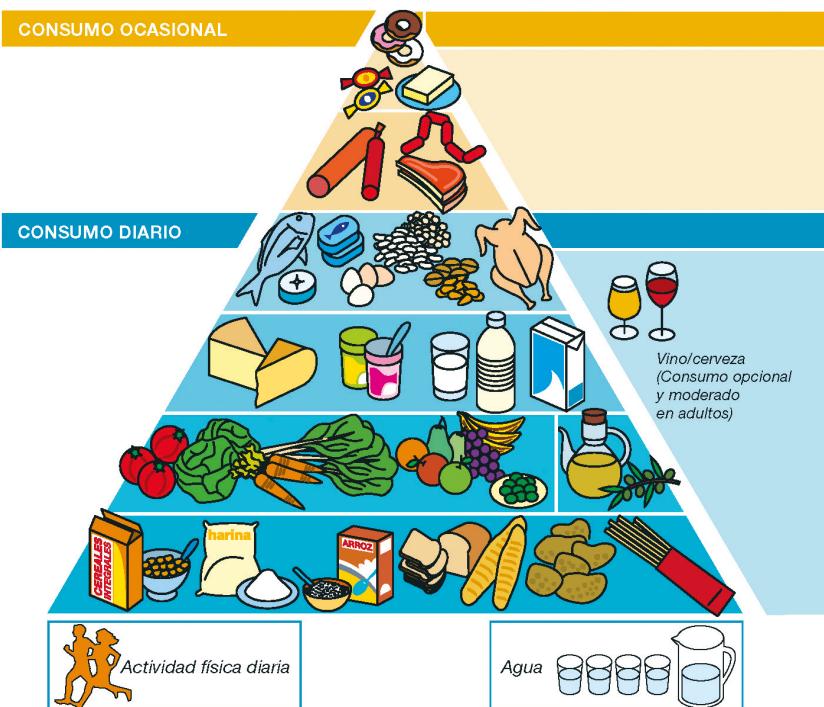


Fig. 7: The Spanish food pyramid, screenshot.<sup>32</sup>

tivity that may correspond with Max Weber's concept of the Protestant ethic and its »this-worldly asceticism«, supporting high productivity and therefore fuelling rising capitalism.<sup>33</sup> To eat healthily means to prevent you (and society) suffering from (chronic) diseases and its costs, and thus it means to be (re-)productive. Thus, healthy food has not only a medical and economic connotation – if you eat healthily, you are productive because you don't get ill – but also functions as a marker of class, education, and self-responsibility: if you are well educated, and food literacy is part of that learning, you earn enough to have the choice to buy »good« products and to prepare and con-

32 Source: <https://www.eufic.org/en/healthy-living/article/food-based-dietary-guidelines-in-europe> (accessed July 10, 2021).

33 Weber 2016.

sume them in a responsible way.<sup>34</sup> The struggle against obesity as a cause of numerous health issues is one of the primary objectives in the field of nutritional science and food safety today. What was once called gluttony and was religiously condemned, with references to specific quotations from the Bible, is now scientifically judged as a severe health issue.<sup>35</sup> The authorities issuing these condemnations may have changed but the issue remains the same.

This shows that the aspect of power that comes along with food and all the practices, ideologies, and rules around it, is essential. Food is a basic social issue that touches almost every sphere of life from agriculture to economics, socio-political systems, gender, and sexuality. Thus, we agree with Roland Barthes's observation: »Modern nutritional science (at least according to what can be observed in France) is not bound to any moral values, such as asceticism, wisdom, or purity, but on the contrary, to values of power. The energy furnished by a consciously worked diet is mythically directed, it seems, toward an adaptation of man to the modern world.«<sup>36</sup> But we also challenge the first part of Barthes's statement because even the health organisations with their guidelines and instructions do not merely provide neutral information but clearly and visually (!) define – on the basis of scientific insights – what is »good« or »bad« for people's health, and in the end, for them as individuals in a specific social, geographical, economic, and religious context, as the comparison of the two selected food pyramids of Austria (fig. 6) and Spain (fig. 7) shows.

In the Austrian pyramid, the written instructions are far more concrete than in the Spanish one and the quantities set out in each section are far more explicitly defined. The punctuation of the Austrian captions under-

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34 Cf. Gentilcore 2015; Grew 2018; Barthes 1997, 24. The original article was first published in 1961 in the French scientific journal *Annales: Économies, Sociétés, Civilisations* 16/5, 984.

35 Historically it was mainly Catholics who were ascribed the vice of gluttony and obesity, a behaviour and a bodily condition which were condemned by Protestants as a sign of the corrupt state of the Catholic Church and were counted as severe menaces to the community because of the consequences to the state. Literary scholar Elena Levy-Navarro explains in her monograph on the culture of obesity how literature in early and late modernity treated the issue: »The foreign, Catholic religions offer a counterpoint to what the puritan male reader should be. In this case, it encourages the puritan reader to promote bodily self-restraint in himself and in his dependents for the welfare of the English state generally.« Levy-Navarro 2008, 123.

36 Barthes 1997, 25; Barthes 1961, 985 (French original).

lines the imperatival aspect of this nutritional guideline and adds a mandatory quality. By contrast, the tone of the Spanish pyramid suggests that it is merely offering well-intentioned advice. It is interesting that, for the most part, the colours of the sections differ and here too, the Austrian pyramid is more explicit: the use of traffic light colours – green for »good, go for it« through shades of yellow and orange »okay, but be cautious« to red for »try to avoid or reduce it« to purple »stop, just don't!« – visually intensifies the recommendations and transforms friendly advice into a risk warning. The Spanish example uses red only for the very top sections of the pyramid and leaves more space for individual interpretation. Strikingly, the products and their place within the sections also vary between the two pyramids. Whereas olive oil is on the same level as fruit and vegetables in the Spanish pyramid and therefore qualifies as »healthy«, the equivalent fat source (rapeseed or sunflower oil?) in the Austrian pyramid is second to the top, which means »quite unhealthy«. How can we explain this? The reasonable use (in terms of quantity) of olive oil in Austria is hardly less healthy than in Spain or in any other European country. But olives, from which the oil is made, have been grown for thousands of years in southern Europe, and Spain is in fact the biggest producer of olive oil in the EU.<sup>37</sup> Thus, we might assume that the identification of olive oil as »healthy« is not just a matter of its nutritional value or due to the cultural heritage that functions as a foundation of national and individual identity.<sup>38</sup> Maybe it also has something to do with the producers of these pyramids and their economic and political involvements? And anyway, who are the designers of these pyramids? Do these guidelines also represent the interests of local agriculture or food companies? The official Spanish nutrition guidelines are published by the AESAN, the Spanish Agency for Food Safety and Nutrition, a governmental agency whose responsibilities range from healthy and safe nutrition to food policy. A close relation between local and international producers of food and the agency's experts seems obvious – not only in Spain but also in Austria

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37 Spain's output of olive oil per year is almost four times the quantity of the second biggest producer Italy. The EU is the largest global producer of olive oil. See the official homepage of the agriculture and rural development department [https://ec.europa.eu/info/news/producing-69-worlds-production-eu-largest-producer-olive-oil-2020-feb-04\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/news/producing-69-worlds-production-eu-largest-producer-olive-oil-2020-feb-04_en) (accessed August 22, 2021).

38 On identity and food see e.g. James 1997.

and elsewhere – because of their converging interests in food, nutrition, and health. They are likely to take different positions regarding the topic but must collaborate for sure. In this contribution we can only hypothesize on the full nature and extent of such competing interests. One indicator might be that in 2011 it was reported that the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA), the agency that covers all direct and indirect aspects of food, health, and feed safety, was not acting wholly independently because of conflicts of interest.<sup>39</sup>

Even though concepts of healthy food differ between various European countries, food producers, health professionals, chefs, and other social groups, all these dietary guidelines are morally charged. The pyramids, just like the early modern engravings discussed above, explain which food – at least from a physiological point of view – is »good« or »bad« for our health. We as consumers are »free to choose«, but are we really? If we voluntarily choose to eat a fatty hamburger with a huge serving of fries, does this choice not come along with a slightly guilty conscience, because we know that it is »bad«, no, »unhealthy« food that can have negative effects on us, and in the end on society as a whole? The moral component of today's nutritional guidelines may be more subtle in comparison to the early modern examples discussed above, because we are mainly talking about physical conditions in the here and now rather than about their spiritual consequences for a »good« life in a specific religious tradition. Still, the popular providers of contemporary food guidelines, such as health organisations, chefs, or food bloggers, often use religiously charged language to highlight the importance of »correct« – in the sense of healthy – nutrition that comes along with a specific worldview.<sup>40</sup>

We could thus talk about a mediatised process of the »re-sacralisation« of food and nutritional habits which serves as an instrument to emphasise the importance of a specific and only seemingly non-religious orthopraxy con-

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39 According to different organisations and journalists, agents of the EFSA have conflicts of interests due to e.g. lobbying: <https://corporateeurope.org/en/efsa/2013/10/unhappy-meal-european-food-safety-authoritys-independence-problem>; <https://www.euractiv.com/section/agriculture-food/news/food-safety-agency-s-reliability-faces-fresh-criticism/> (both accessed August 8, 2021).

40 Just think about movements like vegetarianism or veganism that legitimise their dietary concepts with socio-ecological needs or ethical considerations based on their reading of Genesis and other biblical texts. Sometimes such movements develop a global reach and try to spread their perspective with a missionary zeal. Cf. Wright 2021; Linzey/Linzey 2019.

cerning food, nutrition, and eating. Jamie Oliver's »Ministry of Food« project, discussed below, will provide an example for such a process of re-sacralisation.

But for now, let us go back to the pyramids and their visual successors. Food pyramids certainly leave scope for interpretation, and as noted already, they vary from country to country,<sup>41</sup> but their consistently regulatory and normative character is obvious. The idea of creating a European-wide nutritional guideline provided by the WHO Regional Office for Europe was a consequence of the increasing number of chronic diseases (obesity, hypertension, diabetes) and the attendant rise in health care costs for specific member countries.<sup>42</sup> Although the project was initially based on the assumption that the different members of the EU share a relatively convergent idea of food guidelines, soon, and quite remarkably, the aim of creating a single guideline for the entire EU turned out to be unworkable. The idea of Europe as a conglomerate of different countries with shared values and norms is tempting but in terms of food and nutrition patterns the member states seem to differ fundamentally: be it because of different agropolitical approaches and decisions, be it because of economic or educational discrepancies, or be it because of historical and regional identities that seem endangered. As the French sociologist Jean-Pierre Poulain puts it: »The fact that food and gastronomy are classed as examples of our heritage arose from changes to our eating practices that are viewed as a form of deterioration and, more broadly, as a threat to our identity.«<sup>43</sup>

In 2010, the scientific record of the committee assigned to the project consequently suggested guidelines that mirror the food-health correlation of a specific country. They also recommended country-specific graphical representations – in addition to pyramids, for example circles, plates, or boats – to make the guidelines more comprehensible. Obviously, the need for a visual adaptation of food guidelines today is no less relevant than in early

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41 See for an overview the homepages of the European Commission: [https://knowledge4policy.ec.europa.eu/health-promotion-knowledge-gateway/food-based-dietary-guidelines-europe-source-documents-food\\_en](https://knowledge4policy.ec.europa.eu/health-promotion-knowledge-gateway/food-based-dietary-guidelines-europe-source-documents-food_en) or of The European Food Information Council: <https://www.eufic.org/en/healthy-living/article/food-based-dietary-guidelines-in-europe> (both accessed August 28, 2021).

42 Cf. *Scientific Opinion on establishing Food-Based Dietary Guidelines* of the European Food Safety Authority, <https://efsa.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/pdf/10.2903/j.efsa.2010.1460> (accessed August 31, 2021).

43 Poulain 2017, 16.

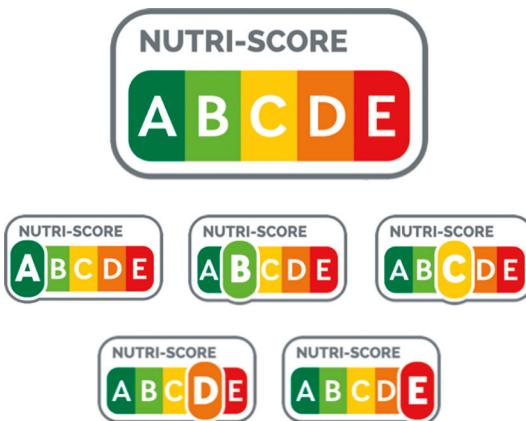


Fig. 8: Nutri-Score. Screenshot of Colruyt Group homepage.<sup>44</sup>

Nutrition Information		
Per 100 g		
Energy	485 kJ / 117 kcal	
Fat	8 g	
Of which Saturates	3,7 g	
Carbohydrate	9 g	
Of which Sugars	8 g	
Protein	1,4 g	
Salt	0,02 g	
Vitamin C	14,81 mg	19% RI*
Salt content is exclusively due to the presence of naturally occurring sodium.		
*Reference intake of an average adult (8 400 kJ / 2 000 kcal)		
INGREDIENTS: Mandarin Oranges (37.9%), Light Whipping Cream (Milk), Pears (12.4%), Peaches (7.7%), Thompson Seedless Grapes (7.6%), Apple (7.5%), Banana (5.9%), English Walnuts (Tree Nuts)		

Fig. 9: How to label a food product according to the European Union Label Regulations, screenshot ESHA homepage.<sup>45</sup>

modernity. Food was and is more than just a provider of energy, it is meaningful on many grounds. And the idea of standardising food habits and visually representing »good« food remains prevalent, as the recently developed Nutri-Score nutritional rating system (fig. 8) shows.

The French Nutri-Score model does not divide food into categories such as carbohydrates or fats in order to connect them with advice on each food-

44 Source: <https://www.colruytgroup.com/en/conscious-consuming/nutri-score> (accessed November 11, 2021).

45 Source: <https://esha.com/blog/european-union-label-regulations/> (accessed August 31, 2021).

stuff, ranging from »good for you every day« to »bad for you, better not«, but rather it attempts to rate the overall nutritional value of a specific product. Thus, it works as an addition to the nutrition information provided on every food item. The five-step rating system of Nutri-Score uses traffic light colours and letters from A to E<sup>46</sup>, with A (dark green) being the best score, and E (dark red) the worst – at least for your health. Preferable products have a high contingent of fruit, vegetables, fibre, or protein whereas a high contingent of saturated fat or sugar indicates a detrimental effect.

Initially, Nutri-Score, which was established as a food label by the French government in 2017, seemed to be much more efficient than the usual nutrition information on food products (fig. 9), because the consumer identifies immediately if a food item is healthy or not. This is a great advantage over the globally used nutrition information labels which indicate the exact quantity of the ingredients but presuppose a certain understanding of what a »balanced diet« or »healthy nutrition« means.

With Nutri-Score, the goal of a single European food guideline seemed to have been realised: the obviously simple and fair rating system – the calculation of the score is just mathematics – was thought to be applicable in every cultural context. But Nutri-Score soon turned out to be more divisive than unifying. Even though some countries such as Belgium, Spain and Portugal joined the Nutri-Score rating system, opponents within the EU are many. The Italian government, for example, was critical that some of the most popular Italian agricultural products such as *parmigiano* cheese or *prosciutto* would be stigmatised as »unhealthy«, a negative label that would soon lead to a reduction of exports and eventually to a collapse of a whole industry sector.<sup>47</sup> Clearly, the discussion is not only concerned with matters of health and morality, but invariably touches highly sensitive economic and political interests. The controversial debate on the European use of the Nutri-Score label is still ongoing. Some European countries, such as Germany and Italy,

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46 Interestingly Nutri-Score uses a rating system that reminds consumers of the A, B, C grading in the educational systems of some countries. This can be read as evidence of a specific value system that clearly defines two diametrical poles and the space between them.

47 Cf. health minister Roberto Speranza on Nutri-Score: [https://www.corriere.it/politica/19\\_dicembre\\_19/ministro-speranza-nutriscore-dico-no-all-etichetta-semaforo-il-cibo-d9e7bf36-226c-11ea-8e32-6247f341a5cc.shtml](https://www.corriere.it/politica/19_dicembre_19/ministro-speranza-nutriscore-dico-no-all-etichetta-semaforo-il-cibo-d9e7bf36-226c-11ea-8e32-6247f341a5cc.shtml), or the argumentation of the Italian agroindustry in *Agrifood Today* <https://www.agrifoodtoday.it/salute/stop-nutriscore-ue.html> (both accessed August 31, 2021).

have developed their own visual labels according to the Nutri-Score system, others like the Spanish government support the rating system, but are confronted with the worries of local producers. A harmonious European solution is not imminent.

This example not only shows that even a supposedly objective scientific food guideline is perceived by different actors to transmit moral values – to rate something one needs a range between positive and negative – but it also highlights that food, despite globalisation, is still a significant means to communicate cultural, local, or national belonging, differentiation, and identity.

## 5. *Jamie's Ministry of Food: A European crusader in the name of health and nutritional education*

As we have seen, the representations of today's food guidelines communicate values and norms. It is noteworthy that establishing one general guideline seems to be difficult if not impossible in this constructed unity that is called »Europe«. Was it easier to come up with general lifestyle guidelines in the times of Bruegel or the Meyers when religious institutions and their worldviews enjoyed broad acceptance? Then, food guidelines were presented and perceived as mandatory for they were legitimised by the Bible and linked to the hope for a good afterlife.

Today this could not function any more ... or could it? Since 2005, famous British chef Jamie Oliver has been on a mission. A mission in the truest sense of the word. He started several projects to improve British school dinners and educate staff and students on balanced diets. He was alarmed by the increasing numbers of young people in the UK suffering from diabetes and other health issues because of obesity.<sup>48</sup> So, the chef started his fight against

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48 It is a fact that the obesity prevalence of children in the United Kingdom is closely associated with the socioeconomic status of their families (see <https://fingertips.phe.org.uk/profile/national-child-measurement-programme/data#page/13/>, accessed November 11, 2021). Healthy food is expensive and the time and knowledge of how to cook tends to be reduced in low-income households. Football star Marcus Rashford together with Jamie Oliver and other celebrities demanded that the UK Government distribute meal vouchers to families with a low income during the pandemic lockdown in 2020 to ensure that these children had at least one warm and healthy meal a day. They further demand that the Government review the premises to have access to free school meals. See Scott 2021.



Fig. 10: Welcome page of *Jamie's Ministry of Food*, screenshot of *Jamie's Ministry of Food* homepage.<sup>49</sup>

fat and unhealthy food habits. The airing of *Jamie's School Dinners* (UK 2005, Channel 4), a documentary TV series featuring Oliver, resulted in the funding of a trust and the promise by the Prime Minister to improve school dinners throughout the UK. Nowadays, the effect seems short-lived because the School Food Trust (later Children Food Trust) established in 2005 was already closed in 2017 due to a lack of funding, and it appears that school dinners have gone back to the times before Oliver.<sup>50</sup> But even though the impact of this first campaign for healthy food was not overwhelming, the chef did not abandon his mission. In 2008, Jamie Oliver created the documentary series *Jamie's Ministry of Food* (UK 2008, Channel 4) in which he teaches people in Rotherham, South Yorkshire, how to cook fresh and healthy meals. Subsequently, a whole campaign named *Jamie's Ministry of Food* was launched to educate people in the UK how to prepare healthy meals (fig. 10).<sup>51</sup>

The name chosen for the campaign is certainly striking. At first sight it might refer to the historical British »food ministry« active during World War II, or more generally to political agencies or authorities which provide guidelines for specific political spheres such as the Ministry of Education. But »ministry« can also refer to a religious function. Could the name of the campaign then

49 Source: <https://www.jamiesministryoffood.com/> (accessed August 31, 2021).

50 For an article on child obesity, see Rose 2019.

51 Homepage of the Ministry of Food: <https://www.jamiesministryoffood.com/> (accessed August 31, 2021).

be understood as a subtle reference to the connection between physical and spiritual nourishment,<sup>52</sup> with the famous chef as the bringer of »good news«? The polysemy of the campaign's name certainly fits with Jamie Oliver's idea of healthy future generations and the conscious handling of resources. Furthermore, Oliver's project not only aims to improve health in the UK by providing practical cooking lessons and nutritional know-how, the campaign also wants to spread the food guidelines and instructions worldwide. With the popular chef as first missionary this objective seems feasible – *Jamie's Ministry of Food* has reached over 100,000 people worldwide.

The campaign is set up like a school workshop with practical training and theory to provide partners from various organisations working with different social groups (for example local councils, charities) with the respective skills. The campaign is financed by various groups or stakeholders such as Rotary clubs, the Premier League or charity organisations. The homepage addresses potential partners – actively teaching/participating or financial – not only by demonstrating the positive and scientifically proven effects of the project, but also by appealing to their responsibilities toward society: »We can all play a part in helping our nation be healthier and happier! The ›Ministry of Food‹ is a partnership model. We support organisations with training and resources, and they use these to deliver meaningful change in their communities through cooking lessons and food education.«<sup>53</sup>

What we see on the campaign website are happy people of different ages cooking healthy meals together (fig. 11). Happiness, it seems, comes along with a healthy lifestyle. Visually the campaign focuses on the communicative and collective aspects of food preparation. The prevailing mood is positive suggesting that healthy food makes you see the world in a positive light. That makes the whole message attractive to many. The campaign's website clearly defines the consequences of unhealthy food and presents a simple solution: »We believe that teaching people to cook plays a vital part in the fight against diet-related disease. Jamie set up his ›Ministry of Food‹ programme to help individuals, families, and communities to start cooking again. Once

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52 Historian Caroline Walker Bynum explains in her monograph *Holy Feast and Holy Fast* (1987, 2): »Medieval people often saw gluttony as the major form of lust, fasting as the most painful renunciation, and eating as the most basic and literal way of encountering God.«

53 <https://www.jamiesministryoffood.com/partnerships/> (accessed August 31, 2021).

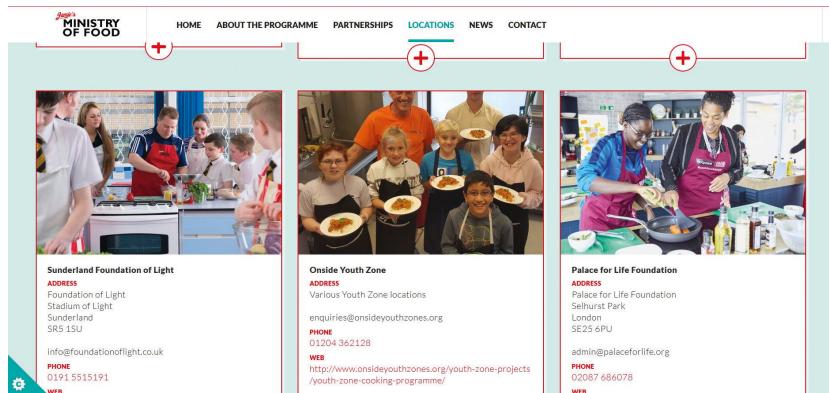


Fig. 11: Healthy food, happy people! Screenshot of *Jamie's Ministry of Food* homepage.<sup>54</sup>

you know how to cook, you have control over your health and the health of your family.<sup>55</sup> The sphere of food and nutrition becomes (again) a morally charged arena where the apostles of »good« and healthy food fight against unhealthy products and »bad« nutrition behaviour.

Jamie Oliver acts as a missionary, his religion is food and healthy nutrition. His opponent is unhealthy food and obesity. Oliver's commitment even appeals to his critics, who don't know if he's a hypocrite or a saint.<sup>56</sup> The media mostly refer to Oliver's »holy war«, his missionary behaviour, and his faith in humankind to understand his idea. Consequently, he is not afraid to use moral language concerning »bad food habits« and adapting religious motifs or language while spreading his faith. When he was awarded an innovation prize in 2010, he explained his vision as follows: »I wish for your help to create a strong, sustainable movement to educate every child about food, inspire families to cook again and empower people everywhere to fight obesity.<sup>57</sup> The wish to spread knowledge of healthy food out of the UK seems ironic given that »British cuisine« has not had a very good reputation for a

54 Source: <https://www.jamiesministryoffood.com/> (accessed August 31, 2021).

55 Source: <https://www.jamiesministryoffood.com/about-the-programme/> (accessed August 31, 2021).

56 Cook 2008.

57 TED prize 2010 to Jamie Oliver, <https://www.ted.com/participate/ted-prize/prize-winning-wishes/food-revolution> (accessed August 31, 2021).

long time but with the right missionary it appears to work also in other countries in Europe and beyond. The war against unhealthy food habits and the connected loss of productivity and financial consequences for communities (or states) is universal, it seems. Clearly then, even today normative food guidelines must be promoted in a special way: by a) an authority that is reliable and serious, b) in a visual form that is attractive to a large group of recipients, c) through a specific set of values that define »good« and »bad« and d) in an inclusive but not generalised way. As these examples show, Europe, down the centuries, appears to have developed and supported a mandatory moral system in terms of food preparation and consumption, albeit continuously adapting it, as well as the visual communication linked to it, to cultural and social specificities.

## 6. Is Nutri-Score the new *Fat Kitchen and Thin Kitchen* and *Jamie's Ministry of Food* a new Concordia Table genre? Closing remarks

In today's multicultural and mediatised society, we note an intense preoccupation with food and health, with different approaches to nutrition, multiple ways of preparation and increasingly complex discourses of (in)tolerance. Museums dedicate elaborate exhibitions to different aspects of food and drink cultures; scholarly publications promote the virtues of some foods and condemn the negative effects of others. Highly frequented blogs, sophisticatedly designed cookbooks, popular television shows and documentaries discuss food as cultural heritage as well as the latest gastronomic and dietary trends.

Focusing on Europe as a frame of reference that was and remains highly complex and contested, we have approached the broad topic of food as an open experimental space within visual and material communication and culture in the analysis of a few selected examples from two distinct periods. In accordance with our hypothesis, we found that certain norms once considered valid in the culturally conceived space of Europe have periodically been taken up again, at least in principle, although they naturally always had to be adapted to new times and circumstances. Such norms concerning eating practices have always remained highly morally charged, whilst the specific norms themselves have varied, because they are linked to specific

social behaviour as well as being perceived as signifiers of individual or collective identity. Based on the source material chosen and analysed as case studies, we touched on some of the early modern and contemporary discourses surrounding food and on the role of visual media as both products and producers of these norms through time and space: the *Dance of Death* was an extremely influential moralising iconography of the Christian tradition. References to the visual and verbal dialectics of Bruegel's *The Fat Kitchen* and *The Thin Kitchen* discussed above are found well into the 19th and 20th centuries and across media, for instance, when in *Le Docteur Pascal*, the twentieth and final volume of his *Rougon-Macquart* cycle, Émile Zola writes of the »bataille séculaire des Gras et des Maigres« (»the secular battle between the fat and the thin«).<sup>58</sup> The association of body size and food in Zola's novel still points to the moral dimension in the conflict between rich (and thus fat) and poor (and thus thin) as raised in the two early modern engravings. As Alejandro Colas notes, though, »[i]n current obesity discourses, class, wealth, and body size associations have largely reversed – the poor are more likely to be fat, and the wealthy thin – but the moralizing nature of the arguments and language persist.«<sup>59</sup> As the analysis of the food pyramids and Nutri-Score scales highlight, the authorities that establish the guidelines may have changed, but they still argue with moral codes of »good« and »bad« referring to nutritional habits. This is visually communicated by the explicit use of colours that are heavy with meaning or forms that clearly define the quantities of specific food categories. Indeed, pyramids, charts and scores are designed to teach people – if not scientifically prove to them – the dangers of improper nutrition for their body (and soul).

In addition, the example of the healthy food-campaign, *Jamie's Ministry of Food*, with its self-declared minister (!), Jamie Oliver, showed that an argument brought forth by a celebrity appears to function quite well concerning food and health issues – maybe better than traffic light declarations on food items. Jamie Oliver is a well-known public figure with a specific expertise. He talks like ordinary people do, he also discusses today's problems concerning food such as the lack of time, the cost of products, and therefore appears very affable. The British chef whose TV cooking series are aired worldwide becomes a popular personification of healthy food and the moral implica-

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58 Zola 1893, 123.

59 Colas 2018, 191–197.

tions linked to its consumption. Oliver's message (and mission) works not only in the UK but far beyond, because his approach is low-threshold and personal at the same time.

Traditions are created, influenced, and transmitted through norms. While necessarily based on elements that are designated and perceived as »tradition«, norms always also define something that is dynamic and subject to changes or, at least, adaptations. We have analysed visual and audio-visual sources: we took a closer look at the action spaces and situations featured, at the individual actors and their bodies, their expressions, and associated emotions. Accordingly, in the case of the more abstract markers, we looked at their letters and colours, their frame of reference and purposeful links. We asked what meaning, what norms are received and legitimised, constructed and represented in and through them. Furthermore, we asked how these norms are intended to affect regulatory processes in eating behaviour and moral concepts connected to food. What is the purpose of the historical images and contemporary pyramids and graphs, what do they want to convey, how, through what medium? Is it possible to establish whether in Europe – conceived of, as stated in the opening section of this chapter, as an imaginary normative power – norms in the field of food and nutrition reflect and reproduce socio-cultural regulations, or whether instead they (re)shape, adapt, and change them? At this stage of our research, rather than presenting a conclusive statement, we prefer to formulate hypotheses based on the sources discussed. In our opinion, and following Simmel, it can be argued that it is precisely its everydayness that makes for a key aspect of eating, as is its ubiquity in ordinary life.<sup>60</sup> The collective imaginary of food, nutrition and the consequences for body and soul as evidenced in the diachronic examples discussed here, and all the notions and rules linked to it, may certainly be described as an (ideal and idealised) construction of a key aspect of »everyday life«, of »reality«, as it were.

In our analysis of some elements of these eating and food norms of past and present Europe, we found elements of a system of values regulating social life to grant it stability and thus, in a broader perspective, contributing to the stability of the many-layered construct of Europe. Eating and food norms are ostensibly related to matters of physical health, and our examples

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60 Simmel 1910.

demonstrate the omnipresence of the question of fat and thin – of body mass, to put it in contemporary terms. But it became just as clear that this seemingly clinical interest in the human body has a very judgmental component. Even if an argument related to health is put forward, the social implications always also address the moral dimension of the actions of individuals or a group or class for the benefit of or to the detriment of the collective. While in the historical case studies discussed the frame of reference was explicitly Christian, the contemporary food pyramids and nutritional indexes are introduced to the public as value-neutral by state authorities in Europe, and formally operate with a post-Enlightenment vocabulary adapted to the time. The particular political and economic interests of individual societies and the resulting conflicts in the endeavour to construct a collectively healthy Europe according to generally binding norms and values became just as clear in our analysis. It seems to us all the more remarkable that the path to building and rebuilding a common set of food values for an imagined European community seems to lead back to a personalised form of mediation in the example of Jamie Oliver's food ministry, and that this again entails the use of a religiously charged vocabulary. For as Roland Barthes points out regarding the mythological impact of food advertisements with all their connected values and normative concepts of a healthy body for a healthy community: »In a mythical way, health is indeed a simple relay midway between the body and the mind; it is the alibi food gives to itself in order to signify materially a pattern of immaterial realities.«<sup>61</sup>

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61 Barthes 1997, 24; Barthes 1961, 984 (French original).

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## Part II

# Imagining Europe from the Outside



# European Matter and Mughal Spirit

## Imaging Europe in Early Modern Mughal Painting

Alberto Saviello

### 1. Introduction

One reaction to Dipesh Chakrabarty's famous call to »provincialise Europe« and to the overt and latent Eurocentrism in the humanities is the reversal of perspective in academic studies of cultural contacts. When analysing pre-colonial and colonial contacts, it is appropriate to ask not how Europeans imagined people on other continents, but how Africans, Asians and Americans perceived and portrayed Europeans.<sup>1</sup> The aim of this change in perspective, however, is not merely to determine the importance or unimportance of Europe from an African, Asian or American standpoint but to gain a more multi-faceted and multi-layered view of entangled history. In fact, the reversal of perspective has not only led to questioning the traditional scholarly characterisations of the historical actors as, say, »centre and periphery« or »sender and receiver«, it has also contributed to the development of new methodological approaches to describing cultural contacts. For example, the notion of a »European influence« has largely been replaced by concepts such as appropriation, adaptation, and translation, to name but a

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1 See Chakrabarty 2008. A classic of this reversal is Lips 1937, which contrasts the colonial view of the west with the view of the colonised peoples. A recent research project following this approach is »Images of Europe Beyond Europe« led by Matthias Weiß at the Bibliotheca Hertziana, Max-Planck-Institut for Art History, <https://www.biblhertz.it/de/dept-michalsky/images-of-europe> (accessed August 3, 2021).

few, which no longer see the active and determining part of cultural transfers in the supposed »senders« but in the »receivers«. This shift is also true with regard to more recent research on the Early Modern Indian Mughal dynasty and especially on the court's reception of European art.<sup>2</sup> For example, Mika Natif, referring to the concept of European Orientalism, which was significantly coined by Edward Said, speaks also of a »Mughal Occidentalism«.<sup>3</sup>

This chapter follows this approach, examining pictorial representations of Europeans in Mughal painting at the turn of the 16th and 17th centuries. It asks what image of Europe these paintings evoke and how this image was related to the culture and the moral and religious norms of the Mughal court.

Works of visual art are of particular relevance for the Mughal imagination of Europe. Not only were Europeans a popular motif in court painting, but works of art from Europe also aroused great interest among court artists. The Mughal painters' artistic engagement with Europe thus took place on two levels, both in terms of motifs, and in the techniques and styles of pictorial representation. The fact that distinct painting styles were associated with different ways of looking at the world, and sometimes also quite decidedly with competing worldviews, is well known in modern times.<sup>4</sup> For the early Mughal Dynasty, too, the confrontation with European images was not merely aesthetic. The claim of a mimetic representation of the visible world often associated with European art, as well as the religious veneration of images conveyed by Christian missionaries, provided the Sunni Mughals with an occasion for critical reflection and commentary on their own treatment of images.

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- 2 This question has also been discussed for Mughal India in the period before colonisation by Europeans with a focus on trade and art. See Das 2020; Natif 2018; Govil 2008; Juneja 2008; Subrahmanyam 2005a; Subrahmanyam 2005b; Beach 2004. Regarding the perception of the Portuguese in Asia see Flores 2014.
- 3 See Natif 2018, 8–9. In contrast to the pejorative and essentialising European Orientalism criticised by Said and later scholars, Natif is less critical of Mughal Occidentalism because it was less defined by the binary of »self« and »other« and allowed for more complex constructions of cultural identity.
- 4 See for example Curley 2018 on the stylistic binary between American Abstraction versus Soviet Socialist Realism in the time of the Cold War, or Orhan Pamuk's historical novel (2001) about the Ottoman artists' conflict in dealing with western European painting style.

## 2. European figures as examples of non-normative behaviour

In general, the early relationship between the Mughals, a branch of the Timurid dynasty originating in Central Asia that came to power in Delhi in 1526, and the representatives of Europe was characterised on both sides by a sense of cultural superiority.<sup>5</sup> The Mughals generally referred to Europeans as »firangi«, as »Franks«, and rarely distinguished between different European nations. Even though the Mughals seemed to show little interest in the geography or political conditions of the »insignificant island« of Europe, they did have a keen interest in European techniques and sciences.<sup>6</sup>

The Europeans were considered technically skilled, but also untrustworthy and rude. The Indian scholar Sanjay Subrahmanyam has collected numerous sources that confirm such a view.<sup>7</sup> At his first encounter with Europeans when he gave an audience during a campaign in Gujarat, Mughal Emperor Akbar (r. 1556–1605) is said to have questioned his guests about their customs. In doing so, Akbar harboured the desire to cultivate this »savage race«.<sup>8</sup> Contacts with Europeans were still rare at that time. However, particularly telling is a description by the Mughal envoy Tahir Muhammad who travelled to Goa in 1579–1580 to meet the Portuguese:

In sum, the community of Franks wear[s] very fine clothes but they are often very slovenly and pimply. They don't like to use water. They bathe very rarely. Amongst them, washing after relieving oneself is considered improper. They are very good at using firearms, and they are particularly brave on ships and in the water. But in contrast to this, they are not so brave on land.<sup>9</sup>

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5 For the Mughal part see for example Natif 2018, 37.

6 Govil 2008, 240. While Digby 1999 refers to mythical stories that entwined themselves around Europe and its geography in Mughal literature, Koch 2010 was able to demonstrate that the Mughal court was not only interested in European cartography, but purposefully adapted cartographic forms and techniques for its own purposes. The reception of Europe thus took place on different levels.

7 Subrahmanyam 2005a.

8 Abu'l Fazl 2000, vol. 3, 37.

9 From *Rauzat al-Tahirin*, Bodleian Library, Oxford, Ms. Elliot 314, cited after Subrahmanyam 2005a, 86–87.

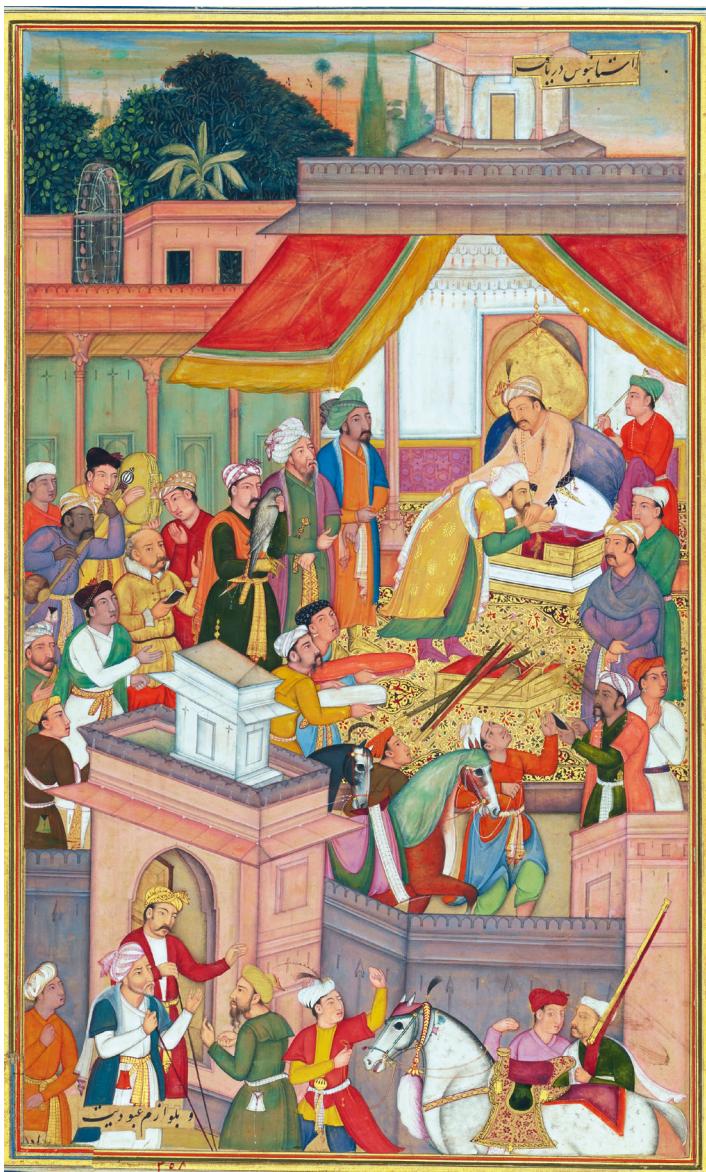


Fig. 1: Dharm Das, Akbar Receives Congratulations on the Birth of his Son Murad, Agra, June 1570, pigment and gold on paper, 45.4 × 27.2 cm, 1603–1605, Chester Beatty Library, In 03.147.<sup>10</sup>

10 Source: [https://viewer.cbl.ie/viewer/image/In\\_03\\_147/2/](https://viewer.cbl.ie/viewer/image/In_03_147/2/) (accessed September 19, 2022).

The contacts with agents from the continent became more frequent after Akbar invited Jesuit missionaries to Fatehpur Sikri in 1580 and European ambassadors and emissaries came to visit the court. However, Europeans could not claim any particular importance at court, as depictions of Mughal court assemblies suggest. Representatives of the continent that appear in these paintings are usually placed at a notable distance from the ruler. The distance to the emperor marked the rank of the respective person at court.<sup>11</sup> An *Akbarnama* illustration attributed to Dharm Das and dated around 1603–1605 gives an impression of this. It shows Akbar receiving congratulations on the birth of his son Murad in June 1570 (fig. 1). Among the well-wishers appears a man dressed in a golden doublet and lace collar. He stands out from the other figures not only because of his European clothing but also because of his lack of headgear. As we know from reports by European travellers as well as from Asian sources, being bareheaded was generally considered a breach of etiquette and a sign of dishonour.<sup>12</sup> Nothing is known about a European representative at the court in Agra during this period, and it is very questionable to what extent the painting, made more than 30 years after the event, is historically accurate.<sup>13</sup> Another work that is artistically less appealing but almost identical in terms of composition and iconography depicts the bestowal of a robe of honour at which the English ambassador Sir Thomas Roe (c. 1581–1644, Ambassador at the Mughal court 1615–1618) was present.<sup>14</sup> The same composition is thus supposed to represent two events that took place more than four decades apart. In both paintings the European is a staffage figure who not only indicates the far reaching relations of the Mughal court, but also the Europeans' unsophisticated manners. As in Tahir Muhammad's description, the European man in the painting is characterised not only by his misbehaviour but also by his expensive and extravagant clothes.

Sometimes, however, the depictions of Europeans represented transgressions of moral and religious norms that were common in Mughal court society itself: for example, the consumption of alcoholic beverages. Even though

11 Eaton 1993, 160.

12 Flüchter 2016, 102; Kaicker 2014, 189; Chopra 1963, 8.

13 Beach (2004, 177) is certain that no European was present at the ceremony.

14 See British Museum, Number 1933,0610,0.1. Sir Thomas Roe was ambassador to the court of Jahangir from 1615–1618. However, the European figure in the version attributed to Dharm Das looks more like Roe than the figure in the painting of the British Museum. The dating of the Chester Beatty Library miniature should be reconsidered.

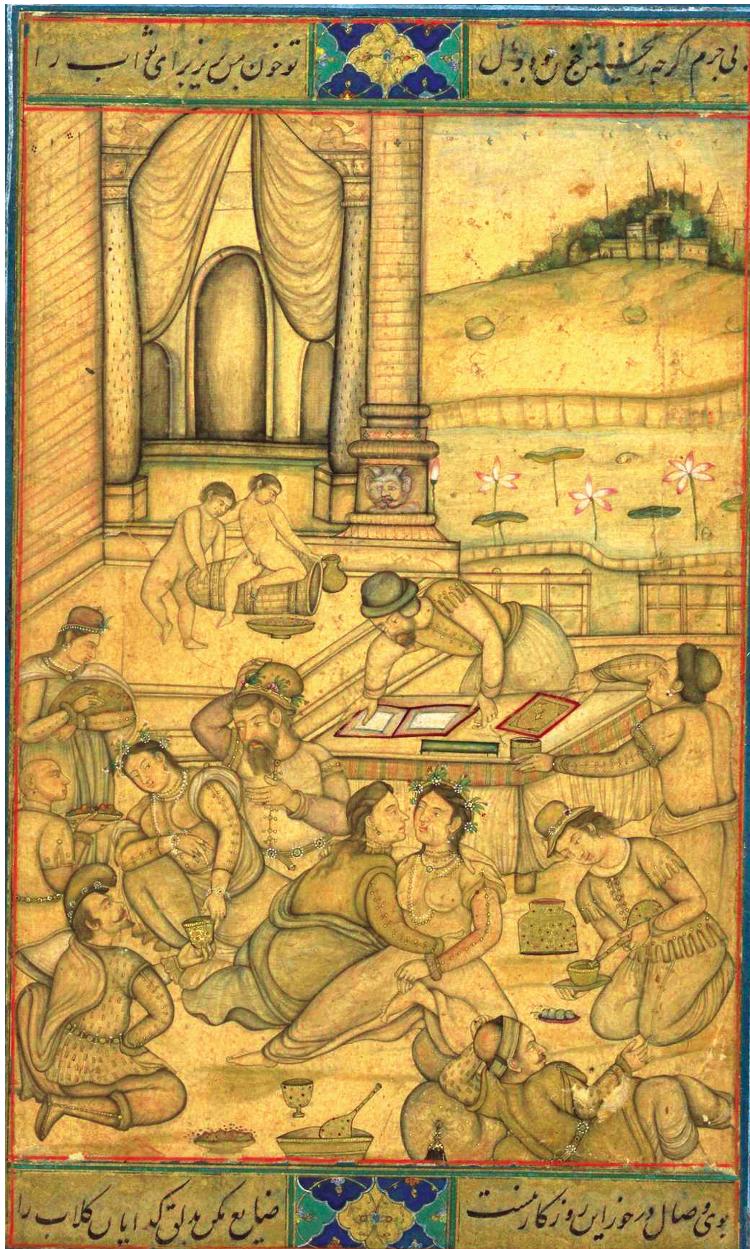


Fig. 2: Anonymous Mughal artist, *A Party of Carousing Europeans*, ink and watercolour on paper, 21.2 x 12.6 cm, ca. 1605, London, Victoria and Albert Museum, D. 399-1885. © Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

alcoholic drinks are forbidden in Islam, drinking was usual at the Mughal court to such an extent that it caused serious damage to courtiers and rulers.<sup>15</sup> Alcoholism was even a common cause of death among Mughal princes. Emperor Jahangir's (r. 1605–1627) two younger brothers died of alcoholism and the addiction of the Shah himself is also well documented.<sup>16</sup> Nevertheless, it seems that the Mughals preferred to illustrate excessive alcohol consumption and associated misbehaviour by depicting European figures. Sometimes these paintings show veritable orgies during which the European carousers also engage in erotic relations (fig. 2).

Other images, however, seem to suggest that the depictions of European drinking carousals were projections of the desires and vices of the court society itself. In a *nim qalam* drawing, the painter Basawan shows a weighty man resting on a large cushion with his hat slipped forward as a sign of his inebriation (fig. 3). Clothing and especially hats were a distinctive feature of the Europeans, who, accordingly, were also called *kulah-poshan* (hat wearers).<sup>17</sup> While the hat seems to indicate a »firangi«, the shaved head visible under the headdress, the leg dress and especially the manner of sitting common to rulers and heroic figures in Persian painting, however, are indications that the man is more likely a Mughal courtier.<sup>18</sup> In fact, Portuguese fashion enjoyed some popularity at court, and Akbar and Jahangir themselves sometimes wore European clothing.<sup>19</sup> Comparable to roughly contemporaneous Oriental masquerades in Europe, the drawing probably shows an Occidental masquerade, in which the subject is depicted in the playful disguise of a European whose accompanying behaviour is presented as transgressive of official norms.<sup>20</sup> The general ability of images to transcend boundaries, to open up new ways of seeing, and to question moral and religious norms

15 Depictions of drinking bouts also exist in Persian painting, from which the Mughal artistic tradition developed. Paintings of Shah Babur's autobiography even show the Mughal emperor in a drunken state. Such depictions, however, are an exception; cf. Beach 2012, 13.

16 Schimmel 2000, 235–242.

17 Subrahmanyam 2005a, 72.

18 Regarding the attribution to Basawan see Beach 2012, 168. Verma 2002, 222, describes the figure as a musician because of the stringed instrument (*rubab*).

19 Flores 2014, 40.

20 This also applies to the field of sexuality. Das (2020, 157) states »that the European female figures became a vehicle to allegorically project indecent and amoral acts in Mughal India.« A similar strategy representing Europeans to deal with non-normative sexual behaviour can be found in contemporary paintings from Safavid Persia; see Babaie 2009.



Fig. 3: Attributed to Basawan, *Man in European Clothes*, opaque watercolour and gold on paper, 8.5 × 8 cm, c. 1585, Washington, D. C., Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, F1953.60.<sup>21</sup>

is reinforced here by marking the figures as foreign.<sup>22</sup> As Das and Gupta put it: »The non-familiar imagery [...] functioned as an easy tool to pictorially legitimise certain restricted behavior.«<sup>23</sup>

While depictions of Europeans could provide examples of bad manners and uncultivated behaviour, Europe was, nevertheless, considered a source of numerous miracles. In addition to various animals and plants, some of which were imported by Europeans from America, Europeans also brought technical devices and instruments to India, such as globes and an organ.<sup>24</sup> Mughal painters portrayed these special objects and adapted them for their

21 Source: [https://www.si.edu/search?edan\\_q=F1953.60&](https://www.si.edu/search?edan_q=F1953.60&) (accessed September 19, 2022).

22 On the ability of images to create spaces of reflection which deviate from written discourses, see Juneja 2009, 204.

23 Das/Gupta 2015, 70.

24 On the globe see Ramaswamy 2007.

pictorial representations. Artworks from Europe aroused much interest, too. Prints and paintings brought by European envoys and missionaries met with particularly open and experimental artists in the workshops of the Shahs Akbar and Jahangir. A creative environment had developed at the Mughal court through contact between traditional Persian and local Indian painting, into which adaptations from the European visual arts increasingly flowed from the 1580s onwards.

### 3. European painting style

Mughal court painters not only used European motifs, but also oriented themselves towards the »naturalism and precise visual observation«<sup>25</sup> that distinguished European visual arts. In doing so the artists followed their Emperors' interest. Akbar's enthusiasm for portraiture, for example, can be seen as a direct reaction to European paintings of this genre.<sup>26</sup> The examination of European models also inspired Mughal painters to engage in naturalistic depictions of plants and animals. Some artists adopted the pictorial representation of body volumes through shading or the depiction of strong emotions in their figures. With these adaptations Mughal court art partially strayed from its roots in Persian painting, which traditionally tends to represent a shadowless world with idealised, elegantly posing figures, and increasingly turned to a mimetic representation of the visible world.

The court historian Abu'l Fazl described this new quality when he reported on the development of painting at Akbar's court in the late 1590s:

Most excellent painters are now to be found, and masterpieces worthy of a Bihzad may be placed at the side of the wonderful works of the European painters who have attained world-wide fame. The minuteness in detail, the general finish, the boldness of execution, etc. now observed in pictures, are incomparable, even inanimate objects look as if they had life.<sup>27</sup>

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25 Beach 2012, 23.

26 On Akbar's enthusiasm for the new genre see Abu'l Fazl 1927, 115.

27 Abu'l Fazl, 1927, 113–114.

In this passage Abu'l Fazl relates Mughal court art to the tradition of Persian painting, of which Bihzad from Herat (1455–1535) was an outstanding representative, and to unspecified European painters. Another artistic tradition to which Abu'l Fazl compared Mughal court painting was the Chinese. In his praise of the painter Daswanth he states rather succinctly: »His paintings were not behind those of Bihzad and the painters of China.«<sup>28</sup> While the previous comparison with the painters of Europe is not surprising given the recent contacts, no direct exchange with Chinese painters or paintings has been reported during this period.<sup>29</sup> Abu'l Fazl's mention of the Chinese masters can rather be explained as an implicit reference to Persian art literature. In this literature, the painting traditions of Europe and China were described as essential poles of tension to which Persian painting related and from which it differed.<sup>30</sup>

A story narrated by various authors characterises the different styles in the context of a competition between Greek and Chinese artists.<sup>31</sup> Alexander the Great, who had to judge which nation produced the better artists, had a large curtain stretched through the middle of a hall and the competitors painted the opposite walls. While the Greeks applied the finest pigments, the Chinese used no colours at all. When both parties had finished, the curtain was pulled aside and to Alexander's amazement, the same painting appeared on both sides. When the curtain was drawn again, the painting of the Greeks remained, while the wall of the Chinese now showed the curtain. The Chinese had polished their wall so that it became a perfect mirror (fig. 4).

In the slightly varying versions of the story the competition is assessed differently. While in Nizami's account Alexander does not name a clear winner, choosing the Europeans as superior in painting and the Chinese in polishing, most authors rank the art of polishing higher.<sup>32</sup> The practice of mirror-making

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28 Abu'l Fazl, 2000, vol. 3, 651.

29 While the Mughal court received luxury goods from China, no direct contacts can be traced in the field of graphics and drawing. Most reminiscences of Chinese painting found in Mughal art, such as certain motifs (dragons, tigers, etc.) and stylistic peculiarities, were probably conveyed via the Persian tradition, as were the tropes of artistic competition with China; see Srivastava 2000, 63–72.

30 See Necipoğlu 2016; Weis 2020.

31 On the narrative tradition of this artistic competition see Soucek 1972; Piemontese 1995; Lamei 2001; Necipoğlu 2016.

32 Weis 2020, 67, 100.

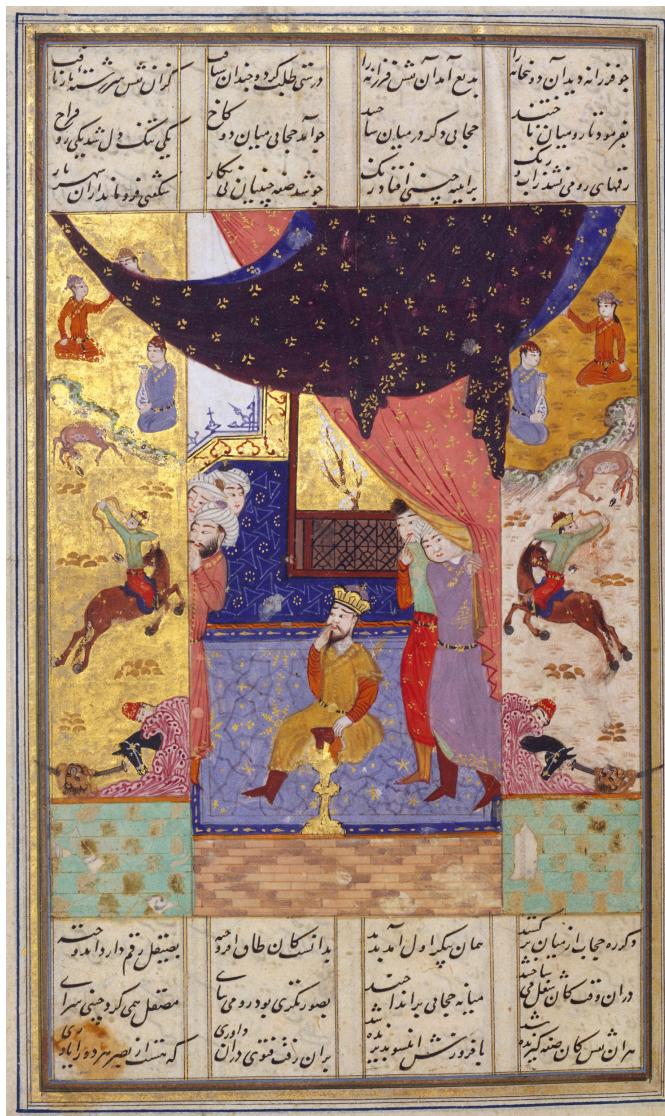


Fig. 4: Anonymous, *The Byzantine and Chinese Painters Vie in a Trial of Skill*, from *Khamsa* (Quintet) by Nizami of Ganja, Iran, Shiraz, opaque watercolour and gold on paper, 25.4 x 15.9 cm (page), ca. 1450, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 13.228.3, fol. 332r.<sup>33</sup>

33 Source: [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Khamsa\\_\(Quintet\)\\_of\\_Nizami\\_MET\\_DT210395.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Khamsa_(Quintet)_of_Nizami_MET_DT210395.jpg) (accessed September 19, 2022).

is likened to the pursuit of spiritual wisdom by Sufis who purify their hearts to make them a mirror of God, or the mirror becomes, as in the version of the poet Amir Khusraw from Delhi, an instrument for a deeper understanding of divine creation.<sup>34</sup> The art of the Greeks (*rumi*), on the other hand, who are equated with the »firangi« in later versions, is seen to correspond to the striving of scholars seeking external truth. Even if the evaluation of the two artistic traditions does not coincide in all versions of the story, it does not seem inappropriate to see in it, if not a criticism, at least a clear characterisation of European art as oriented towards the mimetic reproduction of the external world and less towards spiritual essence.<sup>35</sup>

The distinction of artistic traditions into one directed at the outer world and one directed at inner, spiritual truth, can easily lead to condemnation of the former as merely superficial. However, Mughal court historian and minister Abu'l Fazl defended the European painters against such criticism when he explained that they could lead the viewers to higher truths by depicting external forms: »Although in general they make pictures of material resemblances, the European masters express with rare forms many meanings of the created world and [thus] they lead those who see only the outside of things to the place of real truth.«<sup>36</sup>

While Akbar and his minister Abu'l Fazl appreciated European art, it was probably a vexation for the more orthodox Muslims at court.<sup>37</sup> This was not only because of the mimetic claim of European painting style, which could be interpreted as the artist's attempt to compare himself with the Creator God, but even more because of the Christian cult images brought by Jesu-

34 See Lamei 2001, 83. Amir Khusraw's version of the Alexander novel (*Ayina-yi Iskandari*, 1299) was well-known at the Mughal court and lavishly illustrated. Khusraw gives prominence to the Chinese production of a mirror. See Piemontese 1995, 297–298. The Walters Art Museum in Baltimore holds a luxury copy of Khusraw's work (W.624) that was made during Akbar's reign (1597–1598). Eight pages of this book are kept in the Metropolitan Museum in New York.

35 Cf. Necipoğlu 2016, 48.

36 Koch 2019, 211. I refer to the translation of this passage from Abu'l Fazl's *A'in-i Akbari* suggested by Ebba Koch because it stresses the ability of painting to express »inner truth« through the representation of outward forms.

37 European as well as Mughal sources confirm that Muslim courtiers rejected the European images and opposed their use at court. Jahangir's nephew and successor Aurangzeb (r. 1658–1707) turned away from patronising painting for religious reasons. See Beach 2004, 178.

it missionaries.<sup>38</sup> These holy images were not only held in veneration at the court but were even integrated in the Mughal rulers' representation.<sup>39</sup> Akbar himself defended the art of painting against religious hostility to images and described it as a way of seeking God:

There are many that hate painting; but such men I dislike. It appears to me as if the painter had quite peculiar means of recognizing God; for a painter in sketching anything that has life, and in devising its limbs, one after the other, must come to feel that he cannot bestow individuality on his work, and is thus forced to think of God, the giver of life, and thus will increase in knowledge.<sup>40</sup>

In addition to this argument, which negates the opinion derived from the Hadith that an artist's work competes with the Creator God, the Mughal ruler emphasised that painting was not merely about imitating the external world.<sup>41</sup> In fact, the Shahs claimed for themselves an ability to recognise the spiritual core (*ma'ni*) behind the external forms (*surat*) of things. And they asserted in addition that they could transfer this ability to their court artists. Abu'l Fazl mentions that it was simply Akbar's gaze which caused the painter Abd al-Samad to direct his attention away from outer form and towards inner meaning.<sup>42</sup> Through the power of the ruler's gaze, the artist was able to create works that went beyond a mere rendering of the visible world.

Even though Abu'l Fazl defended the European masters, and ultimately painting in general, against the accusation of superficiality, European painting was considered to be primarily focused on the external, visible world. Kavita Singh has argued that the connotation of different painting styles with particular ways of seeing the world can not only be found in

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38 For this notion in Sunni tradition see Almir 2004, 60.

39 See for example Koch 2019; Weis 2006.

40 Abu'l Fazl 1927, 115.

41 For an interpretation of this statement by Abu'l Fazl against the background of the rejection of figurative images in the *hadith*, the transmitted statements and deeds of the Prophet Muhammad, see Verma 2000–2001, 512–513.

42 Abu'l Fazl 1927, 117. On this passage and the distinction between outward form and inner meaning in Mughal painting, see Saviello 2019, 246. On the general importance of the notions of *ma'ni* and *surat* for the representation of the Mughal rulers, see Franke 2014.

literature but has also shaped artistic practice itself. In an 18th-century painting from Lucknow, the artist Mir Kalan Khan juxtaposed a Europeanising and a Persianate style of painting to visualise two different levels of reality in one image: an actual singer and the ideal lovers she sings about.<sup>43</sup> This parallel use of the different styles can, according to Singh, be regarded as a self-referential play with the illusionistic and idealising capacities of painting, a pictorial reflection on different levels of reality that can also be found in Islamic Neoplatonism.<sup>44</sup>

A similar juxtaposition of different modes of pictorial representation is also evident in some *nim qalam* drawings that depict an episode from the story of Layla and Qays (fig. 5). Already as a child, Qays and Layla fall in love. However, she remains unattainable for him, and Qays's affection increases into a feeling that completely determines him. He breaks all ties with society and moves to the desert, living on his love and poetry alone. He is called Majnun, which means »mad man« or »one who is possessed by Jinns«. In his excessive love he resembles a religious mystic or Sufi directing all his aspirations towards God. From the Akbar period come depictions of Layla and Majnun who, after being separated in their childhood, meet again. Although Layla also loves no one other than Majnun and remains steadfastly faithful to him despite a marriage forced upon her, the lovers again do not become a couple. At this point, Majnun had already left all earthly desire behind. Layla, who visits Majnun in the desert, is characterised in all depictions by a European garment. Ebba Koch assumes that her figure was inspired by the *Pietas Regia*, a personification from the title page of the second volume of the Plantin Bible that was brought to the Mughal court in 1580 by Jesuit missionaries.<sup>45</sup> In a somewhat modified depiction, Layla's European appearance is enhanced by a Renaissance folding armchair, known in Italy as a »Savonarola« chair (fig. 6).<sup>46</sup> The difference between the lovers is further emphasised by Layla's enormous physical presence, the volume of which is particularly accentuated by the technique of shading. The crouching figure of Majnun, emaciated to the bone, on the other hand, corresponds to the models of Persian book painting.

43 Singh 2017, 6–11.

44 Singh 2017, 69.

45 Koch 2010, 218.

46 On the appearances of the »Savonarola« chair in Mughal painting, see Cimino 1987.

In his study of the motifs of love, madness and mystical longing for God in Nizami's *Layla and Majnun*, Seyed-Gohrab has pointed out that in mysticism, Layla represented a way of grasping the beauty of God in earthly forms and terms.<sup>47</sup> However, the beauty of the woman and the desire for her are transcended in the search for God. In the drawings, the contrast between material beauty and the ascetic renunciation of earthly things, which stands for the goal of spiritualisation, is thus made apparent in the juxtaposition of figures that are clearly connected to the European or Persian artistic tradition. The majestic European figure of Layla represents the beauty and opulence of the material world, a world that the ascetic Majnun renounces as a spiritual seeker of God. The distinction between Layla and Majnun as representatives of different cultural traditions seems all the more significant when one considers that Majnun, as Ebba Koch has shown, was a kind of identification figure for the Shahs Jahangir and his son Jahan (r. 1627–1658).<sup>48</sup> While Majnun personifies the Sufi ideals of Mughal culture, Layla is stylised as the Other, a rich and beautiful European woman.

Majnun's effort to overcome his state of wonder and to look behind the compelling physical beauty of his beloved is symbolised by the gesture of the finger raised to the mouth. This gesture, also seen in the depiction of Alexander gazing at the Chinese mirror (fig. 4), is a standard motif in Persian painting, expressing the viewer's astonishment and his desire to overcome his state of wonder and reach an intellectual understanding.<sup>49</sup> In Manohar's other version of this subject the difference between Layla and Majnun is underlined by the text on the sheet Layla holds (fig. 5). It describes Majnun's deliberate turning away: »One night, Majnun said to Layla: O you, the careless beloved, Certainly you will have a lover, but he will not be Majnun.«<sup>50</sup>

47 Seyed-Gohrab 2003, 216.

48 Koch 2010, 279.

49 This gesture of the ruler appears in all known pictorial representations of the story and is concretely described in Nizami's and in Amir Khusraw's versions. See Lamei 2001, 25, 72, 79. It shows the viewer's astonishment, but also his desire to discern meaning behind the visual appearance of the image. On the significance of the gesture of the finger brought to the mouth in the context of the Persian painting tradition, see Saviello 2016.

50 Koch 2010, 291.



Fig. 5: Attributed to Manohar, *Layla and Majnun*, ca. 1595–1600, ca. 14.9 x 9.1 cm, detail of an album page from the *Muraqqa-i Gulshan* (Gulshan Album), Tehran, Gulistan Palace Library, no. 1663, p. 248.<sup>51</sup>

51 Koch 2010, 281. I thank Ebba Koch for her suggestions on this chapter and for generously providing the photograph reproduced here.



Fig. 6: Manohar, *Majnun and Layla*, c. 1605, 13 x 8.7 cm, formerly Paris, Ancienne collection Duffeuty and Galerie Jean Soustiel, location unknown, in: Soustiel 1986, 19.

#### 4. Conclusion: A dialectic reception of European mimetic art

While the Mughal court of the 16th and early 17th centuries seemed to have little interest in Europe as a geographical and political entity, people and goods from the continent were not only welcome but were also popular motifs in the visual arts. Similar to contemporary European depictions of Asians, Mughal representations of Europeans often served to legitimise the depiction of subjects that transcended moral and religious norms. Thus, Mughal Occidentalism seems akin to European Orientalism in its function of projecting one's own fears and desires onto the body of the »Other«.

The most striking aspect of Mughal Occidentalism, however, is the topos of the materialism and superficiality of European culture that emerges in both pictorial representations and written sources. The Mughal court's enthusiasm for the natural and technological »wonders« that Europeans brought with them, including visual arts that aimed at the mimetic representation of the visible world, was countered by an abiding scepticism about supposed European materialism. The accusation of Europeans' boastful appearance and lack of cultivation in the early texts finds a parallel in the characterisation of European art as primarily focused on the external world. The materialism and technical savvy identified with European culture and the European style of painting were not completely rejected, however, but were balanced by the Mughals with idealism and spirituality derived from their Persian roots and Sufi mysticism. In a kind of dialectical process, Mughal court artists refined the mimetic approach of European painting with the traditional idealising style of Persian painting to synthesise a more sophisticated Mughal art that would be able to combine both the external material world and inner truth in a single pictorial representation.

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# The »Buddhisation« of Europe

## A Tibetan Account of Europe in the Early 19th Century<sup>1</sup>

Dolores Zoé Bertschinger

In their 1968 introduction to the cultural history of Tibet, the British Tibetologists David Snellgrove and Hugh Richardson, two renowned scholars in their field, describe the history of modern<sup>2</sup> Tibet in the following words:

The European Middle Ages ended with the Renaissance, leading to the exploration of new fields of learning, which soon began to threaten all the traditional assumptions upon which the earlier stages of our civilization were based. But as the old forms disintegrated, we were ever striving to rebuild them anew, so that although an entirely new kind of civilization came into existence, it still managed to keep some firm roots in the past. The Tibetans, on the other hand, in common with all other oriental cultures, experienced no such renaissance; lacking fresh inspiration from without, they continued to live within the terms of what were now becoming stereotyped forms. One by one the great oriental civilizations have been forced to come to terms with the resilient but forceful modern Western world. Tibet was almost the last country in Asia to have its doors forced open (in the event by the British) and it is to its great tragedy that the perpetrators of the actual

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1 This article would not have been possible without Lobsang Yongdan, who discussed the Tsenpo's work with me and shared his insights. His monograph on the *Geography* will be published soon (Yongdan forthcoming). I am also heavily indebted to Stefanie Knauss and Sean Ryan for their valuable and insightful comments and suggestions.

2 On the question of Tibetan modernity see Gyatso 2011.

rape are humorless Chinese Communists, who show little interest in compromising with their own traditional cultural values, let alone with those of the Tibetans.<sup>3</sup>

Snellgrove and Richardson's comparison of Europe and Tibet (as *paris pro toto* for »all other oriental cultures«) is a prime example of blunt orientalism.<sup>4</sup> Basically all mechanisms of othering, including the utmost sexist imagination of the other – Tibetan – culture as a raped woman, can be found in that statement. In the context of the present volume, it is interesting – and not at all hard – to see, how the authors (re-)construct European history *vis à vis* a seemingly ossified Tibetan culture. In their worldview of the superior, enlightened European civilization the metaphor of rape bears the subtle undertone of victim blaming: due to its stubborn clinging to »stereotyped forms« and its refusal to embrace »fresh inspiration« from the new, modern, western world Tibet has at least been complicit in being attacked by the British and colonised by the Chinese Liberation Army.

Initiated by Peter Bishop's *The Myth of Shangri-la. Tibet, Travel Writing and the Western Creation of Sacred Landscape* (1989), a long overdue reassessment of the western imaginary of Tibet both in Tibetan and Buddhist studies has demystified the orientalist approaches of many pioneers in these fields.<sup>5</sup> In the last decade, this self-critical stance has given way to a more complex picture of imaginations of Tibet from an Asian perspective, and of course Tibetan imaginations of their own cultural and geographic realm.<sup>6</sup> However, only very recently have scholars highlighted the fact that it was not only

3 Snellgrove/Richardson 1968, 16–17.

4 For a thorough introduction to Orientalism with a focus on Asian countries and cultures see Clarke 1997.

5 See Lo Bue 2014; Beinorius 2005; Brauen 2000; Dodin/Bishop 1997; Bishop 1989; on this topic see also Lopez's provoking study on the *Prisoners of Shangri-La* (1998) and the ensuing debate between Thurman 2001; Germano 2001; Lopez 2001; for more balanced reviews of the book see Kapstein 1998; Lavine 2000; and for a reevaluation of the whole discourse see Hansen 2003, 7–10; Smyer Yu 2015, 3–5. For important critical race and whiteness theory in Tibetan studies see Kleisath 2013.

6 For Japanese imaginations of Tibet see Murakami 2010; for Chinese imaginaries Smyer Yu 2011; for examples of how Tibetans mapped and imagined the (sacred) space they inhabited see Gyatso 1989; Brauen 1997; Schwartzberg 1994; Kapstein 2011; various studies on pilgrimage in Tibet and its borderlands complete this picture, see for example Huber 1999; Ehrhard 2003; Chenaktsang 2010; Bogin 2014.

the west<sup>7</sup> who imagined the Tibetan »other« but that there were also Tibetan imaginations of Europe, in which narratives were adopted and new images of European history, science and geography were created.<sup>8</sup>

In this paper I discuss an early 19th-century Tibetan geographical compendium by the 4th Tszenpo Nomon Hen Jampel Chökyi Tenzin Thrinley. After introducing the author and the circumstances of his work, I will focus on his geographical representation of Europe. From the perspective of the study of religion, I will then analyse the Tszenpo's reassessment of Christianity, and his »Buddhisation« of Europe.

I understand texts as media situated in dynamic communication processes in which each new reading and interpretation contributes to the adaptation, consolidation and/or differentiation of worldviews by renegotiating, and thus changing them. Hence, I understand the Tszenpo's compendium as part of a »globally mediated imaginary«,<sup>9</sup> that is, as the result of multi-layered, mutual and interdependent processes of cultural exchange. With the Indian art historian Monica Juneja, I want to emphasise that highlighting transcultural processes

involves more than bringing neglected currents into an existing canon; it means questioning the foundations upon which the notion of the modern has been constructed and to undermine the narrative that hinges upon a dichotomy between the West and the non-West and makes the latter as necessarily derivative, or views it as a series of distant, peripheral or »alternative« modernisms. Instead of coining a host of modernisms – Indian, Chinese, Japanese, Tibetan – all understood as parallel streams that never meet and bring in national

7 In this paper, I use »west« as a synonym for the geographical and historical context of Europe, although I am aware of the broad discourse that goes with the term, as Stuart Hall aptly summed up in *The West and the Rest*: »By ›Western‹ we mean the type of society that is developed, industrialized, urbanized, capitalist, secular, and modern. Such societies arose at a particular historical period – roughly, during the sixteenth century, after the Middle Ages and the breakup of feudalism. They were the result of a specific set of historical processes – economic, political, social, and cultural. Nowadays, any society, wherever it exists on a geographical map, which shares these characteristics can be said to belong to ›the West.‹ The meaning of this term is therefore virtually identical to that of the word ›modern.‹« (Hall 2019, 142).

8 See for example Yongdan 2011; Engelhardt 2011.

9 Gaonkar 2002, 9; on the imaginary in the study of religion see Pezzoli-Olgiati 2015.

or ethnic units through the back door, a transcultural view of modernism regards these as enmeshed with the others [...].<sup>10</sup>

Adopting a transcultural perspective in my discussion of the Tsenpo's *Geography*, I try to trace historical and cultural processes of adaptation and transformation and thus challenge dichotomous attributions like west/east, Buddhist/Christian, scientific/religious, traditional/modern.

## 1. A cosmopolitan geographical work

The full title of the Tsenpos's geographical work is '*Dzam gling rgyas bshad snod bcud kun gsal me long*' or, in English, »The Detailed Description of the World. The Mirror which Illuminates all the World and Its Inhabitants«. It is usually referred to as '*Dzam gling rgyas bshad*' or simply »Geography«.<sup>11</sup> Its author Jampel Chökyi Tenzin Trinley (1788–1839) is best known under the title of his reincarnation lineage as Tsenpo Nomon Han.<sup>12</sup> As part of the Gelugpa school, this Tulku lineage gained influence in the 18th century in Lhasa and at the Qing court in Beijing. At the time, the lineage's main monastery Serkhok Gompa in Amdo, eastern Tibet, was one of the largest monasteries in Tibet, housing about two thousand monks, with branches in Lhasa, Mongolia and China. Travelling formed a central aspect of his life: during his early years he visited the Qing emperor Jiaqing (1760–1820) in Beijing and undertook extensive pilgrimages and visits to dignitaries in all of Tibet. From the mid-1820s he focused his activities and resided mainly at his seat Dolon Nor in Mongolia or the East Yellow Temple<sup>13</sup> in Beijing. In Beijing,

10 Juneja 2019, 302; on transculturality see also Juneja/Grasskamp 2018; König/Rakow 2016; Brosius/Wenzlhuemer 2011.

11 To access the *Geography* I work with the translation provided by Johnson (1972) and information provided by Kapstein 2011; Yongdan forthcoming and 2011; Martin 1990; Wylie 1970.

12 Therefore I will use the title Tsenpo when referring to the author of the *Geography*. The 4th reincarnation's full name was '*jam dpal bstan 'dzin 'phrin las*'; like his predecessor, he also held the titles of the *btsan po no mon han*, and the *hor smin grol chos kyi rgyal po*; see Yongdan 2011, 74, footnote 3; for information on this Tulku lineage see Yongdan 2011, 78–80; for the Tsenpo's biography Yongdan 2011, 80–85; also Johnson 1972, 1–4.

13 This temple, also known as Dong Huang, was built in 1651 by the first emperor of the Qing dynasty; in 1653, when the 5th Dalai Lama visited Beijing, he resided there. In 1734

he fulfilled his task as a seal-holder lama of the Qing emperor. As such, he was part of the *chöyön*-relationship between preceptor and donor, a personal-religious and at the same time political Buddhist system that shaped power structures between Tibet and its Asian neighbouring countries for centuries.<sup>14</sup> Thus the Tsenpo's role at the imperial court was multi-layered: he acted as a representative of the Tibetan government, maintained close relationships to the Qing emperor Jiaqing, acted as ritual master and provided religious teachings to the imperial family, and he held the more secular post of an Assistant of the Consistorial Administration of the Lamas and Monasteries in Beijing.

Although at the beginning of the 19th century the Qing dynasty was already in decline, the Tsenpo definitely benefited from the cosmopolitan atmosphere which persisted at the Qing court.<sup>15</sup> He studied with local physicians,<sup>16</sup> gathered medical and geographical information from Indian Gosains,<sup>17</sup> and established relationships with several Russian Orthodox missionaries. Among his interlocutors were Zakhar Leont'evsky (Anton Legasov), painter and founder of the first private museum of Asian culture and life in St. Petersburg, the (German) botanist and physician Alexander von Bunge, and Osip M. Kowalewski, founding father of Mongolian studies. In this cosmopolitan context, the Tsenpo was fluent in Tibetan, Sanskrit, Mongolian, Manchu and Chinese, he perhaps even knew Farsi and Hindi,<sup>18</sup> and he seems to

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the Yongzhen emperor gave this monastery to the 2nd Tsenpo and it became the main residency of the lineage; see Yongdan forthcoming, 79–80.

- 14 On the *chöyön*-relationship see Seyfort Ruegg 1991; on the role of Tibetan clerics at the Qing court see Kim 2020 and Yongdan forthcoming, 53–59.
- 15 On the Qing's cosmopolitanism see Elverskog 2013 and 2011; for an account of this cosmopolitanism from a visual and material studies perspective see the study on the *Album of the Beasts* by Lai 2018.
- 16 The Tsenpo wrote an influential medical treatise called *Man ngag rin chen 'byung gnaw* or »The Treasury of All Precious Instruction«, in which he gathered information on treatments from China, Nepal, India, and Europe, see Yongdan forthcoming, 9–10; 43–45; 102–106.
- 17 Gosains were a community of religious ascetics from India who emerged in the 18th and 19th century as important wanderers, traders and soldiers. Wealthy Tibetan lamas or merchants as well as British officials used Gosains as messengers and sources of information. Yongdan assumes that the Tsenpo might have employed some Gosains at his residence in Beijing; see Yongdan forthcoming, 84–86.
- 18 On this hypothesis see Yongdan forthcoming, 99–100.

have been familiar with Russian and Latin, as he transcribes the names of European countries and cities based on their pronunciation.<sup>19</sup>

In his *Geography* the Tsenpo cites a vast number of sources in various languages and formats, including oral accounts, traditional Buddhist cosmological works, and Tibetan, Chinese as well as European geographical works, such as historical and travel accounts, local maps, and atlases.<sup>20</sup> Apart from oral accounts, two of his main sources on European geography were the *Kunyu tushuo* (»Illustrated Explanation of the World«) and the *Zhifang wai-ji* (»Records of the Lands beyond the Imperial Administration«), both compiled at the Qing court in the 17th century by the Jesuit missionaries Ferdinand Verbiest and Guiglio Aleni respectively.<sup>21</sup> And also in the 18th century, geography was a vibrant topic in Tibetan scholarship, as can be seen in various compendia and itineraries such as the *General Description of the World* by Sumpa Yeshe Paljor (or Sumpa Khenpo) in 1777, or the account of the 6th Shamarpa Chökyi Wangchuk's transregional pilgrimage to Nepal and Mustang in 1791.<sup>22</sup> Considering the socio-political and intellectual context of its production, the *Geography* can thus be understood as the product of a cosmopolitan context, where a wide range of written, visual and oral sources contributed to a unique piece of geographical and cultural knowledge.

The Tsenpo wrote his *Geography* at some point in the 1820s or 1830s in an accessible style, using vernacular Tibetan to reach as many of his contemporaries as possible.<sup>23</sup> He stated: »In order to be understood by fools and

19 On the Russian names see Johnson 1972, 10.

20 According to Johnson (1972, 9–10), this variety of source material »gives this brief description of Europe a noteworthy richness of fact and anecdote«. On the various sources see Yongdan forthcoming, 112–116. Yongdan (forthcoming, 114) lists one of the sources as »Illustrations of the People of Many Countries in the World« (*Rgyal khams khri phrag gi mi'i ri mo*). The 4th Tsenpo refers to this work in the context of dresses from Thai as well as Portuguese and Corse people, he might actually refer to Bernard Picarts famous *Cérémonies et Coutumes religieuses de tous les Peuples du Monde* (1723–1737); see von Wyss-Giacosa 2006.

21 On these sources see Yongdan 2011, 125–128; Johnson 1972, 6–8.

22 On Sumpa Khenpo's work see Kapstein 2011, 343–350; Yongdan forthcoming, 130–134. On the 6th Shamarpa's work as well as Orgyen Chöpel's geographical and cultural geography of Nepal, and Jigme Lingpa's discourse on India see Ehrhard 2003, 97–100; Ehrhard 2013; Aris 1995; for more accounts of Tibetan geography see Kapstein 2011, 341–342; on Tibetan cartography see Schwartzberg 1994, 640–656, and on pilgrimage and route maps 656–670.

23 On the dating of the *Geography* see Yongdan 2011, 92–93; Johnson 1972, 1 and 4–6; on

scholars, without using poetic cutting and loosening phrases, I plainly use the language of villages to write this work, so that this work might be used by people who have similar interests and ideas.«<sup>24</sup> European readers of the *Geography*, from the 1880s on, were particularly interested in its section on Tibet. Until the 1970s this chapter provided the only known and detailed geography of Tibet written by a native person.<sup>25</sup> Its section on Europe was first discussed in 1970 by Turell V. Wylie in an article entitled »Was Christopher Columbus from Shambhala?«, followed by a full translation of the section by Betty Carol Johnson in 1972. But it was not until 2011 that two scholars in Tibetan studies simultaneously provided new interpretations of this material, acknowledging it in a transcultural perspective as a work of 19th century knowledge production in its own right.<sup>26</sup>

## 2. Scientific knowledge in the *Geography*

In his book *The People of Tibet* (1928), Sir Charles A. Bell, British Political Officer for Bhutan, Sikkim and Tibet, wrote on the Tsenpo's *Geography*: »It aims, indeed, at being a geography of the whole world, but its statements are often fanciful [...]. Tibetans like miraculous interpretations, it is a trait deep in their nature.«<sup>27</sup> Against this racist assessment Johnson argues that »the 19th-century Tibetans were in fact not so credulous«<sup>28</sup> and that at least the scholar Tsenpo did »not believe these outlandish tales«<sup>29</sup>. That the *Geography* is not »fanciful« is proven for Johnson by the fact that the Tsenpo carefully cites his sources, and states when writing from hearsay or when a piece

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the complex production and reception history of the work see Yongdan forthcoming, 101–102; 251–258.

24 Cited after Yongdan forthcoming, 149. Yongdan (forthcoming, 180) highlights the didactic purpose of the Tsenpo's style: »When writing the *Geography*, Tsenpo must have faced many difficulties, because it was a new world geography that no Tibetan had seen before on this scale. This required him to find a new way to communicate with his intended readers.«

25 See Johnson 1972, 1; on the reception and translation of the *Geography* see Yongdan 2011, 90–92; Johnson 1972, 10–11.

26 See Kapstein 2011; Yongdan 2011.

27 Quoted after Johnson 1972, 7.

28 Johnson 1972, 7.

29 Johnson 1972, 8.

of information is unclear to him.<sup>30</sup> This scientific character of the *Geography* is further strengthened by the fact that the Tsenpo treated the content of his *Geography* in a systematic way, leaving narrative elements or poetic embellishment aside. The section on Europe offers a well-structured overview on what today is considered human geography: a wide range of information on the territory, economy, agriculture, flora and fauna, inhabitants, costumes, textiles, arts and crafts of Europe.<sup>31</sup> It starts with a list of all geographical units to be described, followed by a general description of the continent and sub-sections on the various European countries. The general description begins with a definition of the continent, looking at it from the Asian perspective:

If one crosses the great snow-mountains called U-ral [...], there is the great homeland of the Phe-rang<sup>32</sup> called the continent of Yo-rupa [...]. If that land is indeed included in this continent (i.e., Asia), it is cut off on three sides by arms of the ocean; there are those who think (it) another continent, because the race is not the same as (that of) the people of this continent.<sup>33</sup>

This initial definition of Europe as the land on the other side of the Ural mountain range holds in tension an interesting argument. The author implicitly states that, depending on which criterion is favoured out of geographical features or ethnicity, Europe can be considered either part of a common Eurasian space or as an independent continent. In this initial passage, the

30 Besides naming some of his sources explicitly, in the section on Europe we also find phrases like »I have heard that« (Johnson 1972, 84/115b), »Although I personally saw a picture« (Johnson 1972, 102/123a), or »Is not prescribed« (Johnson 1972, 94/120a). These can be understood as an indication that the Tsenpo critically examines his information and tries to be as clear as possible in the transmission of his knowledge.

31 The Tsenpo's considerations are so broad that Martin (1990, 127) designates his work a »universal geography/history/ethnography«.

32 The designation *phe rang* probably comes from »Franks«, but, having lost all reference to France, simply means Europeans (vs. Turks and Asians in general) or Christians (vs. Muslims or Buddhists); see Johnson 1972, 167–168, footnote 51; she leaves the term untranslated as *terminus technicus*, because it has a wide range of meaning and has to be understood according to the context.

33 Johnson 1972, 80/114b; first order insertions (...) by the translator; second order insertions [...] are my own.

Tsenpo does not clearly decide in favour of either option, thereby opening up the possibility of envisioning a single Eurasian continent in accordance with the traditional Buddhist worldview.

The traditional Buddhist cosmology is described in texts such as the *Abhidharmakośakārikā* (4th to 5th century) or the *Kālacakratantra* (11th century). In the Abidharma literature the Buddhist cosmos encompasses a disk-shaped universe with the mythological Mount Meru at its centre, surrounded by rings of water, mountains and four continents, each with two sub-continents on their sides.<sup>34</sup> To describe the different geographical landmasses of earth, the Tsenpo uses the traditional terminology of the Abidharma literature and accordingly equates the Eurasian continent with the southern continent of the Jambu Tree, that is, the continent of the human realm.<sup>35</sup> Such a harmonisation of Buddhist cosmology and western geography has already been suggested by previous Tibetan intellectuals such as Sumpa Khenpo or the 6th Panchen Lama Lobsang Palden Yeshe.<sup>36</sup> The Tsenpo also secured his approach by consulting the 7th Panchen Lama Palden Tenpai Nyima (1782–1853), the second most important Tibetan Buddhist authority in Tibet at the time.<sup>37</sup> The 7th Panchen did not see any contradiction between Tibetan and European cosmology, and he even encouraged the Tsenpo to use the traditional Buddhist terminology. Hence the Tsenpo further contributed to an ongoing integration of Buddhist cosmology and western geography, keep-

34 The four continents are Pūrvavideha (*shar lus 'phags poi*) in the east, Jambudvīpa (*ḍzam bug ling*) in the south, Aparago dāniya (*nub bag lang spyod*) in the west, and Uttarakuru (*byang sgra mi snyan*) in the north. For a traditional depiction see the annotated image on: <https://www.himalayanart.org/items/1038/images/1038z#-1079,-867,1078,212> (accessed 12.09.2022). See also the images in Beer 1999, 103–109; Brauen 1997; Schwartzberg 1994, 619–624.

35 See Yongdan 2011, 94.

36 In the second half of the 18th century Sumpa Khenpo already gathered various oral and written accounts of world geography and discussed cultural, astrological and climatic phenomena in the context of traditional Tibetan knowledge and Buddhist cosmology, and thus established an approach which the Tsenpo could follow later on; see Yongdan forthcoming, 130–134. The same is true for the 6th Panchen Lama Lobsang Palden Yeshe (1738–1780) who wrote an authoritative guidebook to Shambhala, in which he included new information derived from European geography, trying to harmonise traditional Buddhist and western worldviews and providing another rich source for the *Geography*; see Yongdan forthcoming, 128–130.

37 On this exchange of the Tsenpo and the 7th Panchen Lama see Yongdan forthcoming, 28–30; 244–247.

ing at least nominally the traditional Buddhist framework, which served as a sufficiently »malleable template«,<sup>38</sup> to use Kapstein's term.

The rough outline of the location of Europe is followed by a depiction of the regional order (Atlantic, Germanic, Turkish, Russian, Nordic and British regions), and a list of kingdoms, principalities, and »innumerable large and small countries.«<sup>39</sup> This spatial and political order is then enriched through a systematic description of various aspects of European geography and culture.<sup>40</sup> The last of these features is religion, on which the Tsenpo wrote the largest thematic section. He then describes the various countries of Europe in detail, starting with southern Europe (Spain, France, Portugal, Italy), followed by central Europe (Germany, Austria, Hungary), eastern Europe (the Balkans including Greece, Poland, Russia, Prussia), western Europe (Denmark, Low Countries, Great Britain), and northern Europe (Scandinavia, Iceland, northern coast of Russia).

The Tsenpo's general introduction to Europe depicts it in a very positive light. On gender relations, for example, we can read:

The native men (marry) before they reached (the age of) 30 years, and the women (before) 20 years; there is no custom of espousing relatives, or of one man taking more than one wife. In those countries, even such as kings and ministers show respect to women and to all the many female monastics (who) follow the way of the teacher Ye-su' u-si [Russian: Iisus, Jesusu].<sup>41</sup>

It seems that at the time male Europeans, regardless of class or social status, wholeheartedly supported and respected women. Tsenpo emphasises the absence of polyandry and marriage within the family, a fact he highlights either because he is following one of his sources or because to him, it con-

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38 Kapstein 2011, 341.

39 Johnson 1972, 82/115a.

40 The thematic order is climate, agriculture, trade and travel, gender relations, architecture, education and social welfare, jurisprudence, warfare and military alliances, clothing and textiles, technology, stature and physiognomy of Europeans, religion; see Johnson 1972, 84–97/115b–121a.

41 Johnson 1972, 85/116a. There is a mistake in translation here, as in the source text it says *rab tu byung ba pho mo* (18/116a), which means »ordained men and women«, whereas Johnson only translates »female monastics«.

trast with his own cultural and social environment and thus is worth noting.<sup>42</sup> On political alliances the Tsenpo states: »Because there is mutual friendship among the rulers of those countries, they exchange valuable gifts with other kingdoms, and they say they are always traveling back and forth to each other's palaces, etc.«<sup>43</sup> This selfless greatness of the rulers is also reflected in European jurisprudence, which apparently knows no class distinctions:

People pay taxes without being forced. There is no such thing as treating each other badly, accusations, the powerful taking over the weaker, or corruption. If fighting occurs, the elders and smarter people settle the dispute, which finally reaches the ears of the kings. The kings will settle the dispute on the merit of the laws without taking into consideration face, value or wealth. The ministers have never played tricks or lied about the truth. Punishments such as beheadings, cutting off hands, and torture are banned. The guilty party has to pay a lot of taxes and is banished from the home country.<sup>44</sup>

Europe here seems to be a land of peace, justice, and freedom. This euphemistic account may well be attributed to the Tsenpo's missionary sources, who tried to show Christian culture in the best light. One may also wonder if there is a trace of critique involved against failings in the political, judicial and religious elites at home. Or was the Tsenpo simply unfamiliar with current political and historical facts in Europe? Yongdan shows convincingly that the Tsenpo did not write on crucial socio-political issues of his time, for example the French Revolution, the American war of independence, or the slave trade.<sup>45</sup> He was, however, well aware of European expansion and imperialism in the various regions of the world, which he describes in a rather admiring, uncritical tone.<sup>46</sup> And he also wrote from his own expe-

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42 On familial structures in Tibet see Stein 1972, 94–109; specifically on Tibetan fraternal polyandry Willett 1997.

43 Johnson 1972, 85/116a.

44 See Yongdan forthcoming, 207.

45 See Yongdan forthcoming, 232–233.

46 The Tsenpo is quite accurate in describing the conquered countries and colonies: for Spain he treats the old and new world (Johnson 1972, 104/124a), he names different French overseas colonies (Johnson 1972, 111/126a), for Portugal he highlights Brazil (Johnson 1972, 112–113/126b), and for England India (Johnson 1972, 147/139a). On this topic see

rience, for example when describing various mechanical objects and European inventions:

There are many different shapes and sizes of watches; compasses; glass tools for measuring the altitude and temperature; glass tools for warming beds and houses; glass tubes in which chemicals measure a patient's pulse; many different sizes of binoculars and telescopes to observe stars, tools for finding roads at sea; tools that make one object become several; a trumpet that can [allow someone to] speak from a long distance; tubes that can allow one to hear voices from far away; lights that have no oil and clothing that generates light; a box that contains music; a mirror on which appears [distant] places and cities; mirrors on which people inside a house can view outside; mirrors that recognize thieves, hide one from the enemy, and burn the enemy; flags that protect from lightning and hail; many different stunning things such as celestial and global maps; golden, thin and twin-color fabrics; and many good materials, and so-called »pA gru« fabric also comes from this land. There are also machines that are mechanized by fire, water, air and wood. Cooking, carpentry, metal-working, powdering, and making oil [are all done] by using these machines.<sup>47</sup>

As such goods were already traded globally and brought as gifts to the Qing court, the Tsenpo surely had seen them with his own eyes.<sup>48</sup> Therefore, rather than speculating about the sources of the Tsenpo's euphemistic account of Europe, it seems more useful to look for the cause of this depiction in a

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chapters 4, »Creating a New Synthesis«, and 5, »Observing the Rise of Europe« in Yongdan forthcoming.

47 Yongdan forthcoming, 205.

48 See Yongdan forthcoming, 206; for an account of magnificent objects such as glass balls from Berchtesgaden at the Qing court see Juneja/Grasskamp 2018, 12–24. The fact that Tsenpo was familiar with some of his subjects is also evident in his description of German culture, which reads like a description of his interlocutor Bunge: »The people of those lands (have) hair yellow like brass wire, and the shape of the faces is somewhat round. Their disposition [...] is consistently mild and sparing of words. They obtain facts only through personal inquiry and investigation; they do not believe anyone else at all, whether god, devil or man. I myself conversed at length informally with a minor official of that same country, one called A-lag-san-dri (Alexander)« (Johnson 1972, 120–121/129b).

larger context. As we shall see, it is heavily related to his treatment of religion in Europe.

### 3. A Buddhist reassessment of Christianity

Besides the adjustment of western geography and Buddhist cosmology, the Tsenpo's *Geography* holds a variety of remarkable depictions for the study of religion, for example his representation of Christianity in Europe. Of course his description is highly mediated through the information provided by Jesuit missionaries as well as by the Russian missionaries and other interlocutors he encountered. Nevertheless, the Tsenpo's presentation of Christianity can be understood as representative of a global imaginary that sheds light on communication processes of identity and alterity in the Eurasian context.

In the Tsenpo's general introduction on Europe, religion seems to play a minor role. Only now and then do religious aspects come into play, for example concerning gender relations, education and social welfare, or warfare.<sup>49</sup> Concerning the latter he states:

If foreign kings happen to invade them, it is the custom among all the countries, that military alliances are made by the other rulers closely related to the king of the invaded country. If the enemy is of a different race, such as the Kla-klo, [...] it is the kings and ministers of the (whole) land of Yau-ru-pa (who) unanimously make war.<sup>50</sup>

The religious reference in this quotation is hidden in the term *kla klo*, which denotes foreigners, barbarians, and also non-believers, infidels, or sometimes Muslims.<sup>51</sup> Similar to the term *phe rang* Johnson does not translate *kla klo* but takes it as a *terminus technicus* due to its wide range of meanings.<sup>52</sup> This proves to be helpful, for in another passage *kla klo* refers to the Christians as

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49 See Johnson 1972, 85/116a; 86/116a.

50 Johnson 1972, 87/117a.

51 See Johnson 168, footnote 52.

52 See Johnson 1972, 90/118b. In any case, the translation of *kla klo* as simply »Muslim« is problematic: there is a long history of problematising the Buddhist-Muslim relationship, a narrative that is delicate and historically incorrect; see Elverskog 2018; 2010.

people who do not follow the Buddhist path. However, here the use of this term in the context of European religious history and in combination with the depiction of an enemy »of a different race« can only refer to the Muslim »other« during the crusades. By naming the enemies of European kings as *kla klo*, Christianity is defined as the unifying feature of all European countries and kings, a narrative that says more about the informants of the Tsenpo than about the religious unity of Europe at the time.

It is remarkable that only at the end of the general introduction to Europe, and after considering a wide range of cultural practices and artefacts, Christianity as *the* European religion finally comes into play. Johnson referred to these passages as »an interesting spontaneous explanation of Christianity couched in Buddhist terminology«.<sup>53</sup> Until today no scholar has shed light on the complex intertwining of Christian and Buddhist understandings in this section and I can only highlight some aspects here.

The first passage on religion reads analogously to the beginning of the general presentation of the European continent, for the Tsenpo characterises »the Christian« in an ambiguous way leaving a wide margin of interpretation as to what Christians actually do and believe:

Those people are so intelligent and are full of wisdom. Whether worldly or spiritual, there is no one to compare to them. Although they appear not to be Buddhist or barbarian in their hearts, they do not have habitual tendencies or not ones called by particular names, but they do focus on accumulating merit.<sup>54</sup>

The accumulation of merit (Sanskrit *puṇya*; Tibetan *bsod nams*) is a central Buddhist concept and the main motivation for many daily rituals in Tibetan Buddhism to secure a fortunate future rebirth – and it is here declared a Christian practice too. Through his wording the Tsenpo creates similarity and thus invites the intended Buddhist readers to engage with the Christian »other« in an unbiased way. Furthermore, the account may reflect the Tsenpo's own observation: in his many encounters with Europeans at the Qing

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53 Johnson 1972, 1.

54 Yongdan forthcoming, 209. For the sake of my argument on merit, I here give Yongdan's translation, which is clearer in its Buddhist terminology; for Johnson's rendering of the passage see 1972, 90/118b.

court, he may have observed an oscillating identity of formal (outward) commitment to Christian norms and an inner (secret) motivation which he saw as fully compatible with Buddhist approaches.

In the following passages, the Tsenpo treats the Christian understanding of the almighty God, the creation and the question of theodicy. He then discusses the Old and New Testaments, including remarkable descriptions of Moses and Jesus. He discusses the ten commandments and the evangelists, and then mentions some systematic aspects of the Christian religion, such as the use of images or the cross as a sign of membership in the church. In the penultimate passage on religion he very briefly mentions three denominations in Europe, but does not go into further detail. Before moving on to the section offering detailed descriptions of the European countries, the Tsenpo makes a remarkable argument for Europeans as *rigs ldan pa*, which means »of noble descent« or »adhering to the kings of Shambhala«. I will return to this passage below.

For now I would like to highlight two aspects concerning the Tsenpo's treatment of Christianity. First, the Tsenpo's comparison of Moses and Padmasambhava and of Jesus and Buddha Shakyamuni respectively, and second his irritation with philosophical and practical issues concerning human existence, karma, and rebirth.

To characterise the figures of Moses and Jesus Christ, he refers to important men of Buddhist religious history, namely Padmasambhava and also the Buddha himself.<sup>55</sup> When introducing Moses, the Tsenpo describes him as the »Lake born« (*mtsho skyes*), an epithet for the great Tibetan saint Padmasambhava.<sup>56</sup> Padmasambhava is venerated as the person who first brought Buddhism to Tibet. He founded the so-called Nyingma (*rnying ma*) school, the old school, which still stands out against the so-called »new schools« (*gsar ma*, which are Sakya, Kagyu, Gelug).<sup>57</sup> Based on his Buddhist knowledge, the Tsenpo correctly interprets Judaism as the origin of Christianity through the comparison of Padmasambhava and Moses. Also Jesus Christ is presented in a similar way. Whenever the Tsenpo refers to him, he uses

<sup>55</sup> In a similar attempt, the Tsenpo compares Jesus's mother, Mary (Maria) to a Dakini (*mkha' gro ma*; »sky dancer«), when he states: in Loreto there is »the house of the *mkha'* *gro-ma* [...] called Mā-li-yā (Maria), who appeared in ancient times« (Johnson 1972, 115–116/127b). According to legend, in the 13th century the Casa di Loreto was brought by angels from Nazareth to Loreto; see Johnson 1972, 188, footnote 136.

<sup>56</sup> See Johnson 1972, 92/119a; and 173, footnote 75.

<sup>57</sup> See Snellgrove 2002, 211–212.

the designation »teacher« (*bston pa*), which usually refers to the main teacher in Buddhism, the Buddha.<sup>58</sup> Furthermore, Jesus Christ is depicted as one who was »wandering in many countries«<sup>59</sup> in Europe and Africa for years, performing miracles and winning over many natives. From a Buddhist perspective, this may recall the popular story of the Buddha's activities after his enlightenment when he lived as a wandering monk, followed by his retinue, performing miracles and successfully engaging in debates with his brahmin opponents.<sup>60</sup> While the Tsenpo comments only very succinctly on the suffering of Jesus, he describes the resurrection in detail:

After three days had passed, having entered his former body, he frightened the soldiers of that land [...]. Then, having gone to the [...] (Galilee) country (where) he preached to the natives and his own former disciples (about) equality (among) one another, I have heard it said that he visibly manifested the teacher's own body to four of the chief disciples, such as [...] (Peter), (and then) became invisible.<sup>61</sup>

Imagining the resurrection of Jesus Christ as visible manifestation of a bodily form hints at Buddhist practices of visualisation and manifestation of spiritual power in physical form.

In the passages on Christianity in Europe the Tsenpo makes repeated use of phrases such as »They believe that...«<sup>62</sup> »They say...«<sup>63</sup> and »I have heard«.<sup>64</sup> These repetitions give these sections a particularly distanced feeling and seem to express a certain irritation which becomes especially clear when he discusses Christian religious practice and theology. He declares for example:

In that religion they do not trample on any representation, even pictures, of the cross and they do not have many strict rules to observe, except for not eating the meat of dead cattle or the blood of any ani-

58 See Johnson 1972, 85/116a; 92/119a–119b; and Johnson 1972, 97/121a.

59 See Johnson 1972, 92/119a.

60 For an account of the Buddha's missionary activities see Schumann 1982, 107–221.

61 Johnson 1972, 92–93/119b.

62 Johnson 1972, 90/118b.

63 Johnson 1972, 91/118b.

64 Johnson 1972, 93/119b.

mal whatsoever. As for the symbol of membership, it is the sign of the cross, made from such luxuries as gold, silver, copper, iron, precious wood, (which) they wear fastened at their necks. Otherwise, how they perform accomplished meditation, what they commit to memory, etc., is not prescribed (or, clear).<sup>65</sup>

Here, the Tsenpo implicitly refers to specific events of Christianity in China and Japan in the 18th century, when secret Christians were exposed by their reaction to persecutors stepping on the cross.<sup>66</sup> From the outside, only a few markers of belonging are apparent to him, the cross being the most obvious, but no particularly strict religious behaviour. He wonders how spiritual accomplishments are achieved, for he could not make out a habit of meditation or mnemotechnic, which is particularly characteristic of the Tibetan Buddhist monastic curriculum.<sup>67</sup>

The greatest question mark for the Tsenpo lies in the Christian understanding of human existence, the role of karma and the idea of rebirth. Drawing on the Buddhist notion of rebirth in one of the six realms of existence, he tries to understand the Christian concept of the soul. He notices the lack of a thorough understanding of karma, since in Christian philosophy there is no differentiation of inner and outer causes and actions.<sup>68</sup> Although he includes a lengthy description of the opposition of God and Satan, good and bad, paradise and hell, it becomes clear that for him, these teachings are not compatible with his Buddhist understanding of cyclic existence. In particular, the description of Satan and the consequences of bad actions do not seem to convince him. In this passage he refers twice to hearsay with the phrases »it is said« and »I have heard that«.<sup>69</sup>

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65 Johnson 1972, 94/120a.

66 See Johnson 1972, 174–175, footnote 80.

67 On mnemotechnic and the monastic curriculum of the Gelug sect in Tibetan Buddhism see Dreyfus 2003.

68 »While they are not clear on formal conditions, such as requital through deeds of virtue and vice, or external and inherent causation, according to the way (they) put it, they do experience both the inherent effects of self-contained (action), such as accumulating deeds of virtue and vice, and the effects of externally-caused experience. What is done while, having cast off the former body, the next is not (yet) acquired, (is) only the result of external causes« (Johnson 1972, 95/120b).

69 Johnson 1972, 96–97/121a.

Apart from these passages on Christianity, religion plays a strikingly minor role in the Tsenpo's description of European countries. Apparently, he had no information on religious wars in Europe, for in the passage on Italy he refers to the pope as »ruler of the Phe-rang-ki clergy«,<sup>70</sup> that means, the »European clergy«. Concerning the various Christian denominations, he only states that »among the Phe-rang there are three great divisions« but »(I) will not elaborate here«.<sup>71</sup> Probably due to this lack of differentiation, religion is absent for example in the passages on Germany (Protestantism), Russia or Greece (Russian or Greek Orthodox Church). And as far as the *Geography*'s part on Europe is concerned, also Islam and Judaism are absent.

The passage on religion in Europe is the last part of the general introduction to Europe, after which follows the section of detailed descriptions of the various countries. As a sort of transition, there is a passage in which the Tsenpo departs seemingly abruptly from the topic of religion. However, as I will discuss in the next section, his terminology reveals that this passage puts everything previously said and everything to come in a different, still religious, but now Buddhist light. In this short passage the Tsenpo describes Europeans as *rigs ldan pa* (pronounced: Rigdenpa), which means »of noble descent« or »adhering to the kings of Shambhala«.<sup>72</sup>

#### 4. The »Buddhisation« of Europe

Until today the focus of scholars reading the *Geography*'s section on Europe has been the Tsenpo's equation of Europe with the mythic land of Shambhala.<sup>73</sup> As we have seen in the passages on religion, in several instances, the Tsenpo describes Christianity through Buddhist terms, and thus integrates Buddhism and Christianity. This can be read as a strategy to persuade his intended readers why they should engage with Europe and Christianity at all, keeping open a space of interpretation and dialogue. With the section

70 Johnson 1972, 114/127a.

71 Johnson 1972, 97/121a.

72 The Tsenpo uses the phrase *rigs ldan pa* already in earlier passages (see Johnson 1972, 27/120a), but it is only at the beginning of this passage that he explicitly connects Europeans (»Franks«) with Shambhala in phrases such as *phe rang rigs ldan par*, *rigs ldan pa la phe reng*, and *phe reng rigs ldan gyi sder gtogs par* (Johnson 1972, 30/121a).

73 See Wylie 1970; Martin 1990, 129–130; Yongdan 2011, 128–129.

on the Europeans as *rigs ldan pa* however, it becomes clear that the author was concerned to keep this interpretive space open for a very specific notion: identifying Europeans as the kings of Shambhala and Spain as the kingdom of Shambhala itself.

Following the passage on Europeans as *rigs ldan pa*, the Tsenpo begins his journey through the individual European countries with Spain.<sup>74</sup> He provides detailed information on the landscape, flora and fauna, the people and their clothing, their capabilities in astrology and astronomy, and the various provinces.<sup>75</sup> He goes on to describe a landscape in the middle of Castilia:

In the middle of the province Kasti-li-ya there is a rocky mountain (which), not being too high, is easy to climb, and has mostly blue-green colored rock, and broad sides. On its summit is the royal palace called Ma-t'i-ri-tā, or Ma-ti-ri-ka-la-pa (Madrid). [...] Though I have personally seen a picture of that palace, drawn on the cover of a book [...] my impression is not very distinct. They say that city, ranked among the multitude of cities of the land of Yau-ru-pa, is the best, and (its) wealth is the greatest.<sup>76</sup>

The names of the city of Madrid (»Ma-t'i-ri-tā, or Ma-ti-ri-ka-la-pa«) are a crucial point in following the Tsenpo's equation of Spain and Shambhala, because »Kalāpa« is the name of the capital of Shambhala.<sup>77</sup> Hence, the Tsenpo highlights Madrid and its palace as being one of the richest and most powerful royal residences of Europe. He continues by describing two lavish temples in front of the royal palace that contain »golden platforms with precious ornaments«, elegant workmanship, »images of the seven dharmarājas«,<sup>78</sup> mosaics in black and white, thirty-six altars and no less than 3000

74 Classical Greek and Latin and medieval geographies and travel accounts often took the Pillars of Hercules (ie. Straits of Gibraltar) as a fixed point to begin a section. As a result, they sometimes started their description of Europe with Iberia (although not always). Therefore, the Tsenpo's starting point in Spain might be due to the influence of his European geographical sources. I thank Sean Ryan for this insightful note.

75 See Johnson 1972, 98–101/121b–123a.

76 Johnson 1972, 102/123a.

77 See Yongdan forthcoming, 199–200; Wylie 1970, 29.

78 See Johnson 1972, 102/123a.

musical instruments. His textual source explains all that, but it does not make clear to the Tsenpo,

what is on top of the altars in the temple, or which specific kings the seven royal images are likenesses of. After investigating, I think they might be an image of the first Buddha on the golden pedestal, and as for the seven statues of kings, they might be images of the seven dharmarājas such as Zla-bzang.<sup>79</sup>

After this the Tsenpo describes the Spanish expansion to South America and concludes: »[T]heir possessions, their troops and material wealth in all respects exceeded (that of) other kingdoms, I have heard it said.«<sup>80</sup>

Not only did the Tsenpo equate Europeans to Shambhala kings, but also Spain to Shambhala and Madrid to Kalapa, the capital city of Shambhala.<sup>81</sup> Historically, the toponym of Shambhala appeared in the *Mahābhārata* and Indian Puranic literature, where it referred to the village where Kalki, the future incarnation of the god Viṣṇu, will be born and later on engage in an apocalyptic war to purify the world.<sup>82</sup> The authors of the Buddhist *Kālacakraṭantra* adapted this narrative in the 11th century and created a Buddhist text and ritual that soon became popular and authoritative in Tibet. In this adaptation, Shambhala is imagined as a mighty kingdom consisting of ninety-six great lands, led by a dynasty of bodhisattva kings. Whereas in the Indian literature Shambhala is clearly located in time and space and refers to an actual place, it became refashioned in Buddhist imaginary as an ambiguous land, existing in our time and space but only visible for those with pure perception. As early as the 13th century this fostered a Tibetan literary genre of route descriptions and itineraries to Shambhala.<sup>83</sup> In the early 19th century Shambhala entered the western imagination and was once more adapted, turning into a paradise-like spiritual land which fostered new interest in Shambhala from different perspectives such as western occult spiritual

79 See Johnson 1972, 102–103/123b.

80 See Johnson 1972, 104/124a.

81 That this equation was received and accepted is proven by notes in the margins of the manuscript; see Johnson 1972, 100/122b; 101/123a; and Wylie 1970, 29–30.

82 On this and the following information on Shambhala see Lopes 2015, 181–205; Rakow 2012; Berzin 2010; Newman 1996; Schwartzberg 1994, 629–636.

83 On the itineraries to Shambhala see Newman 1996.

traditions, Nazi expeditions in the Himalayas, archaeologists and Tibetologists, and emerging western Buddhist groups. When assessing the Tsenpo's *Geography* from this western reception history, which tried so hard to imagine and actually find Shambhala as a sacred pure land in Tibet, at first it is striking that the Tsenpo did quite the opposite: he imagined Shambhala in the west. However, from the point of view of Tibetan intellectual history, this is not surprising at all, for the Tsenpo intervened in a lively debate on whether Shambhala is located on this earth or not.

As stated above, the Tsenpo's attempt to harmonise traditional Tibetan cosmological and geographical knowledge and western scientific information about earth was in line with earlier attempts in the 18th century. All these authors also engaged with the topic of Shambhala. In his *General Description of the World* (1777), Sumpa Khenpo located the mythical Kingdom of Shambhala in the north of Tibet, that means in a specific geographical terrain that people – especially Buddhists – could actually reach. And the 6th Panchen Lama wrote an authoritative guidebook to Shambhala in 1777. Writing on world geography and *not* treating the question of Shambhala therefore was not an option for an important and well-known Tibetan intellectual such as the Tsenpo was. Nevertheless, how and why he came to identify Europe and especially Spain as the kingdom of Shambhala can only be surmised.<sup>84</sup>

Looking at the complete *Geography* there is a remarkable mirroring. As the Tsenpo writes mainly for a Tibetan Buddhist audience, he commences his world geography in Nepal and India, the Buddhist lands next to Tibet. He concludes the section on India with the words:

What I have mentioned are the twelve principal events of the life of Buddha and where they occurred, with some important holy sites in Magadha that were mentioned in the sutra texts. By using colloquial language and accessible words, I wrote this account for the benefit of the pilgrims.<sup>85</sup>

84 Tsenpo was well aware that his reflections were provocative; the passage in which he characterises the Europeans as *rigs ldan pa* is formulated as a defence against possible objections. And at the end of the *Geography* he defends his position once more; see Wylie 1970, 26–29.

85 Yongdan forthcoming, 157.

From this statement we can conclude that the Tsenpo tried from the outset to adjust Buddhist and western geographical knowledge, here the Buddha Shakyamuni's hagiography and actual pilgrimage sites. Following Yongdan, the depiction of those Buddhist sites worked as *de-mystification*, insofar as the Tsenpo treated them as actual geographical and not mythical sites.<sup>86</sup> As we have seen, when treating Europe, the Tsenpo tried to harmonise Buddhist cosmology and western geography. In this case, however, we have to speak of a veritable *re-mystification* of Europe. For, while the Tsenpo's approach is systematic and his geographical and cultural descriptions are accurate, his reference to Shambhala and the characterisation of Europeans as inhabitants of Shambhala achieves the transcendency or, more precisely, Buddhisation of Europe. Viewed in this light, the positive image of European politics, social welfare and culture that the Tsenpo sketches in the general introduction works as legitimisation: because Europe is such a great continent, it is legitimate to argue that it is the place of the *rigs ldan pas*. And this legitimisation has a catalytic effect: by identifying Europe as the place of Shambhala, the Tsenpo further nobilises and sacralises Europe, making it an even more respectable place, worthy of noble Buddhist inhabitants.

## 5. A transcultural representation of Europe

The Tsenpo's representation of Europe was intended for a general Tibetan audience. He used a common language, drawing on Buddhist cosmological terminology and existing Tibetan geographical knowledge. He did not completely abandon the Buddhist worldview, but he expanded it significantly through the enormous geographical knowledge he has incorporated. Therefore, the *Geography* is a valuable document that bears witness to the negotiation of different worldviews, and, moreover, to global transcultural communication processes, since it is both the result of and the stimulation for entangled geographical and cultural knowledge production.

In the *Geography* cosmological and geographical discourses are interwoven. The Tsenpo continued a tradition of Tibetan geographical works, trying to harmonise western scientific and Tibetan Buddhist worldviews.

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86 See Yongdan forthcoming, 194–197.

In her attempt to grasp Tibetan modernity, Janet Gyatso defines the modern as something »that is bigger than the actor's local context and is cast as something to aspire to, for its intrinsic virtues, and especially as something that seeks to distance itself from past customs and assumptions now deemed unsatisfactory.«<sup>87</sup> However, in a transcultural perspective the modern might not be understood in terms of distanciation and rejection, but as conscious adaption and critical mediation of various knowledge cultures. In that sense, the Tsenpo's *Geography* could be understood as a modern geographical compendium. He condenses differing knowledge systems into a single geographical compendium that provides a means for engaging with local intellectual and religious discourses as well as issues of global politics and power. Therefore, it also has to be understood in the light of geopolitical and socio-cultural shifts at the time.

When the Tsenpo stayed in Beijing, the Qing dynasty already suffered from inner revolts and the British stood at its door. Hence, the Tsenpo was well aware of European expansion and imperialism and in the *Geography* one can sense his admiration for this expansionist policy, especially with regard to Spain. In the light of this very political and historical situation the Tsenpo's equation of Europe with Shambhala could be understood as a strategy to quite explicitly suggest to his intended readers that a rapprochement with Europe could become politically important.<sup>88</sup> In the context of the apocalyptic imagination fostered by the *Kālacakratantra* and the resulting question of who would save the world, the Tsenpo's equation of Shambhala with Spain suggests that salvation would come from Europe, from the kings and inhabitants of Shambhala. Hence the Tsenpo's re-mystification of Europe and his Buddhisation of Christianity – for all the criticism and incomprehension that permeate Tsenpo's description of its theology – have to be considered in this larger, geopolitical horizon.

In a transcultural perspective the *Geography* appears as a cosmopolitan work that is part of a global imaginary. As a seal-holder Lama with a personal relationship to the emperor, the Tsenpo had access to a wide range of textual, visual and oral sources on European geography, history, and culture produced by Asian and European intellectuals, scientists and artists alike. Thus, the *Geography* is the result of a dense web of European and Asian

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87 Gyatso 2011, 14.

88 Yongdan forthcoming, 233.

representations of the world. And it was an impulse to create an ever more entangled web of cross-cultural European and Asian imaginations: As mentioned already, scholars in Tibetan studies were heavily interested in the *Geography*'s part on Tibet, India and Nepal, whereas in Tibet it became one of the most popular and wide-spread accounts of Europe and the world as a whole.<sup>89</sup>

Looking at Europe from an early-19th century Tibetan perspective opens up new approaches to its spatial order, its cultural practices and mythical dimensions. Through the production and reception history of the Tsenpo's *Geography* Europe appears as a figure of never-ending layers of meaning and imaginations that come from far more distant places than we might have thought of. Following the Tsenpo's imagination of Europe, we as European readers, might ask ourselves: what if, for once, we imagined the heart of Europe not in Brussels, Berlin, Paris or London, but in the European south? What if today's politically fragile, economically precarious, and culturally and socially innovative Mediterranean regions were to gain power in European politics and culture? What if, after all, European histories, politics, economies, cultures, and religions were to be reassessed through a Tibetan Buddhist lens? Rethinking the Tsenpo's description of Europe, it might finally become a place where there truly is no corruption, where there is no powerful taking over the weaker, and where authorities settle disputes without taking into consideration face, value or wealth. Europe might aspire to become a place where people are full of wisdom, abandon their habitual tendencies and focus on accumulating merit for the sake of all sentient beings.

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<sup>89</sup> The fact that the manuscript translated by Johnson was edited by four readers, testifies to the fact that it was widely read; see Johnson 1972, 12. She highlights that no other section of the *Geography* has undergone so many emendations, »which suggests that this copy may have been used rather extensively as a reference work on Europe« (1972, 167, footnote 47). On the popularity of the *Geography* in Tibet see also Yongdan forthcoming, 252–258.

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# An American Religion in Europe

## How Latter-day Saints' Temples Communicate a Worldview of Sublimity and Separation

Marie-Therese Mäder

### 1. The religious worldview of Latter-day Saints' temples

The first Latter-day Saint temple I visited was in Provo (Utah, USA) in 2016,<sup>1</sup> the second was the temple in Friedrichsdorf (near Frankfurt/Main, Germany) in 2019. These temple visits allowed me to better understand the meaning, effect, and function of these buildings, and in particular to focus on the sensory experience of the architecture and the interior design, from the carpeted floors to the mirrors with golden frames and the crystal chandeliers hanging from the ceiling. The insights gained from these field trips will serve as the basis for the current contribution.<sup>2</sup> My focus here is to understand how Mormonism adapted its worldview in its shift to Europe, focusing on the temples of The Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter-day Saints, the largest Mormon community, in Europe.<sup>3</sup> What can be learned from the tem-

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1 Mäder 2020, 23–26.

2 My studies of the Latter-day Saints started with the investigation of Mormon media productions (about Mormons or produced by Mormons), followed by an analysis of how these media are received, and finally meeting the people »behind the scenes«. See Mäder 2020; Mäder 2021, 72–95; Mäder/Soto-Sanfel 2019, 98–114.

3 The largest Mormon church, where the main organisation is located in Salt Lake City, is the Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter-day Saints. I refer to this church as LDS, which is used both as a noun and an adjective. From an *emic*, insider perspective, the term »Mormonism« should not be used according to the church's online style guide. Instead one should refer to »the restored gospel of Jesus Christ«. See »Style Guide — The Name of the

gles' architecture about how this genuinely US-American religious community adapted to European contexts, and if and how their American heritage has been Europeanised in the process? What contribution do these temples make to discourses about the role of religion in Europe?

In order to answer these questions, I will discuss the meaning-making practices and rules associated with temples, and analyse the aesthetic dimensions of the temples and their effects, taking into account the history of temple construction in Europe. I will then focus in particular on the Frankfurt temple in Friedrichsdorf, drawing on my observations during my open house visit on 24 September 2019 and my conversation with the representative of the public affairs department of the Mormon community in Frankfurt. My thesis is that the temples are a means to create or represent a religious worldview that can be experienced by members and non-members in Europe. Its worldview is a constitutive element of a religious community. Religious worldviews

convey an overall picture of the world, make it accessible as a cosmos in which the immanent and the transcendent, the controllable and the uncontrollable stand in a relationship to each other. At the same time, they specify how this world should be, they regulate and standardise the relationship to the world.<sup>4</sup>

LDS temples communicate a worldview by means of their architecture, their surrounding outdoor area, and interior design that shape the community members' religious experiences during a temple visit. But how does this communication of a worldview relate to the temples' European context – if at all?

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Church«, <https://newsroom.churchofjesuschrist.org/style-guide> (accessed September 1, 2021). I am aware that the church itself has specific guidelines on how it is to be named. However, I hold that as an independent researcher, adopting an *etic*, outsider perspective to this project, I should be able to choose the most useful and clearest designation in the context of academic scholarship, even if it might not always be in line with the LDS church's official nomenclature, whilst not intending any pejorative sense by using such *etic* terminology

4 Fritz/Höpflinger/Knauss/Mäder/Pezzoli-Olgiati 2018, 56–57 (all translations from German are mine).

In my field study of the Friedrichsdorf temple, I apply a qualitative approach that combines participant observation<sup>5</sup> with a contextualised multisensory analysis of the temple buildings, temple areas, and interiors that attends to the ways in which these affect the various senses.<sup>6</sup> My observations during the temple visit are supplemented by the analysis of Google aerial photographs to examine the terrain in which the temple is located. For my discussion of the other European temples, I draw on visual sources available online. This multi-media and multi-methodological approach allows me to examine the topic of Latter-day Saint temples in Europe from different perspectives that »crystallise« into a partial account of the phenomenon I study here. Communication and gender scholar Laura L. Ellingson developed the concept of »crystallisation« which

combines multiple forms of analysis and multiple genres of representation into a coherent text or series of related texts, building a rich and openly partial account of a phenomenon that problematizes its own construction, highlights researchers' vulnerabilities and positionality, makes claims about socially constructed meanings, and reveals the indeterminacy of knowledge claims even as it makes them.<sup>7</sup>

Part of the reason why such a »crystallization« is valuable is that it acknowledges the indeterminacy of knowledge, which is especially relevant for this study given the relative lack of scholarly resources on Mormon temple architecture and cosmology etc. available to outsiders/researchers. For crystallisation does not claim to provide a comprehensive response to the research questions posed. Instead, spotlights will illuminate the questions' diverse dimensions and multiple methods are applied in an additive strategy, including, as mentioned, the architectural analysis of temple buildings, the analysis of other visual material, field studies, the observation of temple visitors, and the multisensory experience of the temple and its surroundings.

Visual ethnographer Sarah Pink developed this multisensory approach that extends and complements visual methods. She argues that in visual analysis the other senses of smell, touch, taste, and sound are also involved

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5 Thierbach/Petschick 2014, 855–865.

6 Pink 2011, 601–614; Fritz/Höpflinger/Knauss/Mäder/Pezzoli-Olgiaiti 2018, 31–38.

7 Ellingson 2009, 4.

because they are neurologically connected.<sup>8</sup> For this study of the LDS temples, this means that I refer to different sense experiences in combination with other sources and methods, paying attention to how smell, touch, taste, sound and vision play a part in the temple visit. This multisensory experience of the temple visit then influences the visual analysis of the Google maps images and other photographs from the exterior and the interior of the temples. These different sensory perceptions are brought together in a single analysis, aware of its specific cultural construction that includes personal preferences of specific senses. Therefore, the context of the sources is an important element to add.

The theoretical frame of this study is a cultural studies approach to visual and material religion which understands religion as part of culture where meaning-making practices take place. These practices apply different media (here in particular architecture, cultivated garden areas, and photographs) to communicate religion in secular contexts or in actual religious practices. The ways in which religious meaning is debated, differ. Religious actors use media in their religious practice and media are used to communicate religion in secular contexts. These two perspectives influence each other and both produce, distribute, and consume material and visual sources in the corresponding practices to express and represent religious worldviews.<sup>9</sup>

I will begin by providing some context about temple construction in Europe, practices surrounding temple visits, and the conditions to be met to enter a Latter-day Saint temple. I then analyse three European LDS temples, the Frankfurt temple in Friedrichsdorf, the Bern temple (in Zollikofen, Switzerland), and the temple in Rome (Italy), their setting in the landscape, their architecture, exterior façade, and interior design with attention to their possible effects on visitors. I then shift to the discussion of my field visit to the Frankfurt temple, paying particular attention to the sensory effect of the temple visit. My analysis is supplemented with information about the worldview, canonical narratives, and details about rituals conducted in the temple.

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8 Pink 2011, 603.

9 Fritz/Höpflinger/Knauss/Mäder/Pezzoli-Olgiati 2018, 13–14.

## 2. Historical context and premises of temple visits in Europe

Experts agree that Mormonism is deeply rooted in American culture and history. The historian of Mormonism Jan Shipps states that »the story of the interrelationships between Mormonism and American culture is reasonably clear.«<sup>10</sup> Nevertheless, soon after the foundation of the church in upstate New York in 1830, Europe became important for LDS mission work. In 1837, the first European mission opened in England, and in 1840, the first mainland mission was established in Germany. By 1854, 14 years after the first mission in England was founded, the number of European members rose to 33,000. This is an impressive development compared to Utah with its 12,000 members at the same time. In Utah, membership increased further, to 91,000 members in 1900<sup>11</sup> compared to 268,331 members worldwide.<sup>12</sup> Utah also profited from its European converts. Most of Utah's Mormons were Protestant converts from England (61%) and Scandinavia (31%) as well as German and Swiss Mormons who emigrated to the US-American Zion in the desert, which became part of the American Union in 1896.<sup>13</sup> Yet a few more decades passed until the first temple opened its gates in Europe, not in England as one might expect, but in Zollikofen (Switzerland) in 1955. It was the 6th LDS temple built worldwide. Three years later, in 1958, the first British temple was dedicated in Newchapel (Surrey, near London). In mainland Europe, 30 years after the Zollikofen temple, another one was opened in Freiberg (former German Democratic Republic) as the 27th temple worldwide. Currently there are 14 temples in Europe and five more are announced to be constructed (Brussels, Budapest, Oslo, Russia, Vienna)<sup>14</sup> to serve a community of half a million Latter-day Saints who live in Europe where by now 34 missions have been settled.<sup>15</sup>

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10 Shipps 1987, 58.

11 Decoo 2015, 543.

12 Shipps 1987, 168.

13 Decoo 2015, 543.

14 The temples' names are not consistent. Sometimes their names refer to the country, the city, or region. See »Temples of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints«, <https://churchofjesuschristtemples.org/maps/> (accessed August 31, 2021).

15 »Statistics and Church Facts«, <https://newsroom.churchofjesuschrist.org/facts-and-statistics> (accessed May 22, 2022).

On the comprehensive website about Mormon temples (an unofficial site as is noted in red letters at the bottom of the page),<sup>16</sup> one of the topics discussed is temple designs. The website specifies »major design phases« in chronological order. The category for European temples is called »overseas temples«. The description of the European temples additionally mentions the challenge of Europe's multilingualism because language is central in the endowment ritual that takes place in the temple. The ceremony re-enacts the narrative from creation to Adam and Eve's banishment from the garden of Eden in different rituals. After ritual cleansing and anointings the participants receive their temple garments which they wear while they stay in the temple. The endowment ceremony also includes a lecture about the Latter-day Saints cosmology which presents a specific challenge when performed in European countries where English is not spoken:

Taking a temple to Europe brought a special challenge, as the staff and training required to present the endowment in various languages would be too difficult in an area where Latter-days Saints were few and scattered. Gordon B. Hinckley was given the challenge to overcome this obstacle, which he did through inspiration, conceiving the idea of using film to present the endowment in a single assembly-style endowment room. The idea was first realized in the Bern Switzerland Temple (1955) and then followed in the Hamilton New Zealand Temple (1958) and London England Temple (1958). These temples have since been remodeled to include multiple stationary endowment rooms.<sup>17</sup>

Beside »multilingualism«, another challenge is certainly to keep the European membership stable and the members active, if not even increasing in number. A study from 2005 found that more members convert to the LDS church than are born in the church (the so-called cradle Mormons).<sup>18</sup> Given the challenges to maintain the Mormon community in Europe, the number of already existing and planned temples is surprising.

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<sup>16</sup> See »List of Temples, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints«, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/temples/list?lang=eng> (accessed July 22, 2021).

<sup>17</sup> See »List of Temples«, (see footnote 16).

<sup>18</sup> Stark 2005, 136.

Access to a temple is crucial to Mormons in Europe (as elsewhere) because all of the LDS rituals, except baptism, can only be conducted there, such as weddings, the sealing of the family, or the baptisms of the dead. Therefore Latter-day Saints understand the temple visit as a privilege and not as a duty. When visiting a temple, Latter-day Saints have to make specific arrangements. First of all, after being baptised and at least one year after confirmation, the individual needs a temple recommendation authorised by two members of the community which has to be renewed every other year. During the year after confirmation, the applicants are encouraged to apply for a limited-use temple recommendation which allows them to serve in the temple baptistery and to perform baptisms of the dead, a proxy ritual for the dead that all members perform, mostly for deceased family members.<sup>19</sup> Baptism or confirmation even after death results in the possibility that the deceased are still able to enter the Kingdom of Heaven. Another effect of these rituals is that they provide reassurance and affirmation of the affiliation with the church.<sup>20</sup> Besides the blessing of a child born into the church, baptism is the first ritual in the life of a Latter-day Saint and at the same time the first ritual of the temple ordinances, even though it does not take place in a temple but in LDS meeting houses or in any other kind of basin. Even rivers or lakes are permissible. However, since baptism marks the »beginning« of a Mormon's life in the community, the temple's baptistery is usually located on the temple's ground floor where the visitors enter. The pool is always supported by twelve oxen representing the twelve tribes of Israel. It also refers to the Old Testament where it is said that in front of the first temple built by Solomon, a large basin was placed on the back of twelve oxen for the ablutions of the priests (1 Kings 7:23–26).<sup>21</sup>

Before the temple visit can take place, the first regional leader (stake presidency) and then a member of their local bishopric interview the applicant on two different occasions. The interview questions are made public so that the applicants are prepared for the conversation. In 2019 the interview questions

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<sup>19</sup> Also, in temples, confirmations and family and couple sealings for deceased people take place. For more details about these rituals see Hammarberg 2013, 176–177.

<sup>20</sup> Hammarberg 2013, 176–177.

<sup>21</sup> In the Frankfurt temple, the baptistery is located on the ground floor. See <https://churchofjesuschristtemples.org/frankfurt-germany-temple/photographs/#Official-6> (accessed August 5, 2022).

had been updated and published online.<sup>22</sup> The 15 interview questions cover the most important Mormon beliefs and commandments that Latter-day Saints have to follow and they are the same in Europe and everywhere else. Compliance with these commandments does not only grant access to the temple but also provides an identity marker for Latter-day Saints as they regulate central cultural practices such as clothing,<sup>23</sup> food, sexuality, performing religious rituals, and adhering to normative standards regardless of where the religion is practised.

These standardised processes control temple access without taking regional and cultural differences into account. The only difference that can be noted is the geographical distance to the temple that members have to cover which privileges some members over others. It is remarkable that with 14 temples and half a million members, Latter-day Saints in Europe are quite well equipped.

### 3. The conspicuous aesthetics of LDS temples

The architecture of Latter-day Saints temples around the globe is marked by a certain distinctiveness and recognition effect. They are often landmarks not only for the Latter-day Saints but also for non-members of the church who live in or travel to the area where a temple is located. One common feature by which many temples are recognisable, not only in Europe but around the world, is the golden figure of the angel Moroni at the highest point of the building, mostly at the top of a tower.<sup>24</sup> In some cases, for example on

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22 See »Church Updates Temple Recommend Interview Questions, 6 October 2019«, <http://newsroom.churchofjesuschrist.org/article/october-2019-general-conference-temple-recommend> (accessed February 17, 2022).

23 The temple garment is also called »sacred temple clothing«; the church disapproves of the popular expression »Mormon underwear«. Adult Latter-day Saints wear the garment under their daily clothes to protect them from evil. The LDS church explains the temple garment in detail to prevent any false narratives. See »Sacred Temple Clothing«, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/media/video/2020-01-0100-sacred-temple-clothing?lang=eng> (accessed August 27, 2021).

24 Angel Moroni also adorns the pinnacle of the tower of the Temple of Rome that was consecrated in 2019, see <https://churchofjesuschristtemples.org/rome-italy-temple/photos/#Official-39> (accessed August 5, 2022). Since the presidency of Russel M. Nelson many new or renovated temples don't include the figure Moroni. This modification is one of many that are part of an image change during which the official church symbol has also

the towers of the Bern and Freiberg temples, the angel Moroni was added at a later stage. According to the *Book of Mormon*,<sup>25</sup> in 1827 the angel Moroni lead Joseph Smith, the founder of the Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter-day Saints, to the golden plates on which the founding narrative of the Mormons is inscribed.<sup>26</sup>

The following discussion of the European temples in Rome, Bern, and Frankfurt considers three architectural dimensions, namely the area in which they are located, their spatial setting (3.1.), the architecture and exterior (3.2.), and the interior (3.3.) of the buildings. The analysis follows the procedure of a temple visit beginning with a look at the surrounding area of the temple districts from an aerial perspective, and then a discussion of the architecture of the temple building itself as we approach the temple. As we enter the interior, we focus on one specific area, the celestial room. Finally, the field notes of the Frankfurt temple visit (3.4.) will round up this systematic and multisensory walking tour and enrich the analysis with sensory impressions of the temple and its surrounding area.

### 3.1. The spatial setting

Temples are often prominently located in green landscaped areas with no other buildings close by (see figs. 1–3). In this spatial setting, the temple almost seems like an apparition from nowhere. The buildings cannot be overlooked, as they stand out in their isolated setting and with their space-defining form. It almost seems as if they solicit the attention of those passing by or visiting. Visitors perceive the temple instantly without preparation, which creates an impressive surprise effect specifically in Europe where the LDS community and their temples are relatively unknown. A comparison of the setting of different temples reveals some similarities regarding their surrounding area. There is usually a carefully cultivated green area around the temple with paths

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been changed from Angel Moroni to a Christ figure. See <https://www.ldsdaily.com/world/the-case-of-the-missing-moroni/> (accessed January 3, 2023). I thank my colleague Colleen McDannell for this reference.

25 Joseph Smith translated the text from the golden plates written in »reformed« Egyptian into English in 1829. This translation is known as the *Book of Mormon*. As promised to the angel Moroni, Smith returned the plates to the place where he found them. They were never recovered again. See Smith/Maffly-Kipp, 2008.

26 An overview of the *Book of Mormon*'s content can be found in Hardy 2015, 137–139.



Fig. 1: In Rome, the visitor centre is located opposite the temple. It is larger than the temple as seen here from the aerial view. There is also a meeting house and the distribution centre is nearby, Google maps (accessed August 30, 2021).

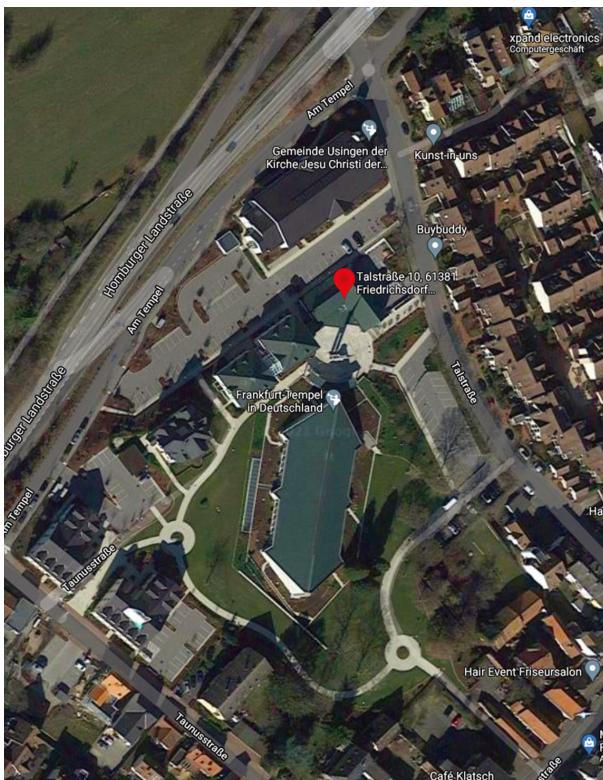


Fig. 2: The Frankfurt temple site includes a visitor centre, a meeting house and administrative buildings, Google maps (accessed August 30, 2021)



Fig. 3: The Bern temple area in Zollikofen consists of a temple hostel, a meeting house, and administrative buildings, Google maps (accessed August 30, 2021).

that lead towards it and in a way celebrate the entrance to the temple complex. The temple complex usually consists of the meeting/community house or church where Sunday services are held, the temple itself, and the visitor centre. In some cases, a temple hostel called »patron housing« and administrative buildings, occasionally combined with a family history centre, are also located in the surrounding area. Sometimes, one of the streets adjacent to the temple references the building, such as »Tempelstrasse« in Zollikofen (Bern temple) or »Am Tempel« in Friedrichsdorf (Frankfurt temple), marking the temple as a landmark in the surrounding urban context.

### 3.2. Architecture and exterior

Churches fundamentally differ from temples in their function and meaning in Mormonism. Whereas every person is allowed to enter the church where Sunday service is celebrated, only Latter-day Saints with a temple recommendation are granted admission to temples. Exceptionally, before a temple is consecrated non-Mormons are allowed to take temple tours which are no longer possible after consecration. One might think that open-house visitors to unconsecrated temples would mostly be non-Mormons, but that is not the case. Instead, many Mormon families with children under the age of

eight years participate in these events. The parents introduce their children to this »sacred«, on no account »secret« place, as Mormons always highlight. For them the temple visit is a kind of promise to their children that they will be allowed to enter this building again if they follow the predefined steps of a true Latter-day Saint life.<sup>27</sup>

Some similarities are noticeable in the exterior design of the three temples in Rome, Friedrichsdorf (Frankfurt temple), and Zollikofen (Bern temple) built and consecrated respectively in 2019,<sup>28</sup> 1987,<sup>29</sup> and 1955 (fig. 4). The façade of all three temples – as of the other eleven European temples – is whitish. An exception is the Copenhagen temple which is constructed of brown bricks. In addition to the noticeable white colour, the design of the outside is characterised by rectangular elements, such as the stone cladding covering the surface of all three temples. This geometric element marks the architecture of the buildings in general: round shapes are rarely, if ever, present. The rectangular design and white stone cladding found in these three temples are typical of other European temples, too, and provide an aesthetic recognition element. Notably, the Swedish temple's façade is not covered by rectangular cladding but its architecture follows a similar rectangular design. And the Freiberg and Danish temples use at least rectangular cladding on the outside of the temple tower.

The geometric architecture and white colour communicate perfection, sublimity, and purity. The building's design with straight lines and angles, and especially the pattern of the cladding covering the façade expresses cleanliness and order as if the world's chaos has been locked out of the temple area. The LDS temples create a world of order, righteousness, and perfection, an image that is clearly connected to a Mormon worldview.

While the temple design is noticeably similar throughout Europe (and the world), some stylistic features of a temple might refer to the particular time and place in which they are built. This is the case in the Rome temple where the visitor area includes a rural Italian house as a minor cultural ref-

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27 The sociologist Melvin Hammarberg (2013) describes in detail what such a Latter-day Saints »quest for glory« looks like.

28 See footnote 24.

29 See <https://churchofjeschristtemples.org/frankfurt-germany-temple/photographs/#Official-23> (accessed August 5, 2022).



Fig. 4: The Zollikofen temple (Bern, Switzerland) was the first Latter-day Saints temple built and dedicated in mainland Europe in 1955. Photograph by the author, 2015.

erence to its Italian context<sup>30</sup> which connects the temple with Italian folkloric culture and its stereotypical architecture, although other differences of regionally typical architecture are not taken into account.

But as the analysis of the temples' exterior and spatial setting shows, there are more commonalities than differences between the temple buildings even if they are built in different eras. Besides the recognition effect, the architecture creates an effect of unity between the buildings that connects them ideologically. Additionally, these stylistic similarities offer a reference point for the members to identify with the place independently of where they visit a temple.

### 3.3. Interior of the temples

The »open space« of the temple sites, where the temple architecture stands out, contrasts with the inside of the temple that is designed in such a way that there is very little natural light and no outside views, with the windows

<sup>30</sup> For a visual of the visitor centre, see <https://news-ch.kirchejesuchristi.org/artikel/tage-der-offenen-t%C3%BCr-im-rom-tempel> (accessed August 5, 2022).

often made of colourful ornamental glass. This clear distinction between inside and outside is disrupted by the colour scheme which again emphasises white and pastel shades and characterises the interior design with furnishings and walls. The colour scheme represents an identifying feature of temples that connects the temple district with the interior: the visitors are prepared to enter a different world to which they are aesthetically introduced through the temple's outside area.

Each temple consists of different rooms on different floors which are related to temple rituals such as baptisms and confirmations of the dead, the endowment ceremony, and family and couple sealings for eternity. In order to be able to perform these essential rituals, all temples need to provide the same rooms. Differences between temples can be seen in their floorplan, building materials, furniture, and interior designs. Nevertheless, the atmosphere in each temple allows for a similar sensory-religious experience that is independent of its geographical location.<sup>31</sup> To provide an overview of a temple's rooms and its rituals, I will briefly discuss the model of the Salt Lake City temple (fig. 5). The model of the Salt Lake City temple shows the different floors that are historically allocated to different and progressive ritual stages. On the lower level or ground floor the baptistry is located. The celestial/world room (left side) and terrestrial/garden room (lower right) are also on the ground floor or first level where the endowment ceremony, consisting of lectures, prayers, anointments, covenants and promises, takes place. In most cases, the celestial room (illuminated and on the middle floor, right side), in which members spend time at the end of their temple visit, is on a higher floor, symbolising the highest level of the ritual progression. Only a few temples have an assembly room located on the top floor of the temple, where solemn meetings with those members in charge of the church organisation take place.

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31 Even though I tried to capture the interiors of the temples as accurately as possible, it remains difficult. As a non-Mormon and outsider not being able to attend the ritual practices, it is not possible to access the full spatial experience of the temple. Even the descriptions of temple interiors in the literature do not reveal the complex arrangement of the spaces. Although I was able to conduct two temple visits during open houses before their dedication, the tours given by temple workers only included some of the rooms. It was almost impossible to understand and memorise the entire building plan in one tour. Nevertheless, some impressions and insights could be gained from these temple visits and these are set out in this chapter.



Fig. 5: The model of the Salt Lake City temple shows the different temple levels and rooms. The illuminated space is the celestial room. Photograph by the author.

Inside the temples, the light in the different rooms and hallways is warm and bright, without any dimly lit corners. Everywhere, the same high-key light is used that connects the rooms by means of the same luminosity. Although decorations and furniture differ from temple to temple, there are some common characteristics. Comparing the celestial rooms of the Salt Lake City Temple,<sup>32</sup> the Frankfurt Temple,<sup>33</sup> and the Rome temple,<sup>34</sup> it is apparent how a similar atmosphere of »perfection« is achieved in each of the rooms even

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- 32 The Salt Lake City temple in Utah, the capital of the LDS church where the main organisation is located, was opened in 1893. Its decoration and colour schemes are decisive for subsequent buildings; see <https://newsroom.churchofjesuschrist.org/article/salt-lake-manti-temples-update-march-2021?imageView=salt-lake-Celestial-Room.jpg> (accessed August 5, 2022).
- 33 The Frankfurt temple's furniture is simpler and less decorated but the whiteness of the furniture, the carpet, and the walls is more intense; see <https://churchofjesuschristtemples.org/frankfurt-germany-temple/photographs/#Official-8> (accessed August 5, 2022).
- 34 The most recently built temple in Rome is rather classic and less playful compared to the Salt Lake City temple but the colours are still pastel shades; see <https://content.churchofjesuschrist.org/templesldsorg/bc/Temples/photo-galleries/rome-italy/2019/800x1280/14-Rome-Temple-2160799.jpg> (accessed August 5, 2022).

though they were built in different places and at different times, namely in 1853–1893 (Salt Lake City), 1985–1987 (Frankfurt), and 2010–2019 (Rome). The bright, festive and majestic but also clean and artificially stylised interior design materialises the specific meaning of the room: the celestial room literally symbolises heaven. The room's high ceiling highlights the vertical axes and the connection to the transcendental. After having performed all the mandatory rituals, the members stay in this room to experience God's presence without further rituals; they are expected to sit, pray, and reflect in silence to contemplate what is expected of them after death, namely to live eternally with their husband/wife and family.<sup>35</sup>

The elegantly upholstered furniture with visible wooden elements generally references the (Americanised) Louis Seize style used in the Salt Lake City temple, which serves as a model for other temples around the world, including the European ones, but some adjustments to the tastes of different times and places are noticeable. Thus the furniture of more recently built temples represent a stylistically simplified version of the Louis Seize style of the Salt Lake City temple. Although the interior design of the celestial rooms generally reminds visitors of a six star hotel lobby, there are some differences in shapes and materials but not in the majestic and sublime atmosphere achieved through the uniformly bright lighting, the symmetric arrangement of the furniture, and the similar colours of carpet and walls. One could even describe the celestial room as illuminated. Without any hidden corners that could provide privacy, spending time in this room means being seen by each visitor who has reached this last stage of the rituals in the temple. In this sense the celestial room's brightness serves to strengthen the community experience as they all share the same illuminated atmosphere.

Reflecting on the exterior design of the temple grounds and their interior design, it becomes clear that the majestic embedding of the temples in the landscape, the perfection of the architecture, the artificially bright lighting, and the elegant interior design of the rooms aesthetically connect the three

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35 There are further rooms in the temple: in the creation room, the members hear and observe the re-enactment of creation. The garden room refers to the state of paradise in the Garden of Eden before original sin. The celestial, terrestrial, and celestial rooms – in exactly this order – represent a progressive unity toward the highest kingdom. For more details from a historical and an ethnographic perspective about the different temple rooms, their meaning, and function see Hammarberg 2013, 188–196.

European temples. The conspicuous commonalities between the European temple buildings can easily be extended to non-European temples. The temple rooms' meaning is the same everywhere, and therefore the same interior style is used, even if it is historically adapted. These similarities guarantee the same religious experience for all visitors, be it in Europe or somewhere else. The temple's setting, exterior and interior do not highlight cultural differences but rather aim at the creation of a spatial-aesthetic unity. The LDS temples are clearly visible on the one hand, and their spatial area separates them from the rest of the world on the other. Their aesthetics makes them conspicuously present in their urban context and at the same time it communicates an exclusivity to which only insiders have access. This ambivalence defines a central feature of the LDS church's religious worldview between unmistakable visibility and religious-practical separation.

### 3.4. A multisensory experience of an LDS temple visit

In this section, I will draw on my observations during the open house of the Frankfurt temple to extend the aesthetic analysis above, highlighting in particular the sensory experience of the temple interior, supplemented by some impressions of my visit to the Provo (Utah) temple in 2015 as a non-European point of reference.<sup>36</sup>

For my field study at the Frankfurt temple I arrived a little earlier at the Latter-day Saint's community centre where a pianist was quietly playing. One of the many volunteers present briefed me on the spot about the open house procedure without having been asked. I looked into the parish hall and was told to sit in the front row, although all the other rows were empty. As soon as the group was large enough, a missionary couple (about 40 years old) greeted the visitors, and the actual tour began. Two more missionaries, young women with English accents, introduced themselves and announced a video which explained the meaning of the temple in the Latter-day Saint theology for the individual members, and of the individual temple rooms.<sup>37</sup> We were also told to wear plastic shoe covers in the temple in order to protect the carpets (fig. 6).

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36 The temple visit in Provo is described in detail in Mäder 2020, 23–26.

37 The video can be viewed here: »Tage der offenen Tür und Weihungen« <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/temples/open-houses?lang=deu> (accessed September 1, 2021).



Fig. 6: Volunteers help to put on the shoe covers to protect the carpets of the temple. Photograph by the author, 2019.

As noted above, the pastel shades of the interior design of the Frankfurt temple, continuing the colour scheme of the sparkling white façade, intensify the experience of being »elsewhere«, beyond space and time. This impression is reinforced by the fact that from inside the temple it is almost impossible to see the outside world, whether it is day or night, cold or warm. Not only is any outside noise dimmed, but also inside, sounds become muffled to be almost inaudible. This audio and visual experience is further intensified through the carpeting in the rooms which are dense and high piled. They do not only impact the auditory experience by silencing the visitors' movements and steps but they also create a feeling of hovering above the ground when walking through the hallways and rooms. Even during the open house when a lot of visitors were walking through the rooms, it seemed as if the people were almost noiselessly floating. The temple's sound design creates a separation from the loud, noisy outside world and provides a different space not only in terms of its religious significance but also affectively, by reducing the noise coming from the external world. This material, tactile and auditory quality adds to the temple's atmosphere of »otherworldliness«, quiet and peaceful but also a bit sterile and flawless, a world to which only Mormons belong. Walking through the different rooms as a non-Mormon I became particularly aware of this exclusivity. Without reference points in the external world, and without any specific locally influenced interior design ele-

ments, the reference to the European location of the temple shrinks to zero. Instead, the specific atmosphere aims to detach the visitors from the temple's geographical location.

In addition, since the light is similar in most of the rooms, the hallways connecting them, and in the staircases, and without external reference points, it is very easy to lose one's sense of orientation. The building tells the visitors that they are not only smaller but also disoriented without the church officials' guidance. Of course, it is impossible to get lost during an open temple tour because the volunteers continuously guide, observe and keep the group together. Individual temple tours are not envisaged.

Apart from furniture, temples do not include much decoration. This highlights the few paintings in the typical Latter-day Saint's style on the walls depicting scenes from the New Testament and the Book of Mormon. On the wall behind the recommend desk where the members start their temple visit, a painting of a typical Mormon subject is prominently placed.<sup>38</sup>

In my short conversation before the tour, the public affairs representative of the Latter-day Saints Europe located in Frankfurt highlighted the importance of geographic proximity of members to their temples in order to facilitate regular visits and experience of God:

We already assume that sooner or later there will be times when people will reorient themselves. The number of spiritual seekers of meaning is relatively low today, depending on which study you believe. Most are carefree everyday pragmatists.<sup>39</sup>

The representative expressed a cautious but unbroken optimism that one day in the future the people of Europe might again be more interested in a spiritual quest for meaning.

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38 See <https://churchofjesuschristtemples.org/frankfurt-germany-temple/photographs/#Official-12> (accessed September 5, 2022).

39 The conversation with the spokesperson took place in Friedrichsdorf (Germany) on September 25, 2019 and has been recorded, transcribed verbatim, and translated in English.

#### 4. The end of my walk through Mormon temples in Europe

By »walking« through three European temple areas, I considered their architecture, the landscape in which the buildings are embedded, their interior, and the temple rituals and regulations. I will conclude by summarising the similarities and differences between the temple squares to discuss the ambivalence of Latter-day Saints temples adapting to some degree to their European contexts yet also remaining separated from European culture.

Regarding the similarities between the LDS temples, the recognition factor is key. This is especially important in a European context where the LDS church is less well known than, for example, in the United States of America. This recognition factor is probably even more important for the LDS members regarding the interior rather than the exterior, so that wherever members visit a temple, they feel familiar with the spatial setting. The temple visitors do not need to adapt to any otherness in different European countries, except the language that is a relevant part of ritual.

The temple's outside appearance is important for members and non-members, for those visiting the temple and others who just pass by. It works like a corporate identity that connects the individual temple buildings with the Latter-day Saints church as a global institution. Additionally, the similarities of style and atmosphere result in a similar experience independent of place. Through their uniformity, the temple squares communicate the worldview of perfection, universality, and separation from the world to Mormons and non-Mormons. The uniform design can be understood as the materialisation of the objective of the LDS church's correlation committee (established in 1907) which is responsible for the uniformity in teaching and doctrines including the reconstruction of their history.<sup>40</sup>

But there are also some differences between the buildings. The period from which the buildings originate is partially recognisable and results in some minor variations among the buildings. This is the case with the Bern temple square which reminds one of the style of the 1950s, or the Frankfurt temple with its traces of 1980s architecture. The Italian rural house at the visitor centre in Rome is perhaps the most obvious example of a desire to create a clear cultural belonging. However, these variations are more notice-

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40 Shipps 2000, 89.

able in the church and community buildings than is the case with the temple's architecture which emphasises uniformity and recognisability. Furthermore, the landscape in which the buildings are set varies based on geography and climate resulting in regional differences of flora and fauna. But again, the natural environment, too, is laid out and maintained in an astonishingly uniform manner. The temples become a part of the natural or landscaped space in which they are located, which is of course defined by its specific situation in a European country. At the same time they are set apart from the natural landscape through their typical architectural type which emphasises geometrical over organic forms.

The temples' specific architecture renders them highly visible in the cityscapes discussed here, staking a claim for a religious community whose origins lie outside of Europe within the public space of Europe and establishing a position from which to contribute – at the very least through its visible presence – to European public discourses, including those about the public role of religion. At the same time, the temples' design emphasises the community's separation from the surrounding world and highlights its universal dimension over against the particular context in which it is placed. Thus the temple architecture suggests a withdrawing of Latter-day Saints from the European context at the same time as they make themselves visible and noticeable.

It seems that the strikingly similar layout of the temples' squares and their interior design is not intended to adapt or contribute to a specific European style. Instead, it seems as if the Latter-day Saints view on Europe is strongly shaped by the community's worldview that is defined and controlled by this organisation and expressed in the universally similar temple architecture. The temples thus generate a global unity that represents the LDS religious worldview and communicates perfection and sublimity. These features of the interior design, the exterior of the buildings, and the surrounding areas communicate a temporal and spatial indeterminacy that fosters universality and unity. In addition, the Latter-day Saints temples' architecture contributes to their staging as representative and conspicuous buildings that attract attention. This is nothing new regarding religious buildings. The practice is also known for many Roman Catholic cathedrals, mosques, and synagogues throughout history. Given post-secular discourses, maintaining, renovating, and even building new temples in Europe seems quite courageous in a

context where religious traditions have become less important in the public sphere and the most prominent new buildings in a city are usually those of large tech corporations, banks, or malls.<sup>41</sup> They represent the new landmarks rather than sacral buildings from religious traditions. But the conspicuous temple areas and buildings of the Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter-day Saints show that they are still optimistic regarding their relevance in contemporary Europe, and that they also dispose of sufficient financial means to invest in generously built temple squares. It testifies to a self-understanding that is evidence of a great conviction of one's own global-religious world-view. It will be intriguing to observe future developments of this ambiguous presence – discussed here with a focus on the architectural, material, and multisensory dimension of their temples – of the Latter-day Saints in Europe.

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41 One characteristic of the notion of the »post-secular« is that religious traces still remain: »Post-secularism recognizes the persistence of religion and marks an acknowledgment of religious and secular pluralism. It recognizes the ethical resources and community-building efficacy that religious systems and practices can offer and acknowledges the function of religion in constructing and defending cultural identities. [...]. According to post-secularism, the secularization thesis has been empirically disproven« (Rectenwald/Almeida 2015, 15).

## An American Religion in Europe

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## Part III

# Contemporary Practices of Representing Europe



# Imagining Europe across Borders

## A Religious Studies Approach

Alexander Darius Ornella

### 1. Introduction

Having grown up in Austria in the *Dreiländereck* region where Austria (Kärnten), Italy (Friuli Venezia Giulia), and Slovenia (or what was Yugoslavia in my childhood) and their borders meet, I can still vividly remember the many border crossings into both countries with my family. After all, Slovenia and Italy are just a 25-minute drive away. I also still remember the annoyances that came with the border crossings before Austria (and later Slovenia) joined the European Union and the Schengen region: Austrian border and customs officers frisked Austrians who had popped over to Italy or Slovenia for lunch or dinner to search for smuggled cigarettes or fuel which were, at the time, much cheaper across the border. These border and customs checks often turned a short drive into something that seemed an eternity for the child I was who was not very keen on being inside a car when it was standing still. Why, I often asked, do we have to wait so long for something that seemed so utterly banal. Failing to grasp the relevance and solemnity with which (some) people imbue these arbitrary lines, I struggled to see the necessity for border checks at all. Yes, people spoke a different language, yes, the food was different, and yes, the architecture looked different, but in the grand scheme of things, everything was fairly similar for me on either side of the border: the trees were still green. The *Dreiländereck* also shows how different borders have their distinct dynamics: crossing into Yugoslavia was not as frequent for me and came with an entirely different politi-

cal system. Its eventual collapse brought fighting to the Austrian-Slovenian border during the Slovenian Independence War in 1991. During that time, Austria stationed 7,500 soldiers in the border region to secure the borders and Austrian territory.<sup>1</sup>

The antipode to my childhood experience came later in my final year of high school. Austria voted to join the European Union on 12 June 1994, became an EU member state on 1 January 1995 and ratified the Schengen Agreement on 28 April 1995. At the time, I was studying Italian in high school and to mark the occasion of Austria's EU membership, our Italian teacher took our class to the Austrian-Italian border where we attended a small ceremony to celebrate Austria's EU membership, the fall of borders, and the new opportunities for the two border regions to grow closer. While I was not overly impressed and probably bored at the time, since then, this ceremony has turned into a key moment that defined my attitude towards borders and border regions, and how I relate Austria (and other EU member states) to the idea of »Europe« and the construct that is called the »European Union«. Today, I no longer recall details of the event, and while it was a further three years, 1 April 1998, before border controls between Austria, Italy, and Germany were finally a thing of the past, I do recall (or imagine such a memory) that during the ceremony at the border, a border boom gate was symbolically removed or opened. Whether real or imagined, I have come to associate that very memory with a sense of mobility, freedom and the ability to breathe in the world in quite a bodily and sensory way.

Borders are many things at the same time for different people: they can provide a sense of security and safety or be a threatening warning sign; they can be easily crossed by some but not by others; they are permeable and impermeable all at the same time; they can inhibit relationships and crossings at the same time as they enable them. These sometimes invisible and immaterial, at other times visible and material lines have legal implications and impose themselves not only onto the public and political imagination but also have an impact on a material level and on material practices. This was most evident in the pre-Euro era when crossing that line had material-monetary implications of having to bring different currencies (even if only

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1 Some visual material of Austrian forces at the border can be found in the media archives of the Austrian Armed Forces: [https://www.bundesheer.at/download\\_archiv/photos/inlandseinsatz/galerie.php?id=1253&currRubrik=136](https://www.bundesheer.at/download_archiv/photos/inlandseinsatz/galerie.php?id=1253&currRubrik=136), accessed August 30, 2022.

for mundane things such as getting a coffee or some food). Yet, pre-Euro monetary practices in border regions also show how permeable these border lines can be since a number of restaurants and stores across the border in Italy also accepted the Austrian Schilling. However, I do not recall any Austrian restaurants or stores advertising »we accept the Italian Lira«. These monetary practices raise questions about the cultural, social, economic, and political relationships of and between either side of the border. What political, economic or cultural interests or dependencies shape the relationship between either side of the border, what hierarchies are being created, subverted, or reinforced?

Borders play a key role in the imagination of individuals, groups, communities, and states. The news on German public TV, the ARD Tagesschau, on 1 April 1998 made these links between borders and imagination most explicit when they reported the end of border controls between Austria, Germany, and Italy. For car loving Germans this meant being able to drive practically across Europe, from the north of Germany to the south of Italy, without border controls: »Europe has yet again grown closer. Since midnight, there are no border controls anymore between Germany, Austria, and Italy, and the barriers have come down even at the major checkpoints [...] green light from Flensburg to Palermo.«<sup>2</sup>

Since then, however, the terrorist attacks in France and what was labelled the migrant crisis have materially changed things at the borders. Several countries, including Germany and Austria, re-introduced temporary border controls. They were meant to last for only six months, in line with EU regulations, but Germany, for example, seems to keep extending these temporary border controls in perpetuity. Is this the end of free movement, of open borders, what was hailed as the green light from Flensburg to Palermo, and what seems like a fragile idea of »Europe«? In this paper, I am interested in the material and visual dimension that borders introduce and in how Europeans and border crossers might experience both Europe's external borders (i. e. the Schengen Zone) and the EU's internal borders.

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2 ARD aktuell 1998: »Europa ist erneut ein Stück weiter zusammengewachsen. Seit Mitternacht gibt es keine Grenzkontrollen mehr zwischen Deutschland, Österreich und Italien, auch an den großen Übergängen fielen jetzt die Schlagbäume [...] freie Fahrt von Flensburg bis Palermo« (translation by the author, accessed September 7, 2021).

The term »Europe« is ambiguous in popular usage: »Europe« sometimes refers to the institution of the European Union, sometimes to a vaguely (un)defined continental Europe that may include non-EU member states such as Switzerland, or the geographic region that is part of the Eurasia land-mass. »Europe« can sometimes also refer to what seems like a mystical whole: an idea that seems linked to a particular geographic region but is seen as the cradle of »western« civilisation that sees itself as the heritage of Greco-Roman, enlightened (and Christian) culture and (male) thinkers. This idea of Europe as a whole, feeds into discussions of »a« European identity, European culture, European citizenship. Diversity features prominently in such a holistic understanding of Europe. The European Union, for example, has as its motto »United in diversity«<sup>3</sup>. Yet, this unity is fraught with tensions, the political and economic self-interests of member states, and endless debates over perceived core European values. Unity and unitedness, the mystical whole that »Europe« sometimes refers to, seems to exist not in diversity but only ever as fragmented pieces that are in constant tension between attraction and repulsion, like pieces of magnets that keep switching their magnetic poles. These tensions between attraction and repulsion become most visible in public and political imaginations of borders and border discourses of both the EU's external and internal borders and the internal and external borders of the Schengen Zone.

For the purposes of this paper, I am particularly interested in the internal borders of the Schengen Zone and the experience of crossing the border or being at the border: if (internal) borders are no longer enforced, do they lose their power in public and popular discourse and as a space for liminal experiences? I will argue that a religious studies approach to border narratives, border politics, and border imaginings can help to better understand why borders are forces to be reckoned with, forces that undergo and resist change at the same time. In a first step, I will very briefly provide some key thoughts from the flourishing field of border studies. In the second step, I will argue for a religious studies approach to borders, or: why it is important to think about borders religiously. In the third and final step, I will reflect on the Austrian-Italian border checkpoint I frequently crossed as a child and the art project by photographer Tristan Poyer through which he attempted to

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<sup>3</sup> European Union 2022.

visualise the omnipresence of the (invisible) border between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. These two examples allow me to provide visual and material support for why a religious studies approach to borders *as borders* is helpful. My argument relies on narratives and fragments of narratives, visual material, and anecdotes because, as David Newman argues: »It is at the level of narrative, anecdote and communication that borders come to life.«<sup>4</sup> Unless otherwise noted, »borders« in this article refers to borders between sovereign nation states.

## 2. Inside/outside, or: Imagining borders

Borders are contested »things«, spaces, ideological inscriptions, narratives, spectacles, and political, economic, and often racialised practices. Border studies has often focused on how borders regulate social, economic, and political interactions.<sup>5</sup> Specifically in a European context, border studies have focused on the role of borders in European integration. These discussions of European integration focused on how borders and the spaces and territories they created were seen as both a source of public anxiety and political exploitation as well as an opportunity for better cultural, economic, and political cross-border collaboration, in particular in border regions. When Austria joined the Schengen Zone, for example, or Eastern European countries were admitted into the EU and Schengen Zone, there was public fearmongering that Eastern Europeans will drive Austrians out of their jobs. Viewed more positively, borders and the cultural differences they created (in people's imagination or observable differences) were seen as opportunities for a more vibrant cultural exchange benefitting border regions and beyond. In other words: borders provide rich material for cultural, economic, and political narratives that fuel the public imagination of Europe, the European Union as institution and cultural, political, and economic project, as well as the role of individual countries within the structure and hierarchy of the EU (such as the tensions between smaller and bigger countries, long-standing EU members and newcomers, countries that see themselves as the

4 With reference to field studies by Augosto Carli, Doris Wastl-Walter and others, Newman 2006, 152.

5 Wilson/Donnan 2012, 9.

»core« of the Union). Discussions about borders in Europe then also focus on the challenges internal and external borders bring with them such as police cooperation and the transnational and cross-border dimension of crime.<sup>6</sup>

The borders of a nation state may seem (fairly) stable but, as discussions about the »migrant crisis« or Russia's invasion of Ukraine show, can easily come under threat. As Thomas Wilson and Hastings Donnan argue, »borders require continual reinscription and reperformance, on the part of citizens, governments and other institutions and groups both within the state and beyond it.«<sup>7</sup> In this context, borders fulfil (and are required to fulfil) multiple purposes all at the same time. Louise Amoore testifies to this complex multiplicity when she argues:

emergent forms of bordering seek to reconcile security with mobility and sovereignty with economy. [...] No longer strictly a matter of disciplinary practices that stop, prohibit, enclose, delimit or proscribe, the work of the contemporary border is conducted in and through movement itself.<sup>8</sup>

The question of who and what might be able and allowed to move across borders, representations and imaginaries of borders that give rise to and are shaped by security and mobility discourses raise complex ethical issues. Proponents of borders often – and often for various reasons – argue that borders can provide a framework and guidance in an increasingly complex world, that they can give people a sense of rootedness and connection, in other words a sense of belonging, geographically and socially, and that they can form a key ingredient in identity negotiations.<sup>9</sup> Frank Furedi, for example, argues that to think the »main purpose« of borders is to »promote and reinforce extreme nationalism« is to misunderstand borders. He holds that opponents of borders not only dismiss arguments that justify the existence of borders, e. g. for security purposes, often too quickly and easily, but that they all too often name and shame proponents of borders.<sup>10</sup> Critics of borders,

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6 Wilson/Donnan 2012, 17–18.

7 Wilson/Donnan 2012, 19.

8 Johnson/Jones/Paasi/Amoore/Mountz/Salter/Rumford 2011, 64.

9 Cf. Scott 2020, 7–8.

10 Cf. Furedi 2021, 1.

on the other hand, argue that border proponents often fall short in addressing the ethical challenges borders bring,<sup>11</sup> such as the inside/outside binaries they re-inscribe, issues related to gender, race, racism, and power dynamics.

In discussions about the ethical values and challenges of borders, it is important to keep in mind that borders are not neutral: they are institutional(ised), imagined, lived, practiced and enacted by the state and its agents as well as the general population crossing borders. The experienced complexities of borders as sometimes enforced lines and at other times blurry spaces crystallise individual experiences as much as power interests and power dynamics. Borders are as much a reaction to social, political, and economic pressures and interests as they are producers of such pressures and interests. »Borders«, as James W. Scott argues, »provide ontological security and enable communities to thrive; they can also be violent tools of exclusion and discrimination.«<sup>12</sup>

Adding to the complexity of tangible, intangible, visible, invisible, materialised and immaterial borders are imaginations of future borders and border crossings using digital technologies. In particular in an airport setting (but also extending beyond airports), borders and security checks are envisioned to be highly connected, digital, invisible, frictionless, automated, and proactive: »The future border will be an invisible one for the majority of citizens and traders.«<sup>13</sup> And it is in this climate of ambivalence and fluidity, and the spaces that it creates, that lived (and sometimes deadly) experiences of borders play out. While state borders are often made visible through signs and border infrastructure, borders and the idea of borders are not merely linked to notions of sovereignty or geography but expand to, evolve around, and give rise to cultural practices and identity negotiations.

Looking at water, water bottles, and the equipment illegal migrants might need to cross the Mexican-US border, Barbara Andrea Sostaita, for example, shows how the border and the space of the borderlands gives rise to very particular practices and a very particular economy catering to the needs of those wanting to cross the Mexican-US border bypassing border controls.<sup>14</sup> Sostaita's study makes explicit that while state borders often seem perma-

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11 Cf. Scott 2020, 8–9.

12 Scott 2020, 9.

13 Canham/Voet 2020.

14 Cf. Sostaita 2020.

ment and fixed, they are constantly under threat and subject to erosion. They need »border work«, a continuous work of sustaining them and imbuing them with meaning and power.

An important element – or building block – of border work is identity negotiations, specifically discussions of who ought to be on which side of the border and why. In this sense, borders can drive, sometimes determine, and even dictate bodily, corporeal practices, no matter how mundane, which still carry significance. Borders both are and create a biopolitical arena, as Yannis Hamilakis argues.<sup>15</sup> The role borders play in identity negotiations as well as in the biopolitical arena can best be explained by looking at religion as an embodied and bodily practice. In other words, looking at the sense of religious belonging can help make the links between borders and identity particularly tangible and visible. At times there is an imagined, at other times an identifiable difference between what happens on the other side of the border, a difference that manifests itself on a material level, a difference that can be seen, felt, and experienced, such as a Catholic/Protestant us/ them or a western Christian us vs. an Arab Muslim other. In particular the Russian invasion of Ukraine and the religious-theological-ideological support the Russian Orthodox Church and its Patriarch Kirill offer are helpful examples for understanding the imaginary-ideological aspects of bordering processes and identity negotiations.<sup>16</sup>

### 3. Bordering, debordering, and shaping imaginaries: A religious studies approach

For the purposes of this paper, I am not so much interested in how religious individuals and communities are shaped by or form their identity in relation to borders (e.g. a Catholic Republic of Ireland and a Protestant Northern Ireland). Neither am I interested in the role borders play in the migration of religious communities or the spreading and mutation of religious beliefs and doctrine within and across borders. Rather, the questions I am asking are: do borders, and how they are imagined and experienced, have a religious dimension? Is there something we can learn about borders – and bor-

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15 Hamilakis 2021.

16 Hudson 2022; Kelaidis 2022.

ders in Europe specifically – as well as the spaces and territories they mark out by looking at borders, and processes of bordering and debordering from a religious studies approach? Here I adopt David Chidester's understanding of religion as practices and imaginations that transcend the everyday and the ordinary, and that which is seen as different from the ordinary.<sup>17</sup>

In order to explore the religious dimension of borders I want to start with what I deem a necessary detour and look at the process of globalisation, i. e. the process of removing trade restrictions across borders, facilitating travel, or the global movement of infectious diseases and invasive species. Looking at the ideologies that drive globalisation and their religious dimensions provides a starting point for exploring the religious dimension of borders. Several scholars approach globalisation in and of itself as a religious phenomenon with its institutions, beliefs, rituals, and global culture.<sup>18</sup> Dwight Hopkins, for example, argues that »globalization of monopoly finance capitalist culture is itself a religion. Such a religion feeds on the most vulnerable people in the world theater.«<sup>19</sup> Hopkins defines globalisation as a religion because he understands globalisation as a system of ultimate concern: »the god of globalization embodies the ultimate concern or ground of being where there is a fierce belief in the intense concentration, in a few hands, of monopoly, finance capitalist wealth on the world stage.«<sup>20</sup>

Neoliberalism, in this context, acts as the theological justification of the religious system of globalisation.<sup>21</sup> Adam Kotsko explores the religious and theological dimension of neoliberalism further and argues for understanding neoliberalism as an all-encompassing and holistic worldview:

Thus neoliberalism is more than simply a formula for economic policy. It aspires to be a complete way of life and a holistic worldview, in a way that previous models of capitalism did not. It is this combination of policy agenda and moral ethos that leads me to designate neoliberalism as a form of political theology.<sup>22</sup>

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17 Chidester 2005, 1.

18 Csordas 2009, 9.

19 Hopkins 2001, 8.

20 Hopkins 2001, 9.

21 Hopkins 2001, 16.

22 Kotsko 2018, 6.

Ivan Strenski holds that both social scientists and religious studies scholars have for a long time ignored the role religion and theology might have played as driving force and legitimising framework of economic globalisation.<sup>23</sup> He argues that »today's language of globalization betrays an implicit religious depth« and that Christian theologies were not only »critical in facilitating the rise of today's economic globalization but that their evangelical residues linger on today«.<sup>24</sup> The idea of natural law and its importance in (Catholic) theological thinking was a key ingredient in justifications and rationalisations of freedom of movement and travel:<sup>25</sup>

In terms of economic globalization, then, what unites these classic [Christian] authors is their unanimous support, often from different legal, philosophical, and religious bases, for the universal and natural human rights and chief among them for the subject of globalization – the right to free passage. All these principal players agreed on the fundamental and unquestioned right to visit and travel in the lands of others and to perform various acts of trade and commerce across national borders. Without this right, there can be no economic globalization.<sup>26</sup>

While (Catholic) theological thinking and recourse to natural law has since lost its driving force, Strenski argues that their heritage and the undercurrents they created still resonate in and underpin some of today's ideological framings and justifications of globalization:

Yet, although the principle of free passage still needs the enabling agency of positive and deliberately drawn formal treaty commitments, in logic it remains the elemental taken-for-granted, precontractual basis for such positive treaties themselves. Thus, even at the bases of movements of economic globalization, such as those embodied in international trading bodies such as the WTO, it is just *assumed* that it is virtually »natural« – that the world would be a better place for all –

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23 Strenski 2004, 632.

24 Strenski 2004, 633.

25 Strenski 2004, 636.

26 Strenski 2004, 645.

if the free passage/free trade policies of economic globalization were to be ratified by binding treaties.<sup>27</sup>

Thomas Csordas, then, asks to what extent globalisation today might still have a religious dimension: »Does it possess a mythic structure, an eschatological promise, a soteriological message, a magical spontaneity, a moral imperative, a dogmatic inevitability, a demonic urge, an inquisitional universality, a structure of alterity or Otherness that is at some level inescapably religious?«<sup>28</sup>

#### 4. A religious dimension of and to borders?

If we entertain the idea that globalisation has a religious dimension and relevance, and that theological frameworks have contributed to paving the way to globalisation and the idea of free movement of goods and people, it stands to reason that borders, these messy »things« that can facilitate or prevent such freedom of movement, might also be imbued with religious meaning. I argue that borders have such a religious dimension, a dimension that exerts a kind of fascination that takes them out of the everyday and the ordinary. I want to start with two – related – observations as a way to close in on my argument.

##### 4.1. Purity and sexuality

Processes of bordering and debordering are often based on ideas of purity, gender and sexuality, issues of race and racism, or religion. At the same time, bordering discourses often turn these ideas into platforms for these very discourses for particular cultural, political, economic, or political gains. Mohammed Amadeus Mack argues that borders are always symbolically and sexually charged. Border narratives of us/ them or in/ out do not only define who is in and who is out, but label us/ them or insiders/ outsiders as male, female, deviant, or the religious other. For example, in discourses of »Frenchness«, France is often imagined as female in need of protection from

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27 Strenski 2004, 646, emphasis in the original.

28 Csordas 2009, 10.

oversexualised Arab or Muslim (and thus religiously othered) men. In these gendered imaginaries of the nation state and its threats, religion and sexual orientation (and the hypocrisy that often comes with it) are key ingredients.<sup>29</sup> While it is not the physical or geographic border that is seen as under attack here, it is the imaginary dimension of borders and the territories they create that are portrayed to be under existential threat both from the outside and the inside. As Mary Douglas in her work on purity and danger showed, the fending off of these (imaginary) threats is often framed in narratives of purity and embedded in ritual practices of meaning making through the (de)legitimising of boundaries.<sup>30</sup> Thus religion and the religious and sexualised other play a role in imagining threats to the nation state. Additionally, ideas of gender and sexuality, ideas of purity and narratives and practices that aim to maintain such postulated purity (developed and maintained also with the help of religious practices and ideas) take borders and bordering processes out of the everyday and ordinary and thus situate them in an otherworldly, imaginary, even transcendent realm.

#### 4.2. Reclaiming and policing borders

In today's public and political European imaginaries, some borders (»our« borders) are easily policed whereas other borders (»some other country's« borders) are thought to be not so easily or thoroughly policed. This idea of »our« borders vs. »the other's« border and their policing contributes to public-political debates in Europe in recent years. The Brexit referendum's result was, to a large part, dependent on the idea of »taking back control of our borders«. Taking back control was linked to the idea that if and when »we« have control of »our« borders again, »we« will be able to properly, effectively, and efficiently police them and control who is allowed in and who must stay out. The idea of (reclaiming) sovereignty over the borders of the United Kingdom was part of the Brexit argument. More importantly, however, were transcendent-utopian promises (or delusions) of a post-Brexit land of – quite biblically – milk and honey (Exodus 3:8), a land of plenty in which the National Health Service will prosper, the fishing industry will be freed

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29 Mack 2017, 1–33.

30 Douglas 1978.

from the shackles of Brussels, the UK will be able to make new worldwide trade deals with whomever they please, where all will earn higher wages.

The ideas of border policing and reclaiming borders can be linked to religious frameworks with roots dating back millennia.<sup>31</sup> In antiquity, for example, where the policing of the frontiers of sometimes far-stretching empires was less practical if not impossible, religion and the gods served as guarantors of borders and territory. Jeremy McInerney argues that:

[i]n a society in which the permanent policing of borders was largely inconceivable, the ephesbes of classical Athens being a notable exception, control of the farthest reaches of territory depended on compromise and negotiation. This was accomplished through religion. Border treaties were authorized by the gods, and, in extreme instances, border zones were dedicated to the gods, either as the sites of sanctuaries or sacred lands, or both.<sup>32</sup>

Borders and border zones served an additional – and crucial – purpose: to distinguish between human, cultivated (sometimes also labelled civilised) land and wilderness, uncultivated or uncivilised land. Such a distinction between civilised/uncivilised and order/chaos has more often than not been gendered rather than neutral and often featured religious undertones: civilised space, i. e. space made by men, was often gendered male while wilderness and chaos were often labelled female.<sup>33</sup> As David Nye argues, labelling spaces as cultivated/uncultivated or civilised/uncivilised or simply venturing into what (white western) settlers perceived to be vast uninhabited land theirs to take can be seen as a religious enterprise, the crafting of creation narratives and stories of origin that draw on and are linked to ideas of the transcendent.<sup>34</sup>

At first sight, it seems that the ideas of gods acting as markers of borders and guardians of territory, the civilised/uninhabited land divide, and the gendering of spaces are unrelated. Yet, as I have discussed above, religious ideas seem to be the glue that ties these unrelated processes together: venturing

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31 Goetz 2000; Ben Eliyahu 2019.

32 McInerney 2006, 34.

33 Cf. McInerney 2006, 39.

34 Nye 2003.

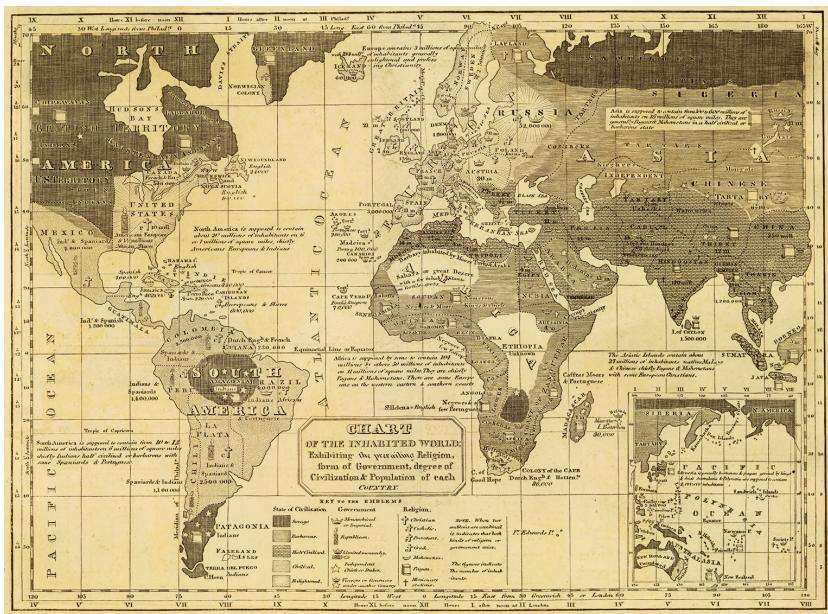


Fig. 1: Woodbridge's chart aims to visualise religion, form of government, and degree of civilisation through colour-coding and the use of symbols. William C. Woodbridge, *Moral and Political Chart of the Inhabited World*, 24 × 16 cm, in: Woodbridge 1821/1824, image 4 of 11. David Rumsey Map Collection at Stanford University Libraries.<sup>35</sup>

beyond known/civilised frontiers is a religious enterprise; and the gendered territory is always also a religious territory. While institutionalised religion plays an ambivalent role in Europe, religious ideas and frameworks continue to resonate in the way European borders and territories are imagined. In other words: religion and religious framing not only tie together different spaces and processes of making spaces but are also key driving forces in imagining borders and the spaces they create and separate.

An example of how religion was employed in marking spaces and territories as civilised/uncivilised is the American geographer William C. Woodbridge's *Moral and Political Chart of the Inhabited World* from 1821. Woodbridge's chart aims to visualise religion, form of government, and (perceived) degree of civilisation through colour-coding and the use of symbols (fig. 1).

35 Source: <http://purl.stanford.edu/fj299xp1087> (accessed September 19, 2022).

Whether intentionally or not, it is quite clear that religion (specifically western Christianity) is employed as delimiter and differentiator of degrees of civilisation and enlightenment. In his chart, the symbols denoting religious affiliation are more than mere information about the »prevailing religion«. Rather, the map simply would not work without these religious labels. Western Christianity equals enlightenment equals republican, monarchical or imperial forms of government equals »civilisation«. In other words, the less western Christian, the less enlightened an area or country is portrayed. It is interesting to note that Christianity does not automatically grant enlightenment status adding an ambivalent and subversive element to this chart that would deserve a more detailed discussion in a separate paper. Russia, for example, is marked as barbarous with some enlightened spots. Italy and Greece are only marked as civilised but not enlightened, placing them in the same category as parts of Mexico, Columbia and other South American areas. It is also interesting to note that Woodbridge's 1827 version of the chart dropped the category »enlightened« and merged it with »civilised«.

Woodbridge's map shows that religion matters when drawing, labelling, and making sense of borders and territories for political and economic purposes. These religious undercurrents remain mostly ignored in contemporary European political discussions but they continue to resonate and exert power in a range of socio-cultural and political debates. I have mentioned Russia's invasion of Ukraine and its theological framework before; they are also present in narratives around the migrant crisis in Europe; they contribute to the rise of the political right across Europe; they are part of what shapes ideas around food and food security; and they are key ingredients in the creation of value systems by various political and social actors.<sup>36</sup>

## 5. Imagining Europe with and at the border

Having explored the idea that imagining borders and processes of (de)bording can carry religious meaning, I now return to the starting point of this paper: being at the border and crossing it. These acts seem to attract a certain fascination. When I drove to the »old« border crossing (i.e. on the

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36 Downing 2010; Schulson 2015; Beal 2022; Davie/Leustean 2022.



Fig. 2: View of Austria from the in-between space of the Austrian and Italian border infrastructure at the Thörl Maglern crossing. Photograph by the author.

B-road before the A2 *Südautobahn* connecting Tarvisio in Italy and Arnoldstein in Austria was built in the 1980s) in summer 2021 to take images, I was not the only person there.

A family from Germany (judging by their German license plate) and a family on their bikes (presumably also tourists) joined me in taking images from and of the in-between space at the Austrian and Italian border checkpoints (figs. 2, 3 and 5). My motivation for taking these images was for inclusion in this paper – but what was theirs? It seems that standing bodily at or on the border in this in-between space radiates a certain fascination. But what exactly is it that fascinates us in this space? Is it the liminality of the neither-here-nor-there, the in-between space as transitory and transitional space or is it a romanticised view of borders, border checkpoints, and the theatricality of borders acted out and embodied by state agents when crossing a border?

The question of theatricality (or lack thereof) adds an additional level of complexity and richness in particular when being at the »old« Austrian-Italian border near Arnoldstein: the border control buildings' best days are long gone. The faded colour of the paint, the closed doors and empty rooms radiate



Fig. 3: The Austrian border infrastructure at the Thörl Maglern crossing.  
Photograph by the author.

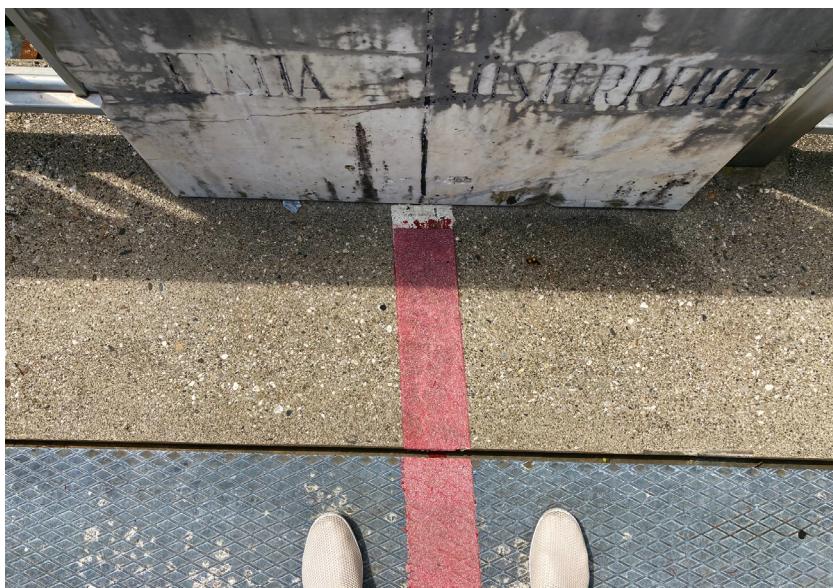


Fig. 4: Only after some searching in the in-between space made possible by the lack of border controls could I find the border line. Photograph by the author.

their loss of purpose – like a theatre stage that's no longer in use but with the props left on stage (fig. 5). Yet, when I was there, they were not abandoned altogether. A small number of cars, including police cars, were parked outside the buildings (fig. 3). The space's liminality between still-being-used-and-abandoned was not necessarily due to the lack of people crossing the border at this checkpoint: while this border checkpoint is not a busy one, people use it to pop to Italy for pizza or coffee in the shops just beyond the border when they do not want to drive all the way to Tarvisio.

Driving across the border and past the buildings on either side, the emptied cubicles (fig. 5) make it clear that border checks are (or at least should be) a thing of the past. The meaning that is attached to that past and the used-but-not buildings, however, remains ambiguous, ambivalent, and subject to the individual's perception of past and present. To some, like myself, the mostly abandoned buildings bear witness to a past in which Austria seemed less connected, less open to the world outside, or – literally – on the other side. For others, these decaying buildings might hold romantic value as remnants of the olden, better, days when »we« Austrians had more control over border movements, when Austrian culture and demographics was »more« Austrian, when one might be reminded of the battles once fought, or as the *Kärntner Heimatlied* with its fourth paragraph added by Agnes Maria Millonig in 1928 states:

Where men's bravery and women's loyalty  
Our homeland sucessfully contended  
Where borderes were drawn in blood  
And remained free in hardship and death;  
The jubilant cheers resonate from the mountain face:  
This is my glorious homeland.<sup>37</sup>

From learning the *Kärntner Heimatlied* in primary school, I still remember how this paragraph and the blood marking Austria's borders were linked to the teaching of history. While I do not want to suggest that we were taught a

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<sup>37</sup> »Wo Mannesmut und Frauentreu'/Die Heimat sich erstritt aufs neu'/Wo man mit Blut die Grenze schrieb/Und frei in Not und Tod verblieb;/Hell jubelnd kling's zur Bergeswand:/ Das ist mein herrlich Heimatland.« Translated by the author, <https://www.ktn.gv.at/Politik/Landtag/Wissenswertes/Kaerntner-Heimatlied> (accessed June 26, 2022).



Fig. 5: View of Italy from the space between the Austrian and Italian border infrastructure at the Thörl Maglern crossing. The ITALIA country sign has been adorned with stickers by people crossing the border. Photograph by the author.

nationalist agenda (or that my primary school teacher had such an agenda), it serves as an example of how borders are imbued with symbolic meanings in a range of different contexts. It also serves as an example that the lines between a romanticised view of the past and an extreme right-wing nationalist agenda can be blurry and their discourses of borders can be fuelled by a range of sources.

And yet, people seem to be attracted by this in-between-ness where nothing happens, certainly no lengthy queues of people waiting for customs officers to search cars for cigarettes like in my childhood. This in-between-ness as well as the material and visual objects present (fig. 4) in this liminal space also invite material and visual practices. The »ITALIA« border sign, for example, has been marked by people crossing the border with a range of stickers (fig. 5). These stickers are testimony to the presence of people in this border area, but more importantly, they bear witness to the absence of state agents with their border practices that ensures the movement of people while at the same time policing and regulating such movement. The stickers found at the »ITALIA« sign also bear witness to tourism at the border and cross-border tourism. Local communities have often tried to encourage cross-border tourism as a means to support the community and to foster cross-border collaboration. Cycling routes such as the Alpe-Adria Cycling Route, which runs

across the »old« border connecting Austria (Salzburg) to Italia (Grado), count among some of these popular activities.<sup>38</sup> Eeva-Kaisa Prokkola argues that

[c]ross-border tourism development in European internal border regions can be regarded as indicative of the process of European integration. Place-making in tourism provides for a spatial reorganisation of political landscapes, and also for the creation of new spatial and social images to replace the national ones. In this context, borders, their symbolic meaning and ideological dimensions are often seen as an economic resource.<sup>39</sup>

In the context of the »old« Austrian-Italian border, the idea of place-making raises the question what kind of place-making happened at the border? Other than the cycling route inviting locals and tourists to cross the border and enjoy refreshments at bars that existed when borders were still enforced, it seems that the old border has not attracted any place-making practices. In this regard, the »old« border can be viewed as a non-place that in itself is ambiguous and sits in-between what it is and what it ought to be.

The notion of the border and borderland as a non-place might help us better understand the visual and material make-up of another complex and complicated border: the border between the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland and the UK. Once an internal border but not quite since it was not part of the Schengen Zone, the Brexit referendum has transformed the Irish border into an external border, but also not quite because border and customs checks are performed and enforced elsewhere. The Irish border is a contested border with a history of violence, yet with the European Single Market Act in the early 1990s and the Good Friday agreement in 1998, a process of debordering started that has rendered the border mostly invisible. In his photographic art project, *Invisible In-between: An Englishman's Search for the Irish Border*,<sup>40</sup> photographer Tristan Poyser explores the Irish border, its (in)visibility, the tensions this (in)visibility might hide, and the impact of the Brexit referendum result on the local community (figs. 6 and 7). In a YouTube interview, Poyser states that he was interested in

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38 Stoffelen 2018.

39 Prokkola 2010, 224–5.

40 Poyser 2019.



Fig. 6: Tristan Poyer, *Invisible In-between*. © Tristan Poyer, courtesy of the artist.<sup>41</sup>



Fig. 7: Tristan Poyer, *Invisible In-between*. © Tristan Poyer, courtesy of the artist.<sup>42</sup>

41 Source: <https://www.tristanpoyer.com/gallery-image/Torn-Archival-Prints/G00006koCZk4.0vs/I0000uY1mDHlKkWo/C0000RFxtfhDX5cI>, (accessed June 24, 2022).

42 Source: <https://www.tristanpoyer.com/gallery-image/Torn-Archival-Prints/G00006koCZk4.0vs/I0000U7GVMOjqrA/C0000RFxtfhDX5cI>, (accessed June 24, 2022).

how one quick irreparable action, such as tearing a photograph or voting in a referendum, impacts other people. And how it's important to consider the impact of our actions [...] and how they affect others, especially in places we've not been to or in situations we don't understand.<sup>43</sup>

For his photographic project, Poyser travelled and photographed the entirety of the border between the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland. To make the invisible visible, he then tore the photographs (figs. 6 and 7):

The materiality of the border is shown through a physical tear, making the invisible, visible. The act of tearing creates uneasiness, evoking notions of the political and economic tensions surrounding the border's position within the Brexit negotiations, symbolising the divorce of the UK from the 27 remaining states. The *Invisible In-between* shows the viewer the reality of the border & encourages them to explore the intangible nature & uneasiness surrounding it.<sup>44</sup>

At the time of writing this article, the EU and the UK are involved in a dispute over the Irish border and post-Brexit customs practices. Poyser documented the – at the time – invisibility of the Irish border. This invisibility was crucial and the UK Government, in utopian-populistic language, promised that through invisible smart border technology, the smooth travel of goods and people would be maintained. Smart border technology has not (yet) fulfilled these utopian promises of invisibility but both smart border technology and Poyser's project highlight that invisibility has a material dimension. And it is this very materiality, even if hidden and invisible, that links the imaginary of borders to the way people experience them and their impact.

How can we link Poyser's project to the religious studies approach to borders I am proposing in this paper? In his foreword to Poyser's *Invisible In-between*, Garrett Carr argues:

Poyser went further than just photographing the route of this invisible frontier. He has taken hold of the physical photographs and ripped

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43 Belfast Exposed 2019.

44 Poyser 2019.

them along the borderline. Each tear is, I think, a stroke of brilliance. It is more of an act than a mark, although it has left a visual record of itself, and it is more eloquent than one hundred newspaper articles about the border. The tears capture something of the uneasiness of the border, and suggest a deeply felt misfortune. It is usually divorces or family estrangements that make us tear photographs, something has to have gone badly wrong for us to make the tear. We must have abandoned hope; we must have accepted that something is not getting put back together. Nobody meant it to turn out this way, but yet there it is and there is no way back. Although Ireland's border is currently much discussed by politicians and journalists its land and people are little known or understood. This landscape is at a far remove from the garbled debates that are shaping its future. Ultimately, I think, Poyser's work speaks of the hidden damage that can be done when places are forgotten.<sup>45</sup>

The tearing of the photographs and the rupture this creates can be linked to a religious studies approach to borders if we remember that the notions of and tensions between continuity and rupture play a key role in Christian identity negotiations. In conversion narratives, for example, converts often talk about their conversion journey as experience of continuity or rupture of space and time.<sup>46</sup> Joel Robbins suggests we can understand rupture as »profoundly felt personal experience – of the undoubtedly presence of Pauline moments of intense personal disruption in some person's encounters with Christian or revolutionary models of change«<sup>47</sup> The EU's borders, internal as well as external, can thus be understood as ruptures of space and time: and it is that very rupture they create that attracts tourists, invites people to linger or take photographs, or encourages material practices such as marking one's presence by leaving stickers at border signs.

I want to push the religious studies approach to borders further and argue – provocatively – that they resemble »thorns of alterity«<sup>48</sup>. The otherness that borders create or make visible through the ruptures they impose are an

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45 Carr 2018.

46 Farnetti 2019; Robbins 2019; Sarró 2019.

47 Robbins 2019, 227.

48 Larcher 2010.

ingredient in identity discourses. Yet, as Ramon Sarró points out, rupture needs to be seen as something that is closely related to the notion of healing and repair.<sup>49</sup> As such, borders can remind us of these violent processes that drive human communities apart and at the same time, as a thorn of alterity, encourage processes of healing.

These two (visual) examples, the Austrian-Italian border (fig. 2–5) and Tristan Poyser's photographic project of the Irish border (fig. 6–7), show that borders do not just denote the »here« and »there« and the »in-between«. Borders themselves (if there is such a thing) are »here«, »there«, and »in-between«. They might be invisible and imagined, yet they have material and visual qualities. They are human-made and often the outcome of power struggles as well as economic interests. They are, to put it bluntly, of this world. At the same time, they are not of this world, they are part of the stories and myths we tell ourselves *about* ourselves. It is exactly this sitting in-between that imbues borders with fascination and power and feeds into identity negotiations and stories of and about communities. This in-between-ness also helps borders to defy critique. It is this religious or mythological understanding of borders, their in-between-ness, the traces of violence and otherness they bear witness to, the thorn of alterity as which they can act, the ruptures in space and time they create, that are all crucial to better understand the dynamic of Europe's internal as well as external borders. As Vincent Della Sala argues, »[t]he creation of a new political space with its own borders requires narratives to give meaning to that space; this new order also implies that the old will be replaced.«<sup>50</sup>

## 6. Concluding thoughts: Contemporary relevance

»Europe« has been imagined and re-imagined in various ways throughout recent history: as phoenix rising from the ashes of the wars,<sup>51</sup> as a unique project of peace and cooperation, or as a political moloch in pro-Brexit propaganda. In all these visions and imaginings, internal and external borders of the EU (and the Schengen Zone) play a crucial role: some borders must be

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49 Sarró 2019, 140.

50 Della Sala 2017, 550.

51 Lacroix/Nicolaïdis 2010, 5.

fortified and others must be levelled. The question of borders is also closely related to the question of how European Union citizens might experience the EU as »their« Union and thus as relevant and »real«. The European Union has woven the idea of freedom of movement into its mythological structure. In a way, EU citizens can experience the Union and the benefits of membership through such freedom of movement and – within the Schengen Zone – without the hassle of border controls. There is a religious element to this understanding of internal and external borders and movement across them, how they are experienced, visualised and become manifest: »religious«, with David Chidester, as that which transcends the everyday and ordinary.

The idea of transcending national borders and the attempt to foster a sense of Europeanness and European togetherness are closely linked to what – in particular in the current political context of increasing political division within as well as outside the EU – must be labelled as a utopian vision of a Europe without borders:

The suspension of hostile, dividing state borders and the negative impacts they have had on interstate relations is perhaps a uniquely European achievement. For this reason, the European Union's political identity – and indeed its *raison d'être* – are closely intertwined with the symbolism of transcending and transforming national borders in the interests of integration and peaceful coexistence.<sup>52</sup>

Political divisions in the EU, such as the tensions between Hungary and other EU countries, and the formations of zones, e. g. the idea of multi-speed Europe, show that borders in a borderless Europe, no matter how frictionless and invisible they might become, will continue to matter, ideologically, politically, and in visions of what Europe can or should be.

Birte Wassenberg argues that the so-called Schengen crisis spurred by terrorist attacks in France in 2015 and the migrant crisis did not put an end to the idea of Europe without borders, the freedom of movement of people, capital, services, and goods. Rather, these crises merely brought an end to one particular interpretation of borderless Europe, the myth based on a solely negative interpretation of borders.<sup>53</sup> Wassenberg traces the emergence of

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52 Scott 2012, 85.

53 Wassenberg 2020, 31.

that particular myth back to the 1980s when the idea of freedom of movement turned into, as she argues, »the final objective of European integration.«<sup>54</sup> But, Wassenberg notes, »whereas the bordering policies did obstruct the free circulation of people, it did not mean that the borders were closed or that the Schengen Convention was in any way abolished.«<sup>55</sup>

I strongly disagree. On a technical level, Wassenberg might be correct: the re-introduction of border checks did not prevent any EU citizen from exercising their right of free movement. One could say that the border checks were merely an inconvenience people experienced while exercising their rights as EU citizens. Therein, however, lies the crux. In arguing that border policies did not obstruct the free circulation of people, Wassenberg seems to ignore the material, visual, and bodily dimension to how people experience borders, the practice of border crossings, as well as the European Union as institution and their EU citizenship. In that sense, queuing for border checks at formerly abandoned checkpoints are more than a mere inconvenience. Rather, they are the re-introduction of border spectacles that are part of the processes of making borders. These spectacles and the state agents enacting them are not merely inconveniences but have performative character, they create, visualise, and materialise a particular European reality. The idea of Europe without borders might be a myth but the argument for borders equally creates a (counter-)myth:

The Schengen crisis has therefore proven that the Westphalian border has stayed highly relevant from a security and geopolitical perspective. [...] It does not mean that there is no longer an ideal of a »Europe without borders« in terms of the principle of free circulation, but it may lead to the realization that this principle may need restrictions and adaptions at certain times and in exceptional circumstances.<sup>56</sup>

In this paper, I suggested that the interdisciplinary field of border studies benefits from a religious studies approach. By that I do not mean to look at how religious communities and identities are related to borders but at the messy »things« that borders are from a religious studies perspective. Such a

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54 Wassenberg 2020, 34.

55 Wassenberg 2020, 33.

56 Wassenberg 2020, 36.

religious studies approach to internal and external EU borders can help us better understand myths and imaginings of Europe, a Europe with borders and a borderless Europe. Exploring the religious dimension of borders, that which lifts borders out of the everyday and the ordinary, can help us to ask questions about who benefits from a borderless or bordered Europe, who are the main political agents and what are their political and economic agendas, and how do people and politicians on the entire political spectrum employ borders, territories, and the experience of borders for their own political and economic gain. Most importantly, such an approach allows us to gain a better understanding of why borders exert such a fascination and political power to this date: not only because they are linked to identity discourses, questions of landownership, and the narratives a people tell themselves about being rooted and connected to their land. Rather, borders impose their power and attract our imagination because they are both: to put it into more biblical language, they are in this world but not of this world. They are human-made but render their createdness invisible. Borders are and create ruptures in space and as such carry a religious dimension. They are a thorn of alterity that sometimes is used and abused for populistic, nationalistic, and right-wing political agendas but can, at the same time, remind us of a painful and violent past and present and thus invite processes of repair and healing. Visualising borders, and border spaces, observing human behaviour in these border spaces, capturing the way borders change over time, or tearing photographs of invisible borders up such as Poyser did, can help to de-mythologise borders and render visible their human createdness.

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# Public Memory under Construction

## Exploring Religion in the House of European History in Brussels

Carla Danani and Daria Pezzoli-Olgiati

Located in the European quarter in Brussels, the House of European History (HEH) is a project which aims at developing a common historical knowledge of Europe. On the one hand, the museum intends to promote European identity by means of a shared memory; on the other, it seeks to establish itself as a place where citizens can interact with the »European idea«.<sup>1</sup> The emphasis on the link between memory and history, conceived as a particular kind of knowledge involving past events, enlarges the plan of the HEH beyond the domain of mere epistemological reflection. The very name of the museum – »house« – suggests a familiar setting that affects individuals directly, by involving their personal identity, a »home«. By choosing to be a »house«, the HEH presents itself as a place where individuals can encounter their own »family« histories in order to »nurture commonality«.<sup>2</sup>

This chapter arises from an interdisciplinary discussion between philosophy and the study of religion, our respective fields of research. First, Carla Danani offers a philosophical reflection to frame the discussion on the temporal and spatial interconnections between the concepts of the past, the performativity of a museum visit, and public memory within the HEH. After-

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1 The question of how to represent European memory and identity in a museum was discussed in many publications even before the opening of the HEH: see Settele 2015; Hilmar 2016; Kaiser 2017; Remes 2017; Weiser 2017. For some early reviews of the permanent exhibitions, see Krankenhagen 2017 and Kesteloot 2018. They both offer a positive evaluation. See also Fickers 2018 and Lutz 2019, whose considerations are more critical.

2 Pöttering 2018b, 11.

wards, Daria Pezzoli-Olgiate explores to what extent Europe's diverse history of religion is mirrored in the museum's narrative. We discuss the HEH as a place of memory, as a spatial performance of remembering<sup>3</sup> a common historical European ground with a special focus on the role of religion, which is represented in the museum in an ambivalent way.

## 1. The museum as medium for public memory

Time and space are both relevant for human beings and societies. These fundamental assumptions underpin the HEH project as it seeks to promote a shared European history. The HEH is analysed here as a place of public memory in which a shared historical narrative arises. First, we explore the past in its dynamic and multilayered relationship with the future. Second, we focus on the spatial features of the museum that impact visitors' movements and perspectives as they move throughout and interact with the HEH. Finally, we explore the concept of memory as a performance emerging from the guests' various interactions with displayed objects.

### 1.1. The past between pastness and »having been«

Paul Ricœur proposes a phenomenology of memory that helps to deepen the performativity of history in a museum by turning the past into a dynamic concept. Revisiting Martin Heidegger, the French philosopher emphasises a twofold property of the past. The past is »no longer there« (Heidegger uses *Vergangenheit*; the verb *vergehen* means to pass away) and, at the same time, the past is also »having been« (*Gewesenheit*, literally, »beenhood«).<sup>4</sup> Ricœur states »that the dialectic of ›having been‹ and ›no longer‹ [should] be re-established in all its dramatic force. Certainly, there is no doubt that the ›simply elapsed‹ bears the mark of the irrevocable and that the irrevocable, in its turn, suggests the powerlessness to change things.«<sup>5</sup> Introducing a morally neutral concept of debt, which expresses a heritage transmitted and assumed, Ricœur argues that even if facts are ineffaceable and that one

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3 See Winter 2010.

4 Heidegger 1962, 429–434 (§ 73).

5 Ricœur 2004, 364.

can no longer undo what has been done, the sense of what has happened is not fixed once and for all.<sup>6</sup> He notes:

In addition to the fact that events of the past can be recounted and interpreted otherwise, the moral weight tied to the relation of debt with respect to the past can be increased or lightened. [...] to the idea of debt belongs the character of »charge«, of »weight«, of burden. [...] Inasmuch as it obligates, the debt does not exhaust itself in the idea of burden either: it relates the being affected by the past to the potentiality-of-being turned toward the future. [...] it relates the space of experience to the horizon of expectation. It is on this basis that one can speak of a rebound-effect of the future onto the past even within the retrospective viewpoint of history.<sup>7</sup>

The human experience of the past is neither substantial nor fixed. Whenever a past experience is considered as being lost, it is always lost in reference to the present and the future. (The basic temporal words »before« and »after«, for example, express this dynamic.) Memory operates by means of a heritage that can be defined as a »debt«. From a philosophical point of view, this leads to questions about the many ways in which memory is supposed to work: of what objects and events can we have memories? To which subjects do memories belong? How are memories shaped and what do they aim at?

Considering the role history plays in memory-formation, Ricoeur points out that human imagination provides the opportunity to go back to a given moment in the past and to view it as having been lived by people of the past as their present – both the present of their past and the present of their future.<sup>8</sup> The consequences of this consideration can be extended to all humans at any time: »Knowing that people of the past formulated expectations, predictions, desires, fears, and projects is to fracture historical determinism by retrospectively reintroducing contingency into history.«<sup>9</sup> When we are able to imagine the many different perspectives that past peoples had to manage in their own present, we are reminded that people who occupy

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6 Ricoeur 2004, 363.

7 Ricoeur 2004, 381–382. This is a possible answer to the question posed by Nietzsche 1997.

8 Ricoeur 2004.

9 Ricoeur 2004, 382.

»our past« possess(ed) human agency, capacity for initiative, and responsibility. This understanding discourages the »retrospective illusion of fatality«, which inhibits anything other than repetition. This is the enigma, or paradox, of the idea of debt, which can paralyse the power to act but can also motivate to take responsibility. This paradox occurs whenever and wherever there is an active recognition of heritage.

Historical knowledge can motivate a dynamic of responsiveness rather than a merely apologetic posture. Ricoeur rejects Marc Bloch's definition of history as a »science of traces«. Since traces have to be followed backwards to their point of initiation, Bloch's concept of history faces the past in a closed, circular way, according to which history is a mere referral of the past to the past. History, therefore, in Bloch's sense, is seen as a signifying narrative that informs but does not involve the audience in a responsive attitude.

Although critical of Bloch's concept of history, Ricoeur nevertheless acknowledges that there are several valuable aspects of »trace«. First, a trace can be written or material; second, it can affect and impress »the soul«; third, it is a corporeal, cerebral, cortical imprint.<sup>10</sup> It is crucial to note that this approach to »trace«, which evokes the controversial relationship between soul and body, overcomes the traditional divide between materialism and spiritualism. Ricoeur remarks that »as left behind, through the materiality of the mark, the trace designates the exteriority of the past [...]. However, there is also a correlation between the significance of the followed trace and the efficacy of the transmitted tradition.<sup>11</sup> Both trace and tradition are mediations between the past and us. They are linked together by those documents through which the trace becomes part of the tradition in the succession of generations who inherit them. The remnants of the past, such as archaeological sites, pottery shards, paintings, oral traditions and written documents, are linked to, involved and evaluated in, complex sets of testimonies, personal impressions and social frames (*cadres sociaux*).<sup>12</sup> Ricoeur assumes that humans engage with history within a lived experience, which always implies meaning-making processes. Thus, every experience is the experience of a living human body, a reality that is relational in itself: spatial, temporal, and societal.

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10 Ricoeur 2004, 15, 27–28.

11 Ricoeur 1988, 229.

12 See Halbwachs 1980.

## 1.2. The museum as public space and social time

Museums as institutions assume different tasks. Not only do they conserve and preserve historical remnants from further deterioration, but they display them in front of a viewing public in order to offer opportunities to engage with the past and foster memorialisation. In the democratic regimes of the 21st century, museums are public spaces *par excellence* due to both their functions and the practices they host. Museums invite people to journey beyond their own private selves by calling their attention to a common heritage, constructing narratives to share, and offering a stage on which debates and negotiation can take place. These and other cultural experiences cultivated in and by museums are addressed – potentially – to everybody.

According to Jennifer Barrett, public discourse takes place in museums.<sup>13</sup> In Barrett's opinion, both material and immaterial cultural objects have to be involved in representing history and, therefore, in building places of inclusion. Today's museums are broad cultural centres that provide multiple services and events that are increasingly accessible to the public. Museums have also turned into significant architectural icons in many cities.<sup>14</sup> Museums are therefore institutions that shape public space.<sup>15</sup> They are places *within* which and *by* which public discourse occurs.<sup>16</sup> First, the museum itself as a public space functions as a spatial medium for the public sphere.<sup>17</sup> Second, the museum explicitly engages in meaning-making processes by curating and displaying certain objects. And third, the museum fosters encounter between visitors.

The museum provides a composite multisensory experience by gathering and utilising a broad range of media.<sup>18</sup> The concept of »experientiali-

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13 See Barrett 2012, for a discussion of Foucault and Bourdieu and other relevant works.

14 Weil 2002, 181 remarks: »Because art museums became one of our most important occasions for public architecture [...] to be institutions that embody some of society's highest aspirations, it has become commonplace in recent years to speak of them as successors in some sense to the great churches and cathedrals of earlier centuries.«

15 See Williams, 2007, particularly 77.

16 See Barrett 2012, 12.

17 See Putnam 2001.

18 See Jaeger 2020, 40–60, in particular 41: »In comparison to a more general reader response theory that relates to textual media, one must here ask what specific role the visitor has in history museums' representations, narrations, staging, and simulations of the past? What does it mean when the visitor moves through space and spatial arrangements, in comparison to the reader of a book who must imagine the spaces being narrated?«

ty« proves fruitful to examine the representational and narrative potential of an exhibition, which, despite being an historical event itself, always mirrors a historical experience. Experientiality – »an experience of experiences« – focuses on this paradoxical feature of a museum display. By offering visitors a »quasi-mimetic evocation of ›real-life experience‹«,<sup>19</sup> a museum exhibition<sup>20</sup> can be considered a »hybrid place« between a historical experience and the visitor experience.<sup>21</sup>

In the multimedia public space of a museum, references to absent facts (that is, past events and contexts; other places) may have different effects on guests. This happens because both the building and its design have been strategically deployed to guide and direct museum visitors. Sophia Psarra, an urbanist and cultural studies scholar, points out that »in terms of operational requirements, museum design has two fundamental problems to solve: a route structure that facilitates the encounter between the displays and the visitors, and spatial mechanisms that aid orientation and enable the building and the exhibitions to be seen as one whole.«<sup>22</sup> Her methodology for studying space relies on a »space syntax«, an analytical approach focusing on patterns of movement, and the use of cultural meaning.<sup>23</sup> This procedure, inspired by Bill Hillier, assumes that museum layouts determine patterns of use and that the logic of the spatial connections made possible through a certain design influences the way people move inside them and consequently outline representations of history and their related meaning-making processes.<sup>24</sup> Integration, a key point of an inspiring layout, relates to spatial elements that are close to each other and easily accessible from every part of the layout. Integrated areas stimulate movement, while segregated ones are less frequent-

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19 See Jaeger 2020, 48, who refers to Fludernik 1996, 12.

20 Gadamer 1975, 267 deals with the hermeneutical significance of »temporal distance«, which is understood as a productive space and thus a fundamental part of the hermeneutical circle, not as an empty space. For more on the concept of »distance« see Pagliacci 2020.

21 Fludernik 1996, 12. See also Jaeger 2020, 40.

22 Psarra 2005, 81.

23 Hillier/Hanson 1984, 82–142.

24 As Hillier and Tzortzi 2006, 299, argue: »[...] the way in which spaces are connected to each other will inevitably influence the potential pattern of movement and, by implication, the way in which visitors explore exhibitions and are exposed to information and to each other. This has clear implications both for the pedagogical function of the museum and for its social function.«

ly used. Hence the main hall and the axes that link this space with the main entrance and other galleries are usually the best integrated elements in a museum; the top floors, which see much less frequent foot traffic, are generally »segregated«. Psarra draws attention to certain discontinuities of layouts, which are present, for instance, when integration is conveyed merely by visual media even in segregated spaces. The spatial structure of an exhibition determines the use of the different locations: it may produce rigid consecutive sequences inside the gallery or allow relaxed and informal experiences by means of circular movements. Psarra shows that the exhibition experience of the visitors implies views, routes, flows of movement across thresholds, and activities in spaces and exhibition rooms, but she admits that the spatial characteristics alone cannot determine how people use the layout.<sup>25</sup> Acknowledging the power of space does, however, enable museums to meet spatial, social and aesthetic objectives.

The notion of a museum's performativity refers to the various ways in which people circulate and occupy these buildings. It also refers to the messages conveyed by the exhibition itself. This means that a

[n]arrative can be strongly or weakly structured. When strongly structured, it has orientation based on sequence and causality, establishing a hierarchy among its elements in terms of their position in the expression. A weak narrative structure uses interconnections to enable its narrative units to equally structure its meaning. The narrative message becomes, thus, »integrated«, including new latent messages arising from a number of connections. In the first case narrative favours temporal progression over space, and is grasped through time. In the second case it emphasizes relations that defy time, collapsing into an integrating frame of space.<sup>26</sup>

Multiple spatial links, permeability, and inter-visibility foster interactions between meaning-making processes as though they were compatible and continuous. In this way, the spatial structure establishes a thematic coherence. The spatial integration of content and its thematic coherence build a mes-

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25 See Psarra 2005, 87. See also Bennett 1988 and 1995, 59–88 as well as Hooper-Greenhill 1992.

26 Psarra 2005, 89.

sage of history as a flow between periods, events and achievements.<sup>27</sup> Hillier underlines the social effect issuing from the balance established between the sequencing of spaces and choice:

Like any spatial layout, a museum or gallery will generate and sustain a certain pattern of co-presence and encounter amongst visitors through the way it shapes movement. If a layout takes the form of a single sequence [...] visitors will enter, circulate, and leave the exhibition in the same order. The limiting case is the »Indian file« in which we are always behind some people and in front of others, and there need be no variation in this, and so little change in the pattern of co-presence. On the other hand, a layout with a certain degree of structured choice, realized through an intelligible shallow core, will mean that visitors who enter the layout together will often split onto different pathways, and then re-encounter each other some time later, perhaps moving in the opposite direction, creating the churning effect we referred to earlier, and thus enhancing the social experience of the visit.<sup>28</sup>

A museum is itself an invitation to all who visit it. Moreover, when visitors can meet each other, they perceive being together, and experiencing the same place, and exploring the same topics. Even though space often remains in the shadow in academic debates, the mediality of museums is produced by spatial performance, which involves visitors in a distinctively synesthetic experience.<sup>29</sup>

### 1.3. Shaping und fostering public memory

The HEH aims at promoting European identity by means of a spatial practice that shapes memory. Edward Casey's phenomenological approach to memory assumes that remembering, regarded as an act of thinking, is intentional in structure. In this process, he distinguishes an »act phase« and an »object phase«, and divides »how« we remember from »what« we remember:

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27 See Psarra 2005, 91.

28 Hillier/Tzortzi 2006, 299–300.

29 See Pallasmaa 2012. Sunstein/Thaler 2008 call this spatial feature a »nudge«.

Each experience of remembering is thus diphasic, but the two phases are simultaneous and not successive. [...] The act and object phases thus call for one another and are strictly correlative: no activity of remembering lacks an object remembered, and vice versa. Each phase is equally essential, since an actless memory is as unthinkable as a contentless remembering.<sup>30</sup>

What is to be remembered is performed in different ways according to the circumstances at hand. Regarding the act itself, there are multiple forms of remembering: remembering *simpliciter*, remembering that, remembering how, remembering to, remembering as, remembering what, remembering on-the-occasion-of, remembering the future. These are basic ways in which remembering realises itself as an act. For example, we can, and frequently do, remember single things in isolation from other things and events, as just this or just that (remembering *simpliciter*); but »in addition to objects and events, we [also] remember states of affairs – whole circumstances in which subjects (or subject-terms) are implicated in actions«<sup>31</sup> (remembering *that*). Further, people can remember how to effect a given movement (remembering *how*): »Yet it remains a very different thing to remember how to swing [...] a club in the right way and to remember that I have once so swung it«. Remembering *as* connects the subject or topic of ascription and the ascribed property. As Casey points out: »When it comes to matters of memory, we almost always have to do with commixture rather than with separation. And not surprisingly in view of the fact that remembering is a paramount, perhaps the paramount, connective power in our lives!«<sup>32</sup>

According to Casey, to analyse remembering, four forms of human memory may be distinguished: individual, social, collective, and public.<sup>33</sup> This categorisation is very helpful to understand the aims of the HEH to shape and foster a shared memory. Individual memory refers to the person who is engaged in the process of remembering on any given occasion. According to Casey, a person is always the unique subject of the act of remembering and performs memory in several particular ways, recollecting different kinds of

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30 Casey 2000, 151.

31 Casey 2000, 53–54.

32 Casey 2000, 187.

33 See Casey 2004, 20.

things. Human beings remember by way of being reminded, by recognising something, and by reminiscing with others. Considering that there is a distinctive body memory and place memory, as well as many acts of commemoration, »we are already beyond any model of memory as confined to the individual mind and its representations.«<sup>34</sup>

Collective memory refers to the circumstances in which different individuals, who do not necessarily know each other, recall the same event in their own way. This plural remembering has no basis in overlapping historicities or shared places, nor do people have to remember at the same time. What matters is having the same content in mind. Collective recollection, however, is not effected by members of existing clans, or regions, or by having projects in common.<sup>35</sup> The grouping is not based on a prior identity or a particular placement; it is formed spontaneously and involuntarily, and its entire *raison d'être* is a convergent focus on a given topic, which typically is an event, a thought, a person, or a nation. Moreover, people can share collective memory but remain completely unknown to each other.

In contrast, social memory denotes the processes of remembering of people who are already related to each other. It is held in common by those who are affiliated in some way »by way of family or friendship or civic acquaintance or just »an alliance between people for a specific purpose.«<sup>36</sup> Three aspects characterise social memory: first, looking back at past events, for instance through members of a same family; second, a link to a common place where the past events were enacted and experienced; third, narratives of past events are performed in a common place.

While individual memory is indispensable at the level of personal experience,<sup>37</sup> collective memory unites people who do not know each other, and social memory, based on already shared commonalities, intensifies the personal process of remembering by enlarging the dissemination of memory beyond personal experience, and by including family history or other shared events. Introducing the concept of public memory, Casey provides a useful frame for understanding other dynamics of collective processes of recalling

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34 Casey 2004, 21.

35 See Casey 2004, 23–24.

36 Casey 2004, 23.

37 See Casey 2004, 24.

past events. Public memory connects people who may not already be related to each other:

»Public« signifies out in the open, in the *koinos cosmos* where discussion with others is possible [...] but also where one is exposed and vulnerable, where one's limitations and fallibilities are all too apparent. In this open realm, wherever it may be – in town halls, public parks, or city streets – public memory serves as an encircling horizon. It is there as a *basso profundo* in the chorus of the body politic, its medley of voices. It is there, however, not just as presupposed but as an active resource on which current discussion and action draw [...].<sup>38</sup>

Public memory is always under construction. It is neither homogeneous nor fixed, but »at least more or less the same, throughout [its] vicissitudes.«<sup>39</sup> Public memory happens in shared places; its conditions of possibility are the proximity of bodies, public debates, common – even controversial – topics, and commemorations:

In contrast to other primary kinds of remembering – which can occur with people who are quite isolated from each other (individual memory or collective memory) or in already constituted groups (social memory), public memory occurs only when people meet and interact in a single scene of interaction.<sup>40</sup>

Casey's concept of public memory proves fruitful for approaching the HEH. The concept draws attention to memory as a permanent work in progress that involves people in practices of remembering past events, which is the point in addressing such a fluid and blurred entity as »Europe«. Furthermore, in this form of remembering Ricoeur's discussion of the mutual relationship between past (as both »no longer« and »having been«), present, and future is crucial. Public memory concerns the past but is enacted in the present as it builds a common imaginary. It therefore influences the future, given the link between collective representations and social bounds. If it is not forci-

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38 Casey 2004, 25.

39 Casey 2004, 25.

40 Casey 2004, 32. Here the interplay between public sphere and public space is of note.

bly reduced to a mere reductive repetition, public memory, as an open process, is a generative force within society. Because it is public, it potentially affects everyone. Because it concerns the past, it does not doom individuals to mindlessly repeat it. Rather, people can discover their own agency and responsibility in dealing with the past.

## 2. A museum for Europe

How does a museum as a stable, public institution foster practices that promote the concept of identity as a work in progress? In the following pages, we explore the strategy of the HEH in providing a place for public memory. First, we discuss the process of creating the HEH. Second, we focus on the layout of the permanent exhibition, the selected topics, and the implemented strategies of the museum's representation. Finally, we discuss the role religion assumes in it.

### 2.1. Creating a place for a European memory

On 13 February 2007, the newly elected 12th President of the European Parliament, the German Hans-Gerd Pöttering, a member of the Christian Democratic Union, proposed in his inaugural address to create a place »where memories of our shared history and of the work of European unification could be nurtured«.<sup>41</sup> The idea of a museum presenting the history of Europe to visitors in the European quarter in Brussels was promoted as an initiative that would shape a common memory in order to highlight and disseminate

common values of European unification – human dignity, freedom, democracy, the rule of law, peace, and the principles of solidarity and subsidiarity – as representing the progress of peaceful coexistence, particularly since the end of the Second World War and the overcoming of divisions within our continent. Furthermore, the House aims to promote greater involvement from citizens in political decision making in a united Europe.<sup>42</sup>

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41 Pöttering 2018b, 11.

42 Pöttering 2018b, 11.

From the beginning, the HEH has been conceived as a place to promote historical knowledge about Europe as a whole, in order to respond to a certain »emotional and symbolic deficit inherent in the Construction of Europe«<sup>43</sup> and to involve the visitors in a narrative that unfolds during their journey through the museum. By walking through various exhibitions, visitors would be confronted with questions about what Europe is or could be.<sup>44</sup>

Promoted by the European Parliament, the HEH is part of a political strategy to increase consciousness about the significance and the values of the EU among its citizens. As a cultural practice, the new museum aims at fostering meaning-making processes about being part of Europe as a project in progress. In this tension between political programme and cultural initiative, the HEH can be understood as a place of negotiation between implicit and explicit ideas of a common European historical and cultural place.<sup>45</sup>

The process of realising the HEH lasted a decade. The museum was designed from scratch, there were no previous collections or buildings; just the idea of a house dedicated to European history for the purposes of stimulating identification processes with the union, and for discussing different facets of economic, political, cultural and symbolic European integration. Various actors and agendas contributed to the development of the project.<sup>46</sup> In 2008 the Bureau of the European Parliament appointed a Committee of Experts to draw up a concept for the HEH. Nine historians and museum experts from different European countries defined the aims and elaborated the basic concept. The initial idea of addressing all generations and promoting knowledge »of their own history and thus contributing to a better understanding of Europe's development in the present and future«<sup>47</sup> was further

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43 Bottici/Challand 2013, 87. In their volume *Imagining Europe*, the authors emphasise the necessity of a shared symbolic integration to provide a European identity: »[...] no European integration is possible outside a symbolic network [...].« (88). Kaiser 2017, 518, argues similarly with regard to the HEH: »The HEH as a major cultural institution to be housed in the Eastman Building close to the EP is a key project for attempts by EU institutions since the 1980s to strengthen the cultural basis for integration, enhance European identity and foster the legitimacy of the EU.« On the role of »mythological« narratives of the EU see also Manners 2010; Hilmar 2016.

44 For the influence of museums and the power of museal narratives on identity processes see Kaiser/Krankenhagen/Poehls 2012, 139–143.

45 See Kaiser/Krankenhagen/Poehls 2012, 14.

46 Hilmar 2016; Kaiser 2017.

47 Hütter 2018, 28.

clarified. The HEH would foster the idea that »a united Europe can coexist peacefully in freedom on the basis of shared values in a world of progress«.<sup>48</sup> The hope was that the HEH would increase participation in political decision-making. To achieve this goal, the Committee suggested that the museum avoid presenting the history of single nations. The idea of a common Europe was not to be conceived as the sum of single pieces, but rather as a common, transnational European phenomenon.<sup>49</sup> Moreover, the museum had to be accessible to all, which required all 24 languages of the European Union to be represented there.

Once the draft containing the agenda for the HEH, the *Conceptual Basis*,<sup>50</sup> had been approved by the Bureau, further steps could be implemented. The architectural competition for restoring and enlarging the chosen site, the Eastman Building, a former dental clinic built in 1935, was launched. In 2011 the Academic Project Team was appointed. With experts in history and museology from across Europe and chaired by the historian and curator Taja Vovk van Gaal, the Academic Project Team took the lead in defining the content and layout of the museum, as well as in implementing the *Conceptual Basis* into the museum and its permanent exhibition.<sup>51</sup> In addition, a Board of Trustees, composed of politicians, was entrusted with supervising the general management of the project. Eventually, the Building Team, was put in charge of the logistical aspects of the project.<sup>52</sup>

This brief summary of the implementation process of the HEH suggests the multilayered challenges of this remarkable undertaking. Among many problems, the following contested questions are particularly relevant for our study. First, is it possible to shape a common European memory and improve involvement and political participation by means of an institutional initiative by the EU Parliament? Furthermore, although it is sometimes taken for granted, it is still not clear what »Europe« is. There is neither a uniform »history« of Europe, nor is it possible to establish what events should be considered as »typically European«. Moreover, whose perspective should

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48 Hütter 2018, 29.

49 Mork 2016a, 220.

50 *Conceptual Basis* 2018.

51 Vovk van Gaal/Dupont 2012; Hilmar 2016; Kaiser 2017; Pöttering 2018a; Hütter 2018.

52 The members of the different boards are listed in Building a House of European History 2013, 45–46.

be chosen to implement a museum about European history in many languages? All actors involved were well aware of the novelty and the difficulty of the task; in fact, as Andrea Mork, the Head Curator of the HEH states, »Europe has innumerable museums, but none about itself, at least not explicitly.«<sup>53</sup> The negotiation process that finally led to the opening of the museum on 6 May 2017 is well documented and discussed in an extensive scholarly bibliography.<sup>54</sup>

Given the plurality of possible perspectives and topics, as well as the fear of political manipulation, the responsible boards decided to base the project upon an academic approach. History and museology were considered the relevant academic disciplines for ensuring the consistency of the project, and scholars from all over Europe took part in the initiative. The aspiration of transmitting knowledge about history to enable citizens to better understand what Europe has been, is and shall be in the future was translated into a museum concept that locates the visitor in the centre. In the wording of the *Conceptual Basis*:

Academic independence and the objective portrayal of history have top priority. The Committee of Experts is adamant that scientifically proven findings and methods are the basis for the work of the House of European History. The accuracy of its portrayal of history is an essential precondition for securing acceptance among specialists and visitors alike. The multifaceted and impartial presentation of historical facts and processes is vital if visitors are to be put in a position to form their own judgments and encouraged to discuss the issues dealt with in the exhibition. The guarantor of this independence could be a high-level Academic Advisory Board, comprising historians and museum specialists, which would supervise the work.<sup>55</sup>

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53 Mork 2018, 129.

54 Meanwhile, the HEH has been presented and discussed in several academic contributions: see e.g. Kaiser/Krankenhagen/Poehls 2012, particularly 138–184; Borodziej 2011; Augustein 2011; Breier 2011; Knigge 2011; Grau i Segú 2016; Hilmar 2016; Mork 2016a and 2016b; Fickers 2018; Mork/Christodoulou 2018. *Conceptual Basis* 2018.

55 *Conceptual Basis* 2018, paragraph 9, page 7.

For the permanent exhibition, a chronology was established with an emphasis on the 20th century. It also contained some information about the *longue durée* of Europe, and an outlook towards contemporary and future European matters.<sup>56</sup> The narrative linking the chosen chapters and topics should be comprehensible to everyone, and highlight various common aspects of Europe, with an emphasis on those influential developments which originated in Europe and continue to hold relevance today.<sup>57</sup> In temporary exhibitions, other topics and approaches would supplement and enrich the offerings of the museum, and address further aspects of the contested undertaking of presenting a European history. Particularly noteworthy is that the HEH did not own a collection prior to this undertaking, and thus had to simultaneously forge a consistent, comprehensible narrative and collect objects to convey it.<sup>58</sup>

## 2.2. The itinerary of the permanent exhibition

Visiting the museum today, the choices made by the Academic Project Team and adapted by the curators of the museum exhibition are clearly visible.<sup>59</sup> The narrative unfolds through six narrative themes in a chronological sequence (fig. 1). The first area provides knowledge about the origins of Europe, and, as we will see below, is especially important for this project's purposes of discussing the role of religion. The other areas are dedicated to modern and contemporary Europe, focusing on the 19th and 20th centuries with an outlook on future developments of the continent. Here is an overview of the different sections of the permanent exhibition.<sup>60</sup>

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56 Vovk van Gaal 2018, 89: »The chronological approach recommended for the structure of the permanent exhibition encourages visitors to understand historical phenomena and events; the objects were recommended to be put in an understandable context and accompanied by modern audio-visual media.«

57 Vovk van Gaal/Itzel 2012, 79; Vovk van Gaal/Dupont 2012, 49.

58 About the effects of visual media and material objects in forging a concept of Europe see Wintle 2004; Drechsel/Jaeger/König/Lang/Leggewie 2010.

59 See the analysis of the museum's narrative in Hillmar 2016.

60 See Guidebook 2017 and <https://historia-europa.ep.eu/en/permanent-exhibition> (accessed December 20, 2021).

**1 Shaping Europe**

Mapping Europe  
The myth of Europe  
European heritage  
Memory

**2 Europe a global power (1789–1914)**

Political change  
Market and people  
Science and technology  
Imperialism

**3 Europe in ruins (1914–1945)**

World War I  
Totalitarianism versus democracy  
World War II  
The harvest of destruction

**4 Rebuilding a divided continent (1945–1970s)**

Rebuilding Europe  
Cold War  
Creating social security  
Milestones of European integration I  
Memory of the Shoah

**5 Shattering certainties (1970s-today)**

End of the boom  
Democratisation in Western Europe  
Communism under pressure  
Milestones of European integration II  
Re-mapping Europe  
Milestones III  
Shared and divided memory

**6 Europe now**

Headlines of our time I  
Headlines of our time II  
Tracking my Europe  
*Vortex of History*  
Europe from the skies  
Views on Europe

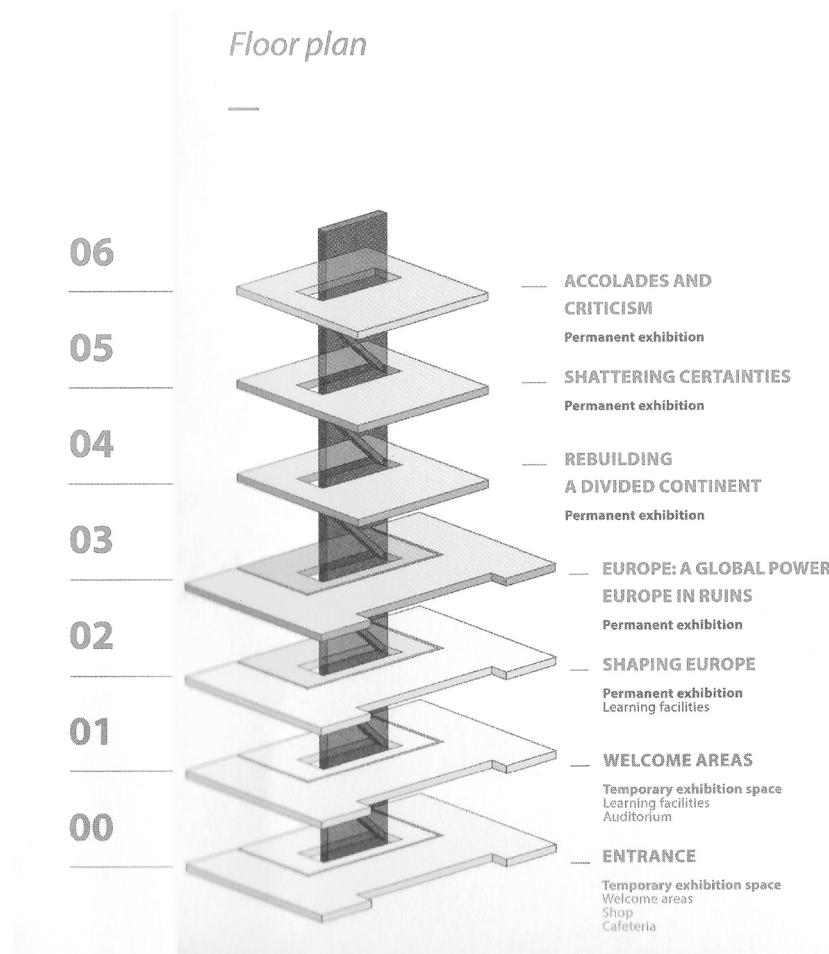


Fig. 1: Map of the House for European History, in: Guidebook 2017, 4–5.

The displayed objects,<sup>61</sup> audio-visual media in the exhibition, and other forms of museal mise-en-scène do not carry written titles or explanations. Entering the museum is free of charge. Each visitor receives an audio guide (a tablet and headphones) with explanations about the exhibits in all 24 official languages of the EU. As an alternative to the audio guide, a guidebook can

61 On the role of museum objects see Schärer 1999, 32.

be purchased in the museum shop. The printed guide contains only a small selection of the information but offers colour reproductions of the displayed objects. Visitors can therefore choose, according to time and interests, how deeply they will engage with a particular object or subject matter.<sup>62</sup>

The six parts of the exhibition are woven together in different ways. On a conceptual level, the chronological-development narrative constitutes a line throughout the various areas. For example, visitors start their explorations in Greco-Roman antiquity, and from there they are finally invited to explore the 19th and the 20th century, before being confronted with questions about Europe today.

Alongside the chronological axis, a massive sculpture ties together the different areas of the permanent exhibition by means of visual and material communication. The *Vortex of History*, designed by Boris Micka and Todomuta Studio in Seville, hangs at the centre of the staircase. This 25-metre work of art, constructed of steel and an aluminium-magnesium alloy, reaches across and into all the floors of the museum. It is composed of banners engraved with quotations from various texts and genres in a broad range of languages.<sup>63</sup> At the centre of the sculpture, the banners are condensed into a huge cluster. Some banners snake into different parts of the exhibition. The sculpture is therefore presented as an »organic living element that floats under the skylight«<sup>64</sup> (fig. 2).

The quotations engraved onto the vortex signify that there are multiple interpretations of Europe and European identity. The question of what Europe is or may be constitutes a leitmotiv of the permanent exhibition. This question is reiterated in each section in many ways and by means of different material objects, documents, images and audio-visual media. The visitors are constantly invited to reconsider their position regarding this question.<sup>65</sup> Yet, the *Vortex of History* emblematises the difficulty of answering

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62 Vovk van Gaal/Itzel 2012, 77.

63 The list of quotations can be found in <https://historia-europa.ep.eu/en/focus/curators-notes-vortex-history> (accessed December 20, 2021).

64 The quote is taken from a video on the website of the HEH: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w-JXyfmPMp4> (accessed December 20, 2021).

65 About the strategy of the HEH to avoid a hegemonic narrative for Europe see Vovk van Gaal/Dupont 2012, 51. Kaiser/Krankenhagen/Poehls 2012 interpret deconstructivist tendencies in approaching a concept of Europe in museums as a counter-reaction to historical national hegemonic narratives, *Meistererzählungen*; see in particular 138–184.



Fig. 2: *The Vortex of History*, film still, 00:10.<sup>66</sup>

this central query: the letters of the main corpus of the sculpture can neither be deciphered nor be recomposed into texts; only the single banners that unravel from the central part are readable.

### 3. Religion in the House of European History

Our chapter contributes to the general question of this book with a close reading of representations of religion and religions in the HEH. We are interested in exploring the role attributed to a phenomenon that is fundamental to understanding Europe and its history. The European history of religion is characterised by an intense exchange between different religious traditions and, within each, by a broad range of different ideas, negotiations, adaptions and transmissions of specific symbol systems. What is generally referred to as »Christianity«, »Judaism«, or »Islam«, as well as the rich and variegated panorama of different religious orientations, originated either in the continent or in the intertwining of travelling people and communities. European religious traditions and communities are marked by a vivid exchange of

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<sup>66</sup> Source: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w-JXyfmPMp4&ab\\_channel=HouseofEuropeanHistory](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w-JXyfmPMp4&ab_channel=HouseofEuropeanHistory) (accessed December 20, 2021).

differing worldviews, social spheres, and cultures.<sup>67</sup> Religion is a key aspect of European diversity. How does the HEH deal with this historical heritage?

### 3.1. Enriching diversities and blind spots

In addressing the question »What is Europe«?, Mária Schmidt, a member of the Academic Committee, writes:

[...] Europe has more often been united than segregated into small communities. It is thus important for us to point out the process of our shared memory, as our national cultures are thoroughly permeated by the Greco-Roman and the Judeo-Christian tradition we inherited from past millennia.<sup>68</sup>

In fact, looking at the exhibition as it is today, it seems appropriate to follow this hint and consider the role of religion in the HEH by looking for references to both ancient Greek mythology, and the Jewish and Christian tradition. But although explicit references to Europe's religious roots are presented in the introductory area, *Shaping Europe*, religion is a rather marginalised topic in the HEH. In the main part of the exhibition, dedicated to the 19th and 20th century, Europe is represented from a resolutely secular perspective; religion is relegated to the private sphere. Religion has often been considered more of a cause of division than a difference enriching European society, and the HEH seems to reflect this take.

In the HEH, the positive value of cultural diversity and the possibility of uniting different nations and cultures is associated with multilingualism, highlighted by the use of 24 official languages. A banner from the *Vortex of History* emphasises the possibility of bringing different languages together with a quote attributed to Umberto Eco: »La lingua dell'Europa è la traduzione« (»The language of Europe is translation«). Pulled out of the argumentative context of Eco's work on translation,<sup>69</sup> the sentence remains ambiguous.

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67 As an introduction to this field see Antes 2002; Elsas 2002; Gladigow 2009; Lehmann 2009; Pollack 2009; Rüpke 2009.

68 Schmidt 2018, 83.

69 <https://historia-europa.ep.eu/en/focus/curators-notes-vortex-history> (accessed December 20, 2021). See also Eco 2017.

Does the quotation in the HEH assume that language should consist in an effort to make a specific culture available to others? Or that it is always possible to transport a cultural constellation into another cultural setting? Or that differences can be overcome? Or that we only can mediate between differences that remain specific and incomparable? In any case, compared with the positive role attributed to the plurality of languages that vividly represent the cultural diversity of Europe, the elusive and cautious approach to the plurality of religious and/or other worldviews is striking.

The (over)emphasis on the academic perspective of the history of Europe is apparently correlated to an approach to cultures that is based on a »disenchanted« approach to history.<sup>70</sup> The HEH, then, seems to take for granted that there is a strong divide between religious (in particular, Christian) and scientific worldviews, the latter being associated with technological development and progress. This assumption is made explicit by the audio guide's commentary on the section dedicated to Humanism:

Humanism is a political and social philosophy that emphasises the fundamental importance of the individual. It was a prominent theme of the Renaissance. And during the Enlightenment of the 18th century it developed into the belief that all individuals are equal and possess certain rights and liberties. In this sense, Humanism is a foundation stone of European culture and civilisation. In society, politics, art and science the focus on the individual would have radical consequences. Art became more realistic, with artists creating the new genre of portraiture and developing an understanding of perspective. Thinkers embarked in a scientific exploration of the world, based on evidence, gathered by the individual, not dispensed by religion, and in politics the belief in the power and the value of the individual would inspire 19th-century demands for self-determination and democracy. Is it everyone's right to act as an individual or is it everyone's duty to play a role in society?<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> As a first introduction to the debate about secularism see e.g. Calhoun/Juergensmeyer/VanAntwerpen 2011.

<sup>71</sup> Transcript of the audio guide *Humanism*, <https://tinyurl.com/2bn563d7> (accessed December 20, 2021).

According to this view, the individual is an autonomous subject of society who is freed from the constraints of religion. Individualisation and emancipation from religious ideology are here directly linked with the foundation of modern Europe as a unique place of scientific, political, and artistic discovery. Religion is associated with an ancient heritage that once shaped the beginning of a European common identity, but, over the course of time, has lost its significance. In light of these tendencies, we now turn our attention to an analysis of those instances of religious traditions featured in the introductory area, *Shared Europe*.

### 3.2. A Greco-Roman myth as a foundation narrative

The showcases dedicated to the origins of Europe are introduced as follow:

What is Europe? Geography shows us that Europe has never been a clearly defined space. The continent's name comes from the ancient Greek myth of Europa, a story that has been re-interpreted, like history itself, from various points of view over time. Europe is described through its achievements and traditions, but what distinguishes it from other continents? Can we say that we have a shared European past, when history has affected people differently? Can we find any commonality – a reservoir of European memory?<sup>72</sup>

A major aim of the project of the HEH is addressed here explicitly: the visitor has to be confronted with Europe as a contested concept. Therefore, the question »What is Europe?« cannot be answered in a univocal way. The text invites the visitor to think about a reservoir of European memory, which can be understood as a self-reflexive description of the museum itself – as both an institution collecting a repertoire, and as an exhibition performing memory through material things and a particular spatial design.

Following its influence on various attempts to define Europe since the Renaissance, the myth of Europa and the Bull is presented as a crucial common basis.<sup>73</sup> Yet, the interpretation of the ancient myth as a representation

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72 Transcript of the audio guide *Shaping Europe*, <https://tinyurl.com/2wz3x88a> (accessed December 20, 2021).

73 Wintle 2004.

of Europe as a geographical, political and/or cultural entity does not always produce a consistent, coherent interpretation. In fact, the narrative of Europa and the divine bull has been associated with a variety of attributes and values in the course of the centuries.<sup>74</sup>

In the HEH, the myth is briefly recapitulated in the audio guide as a comment accompanying a selection of items representing or relating to the myth selected from different places and times in its reception history. Among them, the guidebook highlights: a replica of a metope from a temple in Selinunte (6th century BCE), on loan from the Museo Archeologico Regionale Antonio Salinas in Palermo and representing Europa riding the bull (fig. 3); the serigraphy *Europe on the Bull* by the German artist Timm Ulrich from 1972–1973, belonging to the HEH's own collection (fig. 4); and a replica of a kylix with the letters of the Greek alphabet (ca. 420 BCE, Boeotia) from the National Archaeological Museum in Athens (fig. 5).

The audio guide provides a clear interpretation of the myth:

Europa, a mythical princess from Phoenicia – today's Lebanon – is abducted by the Greek god Zeus, who appears to her in the form of a white bull. Having fallen in love with her beauty, he takes her to the island of Crete. Europe's name has been associated with this myth from antiquity to the present. It appears in art, literature, religion and politics, where the story and imagery are often reinterpreted to reflect the issues of the day.<sup>75</sup>

At the core of the myth of Europa is the reality of ancient interconnections – both good and bad – between the peoples of Europe and those from distant lands. That Europe actually took its name from a mythological princess from western Asia is a testament to such contacts. As is the fact that the myth gives us glimpses into the historical development of the Greek alphabet, a development triggered by contact with the Phoenicians in antiquity.<sup>77</sup>

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74 See Wintle 2004; Bottici 2009; Bottici/Challand 2013, 101–111.

75 Transcript of the audioguide *Reception of the Myth*, <https://tinyurl.com/32vp8vc7> (accessed December 20, 2021).



Fig. 3: Replica of a metope from Temple Y, Seliunte, Sicily, c. 580–560 BCE, in: Guidebook 2017, 12, fig. 1.

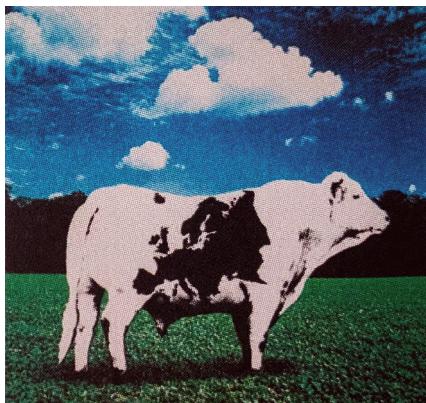


Fig. 4: Timm Ulrichs, *Europe on the Bull*, 1972–1973, in: Guidebook 2017, 12, fig. 2.

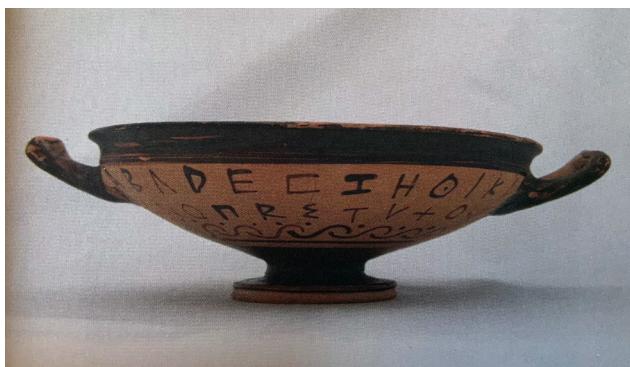


Fig. 5: Replica of a kylix, Boeotia, Greece, c. 420 BCE, National Archeological Museum, Athens, in: Guidebook 2017, 13, fig. 3.

The reference to this narrative – which evokes not only a peculiar ancient narrative but also a dense reception history in texts and images – in the introductory area of the permanent exhibition frames the question »What is Europe?« in very specific ways. First, the narrative is displayed as a founding myth which is mirrored in the very name of the continent. Second, Europe is a reminiscence of a »foreign« princess, indicating that Europe has always been in contact with other cultures. Third, Europe is a narrative undergoing permanent transformations and interpretations. From ancient Greece to contemporary art, various elements of the myth have been interpreted, adapted and transformed in different ways. Fourth, Europe and the alphabet are tied together in a privileged relationship: with the introduction of the alphabet, a »foreign« invention, Europe has developed a crucial skill of progress and development.<sup>77</sup>

The comparison between the ancient archeological objects and contemporary works may be read as programmatic in dealing with religious aspects: the divine Zeus soaring over the sea in the guise of a bull depicted on the replica of a metope is transformed into an animal in flesh and blood and the mythical princess into a printed map on its back in *Europe on the Bull* by Timm Ulrichs. The myth is cleansed of its religious meaning-making performance and transformed into a narrative that conveys the idea of a united (secular) continent. Thus, ancient religious figures like Zeus and Europa, as well as the narratives that preserve them, are presented as merely a part of an influential and productive cultural tradition that shaped the continent over millennia.

### 3.3. Christianity as root and limitation of Europe's unity

Besides the Greco-Roman mythical narrative of Europa and the disguised god, the introductory section, *Shaping Europe*, also explicitly addresses Christianity as a crucial tradition for understanding the roots of the continent:

From its origins in the Middle East, Christianity extended its influence across the whole of Europe to become a defining feature of western civilisation. For thousands of years the power of Christianity in

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76 Transcript of the audio guide *Cadmus and the Alphabet*, <https://tinyurl.com/mv4trfjm> (accessed December 20, 2021).

77 Mork 2016a, 224–225.

Europe centred on Rome and the pope was immense and extended far beyond mere spiritual concerns. It permeated every aspect of life, influencing politics, culture, commerce, and law. Yet Europe's relationship with Christianity has always been diverse and complex. Christianity has frequently been deeply divided within itself, significantly in the division between Eastern and Western Churches and through the Reformation. Also Islam and Judaism have co-existed for centuries in Europe helping to define European life and culture. Today, despite falling church attendance and increasing secularism, Christianity remains embedded in daily European life with values, traditions, and cultures all reflecting Europe's Christian heritage. In an increasingly multi-religious Europe will Christianity remain in its dominant position?<sup>78</sup>

Christianity is introduced as an omnipresent religion that permeates nearly every aspect of »Western civilization«. The audio guide suggests that religion's influence extends beyond »mere spiritual concerns« to touch all social spheres. Christianity, however, is not precisely defined. It is assumed that all the museum's visitors are familiar with this tradition. The audio guide only notes that Christianity is divided within itself with reference to the principal schisms. Furthermore, Islam and Judaism are briefly mentioned as coexisting with Christianity. Other religious traditions are not mentioned; European religious plurality is merely associated with monotheistic religion. The text concludes by emphasising a European paradox: even when the numbers of believers are decreasing, Christianity keeps influencing society. The final question, perhaps rhetorical, poses a moral dilemma about the legitimacy of an alleged Christian cultural rule over a society shaped by secularism and religious pluralism. Overall, Christianity is presented as a worldview that belongs to the past: the exhibition tends to stress the fundamental difference and incompatibility between a religious and a scientific approach to Europe. This dichotomy is visible, for example, in the showcase *Mapping Europe*, which features the printed book *Cosmographia*, first published by Sebastian Münster in 1544, and later translated in several languages. The copy showcased at the HEH, a reprint from 1628 in German, is the latest reproduction of this famous work (fig. 6). The commentary states:

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78 Transcript of the audio guide *Omnipresence of Christianity*, <https://tinyurl.com/3d2jmn2f> (accessed December 20, 2021).



Fig. 6: Europa as a female personification in Sebastian Münster's *Cosmographia* from 1628. Website Exhibition Shaping Europe.<sup>79</sup>

Maps created during the Middle Ages often disregarded geographical accuracy in favour of Christian messages and symbolism. In the Renaissance, the continent of Europe was represented as the Virgin Mary, an expression of its Christian identity.<sup>80</sup>

The map of Europe in this early modern book is embedded in an iconographic tradition of representing the continent in the guise of a queen, with the typical attributes of power: a crown (located in Spain), the *globus cruciger* (which corresponds with Sicily), and a sceptre.<sup>81</sup> In the context of the volume as a whole, this map is far more than an example of a Christian, inaccurate worldview. On the contrary, the document testifies to a rising interest in describing a territory according to humanist procedures and ideals.<sup>82</sup> Sebastian Münster's work is therefore an extraordinary example of a new

79 Source: <https://historia-europa.ep.eu/en/permanent-exhibition/shaping-europe> (accessed December 20, 2021).

80 <https://historia-europa.ep.eu/en/permanent-exhibition/shaping-europe> (accessed December 20, 2021) or Guidebook 2017, 11.

81 See for example the copper engraving by Matthias Quad, Köln 1587 or the representation *Europa prima pars terrae in forma virginis* in Heinrich Bünting, *Itinerarium Sacrae Scripturae*, Wittenberg 1588, plate 12. For reproductions see von Plessen 2003, 114–115.

82 For more information about this book see McLean 2007; Besse 2013.

way of dealing with geography and cartography. The reading of this document by the HEH appears forced, committed to an assumption that religious and scientific worldviews are *per se* incompatible. This problematic reading implicitly reveals an evolutionistic view of the European history of religion.<sup>83</sup> It also subtly implies a conception of historical developments that *inevitably* leads to a contemporary secular paradigm and a commitment to science and technology as a substitute for disused religious systems. The oversimplified presentation of Christianity, the superficial hints at Judaism and Islam, as well as the lack of references to the variety, plurality and dynamics of the many religious communities, traditions and interactions between them seem to be programmatic in this museal representation of Europe.

Religious traditions are neither well-defined systems of symbols, thinking, or practices, nor have they lost influence on European cultures across the centuries until today. Religious symbol systems interact with societies on many levels and constantly adapt to changes and transformations.<sup>84</sup> The introductory area of the HEH enters into the subject of religion disregarding the complexity of meaning-making and transmission processes but the attitude towards religion remains ambiguous. On the one hand, Greco-Roman mythology and Christianity are highlighted as fundamental, influential dimensions in which Europe is rooted. On the other hand, they are represented as ancient and medieval conceptions that (had to) disappear over the centuries: religions are, the HEH seems to suggest, in some way outdated, supplanted by the Enlightenment.

In the following areas, nevertheless, the HEH does contain references to objects or historical situations where religious worldviews, traditions and identities played a prominent role. These implicit references represent religion as a private practice. As an illustration of this kind of approach to religion, the object *Bomb-damaged Bible belonging to Kurt Geller* in the section *World War I* is particularly significant (fig. 7). The guidebook reads:

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83 For a first introduction into this field see e. g. Rüpke 2009.

84 See Adriaanse 2016.

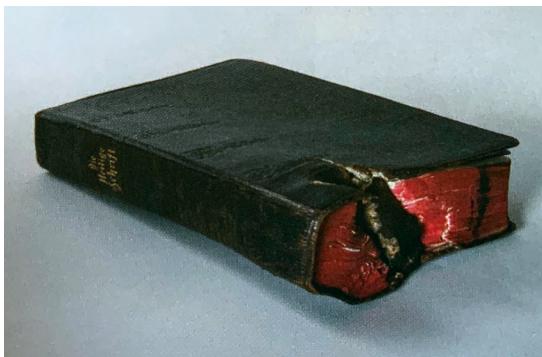


Fig. 7: Bomb-damaged Bible belonging to Kurt Geller, German Empire, 1914–1918, Private collection, Germany, in: Guidebook 2017, 39, fig. 3.

The experience of war was different for each individual. Those who survived often felt it was divine intervention or just good luck, sometimes connected to a talismanic object. This soldier's Bible absorbed shrapnel from a bomb blast and saved its owner's life. Objects like this became treasured mementos of war, and survive in family collections across Europe.<sup>85</sup>

A soldier carried a Bible with him onto the battlefield, and he claims the sacred book eventually saved his life. The damaged Bible recalls not only an incredible story but expresses an individual relationship with a religious tradition, and a form of piety that may have offered a specific orientation to a person navigating a precarious situation. This reference to the role of a material thing – a sacred book – in an individual's life fits with a general tendency to approach religion as something that may be located in the private sphere of European secularised citizens.

Overall, the HEH approaches religion cautiously. It addresses Christianity and ancient mythology as religious-historical heritages that have permeated Europe in the past. In the itinerary of the permanent exhibition, they are represented, to a certain extent, as a cultural and symbolic basis upon which the idea of Europe as a common ground was consolidated in the past. To build a public memory that may facilitate a sense of belonging to Europe, narratives of cultural, linguistic, spatial and national diversities are interwoven with representations of transnational events and developments whose

85 Guidebook 2017, 39.

effects are still relevant today. Set against this background, the plurality of beliefs and religions as social phenomena seems to be disregarded because of their divisive potential.<sup>86</sup>

The variegated and multifaceted landscape of religious traditions and communities that characterises the European history of religion is neglected, despite the deconstructivist narrative of the HEH, which could have allowed a multifaceted and critical approach to this controversial dimension of human life. While the question »What is Europe?« is reiterated in all the areas, »religion« thins along the museum's itinerary and its memory fades out.

#### 4. The role of diversity in the quest for European identity

In this chapter, we have approached the HEH as a public place dedicated to negotiations of public memory. This dynamic process is performed in the encounter between visitors and objects on display. Giving particular attention to European multilingualism, the permanent exhibition aims at addressing everybody, with the guide translated into all official European languages.

Staging memory as a process of negotiation demands an active response by audiences that may engage in a productive relationship with the selected topics overcoming the simple reiteration of knowledge about past events. By doing so, the twofold character of the past may be perceived: events that took place in Europe can be remembered as parts of a concluded history *or* as a common ground that opens up reflection about the present and the future.

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<sup>86</sup> In their analysis of the relevance of myths for providing a cultural and symbolic European identity, Chiara Bottici and Benoît Challand (2013) explicitly question the role attributed to religion, which is identified with Christianity, by some authors like Hans Joas and Klaus Wiegandt (2010). Bottici and Challand acknowledge that »[a]fter all, religions have always been and remain but one way to answer common metaphysical questions that human beings ask about their fate and lives. Religion can, therefore, serve as a bridge between social groups [...]« (2013, 163–164). The authors conclude that »[t]he question of a multireligious Europe ought, therefore, to be taken seriously; this question is rendered more important with the enlargement of Europe toward an Orthodox East and a Muslim South-east. Thus, a thorough reflection on secularism should be undertaken, moving away from simplistic portrayals of threats in terms of religious Otherness (which eventually create a mythical homogeneous block opposed to another). This is true not only for those who describe Islam/Turkey as a problem for a European identity, but also for those who assume that ›secularism‹ is implicitly part of European self-understanding« (2013, 164).

This work of the museum representation is stimulated by multiple objects, showcases and multi-media installations that are meant to involve the visitors as subjects and are articulated on the fragile edge between engagement with or reception of certain contents, active response to or passive consumption of the staged narratives. The museum creates a tension between involvement and distance, particularly highlighting relationships, connections, data, and artifacts.

To allow the audience to engage in a process of discovery, interpretation and construction of a common identity, a focus on transformations, potentialities, and differences in representing European history is needed. Yet, religion, as a relevant factor in establishing and negotiating diversity, is neglected in this remarkable house.

In staging a history for negotiating European memory and, therefore, identity, some tensions emerge in the HEH's design (both as a space and of the exhibition). First, the spatial layout combines integrated with segregated areas. The staircase and the *Vortex of History* cannot counterbalance the chronological path that leads the visitor along the floors with the different chapters and narratives. For instance, while engaging with events of the 20th century on the fifth floor, the spatial contact with the origin of Europe three storeys below gets lost. Furthermore, the tension between transmitting knowledge and stimulating visitors to take an active role in negotiating »Europe« by means of a multi-media and multisensory experience is in some way overshadowed on the one hand by the audio guide, spoken by an omniscient eloquent narrator, and on the other hand by the glass showcases that create a strong physical distance between visitor and object. Finally, the museum narrative appears to be ambivalent in establishing a common ground for a European history, as more than the sum of single national narratives, and the multifaceted dimension of histories and perspectives. In dealing with religion, the museum allows three main approaches: a hint at ancient Greek mythology, a short note on Christianity as a monolithic and hegemonic worldview in the past and, eventually, religion as a feature of the private sphere of individuals in a contemporary Europe that relies on secular values, technology and science.

Public memory is always under construction and has to be negotiated by the transitory dwellers of the House of European History. This dynamic and provisional character of a process of memorialisation is inhabited by

the subject that engages in it. However, the permanent exhibition does not encourage visitors to explore and revisit the variegated European history of religion or to ask about the positive, cohesive potential of the religious communities, traditions and imaginaries that are vividly present on the continent. In the HEH, religious identities are considered as divisive and conflictual differences that, unlike languages, can apparently not engage in a fruitful process of exchange and reciprocal enrichment.

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## »To Be the Soul of Europe«

### Images and Metaphors in Pope Francis's Vision of Europe

Baldassare Scolari

On November 25, 2014, Pope Francis gave a speech in the European Parliament, addressing all European citizens with »a message of hope and encouragement.«<sup>1</sup> This speech was followed by four others in which he addressed the problems, tasks and future of the European Community. Pope Francis's speeches about Europe were held in front of different institutions and audiences: at the Council of Europe (November 25, 2014); on the occasion of the conferral of the International Charlemagne Prize of the city of Aachen (April 6, 2016); in front of the heads of state and government of the European Union in Italy during the celebration of the 60th anniversary of the Treaty of Rome (March 24, 2017); and on the occasion of the conference »(Re) Thinking Europe« organised by the Commission of the Bishops' Conferences of the European Community (October 28, 2017).

In these five speeches, Pope Francis frequently uses metaphors to express his »vision«, his »dream« of a Europe to come, but also his criticism of today's European politics. The focus of my analysis in this chapter lies on the role of these metaphors in the argumentative and persuasive strategy adopted by the Pope in addressing European politics. I understand his speeches as discursive practices within a broader discursive (battle)field in which different social and political actors contend with each other for hegemony over the (cultural, political) meaning and (normative) interpretation of the term »Europe«.

The starting point of this chapter is the assumption that metaphors are not merely stylistic tools of linguistic embellishment and ornament, but

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1 Pope Francis 2014a, 1.

on the contrary have a heuristic and epistemological value as well as a performative force.<sup>2</sup> On the basis of this assumption, this study analyses Francis's speeches in order to answer the following questions: which metaphors does Pope Francis use to address, criticise and describe »Europe« as it *is* and *should* be? What is their function within the general argumentative strategy of the speeches? Is their use necessary or dispensable for the formulation of normative principles and truth contents?

The chapter is structured as follows: the first part summarises the rhetorical-argumentative strategy adopted in official statements of the Catholic Church in discourses concerning the European integration process and its own relationship with European institutions. The following section specifically examines the rhetorical-argumentative strategy adopted by Pope Francis in his speeches on the future of Europe. I will conclude with a critical discussion of the role played by metaphors in Pope Francis's speeches, paying particular attention to the relationship between normative contents, argumentation and metaphors.

My aim is to underline the fundamental role that metaphors play in discursive and imaginative practices aimed at giving a normative foundation to the project of the European community. Moreover, it aims at problematising and critiquing Jürgen Habermas's claim that, within public and political discourses concerning fundamental values and principles, language should be freed from the ballast of religious signification or, more precisely, that religious persons and citizens should formulate »religious arguments« in a »language that is equally accessible to all citizens«.<sup>3</sup> This claim is based on the problematic assumption that the »normative truth content of religious utterances«<sup>4</sup> can be »translated« into an allegedly existing universally shared language. My main thesis is that not only is such a translation impossible but it is also not desirable, because, firstly, it is not possible to separate normative truth content from the particular, historical stratified language in which it is expressed and, secondly, because the performative force of discourses – both »religious« and »secular« – aiming at giving ethical foundation to political projects such as the project of Europe is intrinsically linked to their metaphoricity.

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2 Cf. Blumenberg 2010; Ricœur 1975.

3 Habermas 2006a, 12.

4 Habermas 2006a, 10.

## 1. The Roman Catholic Church and the European integration process

Pope Francis's visit to the European Parliament and the Council of Europe came 26 years after that of Pope John Paul II. The Holy See's involvement in the discussions of pan-European affairs has developed over the course of less than a century, well before the establishment of the European Community. Blandine Chelini-Pont summarises papal thought on Europe and the European Union since 1914 as follows:

At first, under Benedict XV and Pius XI, European unity was presented as the only means to avoid wars and to tame aggressive nationalisms. With Pius XII, Europe became a vision, founded on a sacred past, where »Faith« and »Truth« had been given by Christ (and the Catholic Church) to European peoples. The pope's role was unceasingly to defend federalism, and to condemn communism and Cold War politics. The popes of the 1960s and 1970s recast Catholic doctrine on Europe as a new utopia, replacing Christendom or the Christian Empire. They coloured Europe with a new concern for the situation of Eastern Europe and the necessity of remembering the common belonging of East and West. They aimed to revive the chance for western peoples to live in a secure, democratic and developed continent thanks to the protective cultivation of Christian values. John Paul II's contribution to this debate remains without doubt the most personal and original. According to him, European unity represented more than a hope for a lasting peace for its people and for the rest of the world. It had become a possible vehicle of salvation for its inhabitants and humanity. [...] Its goal was spiritual, and Europe could not reach the best form of society unless it renewed and protected the values which Christianity had encapsulated. John Paul II proposed that Europe build toward this ideal of a humane society, diverse, protected, peaceful and prosperous, with a clearly delineated »political« will, aimed at preserving and promoting inalienable and God-linked values. The legacy of his pontifical teachings continues. His successor,

Benedict XVI, has shown his intention of perpetuating and developing Catholic teachings on Europe, in exactly the same way.<sup>5</sup>

The political relevance of the Catholic Church within Europe is obviously not limited to the person of the pope. Besides the pope himself, other Church officials and institutional bodies are also responsible for devising the Church's foreign policy. In their study of the public statements produced by the Catholic Church regarding the process of European integration, Petr Kratochvíl and Tomáš Doležal analyse texts from the »three most important bodies which represent the Catholic hierarchy, based in Europe and which are at least partially responsible for the relations with the EU:<sup>6</sup> The Holy See, the Commission of the Bishops' Conferences of the European Community (COMECE) and the Council of European Bishops' Conferences (CCEE). Since they collected texts published between 1990 and 2010, they did not analyse Pope Francis's speeches. However, in their conceptual analysis of the Catholic Church's discourse regarding the European integration process they identify some key elements of the rhetorical and argumentative strategy that are also present, as we will see, in Pope Francis' speeches. In the following section, I discuss their analysis of central concepts and arguments to highlight the key elements of Pope Francis's rhetorical-argumentative strategy in his speeches.

The first insight of Kratochvíl and Doležal's study concerns the Catholic Church's position regarding secularism and secularisation. The EU is often seen as one of the world's champions in defending secularism and, indeed, secularism has been described as one of the essential underlying principles of the European integration process.<sup>7</sup> As is well known, secularism, understood as the temporal division between the religious and the political, has been viewed unfavourably by the Catholic Church for a long time. However, with its opening towards the modern world (this attitude is called *aggiornamento*, »update«), which has characterised the Catholic Church ever since the Second Vatican Council, its discussion of secularism has become more complex. This is particularly evident in the Church's discourses about the European Union which almost never reject secularism as such, but instead

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5 Chelini-Pont 2009, 144.

6 Kratochvíl/Doležal 2015, 105.

7 Willaime 2009.

employ a distinction between two kinds of secularism, one of which is usually labelled as »hostile« and the other, »healthy«. Kratochvíl and Doležal describe the difference between the two thus: »[...] aggressive secularism violates the principle of equality of religious and secular citizens [...]. Hence, the secularism that is acceptable to the Church allows for unrestricted participation of religious citizens in the public debate and calls for religious arguments to be as valid in the public domain as those based on secular reasoning.<sup>8</sup>

The second key element in the Church's rhetorical-argumentative strategy in their interaction with the European Union is the critique of individualism or, more precisely, the distinction between the two concepts of »human person« and »individual«. While individualism is depicted rather negatively and connected with »selfishness«, the dignity and individuality of each person are seen as something that must be protected. As Kratochvíl and Doležal highlight, the Catholic Church's critique of individualism cannot be understood if interpreted by referring to the classic distinction between individualism and collectivism:

The current Catholic doctrine highlights the centrality, or even the transcendental grounding [...] of the human being but at the same time it stresses his/her social embeddedness (in their family, their society, and humankind). Hence, the Church's critique of individualism does not build on the individual-collective dichotomy, but is based on the argument that both human collectivities as well as individuals are equally answerable to superior transcendental principles and absolute moral rules.<sup>9</sup>

Another key element is the critique of a free market economy. While sometimes supportive of the free market when it comes to European integration, Catholic Church representatives strongly and repeatedly criticise its materialism, especially when they address »consumerist culture« or the international economic order. Kratochvíl and Doležal distinguish between two approaches within the Church's position in the liberal market economy: the approach that appreciates the positive effects of the free market, and that which relativises the autonomy of market forces while stressing that »the free market

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8 Kratochvíl/Doležal 2015, 111.

9 Kratochvíl/Doležal 2015, 112.

cannot be judged apart from the ends that it seeks to accomplish and from the values that it transmits on a societal level.<sup>10</sup> The Church's position is perfectly expressed in one of the texts analysed by the two researchers: since »economy and the market need ethics in order to function correctly«, they »must draw moral energies from other subjects«.<sup>11</sup>

The fourth and »most unambiguous result« of Kratochvíl and Doležal's analysis is that »the project of European integration [...] repeatedly gets enthusiastic support from the Catholic Church.<sup>12</sup> According to the two researchers, two strands of Catholic thought and institutional culture merge here: the transnational nature of the Church itself and the emphasis on the priority of the human person over the state. The »quasi-federalist rhetoric by the Church« is accompanied by a strong critique of nationalism, which is based on the »distinction between the nationalist past and the peace, stability, and prosperity brought about by the European Communities/EU.<sup>13</sup> The integration of Europe is even described in many texts as a role model for the future global political order.

Kratochvíl and Doležal summarise their results by distinguishing »three basic approaches« or strategies used by the Catholic Church in its discourse about Europe and more specifically about European integration: (a) the strategy of appropriation, consisting of the conceptual reformulation of notions that were rejected by the Church in the past; (b) the strategy of replacement »which seeks accommodation with the EU through offering an alternative term to the notion used in the EU, while hoping that this alternative could be acceptable for the EU as well«; (c) the strategy of rejection which »consists of the identification of some terms with the modern international system (›nationalism‹, ›free market‹, ›nation/state‹ etc.) which allows the Church to adopt a critical position towards the corresponding notions.<sup>14</sup> According to the two researchers, the most interesting result of their analysis is the Church's insistence that both the institutional set-up and the policy-making processes »are firmly grounded in the Catholic theology of creation and sal-

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10 Kratochvíl/Doležal 2015, 112.

11 General Secretaries of the Bishops' Conferences of Europe 2009; quoted in Kratochvíl/Doležal 2015, 117.

12 Kratochvíl/Doležal 2015, 119.

13 Kratochvíl/Doležal 2015, 121.

14 Kratochvíl/Doležal 2015, 123.

vation (human dignity, solidarity) as well as its ecclesiology and eschatology (the positive view of unification and reservations towards nationalism).«<sup>15</sup>

## 2. Pope Francis's rhetorical-argumentative strategy

Pope Francis's speeches on the future of Europe basically reproduce the same key elements and rhetorical-argumentative strategies described above. In the first place, they also articulate an explicit critique of secularism: »Regrettably, a certain secularist prejudice, still in vogue, is incapable of seeing the positive value of religion's public and objective role in society, preferring to relegate it to the realm of the merely private and sentimental.«<sup>16</sup> This secularism is not placed on the same level as the secularity of European states and institutions, since secularity is at least implicitly seen as a necessary precondition for an open dialogue with and between different cultures and religions. The Pope applauds the commitment of the European institutions »to invest in intercultural dialogue, including its religious dimension« where he sees »a valuable opportunity for open, respectful and enriching exchange between persons and groups of different origins and ethnic, linguistic and religious traditions, in a spirit of understanding and mutual respect.«<sup>17</sup> He underlines »the positive and constructive role that religion in general plays in the building up of society« and refers, in particular, to »the contribution made by interreligious dialogue to greater mutual understanding between Christians and Muslims in Europe.«<sup>18</sup>

The use of the contrast between individualism and the dignity of the person is also very apparent in the Pope's speeches: »Today there is a tendency to claim ever broader individual rights – I am tempted to say individualistic; underlying this is a conception of the human person as detached from all social and anthropological contexts, as if the person were a ›monad‹ (μονάς), increasingly unconcerned with other surrounding ›monads‹.«<sup>19</sup> With this form of individualism Francis contrasts the concept of »person«,

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15 Kratochvíl/Doležal 2015, 123.

16 Pope Francis 2017b, 3.

17 Pope Francis 2014b, 6.

18 Pope Francis 2017b, 3.

19 Pope Francis 2014a, 3.

which he understands as intrinsically linked to that of »community« as well as that of »common good«: »Each human being is part of a social context wherein his or her rights and duties are bound up with those of others and with the common good of society itself«;<sup>20</sup> »[c]ommunity is the greatest antidote to the forms of individualism typical of our times, to that widespread tendency in the West to see oneself and one's life in isolation from others.«<sup>21</sup> A particularly interesting concept used by the Pope in this argumentative context is that of »transcendent human dignity«: »[t]o speak of *transcendent human dignity* thus means appealing to human nature, to our innate capacity to distinguish good from evil, to that ›compass‹ deep within our hearts, which God has impressed upon all creation.«<sup>22</sup>

Pope Francis argues that human dignity is the fundamental ideal shared by both Christian churches and secular European institutions: »[t]his contribution [of Christianity] does not represent a threat to the secularity of states or to the independence of the institutions of the European Union, but rather an enrichment. This is clear from the ideals which shaped Europe from the beginning, such as peace, subsidiarity and reciprocal solidarity, and a humanism centred on respect for *the dignity of the human person*.«<sup>23</sup> In contrast to individualism, a person's identity should be understood as »primarily relational«.<sup>24</sup> Not surprisingly, the Pope's argument here revolves entirely around the concept of »family« as the space where relationality is best realised:

By interacting with others, each one discovers his or her own qualities and defects, strengths and weaknesses. In other words, they come to know who they are, their specific identity. The family, as the primordial community, remains the most fundamental place for this process of discovery. There, diversity is valued and at the same time brought into unity. The family is the harmonious union of the differences between man and woman, which becomes stronger and more authentic to the extent that it is fruitful, capable of opening itself to life and to others.<sup>25</sup>

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20 Pope Francis 2014a, 3.

21 Pope Francis 2017b, 2–3.

22 Pope Francis 2014a, 3, emphasis in the original.

23 Pope Francis 2014a, 4, emphasis by the author.

24 Pope Francis, 2017b, 2.

25 Pope Francis 2017b, 3.

The critical discussion of different models and conceptions of the economy also finds ample space in the Pope's speeches. If in certain passages the concept of the economy clearly has a negative connotation – for example when he says that »the time has come to work together in building a Europe which revolves not around the economy, but around the sacredness of the human person«<sup>26</sup> – in others there is a clear distinction between »bad« and »good« economy: »[w]e need to move from a liquid economy prepared to use corruption as a means of obtaining profits to a social economy that guarantees access to land and lodging through labour.«<sup>27</sup> Francis emphasises, in particular, the importance of work for the dignity of the person and the integrity of the family as a central aspect of economic structures:

The time has come to promote policies which create employment, but above all there is a need to restore dignity to labour by ensuring proper working conditions. This implies, on the one hand, finding new ways of joining market flexibility with the need for stability and security on the part of workers; these are indispensable for their human development. It also implies favoring a suitable social context geared not to the exploitation of persons, but to ensuring, precisely through labour, their ability to create a family and educate their children.<sup>28</sup>

Last but not least, the Pope's speeches are in line with the Church's general enthusiastic support for the European Union described above. The clear and explicit papal support of the European integration project as a model for a future global political integration finds expression in the passages dedicated to the history of this project. To underline the historic relevance of the process of European integration, the Pope highlights how important it is to remember what happened during the two world wars in the first half of the 20th century:

In the last century, Europe bore witness to humanity that a new beginning was indeed possible. After years of tragic conflicts, culminating in the most horrific war ever known, there emerged, by God's grace,

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26 Pope Francis 2014a, 8.

27 Pope Francis 2016, 5.

28 Pope Francis 2014a, 8.

something completely new in human history. The ashes of the ruins could not extinguish the ardent hope and the quest of solidarity that inspired the founders of the European project. They laid the foundations for a bastion of peace, an edifice made up of states united not by force but by free commitment to the common good and a definitive end to confrontation. Europe, so long divided, finally found its true self and began to build its house.<sup>29</sup>

As the Pope develops these themes, the use of metaphors represents a key element of his rhetorical-argumentative strategy. The analysis of his speeches shows that he draws in particular on three groups of metaphors. What first catches the eye is the strong presence of metaphors related to construction or building which are scattered throughout all five of Pope Francis's speeches. Through these metaphors, Europe is represented as something that has been successfully built and the construction of which must be continued. In reference to the past, Europe is something that has been built »on the ashes of ruins«<sup>30</sup> and that needed to be »rebuilt [...] in a spirit of mutual service«.<sup>31</sup> With regard to the present, Europe is described as »an edifice made up by states« and which, for this reason, is no more »divided«, since now all Europeans live in the same »house«.<sup>32</sup> But construction metaphors are not always used in such a positive way. For example, the Pope criticises more or less explicitly those policies of European member-state and political parties whose purpose is the erection of internal »walls« within the European »house«:

This »family of peoples« which has commendably expanded in the meantime, seems of late to feel less at home within the walls of the common home. At times, those walls themselves have been built in a way varying from the insightful plans left by the original builders. Their new and exciting desire to create unity seems to be fading; we, the heirs of their dream, are tempted to yield to our own selfish interests and to consider putting up fences here and there.<sup>33</sup>

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29 Pope Francis 2016, 1.

30 Pope Francis 2016, 1.

31 Pope Francis 2014b, 2.

32 Pope Francis 2016, 1.

33 Pope Francis 2016, 1.

Construction metaphors are also used for criticising a form of politics which is only focused on »immediate results« and which therefore lacks a long-term political vision and forgets »those experiences that enabled our peoples to surmount the crises of the past«. »What we need today is a ›memory transfusion‹ – the Pope argues – that »can free us from today's temptation to build hastily on the shifting sands of immediate results.«<sup>34</sup> The same image of »building on sand« is used also in another argumentative context where the Pope stresses the fundamental role of the »family« for the future of Europe: »The family, united, fruitful and indissoluble, possesses the elements fundamental for fostering hope in the future. Without this solid basis, the future ends up being built on sand, with dire social consequences.«<sup>35</sup>

The family is not only a central issue that the Pope addresses repeatedly, but it is also the source of another group of metaphors he frequently uses to discuss Europe. First, he introduces the image of today's Europe as a »grandmother« which is »no longer fertile and vibrant.«<sup>36</sup> This image is also taken up in another, later speech and contrasted with that of Europe as a »fertile mother«:

In addressing the European Parliament, I used the image of Europe as a grandmother. I noted that there is a growing impression that Europe is weary, aging, no longer fertile and vital, that the great ideals that inspired Europe seem to have lost their appeal. There is an impression that Europe is declining, [...] that it is more concerned with preserving and dominating spaces than with generating processes of inclusion and change. [...] Europe, rather than protecting spaces, is called to be a mother who generates processes.<sup>37</sup>

The same image of Europe as a fertile mother is used later in the same speech for a second time: »With mind and heart, with hope and without vain nostalgia, like a son who rediscovers in Mother Europe his roots of life and faith, I dream of a new European humanism [...]. I dream of a Europe that is young, still capable of being a mother: a mother who has life because she respects

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34 Pope Francis 2016, 2.

35 Pope Francis 2014a, 6.

36 Pope Francis 2014a, 6.

37 Pope Francis 2016, 2.

life and offers hope for life.«<sup>38</sup> As the Pope argues in an earlier speech, just as Europe is a mother, both member-state and the peoples of Europe should be understood metaphorically as its (or her) children: »all authentic unity draws from the rich diversities which make it up: in this sense it [Europe] is like a family, which is all the more united when each of its members is free to be fully himself or herself. I consider Europe as a family of peoples.«<sup>39</sup>

Another category of metaphors that recurs frequently pertains to the natural world, specifically to plant life, such as »roots« and »fruit«. Pope Francis speaks for example of the »religious roots« and their »fruitfulness and potential« for Europe;<sup>40</sup> of the family that is »fruitful« because it is »a harmonious union of the differences between man and woman«;<sup>41</sup> of the »just distribution of the fruits of the earth« in Europe;<sup>42</sup> of the Church that has to bring back »the pure water of the Gospel to the roots of Europe«;<sup>43</sup> of peace as »the fruit of a free and conscious contribution by all.«<sup>44</sup> We find the most frequent use of metaphors related to natural life in Pope Francis's address to the Council of Europe, where the extended metaphor of the »poplar tree« becomes the image for Europe's self-understanding:

In one of his poems, [Italian poet Clemente] Rebora describes a poplar tree, its branches reaching up to the sky, buffeted by the wind, while its trunk remains firmly planted on deep roots sinking into the earth. In a certain sense, we can consider Europe in the light of this image. Throughout its history, Europe has always reached for the heights, aiming at new and ambitious goals, driven by an insatiable thirst for knowledge, development, progress, peace and unity. But the advance of thought, culture, and scientific discovery is entirely due to the solidity of the trunk and the depth of the roots which nourish it. Once those roots are lost, the trunk slowly withers from within and the branches – once flourishing and erect – bow to the earth and fall. This is perhaps among the most baffling paradoxes for a nar-

38 Pope Francis 2016, 6.

39 Pope Francis 2014a, 5.

40 Pope Francis 2014a, 5.

41 Pope Francis 2017b, 3.

42 Pope Francis 2016, 5.

43 Pope Francis 2016, 5–6.

44 Pope Francis 2017, 3.

rowly scientific mentality: in order to progress towards the future we need the past, we need profound roots. We also need the courage not to flee from the present and its challenges. We need memory, courage, a sound and humane utopian vision. Rebora notes, on the one hand, that »the trunk sinks its roots where it is most true«. The roots are nourished by truth, which is the sustenance, the vital lymph, of any society which would be truly free, human and fraternal. On the other hand, truth appeals to conscience, which cannot be reduced to a form of conditioning. Conscience is capable of recognizing its own dignity and being open to the absolute.<sup>45</sup>

The image of the poplar tree is here used to link the past with the future, and religious and cultural tradition with scientific and political progress. Moreover, the image conveys the idea that in order to develop in a positive way, Europe must remain grounded in inalienable principles and truths. For the Pope, Christianity, and in particular the Catholic Church, represents the primary actor that has the task of reminding the European institutions what these inalienable principles and truths are.

And finally, the Pope uses Raphael's fresco of the School of Athens as a metaphor to establish a contrast with the image of Europe as a grandmother and criticise current European politics and policies:

One of the most celebrated frescoes of Raphael is found in the Vatican and depicts the so-called »School of Athens«. Plato and Aristotle are in the centre. Plato's finger is pointed upward, to the world of ideas, to the sky, to heaven as we might say. Aristotle holds his hand out before him, towards the viewer, towards the world, concrete reality. This strikes me as a very apt image of Europe and her history, made up of the constant interplay between heaven and earth, where the sky suggests that openness to the transcendent – to God – which has always distinguished the peoples of Europe, while the earth represents Europe's practical and concrete ability to confront situations and problems. The future of Europe depends on the recovery of the vital connection between these two elements. A Europe which is no

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45 Pope Francis 2014b, 3–4.

longer open to the transcendent dimension of life is a Europe which risks slowly losing its own soul and that »humanistic spirit« which it still loves and defends.<sup>46</sup>

Like the image of the tree, the image of the School of Athens has the function of harmonising or rather creating a bridge between the immanent dimension of politics and the transcendent dimension of religion. The Pope stresses that the resolution of concrete political problems – he often uses the term »crisis«, referencing the economic crisis, migrant crisis, crisis of institutions – is only possible if Europe stands firmly grounded in its tradition of »openness to the transcendent«, a condition *sine qua non* for the maintenance of Europe's »soul«. And what is the »soul« of Europe for the Pope? The answer is predictable:

At the origin of European civilization there is Christianity, without which the Western values of dignity, freedom and justice would prove largely incomprehensible. As Saint John Paul II affirmed: »Today too, the soul of Europe remains united, because, in addition to its common origins, those same Christian and human values are still alive.«<sup>47</sup>

Less explicit, but perhaps even more exemplary for the Pope's rhetorical-argumentative strategy is a passage in his speech before the European Parliament:

An anonymous second-century author wrote that »Christians are to the world what the soul is to the body«.<sup>48</sup> The function of the soul is to support the body, to be its conscience and its historical memory. A two-thousand-year-old history links Europe and Christianity. It is a history not free of conflicts and errors, and sins, but one constantly driven by the desire to work for the good of all. [...] Europe urgently needs to recover its true features in order to grow, as its founders intended, in peace and harmony, since it is not yet free of conflicts.<sup>49</sup>

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46 Pope Francis 2014a, 4.

47 Pope Francis 2017a, 3.

48 Cf. Letter to Diognetus, 6, quoted after Pope Francis 2014a.

49 Pope Francis 2014a, 7–8

### 3. Critical reflection on the function of metaphors in Pope Francis's Europe speeches

Both Hans Blumenberg and Paul Ricoeur understand metaphor to be a valid and effective rhetorical device which not only increases our ability to understand and experience others, the world and ourselves, but also our ability to make decisions and act in this world. For Ricoeur, metaphors show that language is composed of both words and images.<sup>50</sup> Metaphor is a borderline case in which a sentence works with words that are images, and images that are words. This twofold linguistic and visual nature of language allows language itself to refer to the world. For Blumenberg, there are metaphors which are indispensable and therefore legitimate instruments of reason, because, contra Descartes, the ideal of a purely conceptual language is illusory. Blumenberg calls these indispensable elements of language »absolute metaphors«, that is, »*foundational elements* of philosophical language, ›translations‹ that resist being converted back into authenticity and logicality«.<sup>51</sup> Blumenberg's »absolute metaphor« corresponds to Immanuel Kant's definition of a »symbol«: »the transportation of the reflection on one object of intuition [*Anschauung*], to another, quite different concept, to which perhaps no intuition can ever directly correspond.«<sup>52</sup>

The language used by the Pope in his speeches, as we have seen in the previous section, is decidedly metaphorical or, in Kant's terminology, symbolic. Why is this so? Could the Pope have expressed his ideas without using metaphorical language, the language of images? What is the function of his metaphorical language? Let's take the metaphors of plant life and construction as examples. These metaphors should be understood as absolute and therefore untranslatable, in the sense that they cannot be substituted by non-metaphorical (or non-symbolic) concepts. Kant himself gives examples of these kinds of irreplaceable and untranslatable concepts: »[T]he words *foundation* (support, basis), to *depend* (to be held from above), to *flow* (instead of to follow) from something, *substance* (the support of accidents, as Locke puts it), and countless others are not schematic but symbolic hypotyposes; they express concepts not by means of a direct intuition but only according

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50 Ricoeur 1975.

51 Blumenberg 2010, 9, emphasis in the original.

52 Kant 1987, 228, quoted in Blumenberg 2010, 12.

to an analogy with one.<sup>53</sup> Thus, when the Pope says that Europe has been »built« by its »founding fathers«, that it is »an edifice made up of states«, that it is like a »poplar tree« that, in order to »grow« and to »flourish«, it has to remain »firmly planted on deep roots sinking into the earth«, he creates an analogy between something that can be experienced through sensible intuition in Kant's sense – the growth of a tree, the building of a house – and something to which *no intuition can ever directly correspond*. The reason for this is, ultimately, quite simple: in his speeches, the Pope expresses normative ideas, values, evaluations about objects – Europe, the European Union, the European Community – that cannot be the object of sensible intuition.

The metaphors of plant life and construction are clearly not exclusive to the Pope's speeches on Europe but can be found in virtually any political discourse about national or transnational political entities (and in many other kinds of discourses). Why? Because they can be understood *intuitively* by any person regardless of their socio-cultural context. However, the Pope also uses certain metaphors in a way that are specifically attributable to the rhetorical and discursive tradition of Christianity. This is the case with metaphors related to the sphere of family life. The analogy constructed discursively by the Pope between the family in the »literal« sense and the »European« family is in fact performative in two senses: not only does the analogy succeed in expressing and enhancing the idea that European states and peoples have to be understood as members of a family and Europe itself as a fertile mother, but at the same time it expresses the idea that a certain (Catholic) model of family – heteronormative, with the main purpose to procreate – is the foundation of any form of political community, be it national or transnational. In other words, it is an analogy that produces a certain kind of meaning on both sides of the analogy itself: just as Europe is a fertile mother who gives birth to children destined to live together under the same roof, the »natural« family has the task of procreating those children who will be children of Europe. The same can be said of the metaphor of the »soul of Europe« in which the analogy drawn between the interrelationship of body and soul and the interrelationship of Europe and Christianity is aimed at giving expression to the idea or, rather, to the *truth of faith* that body and soul, as well as Europe and Christianity, are »inseparably linked«.<sup>54</sup>

53 Kant 1987, 228, emphasis in the original.

54 Pope Francis 2017, 1, emphasis in the original.

To avoid any misunderstanding, it should be noted that I am not suggesting that metaphors using the word »soul« or words that concern family life always produce these meanings or that they always carry the same normative principles and values. I am not even trying to say that these metaphors will remain absolutely irreplaceable, forever. In fact, as Blumenberg highlights,

[t]hat [...] metaphors are called »absolute« means only that they prove resistant to terminological claims and cannot be dissolved into conceptuality, not that one metaphor could not be replaced or represented by another, or corrected through a more precise one. Even absolute metaphors therefore have a history. They have a history in a more radical sense than concepts, for the historical transformation of a metaphor brings to light the metakinetics of the historical horizons of meaning and ways of seeing within which concepts undergo their modifications.<sup>55</sup>

The metaphors of the »soul of Europe« and of the »European family« are absolute in the sense that they are part of a complex discursive framework in which the historically stratified tradition of Christianity always directly or indirectly related and still relates to the idea of God, an idea that can be expressed only metaphorically. In other words, their use is necessary for the formulation of normative principles and truth contents that ultimately legitimise themselves with reference to the idea of God. What is at stake in Pope Francis's speeches about Europe is nothing less than the question of the foundation of the moral principles and values at the core of the project of the European community, such as they are codified for example in the European Convention on Human Rights, and which Francis summarises with the notions of »human dignity«, »freedom« and »justice«. According to the Pope, as we have seen, these values are incomprehensible without knowing the history and language of Christianity. The core of Pope Francis's normative ethics is the idea that human beings have a transcendent human dignity, an »innate capacity to distinguish good from evil« and that this capacity has been »impressed upon all creation« by God.<sup>56</sup> In other words, because human beings participate in God's transcendence through the fact that they

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55 Blumenberg 2010, 13.

56 Pope Francis 2014a, 3.

have been created by God, they are able to discern good and evil and thus also to recognise their dignity of living beings as God's creatures.

Interestingly, the relationship between the notion of »human dignity« and the notion of the human being's likeness to God also plays a major role in Jürgen Habermas's reflections on the legitimisation of the modern constitutional state and more generally on the foundation of normative principles. According to the German philosopher, the modern constitutional state legitimises itself through democratic decision-making processes. The self-image of the constitutional state develops in the context of a contractual tradition based on »natural« reason, that is, exclusively on public arguments to which all people should have equal access. The assumption of a common human reason thus forms the basis of justification for a secular state that is no longer dependent on religious legitimisation. In other words, the constitution of the liberal state can legitimise itself argumentatively independently of religious and metaphysical traditions.<sup>57</sup> Characteristic of Habermas's thought is the conviction that throughout the history of humankind, and especially in the modern age, language has increasingly taken the place of religion, and rational discourse that of the experience and symbolisation of holiness. For this process he coined the expression of a »linguisticification of the ritually sacred«:

The authority of the holy is gradually replaced by the authority of an achieved consensus. This means a freeing of communicative action from sacrally protected normative contexts. The disenchantment and disempowering of the domain of the sacred takes place by way of a linguisticification of the ritually secured, basic normative agreement; going along with this is a release of the rationality potential in communicative action. The aura of rapture and terror that emanates from the sacred, the *spellbinding* power of the holy, is sublimated into the *binding/bonding* force of criticizable validity claims and at the same time turned into an everyday occurrence.<sup>58</sup>

Basically, what Habermas is asking for when he writes that »religious utterances must be translated into a generally accessible language«, is a *de-sacralisation*

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57 Cf. Habermas 2006b, 253.

58 Habermas 1987, 77–78, emphasis in the original.

*sation* of the normative content of religious utterances. In fact, he argues that this desacralisation has already taken place in the west through an increasing appropriation of semantic content from the Judeo-Christian tradition through philosophy:

The mutual penetration of Christianity and Greek metaphysics did not, of course, bring about only the spiritual form [*geistige Gestalt*] of theological dogmatics and a Hellenization – not in every aspect beneficial – of Christianity. It also promoted philosophy's appropriation of genuinely Christian content. This work of appropriation found its expression in heavily laden, normative conceptual networks such as: responsibility; autonomy and justification; history and memory; beginning anew, innovation, and return; emancipation and fulfillment; externalization, internalization, and embodiment; individuality and community. It is true that the work of appropriation transformed the originally religious meaning, but without deflating or weakening it in a way that would empty it out. The translation of the notion of man's likeness to God into the notion of human dignity, in which all men partake equally and which is to be respected unconditionally, is such a saving translation. The translation renders the content of biblical concepts accessible to the general public of people of other faiths, as well as to nonbelievers, beyond the boundaries of a particular religious community.<sup>59</sup>

Habermas's argumentation is based on the assumption that a) certain aspects of religion are untranslatable into a generally acceptable language, which is why, to be accepted in the democratic process of political deliberation, they must be »filtered« through an operation of secular translation; b) it is possible to separate certain truth contents of religious utterances from their sacral »ballast« and to resignify them in a language that is equally accessible to all citizens. Habermas thus believes in the possibility of identifying truth contents in the religious contributions and of incorporating them into the philosophical discourse by »using a description [...] from the universe of argumentative discourse that is uncoupled from the event of revelation.«<sup>60</sup> As Badredine Arfi puts it,

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59 Habermas 2006b, 258.

60 Habermas 2002, 74–75.

Habermas wants the language of his discourse to no longer follow the twists and turns (*tropoi*) of religious discourse. His concepts such as, for example, the idea of the equal and unconditional dignity of all human beings are not metaphors; they are, by dint of discourse, products of de-signification of the religious figures and thus constitute new figures, absent from religious discourses. Habermas's secularizing translation thus begins with a de-signification of the truth contents of the religious figures that strips the religious discourses from their religious signification.<sup>61</sup>

I am very sceptical of this theory of translation of religious language into a secular one. Let us take Habermas's own example of a successful translation of a religious »truth content« into a secular one: Habermas argues that the notion of human dignity is a translation of the religious notion of the human being's likeness to God, a translation by which the sacral substratum of the religious notion is thrown away, set aside. What remains is the purely conceptual, non-metaphorical notion of human dignity.

Now, it is clear that the notion of »human dignity«, as Habermas uses it, is a concept and not a metaphor. In contrast, the religious notion of the human being's likeness to God is clearly metaphorical, because every notion or representation of the nature of God is by definition, as we have seen, metaphorical or, in the Kantian terminology, symbolic: »if a mere way of presenting something may ever be called cognition [...], then all our cognition of God is merely symbolic.«<sup>62</sup> The »truth content« that all human beings are equal is articulated through a metaphor, that is, in Kant's word, through the transportation of the reflection on one object of intuition (»human being«), to another concept, to which no intuition can ever directly correspond (»God«). And what happens to the notion of the equality of all human beings if we eliminate this image? What remains is a literally »amorphous« notion, a »truth content« without a (metaphorical) form, incapable of expressing meaning. In fact, without metaphorical articulation, it is not possible to answer the question: why is it a truth that all human beings have equal and unconditional dignity? The fact that many secular citizens are firmly convinced of the truthfulness of the notion of human dignity is, I believe, not a demonstra-

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61 Arfi 2015, 497.

62 Kant 1987, 228.

tion that it is possible to express this »truth content« in a purely conceptual way, using non-metaphorical language. On the contrary, I believe that this demonstrates that in certain secularised religious notions there is a »secret index« which recalls previous religious meanings without making them explicit. As Blumenberg argues, »the phenomena of secularization derive to a large extent from [the] linguistic genius [of Christianity], from the familiarities that it produced, the transferable materials that it left behind it, and the residual needs that are associated with its materials.«<sup>63</sup>

It is very important here to stress that I am not saying that the idea of human dignity is an essentially Christian or, more generally, religious idea. Following theologian and ethicist Hille Haker, I rather believe that the idea of human dignity is rooted in the human experience of bodily vulnerability, that of ourselves and of others: »Vulnerability encompasses the radical ambiguity of human relations. We do not ›naturally‹ develop into agents; rather, we are addressed and shaped by others *as* (potential, actual, or former) *agents*, in order to *see ourselves as* agents, beings who are able to act on one's own account.«<sup>64</sup> Vulnerability is »ontological, because it does not matter whether we feel vulnerable or invulnerable: human beings *are*, by their nature, vulnerable, i. e. susceptible to be affected by incidents and/or conditions beyond their control.«<sup>65</sup> Vulnerability is »the condition for a most basic openness to the world«<sup>66</sup> and the experience of oneself as vulnerable »involves an understanding of the self as being shaped through its relationships to others, to its world, and environs.«<sup>67</sup> The idea of human dignity is intrinsically linked to this universal experience of vulnerability, and it would therefore be erroneous to consider it as the product or result of a particular culture or religion.

Experiences, however, can be shared and become the basis of collective projects and actions only if they are articulated discursively by the means of historically stratified elements of language. As Habermas himself stresses, the collective generalisation of the idea of human dignity took place in Europe through the »appropriation of motifs and figures of thought from

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63 Blumenberg 1985, 114.

64 Haker 2020, 138–139, emphasis in the original.

65 Haker 2020, 139, emphasis in the original.

66 Haker 2020, 150.

67 Gilson 2014, 86.

the Judeo-Christian tradition.«<sup>68</sup> The fundamental problem with Habermas's thought thus lies not in the misconnection of the historical role played by religion in the articulation of fundamental notions of modern and contemporary ethics, but in his theory of the translation of religious language into a secular one. This theory reproduces the Cartesian illusion according to which it is possible to free language from its metaphorical and sacral »substratum«, that it is possible to »filter« language in order to produce a purely conceptual language, accessible to all individuals regardless of their origin, faith, cultural context, and so on. What this illusion hides is the fact that the fundamental values and principles underlying modern and contemporary secularised thought are the result of a secularisation that cannot free the language through which these values and principles are expressed and articulated from its metaphorical and sacred ballast, because, ultimately, »the human relationship to reality is indirect, laborious, delayed, selective and above all ›metaphorical‹.«<sup>69</sup>

The metaphors and images in Pope Francis's speeches should thus not be understood as »mere« decorative elements nor simply as sophisticated means of persuasion, but as necessary components of a discourse of truth aimed at giving a religious and ethical fundament to the normative values and principles at the core of the project of the European community. I agree with Habermas when he writes that »religious traditions have a special power to articulate moral intuitions, especially with regard to vulnerable forms of communal life.«<sup>70</sup> However, it is misleading to affirm that »the truth content of religious contributions« should only be allowed to »enter into the institutionalized practice of deliberation and decision-making if the necessary translation already occurs«,<sup>71</sup> because these truth contents are articulated by means of untranslatable images and metaphors. The goal should thus not be the illusory attempt to »translate truth contents« for an alleged »secular public«, but rather to understand, critically interpret and explain how these truths are articulated linguistically and rhetorically. Such an approach, I believe, not only allows us to better understand the language and rhetoric as well as the positions, assumptions, convictions, and goals of (religious)

68 Habermas 2011, 28.

69 Blumenberg 2010, 415.

70 Habermas 2006a, 10.

71 Habermas 2006a, 10.

institutions and social actors, but also to become more aware of the fact that without metaphors, without images, it is not possible to give form and expression to fundamental values, ideals and principles.

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# Representing Europe in a Children's Book

## Values between Commonalities and Demarcation

Verena Marie Eberhardt

### 1. Why children's media?

What do we want to pass on to the next generation and how do we hand ideas down? Where do the images come from that arise in our heads when we think of something? One of the places where worldviews are discussed and passed down in cultural memory is children's media. Studying children's media inevitably leads us to questions of representations of the world, issues that are considered important, and associated ideals, values and norms. Children's media formulate ideas about society, who we are, want and should be. Questions of identity are central in children's literature, audio dramas and films, as these media deal with current issues in society, with politics, the environment, and questions of living together. Thus, when considering European values and identities, children's media provide an important resource.

This article investigates imaginations of Europe in media that are intentionally produced for children. My choice of sources is motivated by three insights: first, children's media communicate ideas of the world in which we live. Through texts and images, they mirror current discourses on the one hand, and on the other, they contribute to the construction of comprehensive worldviews. Accordingly, children's media operate as models of and for reality. Second, children's media participate in socialisation processes. They convey, reflect and transform collective knowledge and images of society and thus contribute to the identity processes through which individuals situate themselves in a group and develop a sense of belonging. Identity thus

appears to be a useful basic concept for studying constructions of imagined groups and their boundaries. And third, children's media condense content and reduce complexity. Due to their brevity and the goal to be understood by very young children, they reduce content to what is considered essential and present it in a way that is easy to grasp.

In this contribution I focus on the German language children's book *Europe in 80 Sounds. A Multicultural Journey through Europe with Songs, Dances, Plays and Customs* and the companion audio book *Europe in 80 Sounds. Nursery Rhymes and Dances from all over Europe – Sung in German and Original Languages*,<sup>1</sup> both published in 2002. In my analysis of textual and visual representations, I focus on the following questions: how do the sources imagine Europe? Which identities do they construct, and what are important identity markers? Do the sources emphasise similarities or differences? What role does religion play in their representations of Europe and Europeans? And, are normative ideas of coexistence in Europe conveyed? The article explores ideas of Europe that are handed down to the youngest members of society in order to reconstruct representations of people, nations, and an imagined European community. I will argue that Europe is understood as a very complex concept that is characterised by multiple cultural, geographical and political ruptures, which, at the same time, the books seek to overcome in the representation of Europe as united in a common canon of values.

In the next section, I will present my sources, provide some basic information about the structure of the book and CD, and introduce the authors and publishing house. Concepts of collective identity and processes of othering provide the theoretical framework for my analysis, for which I focus on the first edition of the book (with only occasional references to the CD). In the following sections, I will discuss these with regard to their imaginations of Europe, questions of identity, the role of religion, and the normative and epistemological premises of processes of othering. In my conclusion, I will correlate the book's representations with general discourses of Europe distributed in the media in order to identify widespread imaginations of Europe as a common ground.

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<sup>1</sup> German original titles: *Europa in 80 Tönen. Eine multikulturelle Europareise mit Liedern, Tänzen, Spielen und Bräuchen*; *Europa in 80 Tönen. Kinderlieder und Tänze aus ganz Europa – in Deutsch und Originalsprachen gesungen*. All translations from the German are by the author.

## 2. *Europe in 80 Sounds*

The children's book and CD *Europe in 80 Sounds* is intended for children between eight and ten years and was first published in 2002, with a second edition published in 2006. The book (144 pages) and CD (37 tracks) are structured as a musical tour through Europe and aim at conveying the diversity of European music culture. Thus, music is considered as a medium of intercultural communication.<sup>2</sup> The authors argue that music functions as a »universal language that becomes important for building the cultural Europe.«<sup>3</sup> Given that European borders are disappearing, and today's young people grow up quite naturally in a multicultural society, getting to know »the neighbours« should be a matter of course, the authors state: »If we know a lot about one another, we can understand each other better!«<sup>4</sup>

The book (and CD) contains songs, poems and legends considered typical of the cultures of a range of European countries. The book's structure conveys the idea of a homogeneous national (or ethnic) culture, including chapters covering 35 countries and the »travelling people« Romanies and Sinti. However, not every country is presented in its own chapter; some states are grouped together, such as Serbia, Slovenia and Croatia representing together the culture of Southern Slavs, and the Czech Republic and Slovak Republic are combined into the region of Bohemia and Moravia.<sup>5</sup> The book's introduction briefly outlines the history of Europe.

The presentation of songs, dances and customs is geared towards nation-states which are represented as culturally homogeneous. Most countries are introduced with information about history, geographic location, places of interest, music and literary traditions, and cultural idiosyncrasies, such as typical dress or character traits, for instance being fiery in Spain or equanimous in Luxembourg. The chapters also introduce musical instruments and information about languages. They include the numbers from one to ten in one of the national languages, songs with notations, finger and music

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2 Steffe/Höfele 2002, 5.

3 Steffe/Höfele 2002, 5: »Als verbindendes Element, das sich einer universellen Sprache bedient, spielt Musik eine wichtige Rolle für den Aufbau des kulturellen Europas.«

4 Steffe/Höfele 2002, 5: »Wenn wir viel übereinander wissen, können wir einander besser verstehen!«

5 Steffe/Höfele 2002, 77, 87.

plays, or dance steps. However, the specific content differs from chapter to chapter, and the countries are not always treated with the same amount of detail. For example, the chapter on France is four times as long as the chapter covering both Bulgaria and Romania. In addition to text and musical notations, all chapters also contain black-and-white illustrations depicting children, sights and musical instruments, well-known personalities and fictional characters, such as Hans Christian Andersen or Pippi Longstocking.

The audio version consists of 37 tracks with musical settings of the songs presented in the book and short explanations. The texts are spoken by a man – the author Hartmut Höfele – and various children. They also sing the songs together, which are accompanied by musical instruments. The *Anthem of Europe*, which is based on the final movement of Beethoven's *Ninth Symphony*, can be heard in the background of the first and last track.

The book and CD appear as a mixture between a pedagogical medium with explanatory notes concerning the effects of making music together or learning from each other, and a children's book with child-like illustrations and simple songs. In the style of a non-fiction book readers learn about people, countries, music, dances, and customs.

The book and CD were published by Ökotopia, a publisher of pedagogical media, located in Muenster (Germany). The authors are Susanne Steffe and Hartmut E. Höfele. The latter grew up in Karlsruhe in south-western Germany, Susanne Steffe was raised in Brussels and Luxembourg. Höfele and Steffe live in Baden-Württemberg, both of them work as authors. Additionally, Höfele is an audio drama producer, singer and songwriter. Kerstin Heinlein contributed the cover picture and the 73 black-and-white illustrations of the book. Steffe, Höfele and Heinlein also produced similar books, such as *Around the World in 80 Sounds*, *Around the World with 80 Children* or *Children's Dances from all over the World*.<sup>6</sup> Some passages of *Europe in 80 Sounds* reveal the authors' role as narrator: they use the pronoun »we« and talk about their travels to several European countries. We may assume that the author and narrator are identical, since, for example, in the chapter

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6 German original titles: *In 80 Tönen um die Welt. Eine musikalisch-multikulturelle Erlebnisreise für Kinder mit Liedern, Tänzen, Spielen, Basteleien und Geschichten; Mit 80 Kindern um die Welt. So leben Kinder anderswo: Bunte Geschichten, Lieder und Spielaktionen; Kindertänze aus aller Welt. Lebendige Tänze, Kreis-, Bewegungs- und Singspiele rund um den Globus.*

on Italy they reference their own experience when they recommend using the method of solmisation (using syllables to denote the tones of the musical scale) as a listening and singing exercise for children's choirs.<sup>7</sup>

### 3. Representations of Europe

Opening the journey with a historical overview, *Europe in 80 Sounds* imagines Europe in the introduction as a geographical and historical entity with a long tradition of settlement, starting 1.5 million years ago, when first settlers migrated from Africa to southern Europe.<sup>8</sup> Over the course of time, Celts, Huns, Avars, Vikings and other peoples populated the area known as Europe today. The usage of verbs is striking: the introduction describes the history of Europe through words like »immigrate«, »enter«, »conquer«, or »invade«, for example: »The fact is that every intruder, immigrant or displaced person, wherever they came from, brought their culture with them.«<sup>9</sup> Accordingly, the search for an origin results in the assumption that there must have been someone who lived there *rightly* and was threatened by invading peoples. Thus the book offers an ambivalent perspective on Europe's history: on the one hand, it shows that Europe is an area that developed historically and did not always exist in the way we know it today; on the other hand, the cultural diversity brought about through the migration of different peoples to Europe is emphasised.

It is noticeable that countries such as Albania, Belarus, Georgia or Moldova are missing, whereas the authors dedicate a chapter to Russia and Turkey. The selection is therefore not based on a geographical understanding of Europe or the political structure of the European Union. Nevertheless, the EU seems to play a formative role in the image of Europe conveyed in the book, since the Benelux states are presented as founding members of the European Economic Community, and the *Anthem of Europe* on the first and last tracks on the CD also refers to Europe as a political entity.<sup>10</sup>

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7 Steffe/Höfele 2002, 70.

8 Steffe/Höfele 2002, 6.

9 Steffe/Höfele 2002, 6: »Tatsache ist, dass jeder Eindringling, Einwanderer oder Vertriebene, wo immer er auch her kam, seine Kultur mit im Gepäck hatte.«

10 Steffe/Höfele 2002, 31.

Besides the geographical and political dimension as well as the different peoples that settled in European areas, the book makes a cultural point about Europe: Greece is represented as the cradle of European culture.<sup>11</sup> What European culture precisely means or consists of, is left unclear. The introduction simply references the narrative of Europa and Zeus, which is part of Greek mythology and traces back to the poets Moschus and Ovid.<sup>12</sup> The story is told to explain the name of Europe and gives the impression that Europe is not just a space settled by different peoples with their diverse cultural traditions, but that there is some cultural coherence. »Culture« primarily appears to refer to language, food, music, clothing, and religion.<sup>13</sup> Comparing different national cultures according to these categories, the book emphasises the similarities among peoples. For example, the book notes that there are pancakes in England, France, Austria and Germany, they are just named differently in each country.<sup>14</sup>

In an attempt to think culture and nation-state together, borders are established, only to be torn down at the same time. Both through the structure of the chapters and the designation of inhabitants as Spanish, German or Irish, each with their specific language and cultural peculiarities, culture and nation-state are associated with each other. But at the same time the book breaks up this construction of culturally homogeneous nation-states, emphasising, for example, that there are different dialects in some nations, that in Belgium, Flemings speak Dutch and Walloons French.<sup>15</sup> In some respects, then, national unity is further differentiated and broken down into different »ethnic groups«.<sup>16</sup> Language thus becomes the intersection between culture, ethnic groups and nation. In addition, the idea of culturally distinct nation-states is deconstructed through the book's emphasis that culture transcends national states:

They call themselves French, Germans, Italians, Russians, Finns, Sami, Danes, British, Irish, Bulgarians, [...] Hungarians etc. But between the

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11 Steffe/Höfele 2002, 71.

12 Hard 2020, 11, 288.

13 Steffe/Höfele 2002, 9.

14 Steffe/Höfele 2002, 9.

15 Steffe/Höfele 2002, 31.

16 Steffe/Höfele 2002, 10.

inhabitants of the individual states there are not only differences, but also many, many similarities, because culture and music have by no means been delimited by the constantly changing national borders.<sup>17</sup>

The confluence of peoples of various origins with their respective cultural traditions is seen as the cause of cultural diversity in Europe, which is something from which Europeans benefit today without having to give up their distinctiveness.<sup>18</sup> Similarities and differences refer to language, nation, food, belief, and styles of music that are considered as identity markers. Interestingly, these markers function differently: whereas languages, nations and religions create difference, the authors suggest that music, food, and customs are similar in many parts of Europe.<sup>19</sup>

In addition to inconsistent concepts concerning geography, culture and politics developed in the book's imagination of Europe, music operates ambiguously, as an expression of cultural particularity on the one hand, and as a connecting element between different cultures on the other hand, as mentioned above.<sup>20</sup> The chapter on Poland is particularly interesting in this regard. It argues that Polish young people are orienting themselves towards the »west« regarding their musical choices. Steffe and Höfele explain the challenge this poses: »It is difficult to reach the real Polish [music] culture«.<sup>21</sup> This shows the book's understanding of culture as relatively monolithic, a closed container, with the »real« or authentic culture of a group or nation derived from its folk traditions. With cultural theorist Raymond Williams it can be argued that this understanding of culture represents the long impact of the romantic self-understanding of nations and their cultures of the 19th cen-

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17 Steffe/Höfele 2002, 9: »Sie nennen sich Franzosen, Deutsche, Italiener, Russen, Finnen, Sami, Dänen, Briten, Iren, Bulgaren [...] Ungarn usw. Zwischen den BewohnerInnen der einzelnen Staaten gibt es aber nicht nur Unterschiede, sondern auch viele viele Gemeinsamkeiten, denn Kultur und Musik haben sich keineswegs an den sich ständig verändernden Staatsgrenzen orientiert.«

18 Steffe/Höfele 2002, 6: »Aber gerade diese Mischung von Menschen und die sich gegenseitig befruchtenden Kulturen haben Europa schließlich die ungeheure Vielfalt auf relativ engem Raum beschert, von der heute alle Europäer gemeinsam profitieren können, ohne deshalb ihre ganz spezifischen Eigenarten aufgeben zu müssen.«

19 Steffe/Höfele 2002, 9.

20 Steffe/Höfele 2002, 5.

21 Steffe/Höfele 2002, 108: »Es ist schwer, an die eigentliche polnische Kultur heranzukommen.«

tury.<sup>22</sup> Given this focus on folk traditions, pop music and international influences with their global connections are elided in the book except for the chapter on England as the European centre of contemporary pop music.<sup>23</sup> Children's music, instead, appears to be a part of folk music.<sup>24</sup> This raises more fundamental questions about which cultures and values are considered important for children's socialisation, to which the book contributes: a country's past, perhaps experienced primarily through museums or books such as the one discussed here, or a country's present, in which the past is certainly relevant but not at the exclusion of contemporary developments?

In sum, the book constructs an ambiguous imagination of Europe. Europe is represented as a historical, cultural, political, and geographical concept at the same time, each with its own inconsistencies. The outline of Europe as a geographical entity remains vague. While the Mediterranean is understood as a *natural* border in the south, Iceland in the north-west belongs to Europe as a matter of course. In the East, Turkey and Russia mark the extreme points, while countries like Albania or Belarus are not mentioned as part of Europe. The book refers to the economic and political system of the European Union, but Norway, Switzerland and several Eastern countries, which are not members of the EU, also belong to the Europe imagined in the book. Additional ambivalences emerge from the separation into nation-states and the claim to be able to grasp them as homogeneous cultural units, while at the same time outlining similarities cutting across national borders.

Both the similarities and differences across borders, between people, cultures and countries, are repeatedly emphasised. This plays a significant role for the formation of identities. Thus, in the next section I will take a closer look at these boundaries, similarities and differences, and ascertain their role in imaginations of Europe and European identity.

#### 4. Identity

How we understand ourselves and perceive others, how groups are shaped, and differences characterised – these are questions of identity. In cultural stud-

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22 Williams 1985, 63–64.

23 Steffe/Höfele 2002, 18.

24 Steffe/Höfele 2002, 10.

ies, identity is understood as a cultural phenomenon, and hence it possesses symbolic and social implications.<sup>25</sup> Many different components influence a person's identity processes. These include, for example, ancestry, race, ethnicity, gender, language, or religion. These dimensions of identity are interwoven with one another and interdependent.<sup>26</sup> Stuart Hall conceptualises identities as »never singular but multiply constructed across different, often intersecting and antagonistic, discourses, practices and positions. [...] [I]dentities are constructed through, not outside, difference.«<sup>27</sup> The concept of identity raises fundamental questions about how individuals and groups fit, are co-opted into or excluded from communities and the social world.<sup>28</sup> Media representations contribute to identities and shape images of people and groups. Since the analysed book *Europe in 80 Sounds* represents people, cultures and a broad idea of Europe, identity can be a useful concept to reconstruct imagined groups, their peculiarities and significance for the imagination of Europe: Which communities are represented, who is considered as belonging to them, and who is excluded in *Europe in 80 Sounds*? How are differences constructed, and through them, a sense of »us« and »them«?

The perspective from which the book is written is an important aspect to consider. At first glance it appears to be the neutral perspective of an outsider's view since all countries are described in a similar way. Nevertheless, it becomes manifest that the content reflects a *German position*, both in terms of who tells the stories about other people, and to whom these stories are addressed: German authors, and a German readership. Some chapters relate to Germany directly, for example, the chapter on Turkey argues that many Turkish children sing German songs in their mother tongue, since many guest workers came to Germany from Turkey.

Many stories about European countries and cultures in the book are fed by clichés; what appears unknown to the authors and thus presumably also to the child, the implied reader, is represented by stereotypes. Stereotypes are »associations and beliefs about the characteristics and attributes of a group and its members that shape how people think about and respond to

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25 Reisenleitner 2001, 8.

26 Crenshaw 1991, 1244.

27 Hall 2009 (1996), 4.

28 Reisenleitner 2001, 8.

the group«.<sup>29</sup> The meanings that people ascribe to objects, other people or relationships arise from the interactions between perception, visibility and mental images. In order to be able to create meaning at all, it is necessary to distinguish impressions from each other. The brain tries to reduce the variety of stimuli which our environment produces, and stereotypes are one tool of creating order among our multiple experiences.<sup>30</sup> However, stereotyping is more than the ordering and classifying of impressions. Stereotypes are not just descriptive observations but reduce diversity and are connected to normative ideas about people and groups. They

represent a set of qualities perceived to reflect the essence of a group. Stereotypes systematically affect how people perceive, process information about, and respond to, group members. They are transmitted through socialization, the media, and language and discourse.<sup>31</sup>

Literary scholar Suchismita Banerjee notes that in children's literature, »[t]he simultaneous perpetuation and dismantling of cultural stereotypes has particular shaping effects on the construction of identity in children of multicultural societies.«<sup>32</sup> In *Europe in 80 Sounds*, stereotypes are used to clearly distinguish groups from one another and to assign a specific, unmistakable characteristics to each. As mentioned, Spanish people are called »fiery Spaniards«, the chapter on Luxembourg introduces the »equanimous Luxembourger«, »and the Tyroleans are known to be funny.«<sup>33</sup>

The chapter on Germany shows very clearly how self-perceptions and perceptions of others differ. While at least one song was selected for most of the countries, the chapters on Germany and Luxembourg, where the authors come from and Steffe was raised, are surprisingly short. No piece of music was selected for Germany, but instead the legend *The Pied Piper of Hamelin*. According to the authors, this is because German culture cannot be reduced to one or two representative pieces: »There are Swabian, Bavarian, Frisian [...]

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29 Dovidio/Hewstone/Glick/Essex 2010, 8.

30 Tajfel 1969, 81–82.

31 Dovidio/Hewstone/Glick/Essex 2010, 8.

32 Banerjee 2018, 192.

33 Steffe/Höfele 2002, 55, 44, 133: »feurige SpanierInnen«, »die gelassenen Luxembourger«, »und die Tiroler sind ja bekanntlich lustig.«

children's songs, plays and dances in abundance, which can be selected for a ›Journey through Europe‹ according to the occasion.«<sup>34</sup> Thus, what is perceived as one's own, German culture, is understood as diverse, with different regions and dialects and their respective traditions and particularities, whereas people, countries and cultures that are perceived as foreign, are reduced to unidimensional stereotypes. The internal diversity recognised in one's own group but not acknowledged in others can also be observed in discourses on culture and religion and shows that speaking and writing about »others« is never neutral but shaped by mental concepts and stereotypes.

Despite stereotypical representations, all countries are described positively and appreciatively. Nevertheless, some inappropriate statements also appear, especially in the section on Romanies and Sinti, which are named with the term »Zigeuner« (gypsies) not used by the communities for themselves. The authors are aware that this term is perceived as an insult by Romanies and Sinti themselves. However, they use the term arguing that etymologically, it derives from the Byzantine *Atiganoi*, which means »untouchable«, or Persian *Ciganch*, meaning »musician« or »dancer«.<sup>35</sup> The authors' awareness that this term is no longer used and their attempt to explain its origins makes it clear that identities are always a political issue, since they not only determine how we perceive ourselves and others, but in the worst case also mean different rights, duties and living conditions.

Identities are not only constructed through verbal descriptions and the differences of musical styles that can be heard on the CD, but also in the illustrations of the book. The illustrations show numerous figures, partially wearing what is – again, stereotypically – perceived as traditional dress, making clothing thus a crucial identity marker.

The chapter about Turkey includes an illustration of two men sitting cross-legged on pillows on the floor (fig. 1). Whereas one figure holds a glass of tea in his hand, the other man raises his finger that is decorated with three opulent rings. Both men have a moustache. The figure on the right wears a vest with a loose shirt and a hat that is known as a *fez*, the man on the left is dressed in an embroidered blouse and copped shoes similar to *Khussa*,

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34 Steffe/Höfele 2002, 142: »Es gibt schwäbische, bayrische, friesische [...] Kinderlieder, Spiele und Tänze in Hülle und Fülle, die für eine ›Reise durch Europa‹ dem Anlass entsprechend selbst ausgewählt werden können.«

35 Steffe/Höfele 2002, 94.



Fig. 1: Visual representation of Turkish men. Steffe/Höfele 2006, 74.

tracing back to Pakistani and Indian styles of footwear. He also wears a turban, whose shape, however, does not reflect any Turkish customs but rather is wrapped in the way men wear it in India. Conflating styles of clothes from diverse cultural contexts, this figure, thus, associates the Turkish population with a generalised idea of the *oriental* man.<sup>36</sup> By contrast, the dress of the man on the right corresponds to the time of the Ottoman Empire. The *fez* was the national headgear and men »from various ethnic and religious backgrounds were identified as Ottomans« by their *fez*.<sup>37</sup> Since Mustafa Kemal Ataturk outlawed the *fez* as a symbol of Ottoman decadence in 1925, it disappeared from the public sphere and has since become a symbol of *traditional Turkey* sold to tourists as a souvenir.<sup>38</sup> Taking up this traditional notion of Turkish people, the illustration consolidates the stereotypical representation of Turkish men. Different ideas of culture are mixed up: cul-

36 The term Orientalism deals with the perception of oneself and others regarding to a concept of Orient. Texts, images, and stories shaped an idea of the Orient, which is reflected in the representation of the Turkish men in fig. 1; see Said 1978.

37 Aktürk 2017, 160.

38 Deringil 1993, 9.

ture is historicised and understood as a way of expressing a romantic idea of the past. The Turkish present with its cultural diversity plays no role in the book; Turkey is fixed into the past, which is also expressed in the pictures. The oriental dimension is explicitly emphasised by clothing that combines India and Turkey in the same illustration. The two men appear foreign, and with a teapot and oil lamp as accessories, they seem to have come out of the fairy tales of *Thousand and One Nights*. The illustration thus refers to, and reinforces, a widespread image of the Orient that can be found again and again in children's media.

Just as the *fez* has become a souvenir, the wooden shoes in the chapter about the Netherlands are no longer worn today but have become a visual stereotype (fig. 2). This image is particularly interesting because it also illustrates the processes through which stereotypes emerge and are circulated through media. The illustrated girl represents not just any Dutch girl but is modelled on *Frau Antje*, an advertising character invented in the 1960s by the Dutch dairy association Nederlandse Zuivel Organisatie to promote dairy products in Germany. Explaining how to prepare dishes with cheese, *Frau Antje* became famous in German commercials. She wears a fantasy costume, consisting of a striped blouse with a neckerchief, an apron, wooden shoes and a white hat (fig. 3).<sup>39</sup> The character was developed for a German audience and heavily criticised by the Dutch as a stereotypical and outmoded image of the Netherlands,<sup>40</sup> not corresponding to the self-perception of Dutch people but geared towards the German audience of the ads. The figure of *Frau Antje* dates from the 1960s, and her presence in a German children's book published more than 40 years later, is probably due to the fact that the authors of *Europe in 80 sounds* grew up with this image. Through the transmission through various media, such as advertising, packaging of groceries and children's books, *Frau Antje* became and continues to be a symbol of the Dutch woman in the collective memory of many Germans. The fact that she was chosen to represent the Dutch is also further evidence for the German perspective the book implicitly takes, as discussed above.

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39 Elpers 2009, 7.

40 Elpers 2009, 51.



Fig. 2: Figures dressed in traditional Dutch clothing. The girl's appearance is based on Frau Antje. Steffe/Höfele 2006, 43.



Fig. 3: Wheel of cheese labelled with advertising character Frau Antje. Nederlandse Zuivelstichting.<sup>41</sup>

41 Source: <https://www.frauantje.de/kaesewelt.html> (accessed August 16, 2021).

In texts, music and visuals, the book and CD draw on and reinforce stereotypical representations of the population of several countries. People and their identities appear as fixed, and their characteristics are either *real* or *inauthentic*, as shown in the example of Polish folk traditions and contemporary music.

Most of the visual, audible, and textual elements refer to reductive popular stereotypes in order to designate different groups and their peculiarities. Thus, the book and its audio version contribute to imaginations of fixed cultures in which fixed identities are grounded. So far, I have mainly focused on cultural and national groups of Europe and their visual and textual representation. In the next section I will discuss the role of religion in the conception of Europe.

## 5. Religion

As mentioned earlier, the book comprehends music, plays, and dances as mediators of knowledge about »culture«, understood in terms of eating habits, customs, languages – and also religions. A look at religion is interesting because on the one hand, it is a supranational phenomenon, and on the other hand, it highlights different regional characteristics. Since religions offer different worldviews and myths of origin, they can provide interesting perspectives on imaginations of Europe.

In general, representations of religion in *Europe in 80 Sounds* relate to mythological tales and popular or folk beliefs. The myth of Zeus and Europa is traced back to ancient Greece and does not appear as a religious narrative, but in the sense of a common European cultural heritage. The chapter on Hungary asserts that Hungarian music has its origins in shamanic rituals.<sup>42</sup> The chapter on Ireland describes popular beliefs, such as fairies, elves, and dwarfs, and explains that the Celts worshipped personified natural powers.<sup>43</sup> It is noticeable that contemporary religious life does not play a role in the book. Rather, the concept of religion melts into a general idea of culture and customs. Since culture is understood throughout the book primarily as tradition, it can be assumed that religion as part of culture also belongs

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42 Steffe/Höfele 2002, 82.

43 Steffe/Höfele 2002, 24.

to the past. The book does not make an explicit argument about secularisation, but it is clear that religion does not play a significant role in contemporary European life.

In their study of traditional stories and metanarratives in children's literature, John Stephens and Robyn McCallum identify important cultural functions of folk tales which also emerge in the treatment of popular religion in *Europe in 80 Sounds*:

[R]etold stories have important cultural functions. Under the guise of offering children access to strange and exciting worlds removed from everyday experiences, they serve to initiate children into aspects of a social heritage, transmitting many of a culture's central values and assumptions and a body of shared allusions and experiences. The existential concerns of a society find concrete images and symbolic forms in traditional stories of many kinds, offering a cultural inheritance subject to social conditioning and modification through the interaction of various retellings.<sup>44</sup>

The chapter on Poland and Jewish traditions tries to fulfil exactly this function of transmitting central European values by narrating the folk tale *Moishe with the Fiddle* introducing the Yiddish song *Amol is gewen*.<sup>45</sup> The section alludes to the Shoah and past Jewish contributions to artistic, intellectual, and economic life.<sup>46</sup> The illustration of the corresponding story *Moishe with the Fiddle* pictures two figures with a violin and a flute in a stereotypical manner; their *kippot* suggests that both are Jews (fig. 4).

In this chapter, the authors return to their initial argument about music as promoting intercultural communication and are explicit about their intention to convey particular values through the included song: »Singing Yiddish folk and children's songs stands for tolerance and understanding. A sign of peace and the willingness to stand up against hatred and racism«.<sup>47</sup>

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44 Stephens/McCallum 1998, 3.

45 Steffe/Höfele 2002, 110–111.

46 Steffe/Höfele 2002, 108.

47 Steffe/Höfele 2002, 112: »Das Singen von jiddischen Volks- und Kinderliedern steht für Toleranz und Verständigung. Ein Zeichen für Frieden und die Bereitschaft gegen Hass und Rassismus einzutreten.«



Fig. 4: Visual representation of Jewish musicians. Steffe/Höfele 2006, 111.

In summary, religion appears in the book in two different dimensions. On the one hand, religion is understood as popular beliefs that belong to the past and are specific to a particular people. On the other hand, religious affiliation and resulting conflicts serve – again in an orientation towards the past – as an occasion to convey values that promote tolerance, peace and resistance to racism, which may be understood to be values that characterise European societies. With their emphasis on learning from each other in order to respect one another and to strive towards comprehension in order to live together equitably and peacefully, the authors assume that knowledge about »the others« results in greater understanding, tolerance and peace.<sup>48</sup> This approach is common to many children's books on culture and religion and in the next section, I will discuss in more detail the relationships between epistemology, values and ethics implied in it.

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48 Steffe/Höfele 2002, 5.

## 6. Getting to know others: Values and their epistemological premises

What does it mean to impart knowledge about people and cultures? What are the effects of such knowledge? As will become clear, knowledge is not a value-free category, but is shaped by internal and external perspectives and preceding mental concepts. But what does this mean for the representation of people and for the book's imagination of Europe?

The analysis of *Europe in 80 Sounds* shows that diversity in Europe is represented as something requiring explanation that is given particular value, instead of being normal and commonplace. In the demarcation of cultures perceived as different – sometimes also strange and foreign – the book constructs and consolidates clearly distinct identities. The representation via text, image, and music constructs communities primarily as identical with nation-states, which together are perceived as Europe.<sup>49</sup> The differences between cultures are appreciated and valued, yet at the same time diversity appears as a problem. At the beginning of the book, the authors state: »If people of different ethnic and cultural origins are willing to learn from one another, to respect each other and to strive for understanding, an equitable and peaceful coexistence is possible«.<sup>50</sup> This statement presupposes that life in Europe is or was not peaceful and equitable, but accompanied by inequalities and conflicts. We do not learn anything about the cause of conflicts in the book but encounter a moral imperative of living peacefully together. The book implies that peaceful coexistence in a plural society requires effort. The authors explicitly appeal to the reader to make this effort: we have to know a lot about each other in order to understand each other better.

*Europe in 80 Sounds* suggests that such knowledge implies basic information about language, geography, and history, yet common stereotypes are used to convey this knowledge. Stuart Hall calls the process of emphasising

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49 Political scientist Benedict Anderson 2006, 24–25, identified media such as the novel and the newspaper as important tools for representing nations as imagined communities in the 18th century. *Europe in 80 Sounds* fits into this discourse as the book tries to represent an imagined European community.

50 Steffe/Höfele 2002, 5: »Sind Menschen verschiedener ethnischer und kultureller Herkunft bereit voneinander zu lernen, sich zu respektieren und sich um Verständigung zu bemühen, ist ein gleichberechtigtes und friedliches Zusammenleben möglich.«

the differences between people »othering«.<sup>51</sup> Constructions of the self, the other, and the stranger produce and reproduce cultural patterns and classification systems, lead to inclusion and exclusion, and evoke images of identity and normality.<sup>52</sup> Even if *Europe in 80 Sounds* attempts to teach readers about foreign cultures and through this knowledge, convey values that promote diversity as positive, this approach must fail simply because people are not captured as individuals, but rather depicted through stereotypes. Text and pictures create a media reality that is largely shaped by a superficial view of the other and thus does not promote the knowledge the authors consider essential for peaceful coexistence. *Europe in 80 Sounds* as well as other children's media represent the epistemological paradox that they argue that we should get to know the other in order to understand and respect them but they draw on stereotypes that reduce the other and inhibit precisely the knowledge they seek to convey.

Most children's media suggest an understanding of knowledge as a neutral category that claims to be objective. But knowledge is not only cognitive and related to facts, but also emotional, tied to our perception and shaped by normative structures and power relationships. The way in which a country, culture, community, or the relationship between communities is represented, influences our imagination of ourselves and the other. Images and illustrations contribute significantly to creating impressions, to consolidating, supplementing, or transforming already existing ideas.

## 7. In conclusion: Children's media as a mirror of European ideas

My analysis has shown that *Europe in 80 Sounds* represents Europe as a heterogeneous, to some extent contradictory concept. Since brevity and condensation are necessary elements of children's literature, it is all the more interesting to consider, in this conclusion, which aspects of Europe are included and emphasised, especially in comparison with theoretical discourses of Europe and European identity.

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51 Hall 2004.

52 Ricken/Balzer 2007, 57.

In public discourses there is no consensus of what exactly Europe is or should be. This indeterminacy manifests itself in a plurality of images and views. Nevertheless, there is a drive to look for a common European core and to find a collective identity.<sup>53</sup> These controversies are also reflected in this children's book which represents Europe as a multifaceted, sometimes contradictory concept. It tries to highlight differences and similarities and thus helps to shape identities. At the same time as it reflects controversies surrounding Europe as a concept, *Europe in 80 Sounds* can be seen as a part of a positive European discourse that strives for a common cultural idea of Europe. This discourse developed after the Second World War and describes visions of what Europe is or could be.<sup>54</sup> The book represents diversity as a positive phenomenon and perceives it as enriching, reflecting the motto of the EU »United in diversity«. In particular, music is represented as a means to create coherence at the same time as the book notes the diversity of musical styles. Finally, theoretical discourses of Europe focus on developing a common memory and shared myths uniting the Europeans who, at the same time, are represented primarily as citizens of individual nation-states.<sup>55</sup> These tensions between a common European idea and sovereign nation-states are also reproduced in this children's book. Myths and popular beliefs, folk tales and customs reinforce the 19th-century image of nation-state traditions. Since similar customs and songs exist across nation-states, Europe appears simultaneously as a unity with a significant cultural heritage and shared values, and as a multilingual continent that thrives on exchange and diversity. But while in many pictorial discourses, Europe is constructed in contrast to others, for example Africa, the USA or Islam,<sup>56</sup> these tendencies cannot be found at all in *Europe in 80 Sounds*. The demarcation processes only affect the countries, cultures and languages understood as part of Europe. Thus, the book and CD follow the idea of understanding Europe as a unified, stable entity with room for diversity and exchange.

My analysis shows that *Europe in 80 Sounds* promotes an idea of Europe in a permanent contradiction emerging from the search for similarities and disparities, trying to find a common ground but not giving up on differenc-

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53 Drechsel/Jäger/König/Lang/Leggewie 2010, 12.

54 Paul 2010, 261.

55 Bondebjerg 2012, 650.

56 Paul 2010, 256–260.

es. The common idea of what Europe is relates to geographic, cultural, political and historical similarities that are emphasised in the book. But above all, with the claim to share common values and to live peacefully with one another, the book asks us to understand Europe as a place of diversity.

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# The Band Lordi as Rock 'n' Roll Angels

## Staging Religion in the Eurovision Song Contest

Anna-Katharina Höpflinger

Figures in demonic masks enter the stage and start their *Hard Rock Hallelujah*. The audience in the hall celebrates the performance and flags from different countries are waved in the auditorium. Many more viewers sit in front of their TV screens and watch the show. It is the year 2006 and the Eurovision Song Contest (ESC) takes place in the OAKA Olympic Indoor Hall in Marousi, a suburb of Athens, in Greece, the home country of the previous year's winner. The band Lordi competes in the final for Finland in seventeenth position in the running order. The performance of this band wins the ESC 2006 with a mixture of Hard Rock, horror costumes and religious references. In this contribution, I explore Lordi's performance as an example of the interaction between religion and music on a European stage, with a particular focus on the role of religion in this European popular show and its interplay with values. I argue that religious symbols are not only used in this show to create a fantasy world, but they also form an idea of European commonality and unity. I will first briefly introduce the ESC as part of popular culture, then analyse the use of religious symbols by the band Lordi and finally focus on the values that are associated with this European show.

### 1. The Eurovision Song Contest and popular culture

The Eurovision Song Contest is a music competition held among the members of the European Broadcasting Union (EBU). This show was created in 1956 and has been broadcast annually (with only one interruption) to Euro-

pean television networks since its inception.<sup>1</sup> The ESC was initiated by Marcel Bezençon (1907–1981), the General Director of the Swiss Radio and Television Company (SRG-SSR) from 1950 to 1972 and Chairman of the Programme Commission of the European Broadcasting Union from 1954 to 1969. The first ESC took place in 1956 in Lugano in Switzerland. Since 1958 the competition has been staged annually in the home country of the previous year's winner. All countries that are members of the EBU are eligible to participate. Currently, in 2022, the competition comprises 72 broadcasting stations from 57 countries from Europe, North Africa, and the Middle East as full members with a further 33 associated members from 21 other countries. Due to the large number of participants, a preliminary round has been held since 2004. Since 2008, two semi-final shows have served as preliminary rounds.<sup>2</sup> The so called Big Five, the UK, France, Germany, Italy, and Spain, however, are exempt from these rules and are each guaranteed a place in the final without having to go through the pre-selection process. The ESC is a popular show that is widely broadcast and watched by several million viewers via TV and the internet. Thus, it can be considered an important part of European popular culture.

According to Terry Ray Clark, a US-American scholar of religion, popular culture refers to »widespread and well-liked products, practices, themes, and values that have achieved their popular status as a result of their dissemination through the vehicles of modern technology, including mass marketing strategies«.<sup>3</sup> The German sociologist of religion Hubert Knoblauch emphasises that given its broad dissemination popular culture bridges the differentiated systems of a society and provides the common knowledge shared across them.<sup>4</sup> Popular culture can thus be seen as a kind of »glue« of a society; it conveys collective ideas and offers a space where values are formed, communicated and practiced. In this respect, popular culture indicates fundamental expectations and ideas and mirrors current issues, questions and social processes. As Clark points out:

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- 1 The only exception is 2020 because the competition was cancelled due to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- 2 For more information see the website of the ESC: <https://eurovision.tv/> (accessed August 30, 2021).
- 3 Clark 2012, 8.
- 4 Knoblauch 2009, 236–237.

a culture's popular ideas, products, and practices have much to teach its own members about themselves, including their religious assumptions, their foundational beliefs, and their motivations for certain behaviours.<sup>5</sup>

The ESC competition shows that popular culture not only functions as a mirror of a particular society, but also connects people in a transnational sense. The ESC addresses audiences of different nationalities, generations, professions, genders, and social backgrounds. It provides a common – in our case musical and performative – language across these differences and offers shared knowledge in a global sense.

Religion is an important part of the language and the shared knowledge of popular culture.<sup>6</sup> I understand religion here as a part of culture. With Clifford Geertz, religion can be considered as a symbol system, which »creates strong moods and motivations and provides comprehensive orientation and sense«.<sup>7</sup> Religion as a symbol system is therefore connected with an emotional level and with processes of meaning making. These processes of meaning making relate to questions of transcendence. Religion creates a reference to transcendence, making it symbolically apprehensible and communicable through metaphors, words, images, and music. This symbolic shaping of the world through religion does not happen randomly, but is elaborated by traditions in which religious symbols are formed and transmitted from one generation to another. In this way, religious ideas are symbolically condensed and passed on. However, such symbols are not tied to religious communities or organisations but are passed on in other cultural spaces, such as in popular culture as we will see in the following example.<sup>8</sup>

In the performances of the ESC, religious symbols play a role on different levels: on the one hand individual artists integrate religious symbols in their lyrics and/or their stage performance as we will see below. On the other hand, the ESC stages itself as a fantastic world that floats into a transcendent dimension. This tendency in dealing with religion is evident in the show's slogans. Since 2002, the show has advertised itself with different tag lines and themes. Some of them contain religious references and point to an exception-

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5 Clark 2012, 1.

6 On religion and popular culture see Lyden 2015; Schlehe/Sandkühler, 2014.

7 Geertz 1993, 90.

8 See Fritz/Höpflinger/Knauss/Mäder/Pezzoli-Olgati 2018.

al or even supernatural sphere. Such slogans include: »A Modern Fairytale« (2002)<sup>9</sup> or »Dare to Dream« (2019).<sup>10</sup> These emphasise the special nature of the ESC, taking this competition out of the everyday realm and turning it into something fantastic and extraordinary that is closely linked to national as well as transnational identities.

In the following section I will focus on the band Lordi in order to analyse how religious symbols are connected to the ESC, how this idea of something extraordinary is formed, and which values are thereby conveyed.

## 2. Rock 'n' Roll angels

When Lordi won the ESC in 2006 with 292 points – a new record at the time – they were the first winner from Finland, as well as the first participating Hard Rock band.<sup>11</sup> At first, it is surprising that this genre of music was so successful, because in 2006, as the Serbian musicologist Marija Maglov points out, Hard Rock »was miles away from the expected ESC (winning) sound«.<sup>12</sup> She argues:

Regarding trends, it is obvious that [...] the ESC stood firmly on its own traditional and expected sound and performance. [...] It was the music that could appeal to diverse European audiences. Thus, we can argue that until the »New« Europe era,<sup>13</sup> (or from 1956 as the founding

9 The slogan can be found in the last paragraph of the text on the following page: <https://eurovision.tv/event/tallinn-2002> (accessed July 26, 2021).

10 See <https://eurovisionworld.com/esc/slogan-for-eurovision-2019-revealed-dare-to-dream> (accessed July 26, 2021).

11 Lordi are sometimes categorised as a Hard Rock band, sometimes as Heavy Metal and sometimes as Hard Rock/Heavy Metal or Metal Rock. I categorise them here in the genre Hard Rock, but emphasise the proximity of Hard Rock and Metal. The band has a long history before the ESC. Initially formed as a solo project in 1992, Lordi became a band with several musicians in 1996. In 2000 they got their first record deal with BMG Finland. The first single *Would You Love a Monsterman* was released in 2002 and became a hit in Finland. For all releases see <https://www.metal-archives.com/bands/Lordi/2976> (accessed February 10, 2022). For the Finnish context and the impact of winning the ESC on Finland see Jordan 2014, 125–133.

12 Maglov 2016, 60.

13 Maglov refers here to Gerard Delanty and Chris Rumford and the post-Cold War context with new ESC participants integrating new musical traditions and genres.

year of ESC, to Insieme by Toto Cutugno's winning in 1990) the main tradition of the ESC is embracing the sound of mainstream music, styles and genres, capable of uniting as many countries in the form of »light entertainment«, as imagined or expected by its founders.<sup>14</sup>

Even if Hard Rock and Metal cannot be called »light«, in 2006 they already looked back on a decade-long history and were both globally and economically important music genres.<sup>15</sup> Nevertheless, Lordi's performance in 2006 appealed to a new ESC generation: the band impressed with its elaborate costumes, its Hard Rock song, its stage presence and its religious references. Therefore, in my analysis I will first consider the lyrics, as they explicitly play with religious motifs.

While the music in the song *Hard Rock Hallelujah*<sup>16</sup> is catchy, the lyrics are about a Rock apocalypse, or more succinctly »a rockalypse«, as described in the first verse:

The saints are crippled  
On this sinners' night  
Lost are the lambs  
With no guiding light  
The walls come down like thunder  
The rock's about to roll  
It's the Arockalypse  
Now bare your soul.<sup>17</sup>

In the song's bridge, the false prophets are overthrown and the true ones are raised up – under the moon (the night and the moon are typical motifs in Hard Rock and Metal songs):

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14 Maglov 2016, 62–63.

15 Lücker 2011; Wallach/Berger/Greene 2012.

16 The melody and lyrics of *Hard Rock Hallelujah* are written by Mr. Lordi. The song was released in the album *The Arockalypse* (Drakkar Records, 2006).

17 The quoted excerpts all follow the transcript on Metal Archives: [https://www.metal-archives.com/albums/Lordi/The\\_Arockalypse/105545](https://www.metal-archives.com/albums/Lordi/The_Arockalypse/105545) (accessed August 4, 2021). These first verses could be an allusion to Revelation 6:12–17.

All we need is lightning  
With power and might  
Striking down the prophets of false  
As the moon is rising  
Give us the sign  
Now let us rise up in awe.

In the chorus, the Rock 'n' Roll angels offer their Hard Rock Hallelujah. Hereby, Hard Rock is explicitly elevated to a tool of divine praise:

Rock 'n' Roll angels, bring thyn hard rock hallelujah  
Demons and angels all in one have arrived  
Rock 'n' Roll angels, bring thyn hard rock hallelujah  
In God's creation supernatural high.

The second strophe promises salvation to the true believers (i. e. the Hard Rock fans) and a transformation of society (the jokers as kings):

The true believers thou shall be saved  
Brothers and sisters keep strong in the faith  
On the day of Rockoning it's who dares, wins  
You will see the jokers soon'll be the new kings.

And the third verse reveals the messiah of this apocalypse, namely Mr. Lordi,<sup>18</sup> the band's singer, who compares himself to Lucifer as the fallen angel and includes a call for discipleship:

Wings on my back, I got horns on my head  
My fangs are sharp and my eyes are red  
Not quite an angel or the one that fell  
Now choose to join us or go straight to hell.

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18 Fun fact on the side: at the ESC 2012, Mr. Lordi was the points announcer for Finland in his monster costume, taking on the role of the herald.



Fig. 1: Mr. Lordi at the ESC 2006, film still, 02:16.<sup>19</sup>

Mr. Lordi sings these lines in a costume with huge bat-like extending wings (fig. 1). Especially during the last chorus pyrotechnical effects were used to underline the apocalyptic atmosphere. These lyrics declare Hard Rock to be a religion, coupled with an apocalyptic promise of salvation, the band's singer a messiah figure and the fans the believers who must decide between good and evil. The verses refer to religious symbols throughout, the matrix for this symbolism being a kind of common idea of Christianity (and not a specific community or denomination). The serious yet self-deprecating comparison of

Hard Rock and religion is quite typical for Hard Rock and Metal. Elevating music to the status of a religion is a theme one encounters again and again in this genre, particularly prominent examples being *The Gods Made Heavy Metal*<sup>20</sup> by the US-American Heavy Metal band Manowar or *Heavy Metal Is Our Religion*<sup>21</sup> by the Slovenian Heavy Metal band Metalsteel. The music is elevated to something transcendent, thus emphasising its importance in the lives of musicians and fans. This transcendence of music is often expressed through symbols from religious traditions.

19 Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gAh9NRGNhUU> (accessed July 27, 2021).

20 From the album *Louder Than Hell* (Geffen Records, 1996).

21 From the album *Taste the Sin* (Independent, 2005).

While the lyrics of Lordi's song take up references to apocalyptic ideas, the costumes, designed by Mr. Lordi, refer to a mixture of horror films<sup>22</sup> and other popular cultural ideas of demons, zombies, and monsters. The whole staging emphasises the performance's extraordinary (and non-everyday) character. Lordi realises the ideas of another world – a fantastic Europe – in which music, specifically Hard Rock, is a religion and separates the believers from the unbelievers. It is a playful transcendental horror fantasy of order in chaos and chaos in order.

The Greek ethnomusicologist Dafni Tragaki explains this as follows:

Lordi, following the tradition of Scandinavian metal rock, wished to be experienced as supernatural creatures living in a mythical cosmos popularly associated with a mysterious and timeless European antiquity imagined as a gothic fairy tale.<sup>23</sup>

This extraordinary world is aesthetically shaped by Gothic novels of the 19th century as well as by horror films and other popular cultural media of the 20th century on the one hand, and, on the other hand, by a Hard Rock and Metal tradition. In this fictional dream, the usual social hierarchies are turned upside down, good becomes evil, death becomes life, and, as Lordi sings in the second verse, the jokers become the kings.<sup>24</sup> This idea of turning hierarchies upside-down is pictured in the official music video for *Hard Rock Hallelujah*, which was released in 2006 and published by Sony BMG Music Entertainment.<sup>25</sup> In this clip, a shy and bullied Hard Rock fan (fig. 2) is empowered by Lordi so that she ends up taking over the school, followed by cheerleaders turned into zombies (fig. 3). In this clip, the beautiful cheerleaders are transformed into undead monsters, the monsters of Lordi become figures of liberation from oppression and dominant social rules. The whole scene of zombies in the high school again refers to horror films as for example *Nightlife* (David Acomba, US 1989), but in Lordi's video the sympathies are on the side of the »bad guy«.

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22 Mr. Lordi is not only fascinated by horror films, but also produced some himself. See [https://www.metal-archives.com/artists/Mr.\\_Lordi/11272](https://www.metal-archives.com/artists/Mr._Lordi/11272) (accessed August 6, 2021).

23 Tragaki 2013, 243.

24 This idea of turning hierarchies upside-down is also quite common in apocalyptic texts.

25 See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-6XI9tBWt54> (accessed July 27, 2021).

## The Band Lordi as Rock 'n' Roll Angels



Fig. 2: The Hard Rock fan (left) is bullied by cheerleaders. Official music video clip of *Hard Rock Hallelujah*, 2006, film still, 00:31.<sup>26</sup>

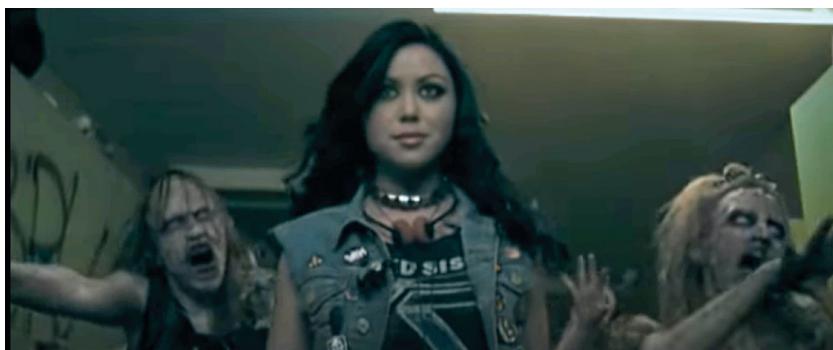


Fig. 3: The outsider becomes queen of her school, followed by cheerleader zombies. Official music video clip of *Hard Rock Hallelujah*, 2006, film still, 02:55.<sup>27</sup>

The lyrics and the staging create a portrayal of a specific and extra-ordinary fantasy. This fits the ESC, since a show is *per se* a fantasy performance. While the ESC propagates a world of glitter and »light« music, Lordi turn this upside down and proclaim an apocalyptic realm of demons and monsters. But both fantasies are lifted out of everyday life and form in their theatricality a liminal space.<sup>28</sup> We find here an artificial and theatrical liminality that is explicitly created to shape certain moods and motivations. This liminality creates a space for experimentation with cultural values and norms.

26 Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-6Xl9tBWt54> (accessed July 27, 2021).

27 Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-6Xl9tBWt54> (accessed July 27, 2021).

28 See Turner 1982.

As the official video clip for *Hard Rock Hallelujah* claims, it can therefore also empower people. The ESC is known for breaking stereotypical gender binaries at the level of performance and offering a playful approach to other possibilities of expression. Lordi do not blur gender; they rather blend common assumptions linked to religious worldviews and values.

With Lordi's victory, this reversal of familiar expectations is projected onto Finland as a nation. It is Finland, a marginalised region in the European imaginary, that wins the competition. Because the ESC »is an event ultimately linked with national prestige«,<sup>29</sup> this unexpected outcome had, according to the ESC-expert Paul Jordan, an impact not only on the European reputation of this country, but also on Finland's own national imagination: »[u]ntil its victory in 2006, Finland was one of the least successful competing nations in the ESC, finishing in last place eight times (nine as of 2009) and never reaching the top five.«<sup>30</sup> Lordi winning the ESC »engendered a sense of national pride and provided an opportunity for the commemoration of Finnish nationhood.«<sup>31</sup> This manifested itself in the frenetic celebration of the band after their return home from Athens, and in acts such as the renaming of a square in Rovaniemi, Mr. Lordi's hometown, in honour of the band.

The liminal theatrical fantasy on stage and in the video-clip performance, as well as of Finland as a new force of popular culture in the European imaginary, can both be seen as aspects of an inversion of current stereotypes. Lordi's song enhances a new idea of Europe, as Dafni Tragaki argues: »This spectacle of neomedieval horror-glam rock fed a fantasy of a Europe that could also be obscurely majestic, dramatic and eternal.«<sup>32</sup> With this song – so goes the thesis – a new idea of Europe enters the ESC: it is no longer the Europe of love songs, but a Europe that has shaped gothic novels, horror films and apocalyptic ideas. In this context it is interesting that at the beginning of the show the band's leader wears a top hat with a Finland flag painted on it. After the first chorus he takes it off. Does this indicate the change from the representative of Finland to the Hard Rock messiah? Or maybe from a Finnish to a European figure?

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29 Jordan 2014, 129.

30 Jordan 2014, 129.

31 Jordan 2014, 130.

32 Tragaki 2013, 244.

### 3. The Eurovision Song Contest, religion, and Europe

In Lordi's show in the ESC, Europe is represented in two different, but interlinking ways. On the one hand, Europe is a union of individual and clearly defined nations that participate in a broadcast competition. On the other hand, Europe is a common popular culture that extends beyond the borders of a geographical subcontinent. Europe is symbolised by a multitude of flags representing countries competing in the musical contest; at the same time Europe is staged as a transnational popular culture sharing music entertainment and genres. Especially on this second level, religious references play a striking role. They are part of the ESC as a transnational European popular culture with shared religious symbols and traditions.

The US-American ethnomusicologist Philipp V. Bohlman argues that the representation of religion at the ESC is interlinked with a staging of Europeanness:

Religion, however, has not disappeared as a marker of Europeanness in the Eurovision song. The winning songs in 2006, 2007, and 2008, Lordi's *Hard Rock Hallelujah*, Marija Šerifović's *Molitva* (Prayer), and Dima Bilan's *Believe*, explicitly employed reference to religious practice. Spiritual beings from angels (Georgia, Germany) to spirits of the sea (Portugal) to the symbolism of national religious holidays (Serbia) populated the stage in Belgrade.<sup>33</sup>

In more recent competitions this has not changed, and religious symbols are still relevant. A prominent example of this is the artist Tix, who took part in the ESC 2021 in Rotterdam representing Norway with the song *Fallen Angel*.<sup>34</sup> He sang the song clad in huge white angel wings while six demons with black wings, horns and pointed tails danced around him (fig. 4).

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33 Bohlmann 2011, 256. The ESC was held in Belgrade in 2008; Dima Bilan won for Russia.

34 See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F0r3vmGLzZU> (accessed August 4, 2021). The song lyrics are about depression and being rejected by a woman, and are loaded with religious references.



Fig. 4: The artist Tix as an angel. ESC 2021, film still, 00:11.<sup>35</sup>

Like in Lordi's *Hard Rock Hallelujah*, on the level of media these references to religious symbols as a transnational European marker can come into play in different ways: as lyrics, in the stage performances, as a slogan for the show, but also in the sense of lifting the ESC out of everyday life by presenting a theatrical space (evening dresses and elaborate costumes, spectacular shows and so on) and forming a liminal fantasy. Thus, through religious symbols a European unity is performed.

With these references to shared religious traditions and transnational religious symbols collective values are conveyed. In conclusion, I focus on these values transmitted by the ESC.

#### 4. Conclusion

The Austrian historian and ESC expert Dean Vuletic argues that the three fundamental values characterizing the ESC are diversity, democracy, and commercialism – and that they are closely linked to the political, economic, and social issues specific to that time.<sup>36</sup> The ideal of diversity is expressed not only in the various countries that participate, but also in the different

35 Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bp2kfhu8ZU> (accessed August 15, 2021).

36 See Vuletic 2018, 163–199.

languages, the different musical styles, and gender diversity (e.g. the winner of the ESC 2014 for Austria, Conchita Wurst).<sup>37</sup> The ESC thereby takes up current issues, as Vuletic points out, such as migration: »While migration patterns were always reflected in the ESC through the biographies of artists who have had transnational careers, after the end of the Cold War the contest more consciously reflected migration waves.«<sup>38</sup>

The second value according to Vuletic is democracy. A democratic ideal shapes the basis of the competition insofar as the participants are given the same stage and the same time for their performance and the winners are democratically chosen through an allocation of points. The fact that the Big Five have a small advantage only marginally breaks this ideal. According to Vuletic with the Big Five we are already in the sphere of the third important value: commercialism. The five states have, as already mentioned, a guaranteed place in the final. They not only have a financial stake in the EBU, but also bring in a lot of viewers for both audiences, the one present in the auditorium, but above all the people watching the show on TV or via the internet. If these countries were absent from the final the audience numbers and viewer ratings on TV could significantly drop. The ESC is an entertainment show, needing the audience, especially those in front of the TV and computer screens. And last but not least, it's a show that not only costs a lot but can also bring in money and prestige (or even fame), for the broadcasters and the countries winning and staging the contest. Especially for the winning artists, the ESC can be a prestigious and financially lucrative stepping-stone. So, the ESC is a show charged with consumerist ideals.

In addition to these values elaborated by Vuletic there are also religious values, for example a competitive, but peaceful coexistence based on love and charity and, as argued in this chapter, the power of a (religious) fantasy. These religious values are connected to European identity:

Religious images and themes do not so much challenge the secularity of the Eurovision itself. Rather, they draw our attention to Europe and its identity, tenaciously sacred and Christian even twenty years after the fall of communism.<sup>39</sup>

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37 See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QRUIava4WRM> (accessed August 4, 2021).

38 Vuletic 2018, 166.

39 Bohlmann 2011, 256.

The religious references form a common language and normative visualisation based on European symbols and traditions, but also on a popular idea of religion.

The symbolic representation is thereby closely linked to a fifth value, that forms one of the cornerstones of the ESC: unity. Or to use a term of Marija Maglov, »unity in diversity«; the fact that the slogan of the European Union since the year 2000, »United in diversity«, is very similar is certainly no coincidence here.<sup>40</sup> The common religious symbols used in popular culture, which are understandable to all, help unite the diversity of countries, people, genders, musical styles and cultural ideas. Thus, the staging of an extra-ordinary fantasy and of religious symbols is definitely system-strengthening in the sense of playfully performing a unified Europe whose tensions can be explored on stage and – according to the performance of the ESC – also resolved there. This is, of course, again a fantasy, but still one that shaped and continues to shape European popular culture.

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## Discography

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Lordi, *Hard Rock Hallelujah* (7th song of the album: *The Arockalypse*, Drakkar Records, 2006).

Manowar, *The Gods Made Heavy Metal* (3rd song of the album: *Louder than Hell*, Geffen Records, 1996).

Marija Šerifović, *Molitva* (Single: *Moltiva*, Connective, 2007).

Metalsteel, *Metal Is Our Religion* (5th Song of the album: *Taste the Sin*, Independent, 2005).

Tix, *Fallen Angel* (Single: *Fallen Angel*, Universal Music, 2021).

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# Festivals of European Film and Their Image of Europe

## Religious Complications<sup>1</sup>

Stefanie Knauss

### 1. Introduction

What is the Europe of festivals of European film? How do they define European films, and what are the concerns, the stories of Europe told in them? And what role does religion play in these films and their ideas of Europe? In this study, I investigate the image of Europe constructed through festivals of European film via their self-presentations and the films they screen, motivated by the coincidence of two observations made about Europe and film festivals: Jürgen Habermas (as well as others) notes the importance of a European public sphere in which citizens debate problems and decisions, as a precondition for the development of a collective European political and cultural identity, a sense of belonging.<sup>2</sup> Drawing on Habermas's notion of the public sphere, Thomas Elsaesser then describes film festivals as »the symbolic agoras of a new democracy«.<sup>3</sup> Bringing these two assessments together, one can then posit that festivals of European film function as a space where ideas and concerns of Europe are debated and negotiated – explicitly or implicitly – in the interaction between their various stakeholders: film producers

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1 I am grateful to Jacob Given for our exchange of ideas in the initial phase of this project. Thank you also to the production or distribution companies that have allowed me access to screen their films.

2 Referenced in Quenzel 2005, 11.

3 Elsaesser 2005c, 103.

and their films, festival organisers and curators, industry guests and media, political and economic entities, and not least the audience.

While certainly not the only space in which discourses around Europe take place, European films and their festivals are interesting in this regard, for two reasons: first, and on a general level, with its capacity to both reflect and construct reality and its affective as well as cognitive forms of address, the importance of film for the formation of individual and collective identity has been widely recognised.<sup>4</sup> And second, while the definition of European film is contested, as will be seen below, one way of characterising a film as European is its focus on themes and concerns relevant to Europe and those living there.<sup>5</sup>

Thus Jill Forbes and Sarah Street describe as the main challenge for European cinema »negotiating a cultural space for the fluid, unstable and ever-changing facets of European identity.«<sup>6</sup> The importance of cinema in this regard is also noted by Wim Wenders who, as Stan Jones observes, »warns of the supreme importance of retaining specifically European cinema, since without its own images, Europe will lose its identity.«<sup>7</sup> European cinema's importance for Europe is further reflected in the fact that films »as an expression of national and cultural identity« have been exempt from the international free trade agreement during the GATT talks in 1993,<sup>8</sup> and in the integration of media and cultural policies via article 128 on culture in the Maastricht Treaty,<sup>9</sup> as well as EU programmes for the promotion of film production and distribution, such as Eurimage or MEDIA.<sup>10</sup>

Here, I argue that the Europe emerging from the profiles of the festivals and their programming is marked by inclusivity and diversity, emphasising geographical and cultural dimensions, as well as an ethics of social justice and concern for those at the margins. While religion is not a predominant theme, it is nonetheless one of the voices heard in the public sphere of the festivals, and its presence and contributions complicate the secularisation narrative

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4 As noted, with a focus on European film, for example by Ezra 2004b, 218.

5 See Everett 2005a, 9.

6 Forbes/Street 2000, 48.

7 Jones 2005, 51.

8 Ezra 2004a, 16. The issue was not conclusively resolved, however, leaving it open to further negotiation.

9 Bondebjerg 2012, 650.

10 Forbes/Street 2000, 24.

of Enlightenment Europe as well as dualistic perceptions of religious traditions as markers of belonging and difference, and thus sources of conflict.

I will begin by briefly outlining some salient points in the theory of European film and film festival studies that frame this chapter. After a more general overview of the goals of festivals of European film and their vision of Europe, I will focus on the festival Crossing Europe in Linz (Austria) as a representative case study and discuss its construction of Europe through the analysis of its self-representation, media reception, and programming. The article concludes with the discussion of the complex role of religion in Crossing Europe's construction of Europe via the more detailed analysis of two recent award winners, *Beginning* (Dasatskisi, Dea Kulumbegashvili, GE/FR 2020) and *Oray* (Mehmet Akif Büyükkatalay, DE 2019).

## 2. Theoretical framework: European film and film festivals

The debates about approaches to European film and film festivals are, of course, wide ranging and often quite controversial. In the following discussion, I engage with only those aspects that are relevant for my particular research interest, the image of Europe developed through festivals of European film, and the role of religion in it.

### 2.1. European film: A reality or a discursive construction?

European film shares with Europe the difficulty of defining exactly what it is: films produced in Europe? But then, which countries exactly count as »Europe«, and what about co-productions with non-European ones? Or films set in Europe? But how about a US-production like *Before Sunset* (Richard Linklater, 2004), set and filmed entirely in Paris? Or is it films whose creators have a European background? But this, too, isn't a helpful criterion because of the mobility of cast and crew, both within Europe and beyond. Is it a question of style, then, with auteur or arthouse films the »quintessential« European film? Yet this leaves out of consideration a large number of European popular productions, such as *Der Schuh des Manitu* (Michael Herbig, DE/SP 2001), certainly not an arthouse film but one of the financially most successful European films in recent years. Does European film even exist,

as something different than the sum of national cinemas in Europe, or is it a purely theoretical category, as Wendy Everett asks?<sup>11</sup>

Similar to discourses about Europe, the easiest way to define European cinema seems to be by distinction from its other, Hollywood cinema: while Hollywood films work with plots organised in a question-answer scheme and with a focus on solving the problems posed to their characters, use faster editing and tend to align image and sound, European films are slower, tend to have a de-centered plot that explores the dilemmas faced by their complex characters whose motivations are psychologically driven but usually implicit, with ambiguous stories left open to interpretation, and might include self-reflexive or ironic elements.<sup>12</sup> Of course, these distinctions are not as clear-cut as it appears, either, and even more importantly, they implicitly associate European film with the auteur or arthouse tradition (ironically, developed originally in light of the work of Hollywood directors such as Alfred Hitchcock) characterised by these elements.

While much of the theory of European film seems to have considered it through the lens of national cinemas, Tim Bergfelder proposes to reconceive of European cinema as »transnational« to reflect the movements and relationships between cultural and geographical contexts.<sup>13</sup> Drawing on Ulf Hannerz, Bergfelder uses »transnational« as describing phenomena of various scale involving different actors<sup>14</sup> to understand the mutual exchanges that characterise European cinema today: co-productions with various national or European funding bodies, migrations of directors, crew and cast among various centres of production, and the experience of diaspora as »a mode of everyday experience and [...] a mode of imagination«, of those involved in the making of a film as well as its recipients.<sup>15</sup> European cinema in Bergfelder's understanding then is less a clearly defined category than »an ongoing process, marked by indeterminacy and ›in-between-ness‹«.<sup>16</sup>

European co-productions – an economic necessity but also promoted by EU media programmes – contribute to the transnational dimension of

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11 Everett 2005a, 8.

12 Elsaesser 2005b, 43–44; Everett 2005b, 17.

13 Bergfelder 2005, 320.

14 Bergfelder 2005, 321.

15 Bergfelder 2005, 322.

16 Bergfelder 2005, 320.

European film at the same time as they focus attention on cultural distinctness, reminiscent of the European motto »United in diversity«. Bergfelder thus notes that

in its contested position between national and supranational interests the study of European cinema can be seen to mirror the central debate of the European project more generally, namely to negotiate and reconcile the desires for cultural specificity and national identity with the larger ideal of a supranational community.<sup>17</sup>

In spite of these complexities of defining European cinema, two characteristics still appear as prominent: a particular style associated with arthouse cinema, as mentioned above, and a focus on socially relevant themes such as identity, memory, conflict, poverty, marginalisation, or disconnectedness.<sup>18</sup> Style and content are, of course, interconnected and reinforce each other: the art(house) or auteur cinema (problematic and slippery as the categories may be)<sup>19</sup> is associated with a stylistic preference for realism, abstraction, and/or artistic experimentation and innovation, which lend themselves to the exploration of reality, self-understanding, and socio-political issues. This is noted by Stefano Baschiera and Francesco di Chiara in their analysis of the Lux Prize of the European Parliament, which promotes arthouse cinema »not only [as] part of a tastemaking operation aimed at perpetuating the values of a film heritage. Rather, it is the style of European art cinema that seems to be perceived by European institutions as the most viable for tackling topics that are relevant to the contemporary debate on social rights in Europe.«<sup>20</sup> Thus arthouse cinema still stands for creative autonomy and the socio-politically engaged filmmaking which is taken to be characteristic of European cinema today, as Everett notes: »European films frequently adopt a sceptical view of society and the establishment, and their ironic gaze frequently seeks to provoke, challenge, and disturb.«<sup>21</sup>

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17 Bergfelder 2005, 315.

18 Everett 2005a, 12; Everett 2005b, 24–25; Orr 2004, 301. Religion as a topic of European film is – conspicuously but unsurprisingly – absent.

19 Bergfelder 2005, 317.

20 Baschiera/Di Chiara 2018, 247.

21 Everett 2005a, 12.

## 2.2. Film festivals and their functions

The description of European film as aesthetically challenging, socio-politically critical and transnational is mutually related to the theorisation of film festivals as aesthetic tastemakers and bestowers of prestige, as a public sphere for the debate of socio-political issues, and a transnational network of multiple actors in mutual and dynamic relationships with each other.<sup>22</sup> This reciprocal affirmation of criteria of excellence based in the European arthouse tradition (distinguishing both films and the festivals that screen them) is not altogether surprising given the Eurocentrism of the festival circuit (in spite of its more recent global expansion)<sup>23</sup> and its self-differentiation from Hollywood cinema.

The frequently used term »festival circuit« implies that film festivals are best understood not as individual, local events occurring independently from each other, but as interconnected in a transnational network with multiple and interdependent, human and non-human actors.<sup>24</sup> festival organisers, films, filmmakers, industry participants (producers, distributors), audiences, press and other media, policy makers, funders, tourism and the service industry all make up this network with their multiple interests, interactions with and impact on each other.<sup>25</sup> The festival network provides both stability, at the very least through a reliable schedule that allows planning in production and exhibition, and flexibility or surprise,<sup>26</sup> for example in the discovery of a new masterpiece or a new trend in filmmaking, necessary for the legitimisation of festivals as spaces of cinematic innovation and aesthetic quality. While the actor-network theory helps to understand both the functioning of individual festivals and the festival circuit in general, it does not account for the power dynamics that further some connections and inhibit others, nor for the neocolonial tendencies at work in the festival circuit.<sup>27</sup>

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22 For a brief summary of theoretical positions in film festival studies, see Iordanova 2013, 11–12; Elsaesser 2005c, 83.

23 The A-list of festivals curated by the Fédération internationale des associations de producteurs de films now includes – with a continued heavy emphasis on Europe – festivals in Asia, North and South America, and northern Africa, [http://www.fiaf.org/intfilmfestivals\\_sites.asp](http://www.fiaf.org/intfilmfestivals_sites.asp) (accessed August 12, 2021).

24 De Valck 2007, 32–35.

25 De Valck 2013, 98.

26 Elsaesser 2005c, 87.

27 See for example Falicov 2016, 210–212.

Nevertheless, it is useful to understand the role of the various actors in the network as participants in public debates around the idea of Europe.

The function of festivals in public discourses has been theorised through Habermas's notion of the public sphere and further developed to take into account the limitations to participation in the public sphere, for example by time or education, and the existence of alternative public spheres, counter- or subaltern publics.<sup>28</sup> Cindy Hing-Yuk Wong applies this understanding of multiple and transnational public spheres to film festivals: »[f]ilm festivals thus participate in the varied public and counterpublic spheres in the larger world, adding their distinctive contributions to the discursive formations of the public spheres and our conceptualization of them.«<sup>29</sup> The interactions between the multiple actors in the festival network create multiple discourses that may reinforce or contradict each other, affirm or critique ideological positions, remain connected to the local or national sphere and reach beyond it.<sup>30</sup> Elsaesser thus concludes that festivals »created one of the most interesting public spheres available in the cultural field today.«<sup>31</sup>

Finally, Pierre Bourdieu's impact on film festival theory, with concepts such as cultural field, cultural/symbolic capital, prestige and value addition, and habitus, cannot be overestimated. As participants in the cultural field, film festivals contribute to the production of codes that create cultural unity and identity.<sup>32</sup> Given the competitive nature of festivals, they attribute social, cultural and symbolic capital through access to networks, the promotion of skills, and the bestowal of prestige on films and filmmakers.<sup>33</sup> The »hallmark of quality«<sup>34</sup> attributed to a film through its screening or award at a festival (highlighted on posters and other promotional material) may then be converted into economic capital when the film is picked up for distribution, or the filmmaker is offered production funds for their next film. This form of value attribution functions in a circuit of mutual legitimisation: as the film gains prestige through being screened at a festival, the festival gains prestige through screening artistically and economically successful films, which again

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28 Wong 2016, 83–84.

29 Wong 2016, 86.

30 Wong 2016, 87–89.

31 Elsaesser 2005c, 101.

32 Quenzel 2005, 73.

33 Elsaesser 2005c, 96–97.

34 De Valck 2016, 105.

increases its capacity to attract films, filmmakers, audiences, press and industry.<sup>35</sup> The prestige bestowed to a film (and vice versa, to the festival) affirms the festival's role as tastemaker, which functions through reward (selecting a film for screening) and gatekeeping (gently keeping out films that do not fit the artistic norms).<sup>36</sup> Festivals thus cultivate a particular habitus of aesthetic taste and reception, nurturing an audience appreciative of the kinds of films screened at the festival.<sup>37</sup>

Given the general absence of religion as a category of analysis in film studies, it is noteworthy that Elsaesser draws on religious elements to describe the process of value addition as a kind of »transubstantiation« with the Holy Spirit hovering over the discovery and consecration of a new masterpiece or auteur,<sup>38</sup> and draws attention to the ceremonial aspects of a festival (award ceremonies, exclusivity, scripts of behaviour, hierarchies of access, etc.) as well as its singularity as an event.<sup>39</sup> These religious parallels – whether explicit or not – further enhance the festival's role as tastemaker and the importance of the prestige it bestows.

### 3. Festivals of European film and their construction of Europe

Of the many film festivals annually held in Europe,<sup>40</sup> several focus specifically on European film. To my knowledge, these are Crossing Europe Film Festival Linz (Austria), ÉCU – The European Independent Film Festival Paris (France), Europäisches Filmfestival Göttingen (Germany), European Film Festival Palić (Serbia), Festival del cinema europeo (Lecce, Italy), Film Festival Cottbus – Festival of East European Cinema (Germany), goEast – Festival of Central and Eastern European Film Wiesbaden (Germany), Les Arc

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35 De Valck 2016, 105–106; Elsaesser 2005c, 101.

36 Elsaesser 2005c, 96.

37 De Valck 2016, 109–112.

38 Elsaesser 2005c, 99.

39 Elsaesser 2005c, 94–95; Dina Iordanova (2013, 8) notes that already André Bazin drew the comparison between the festival at Cannes and a religious rite or liturgy.

40 A number of festivals of European film are also held outside of Europe; however, their distinct objectives, organisation, and perspective on Europe would require a different theoretical framework, and so I will leave a comparative study to future investigations.

Film Festival (France), Scanorama Film Festival (multiple locations, Lithuania), Sevilla European Film Festival (Spain), Trieste Film Festival (Italy).<sup>41</sup> I draw in particular on their webpages to analyse their profile and understanding of »European film« as indicators of the image of Europe they seek to communicate.

The festivals vary somewhat in how they delimit their focus: while at ÉCU Paris, only half of its 14 sections are limited to European film, other festivals focus on a particular region (for example Central and Eastern European cinema in Wiesbaden, Cottbus and Trieste) or just one or two European countries per year (Göttingen). Most festivals combine a transnational European focus with the promotion of a particular region, such as Scanorama with its section for New Baltic Cinema in addition to its general »European« programme.

Generally speaking, the festivals pursue three main goals: first, the promotion of a European cinema characterised by the aesthetic traditions of auteur or art cinema; second, the emphasis on films dealing with socio-political issues – with these two goals echoing Everett's tentative definition of European film.<sup>42</sup> A third objective is the festival's activity in networking and training, reflecting Elsaesser's evaluation of festivals as major players in the European film business.<sup>43</sup>

Focusing on the aesthetic aspect and networking, ÉCU Paris, for example, presents itself as »a unique platform for risk-taking storytellers« and emphasises »quality, innovation, and creativity in both form and content« of the films presented.<sup>44</sup> With its programme that highlights aesthetic criteria reminiscent of the auteur tradition (»bold and visionary filmmakers«)<sup>45</sup> and arthouse cinema (»new and thought-provoking cinematic creativity«),<sup>46</sup> the festival, like others, »aim[s] not only at a general audience appreciative of

41 I do not presume that this list is exhaustive; however, these festivals are visible on an international scale and somewhat comparable in scope, competitions, and organisation. Seven of the festivals (Linz, Palić, Lecce, Cottbus, Les Arcs, Scanorama, Seville, and Trieste) are organised in the network Moving Images – Open Borders (Crossing Europe n. d., Moving Images | Open Borders).

42 Everett 2005a, 9.

43 Elsaesser 2005c, 83.

44 ÉCU n. d.

45 ÉCU n. d.

46 ÉCU n. d.

such challenging films« but also at »agents, talent scouts, production company representatives, distributors, and established producers, all of whom are searching for inspiring projects and raw talent.«<sup>47</sup> Thus the festival functions both as a tastemaker that habituates audiences to appreciate innovative and challenging films<sup>48</sup> and an active player in the industry, providing possibilities for networking with producers or distributors, or training and professionalisation opportunities for young filmmakers.

While also attentive to aesthetic criteria, the non-profit association, Art Promotion, that organises the festival in Lecce emphasises its commitment to socio-cultural values as well as regional and European identity promoted through the arts, and film in particular, such as »il dialogo interculturale; il diritto alla libertà di espressione; la valorizzazione della diversità culturale; l'educazione e la formazione dei giovani in ambito socio-culturale; la lotta al razzismo e alla xenofobia; la tutela e la valorizzazione del territorio e della tradizione pugliese, la promozione e la diffusione della cultura europea e mediterranea.«<sup>49</sup> The focus on social justice issues is also noticeable in the goEast festival, which partners with Renovabis (a Catholic charity in Germany) and Amnesty International.<sup>50</sup>

One way to gauge how a festival defines »European film« is their submission criteria. The Cottbus festival, for example, accepts films whose »producer or one of its co-producers and/or director resides in one of Europe's post-socialist countries (including all successor states of the Soviet Union) or its neighbouring European countries (Finland, Greece, Turkey), as well as feature films dealing thematically with this territory«,<sup>51</sup> favouring thus a geographical and political definition of Europe with regard to the residence (not ethnicity or nationality) of the main figures involved in a film's production and a film's theme and setting. Les Arcs (as well as others) also specifi-

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47 ÉCU n. d.

48 De Valck 2016, 109–112. goEast is one of the few festivals that mentions explicitly the inclusion of both experimental, arthouse and mainstream films (goEast n. d., About).

49 Festival del cinema europeo n. d.: »intercultural dialogue; the right of free expression; the appreciation of cultural diversity; the education and formation of young people in the socio-cultural field; the fight against racism and xenophobia; the protection and appreciation of the territory and tradition of Puglia, the promotion and spread of European and Mediterranean culture« (my translation).

50 GoEast n. d., Partners.

51 Filmfestival Cottbus n. d.

cally includes Turkey and Russia, countries that are only partially located on the European continent, among the »European« films screened.<sup>52</sup>

While the festivals' definition of Europe is thus more than a little vague, many of them are quite clear about their »other«: ÉCU, for example, distinguishes the films in its programme from »commercial-hungry major studio projects«,<sup>53</sup> and the festival in Palić sees itself poised against the »globalizing power of cultural imperialism«, with European film resisting the tendencies of commodification and commercialisation at work elsewhere.<sup>54</sup> The festivals distinguish themselves thus from commercial (Hollywood) cinema as both a particular stylistic tradition (entertaining rather than challenging) and a capitalist system oriented towards economic profit.

This first overview of the festivals' profiles shows that the festivals held in Europe reflect the uncertainties around definitions of Europe by referring to Europe both in geographical, political or socio-cultural terms, although with a noticeable emphasis on the geographical understanding of Europe as a continent, with very elastic boundaries towards the east. It is worth noting that countries often considered as Europe's »others« (Turkey, Russia) are considered a part of Europe and included in the festivals as a matter of course. Echoing the debate around European cinema, they screen films characterised by the aesthetic tradition of innovative auteur or arthouse cinema, which thus may be seen to function as a shared European cultural tradition, and by their critical engagement with socio-political issues relevant to societies across Europe, reflecting »European values«<sup>55</sup> such as the commitment to freedom, dignity, solidarity and the appreciation of cultural diversity and intercultural encounter.

#### 4. Crossing Europe: A cinematic journey through Europe

A closer look at the Crossing Europe festival in Linz confirms these first impressions. I have chosen this festival because it is largely representative of festivals of European film in scope and profile, and because a sufficient

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52 Les Arcs n. d.

53 ÉCU n. d.

54 European Film Festival Palić n. d.

55 See for example the preamble of the Maastricht Treaty on European Union 1992; see also Baschiera/Di Chiara 2018, 244–245; Bottici/Challand 2013, 127; Quenzel 2005, 128.

amount of information (including an extensive archive of previous editions and media reviews) is available online.<sup>56</sup> For this analysis, I draw in particular on the self-presentation of the festival and its reports on previous editions. Excerpts from media reviews curated by the festival provide some insight into how it has been perceived by its audience.

Founded in 2004 by Christine Dollhofer and directed by her until 2021, the festival has developed from a regional festival to one of national importance in Austria, attracting also some degree of attention in international media (especially in Germany). Starting in 2004 with 143 films from 30 countries across 12 sections and attracting an audience of 9,000, the festival has steadily grown to reach an audience of 24,000 in 2019, with 149 films from 48 countries shown in 12 sections and an additional programme of 22 events with 140 industry guests.<sup>57</sup> With its focus on European film as well as sections that feature local filmmakers, the festival brings together the transnational and regional dimensions characteristic of European cinema, and European identity more in general.

The festival partners with a range of institutions and businesses on the European, national, regional and local level, most notably the Creative Europe – MEDIA sub-programme of the European Union, Austrian media partners, the Austrian federal ministry of art, culture, public services and sports, and other publicly funded cultural institutions in Europe, as well as various business partners.<sup>58</sup> It is interesting to note that the partnership with the MEDIA programme – the only link with an EU office or programme – is not highlighted in the festival's profile or visualised through the prominent placement of its logo. Also noticeable is the absence of other visual markers of the EU, such as the European flag, from the festival webpage: the festival logo emphasises the idea of »crossing« but does not visually express the idea of Europe (fig. 1).

With the festival's focus on »idiosyncratic, contemporary and socio-political auteur cinema from Europe« and its intended audience of »international film and press representatives and guests of the film industry [...] and the

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56 See the festival webpage at <http://crossingeurope.at/en> (accessed June 2, 2022).

57 The festival was cancelled in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic and ran at limited capacity in a hybrid edition in 2021.

58 Crossing Europe n. d., Partners and Sponsors.

# CROSSING EUROPE

Fig. 1: The logo of Crossing Europe.<sup>59</sup>

Austrian audience».<sup>60</sup> Crossing Europe includes the three main objectives shared by festivals of European film: emphasis on auteur cinema as the specific aesthetic tradition of European filmmaking, concern with social questions relevant to Europe, and participation in the film industry. The festival functions as a tastemaker and bestower of prestige by »bringing new positions and developments in film art to a wider public [...] that, all too often and despite international festival success, have no place in cinemas for economic reasons, and giving them an audience.«<sup>61</sup> It also serves as a public sphere as it raises socio-political issues (expressed for example through a Social Awareness Award for a documentary), and promotes values such as openness and cultural diversity,<sup>62</sup> gender equality,<sup>63</sup> and environmental and climate protection.<sup>64</sup>

The European cinema presented at the festival is described primarily in terms of its diversity: it is »[m]andering and fraying, inconsistent, contradictory, and really quite sexy.«<sup>65</sup> Nevertheless, two elements mark this diverse cinema: artistic creativity and innovation on the formal level, and attention to European issues and the European reality on the level of content or subject matter. The films are »aesthetically sophisticated«<sup>66</sup>, »artistic-eccentric«,<sup>67</sup> »[e]xperimental«<sup>68</sup> and references to European auteur cinema evoke a tradition of independent, creative filmmaking as a shared cultural tradition.

59 Available for download at <http://crossingeurope.at/en> (accessed June 2, 2022).

60 Crossing Europe n.d., About Us.

61 Crossing Europe n.d., About Us.

62 Crossing Europe n.d., Festival History 2019.

63 The unusually high number of films by women (50% in 2017), and focusing on women, is mentioned repeatedly in media responses; see Nora Bruckmüller, *Oberösterreichische Nachrichten*, quoted in Crossing Europe n.d., Media Response 2017.

64 Crossing Europe n.d., Green Event.

65 Markus Keuschnigg, *fm4.orf.at*, quoted in Crossing Europe n.d., Media Response 2011.

66 Stefan Grissemann, *Profil*, quoted in Crossing Europe n.d., Festival History 2014.

67 Crossing Europe n.d., Festival History 2018.

68 Eva Pakisch, *Raiffeisenzeitung*, quoted in Crossing Europe n.d., Media Response 2011.

Through this innovative film language, the films deal with issues of concern to Europe, and thus represent, for some critics, the »face of contemporary Europe«<sup>69</sup> or »the state of Europe on the cinema screen«.<sup>70</sup> Reviews note specific topics of concern to contemporary Europe, such as migration, democracy, nationalisms, and quite in general, »the political and moral drama called Europe«.<sup>71</sup> The films are described as »politically aware«,<sup>72</sup> and the festival overall as a »socio-politically engaged international film-festival«.<sup>73</sup>

What, then, is the Europe that viewers experience in the »cinematic journey«<sup>74</sup> that the festival offers? Most prominent is again the geographical understanding of Europe as a continent, reaching »from Iceland to Calabria and from the Atlantic to the Urals«,<sup>75</sup> supported by the use of metaphors such as map or journey. As in other festivals of European film, Turkey and Russia, in spite of their discursive construction as Europe's others, are considered as part of the continent. The reach of European film even extends beyond the continent via co-productions with Brazil, Qatar, or the US. With this broad geographical scope, the festival seems to serve an integrating function by »bring[ing] countries from the edges of Europe into the center«,<sup>76</sup> both literally, as Austria is situated in Central Europe, and figuratively, into the centre of attention of the (European) film world.

Often conflated with Europe as a continent is Europe as a political entity, the EU, even though it is mentioned more rarely. One reviewer notes, for example, that »European film is shown in all its diversity and even in times in which the European Union has to deal with immense backlash, the festival still feels a political obligation to the continent.«<sup>77</sup> This sense of an EU in crisis is also noted by another reviewer who describes Europe as »a politically and morally ailing continent«.<sup>78</sup> Nevertheless, the festival is also seen to

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69 Maria Motter, fm4.orf.at, quoted in Crossing Europe n. d., Media Response 2019.

70 Markus Vorauer, Kirchenzeitung, quoted in Crossing Europe n. d., Media Response 2017.

71 Stefan Grissemann, Profil, quoted in Crossing Europe n. d., Media Response 2017.

72 Stefan Grissemann, Profil, quoted in Crossing Europe n. d., Festival History 2014.

73 Tiziana Aricò, 3sat Kulturzeit, quoted in Media Response 2014.

74 Maria Motter, fm4.orf.at, quoted in Crossing Europe n. d., Media Response 2019.

75 Crossing Europe n. d., Festival History 2018.

76 Magdalena Miedl, Salzburger Nachrichten, quoted in Crossing Europe n. d., Media Response 2017.

77 Oliver Stangl, ray film magazine, quoted in Crossing Europe n. d., Media Response 2019.

78 Stefan Grissemann, Profil, quoted in Crossing Europe n. d., Media Response 2017.

communicate an optimistic view of Europe: »Europe appears young, strong, active and right at the heart of times.«<sup>79</sup>

The image of Europe is primarily characterised by (cultural) diversity, not to say heterogeneity: Europe is a »quilt«<sup>80</sup> or »puzzle«.<sup>81</sup> While recognising something like a »European cultural region with its imagined and actual communities«, a »homogeneous superstructure« should be avoided: »European means, in the best case, multiple sensibilities drawing from regional circumstances.«<sup>82</sup> The festival thus negotiates an awareness of a shared cultural tradition and shared social concerns with the appreciation of cultural and aesthetic diversity encompassed by the geographical-cultural entity, Europe, whose political dimension is not altogether absent but understated.

A closer look at the programming of Crossing Europe provides a sense of what these shared concerns of European societies are, and of the formal approaches taken to tell these stories. A thematic analysis of the synopses provided in the festival catalogues of the films in the main competition for feature films over the last ten years (2011–2019 and 2021) provides a first overview of prominent thematic clusters which is substantiated through the screening and more detailed interpretation of the eight winners (including special mentions) of the feature film competition of the last four years (2017–2019 and 2021).<sup>83</sup>

The festival films deal with a wide range of topics which can be clustered into three broad themes: family and relationships; crisis and conflict; and identity and belonging. Of course, some sub-themes fit with more than one cluster, and in addition, most films explore several themes from different clusters. These clusters thus serve primarily a heuristic function to create

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79 Philipp von Lucke, Film & TV-Kameramann, quoted in Crossing Europe n. d., Media Response 2014.

80 Andrey Arnold, Die Presse; Maria Motter, fm4.orf.at, both quoted in Crossing Europe n. d., Media Response 2014.

81 Maria Motter, fm4.orf.at, quoted in Crossing Europe n. d., Media Response 2019.

82 Markus Keuschnigg, fm4.orf.at, quoted in Crossing Europe n. d., Media Response 2011.

83 These include: *Beginning* (winner 2021), *Oray* (winner 2019), *The Man Who Surprised Everyone* (*Tchelovek kotorij udivil vseh*, Natasha Merkulova/Aleksey Chupov, RU/EE/FR 2018; winner 2019), *Light as Feathers* (Rosanne Pel, NL 2018; special mention 2019), *Antonio One Two Three* (*António um dois três*, Leonardo Mouramateus, PT/BR 2017; winner 2018), *The Gulf* (*Körfez*, Emre Yeksan, TR/DE/GR 2017; special mention 2018), *Crafter* (*Il cratero*, Silvia Luzi, Luca Bellino, IT 2017; special mention 2018), and *Quit Staring at My Plate* (*Ne gledaj mi u pijat*, Hana Jušić, HR/DK 2016; winner 2017).

some order in the diversity of topics, as they also reflect the themes and concerns in discourses of Europe and European filmmaking.

Issues related to family life are particularly prominent and range from external challenges posed to a family, for example through poverty, loss of employment, or socio-political tensions (e.g. in *Eat Sleep Die* [Äta Sova Dö, Gabriela Pichler, SE 2012]), or emerging from relationships within a family, between partners, parents and children, or among siblings, such as abusive relationships, co-dependency, illness or death of a family member, with their impact on the emotional and economic well-being of the families (e.g. *The Levelling* [Hope Dickson Leach, GB 2016]). Films dealing with family and other relationships of love, friendship or sex explore the human need for connection, communication and community, together with the potential threats that might shape them, and thus represent family and relationships as ambivalent, both prone to exploitation or abuse and as sources of support and affirmation.

This cluster of topics is present in most of the films screened for this study, particularly in *Quit Staring at My Plate* and *Light as Feathers*. In both films, the family represents an ambivalent space of support, love, and violence. In the Croatian film *Quit Staring at My Plate*, Marijana, the adult daughter, struggles to define her own place in life over against her oppressive, patriarchal father, her weak, disaffected mother, and a mentally disabled brother, with the responsibility as the breadwinner of the family resting heavily on her shoulders when the father is debilitated by a stroke. Moments of tenderness are rare and yet there is a sense of solidarity and mutual support among the family members. With her relationships outside of the family reduced to the bare minimum, Marijana searches for something like self-affirmation and autonomy in casual sexual encounters but ultimately does not dare – or need to? – break away from her family when she disembarks, in the middle of the road, from the bus that was to take her to a different life in Zagreb.

*Light as Feathers*, set in rural Poland, pursues a different take on family relationships by focusing on a teenage boy, Eryk, who rapes his girlfriend. Without absolving him from his responsibility, the film explores the everyday character of sexual violence and the conditions that enable it, in particular the co-dependency between the boy and his mother, which borders on the incestuous and inhibits the son from developing a sense of boundaries and responsible intimacy. The boy's incapacity to distinguish between gentleness

and force in interacting with his girlfriend is also reflected in how animals – cats, dogs, geese – are treated in the film with both care and casual violence.

This noticeable focus on familiar and intimate relationships reflects a desire for personal relationships, perhaps in particular in a context in which social institutions and the political community are no longer experienced as supporting the individual.<sup>84</sup> Thus the tensions in marriages, families and between lovers or friends in the films can also be read as a socio-political metaphor for the state of the societies the films are set in and, more broadly, the European context in which they are situated (e.g. in *Martesa [The Marriage]*, Blerta Zeqiri, AL 2017]).

The second cluster of themes emphasises a sense of crisis, conflict and insecurity, reflected in a few films in their (post-)apocalyptic setting (e.g. *Fallow [Brak*, Laurent Van Lancker, BE 2015]). The crises and conflicts faced by protagonists are many: most significant are economic ones, the loss of employment or housing (as in *Irina* [Nadejda Koseva, BG 2018]); political tensions or social unrest (*Saf* [Ali Vatansever, RO/DE/TR 2018]); existential crises of illness or death (*Dying [Morir]*, Fernando Franco, ES 2017]); as well as the experience of violence and/or crime, either as victims or perpetrators (noticeably, children and young adults figure strongly in these films, indicating a problematic lack of ethical structures that could guide their moral development, as in *Chrieg* [Simon Jaquemet, CH 2014]).

In *The Gulf* the crisis is environmental: a fire on a tanker results in a toxic odour that prompts those who can to leave the city, Izmir, that is slowly taken back by the mud of the gulf where it is built. Echoing the socio-political situation of living »in a period of slow decay«, as the director says,<sup>85</sup> the film also explores the existential crisis of its protagonist, Selim, who seems to have lost his meaning of life after his divorce. As his middle-class privileges become irrelevant in this apocalyptic situation (they no longer protect him from being beaten up by the police, for example),<sup>86</sup> Selim is increasingly drawn into the world of the lower class, who like him appear strangely unaffected by the noxious air, and seems to find a sense of belonging in their community.

<sup>84</sup> This resonates with John Orr's (2004, 300–301) observation of disconnectedness as a key motif in contemporary European cinema.

<sup>85</sup> Economou 2017.

<sup>86</sup> As noted by Jessica King (2018) in her review of the film.



Fig. 2: Hope in the face of crisis? Selim (left) with others above Izmir. *The Gulf* (Emre Yeksan, TR/DE/GR 2017), film still, 1:45:46.<sup>87</sup>

While crisis is, of course, an important dramaturgical device in most plots, this thematic cluster indicates crisis, conflict and insecurity as a primary experience and concern in Europe, contradicting the ideal of Europe (especially of the EU) as promoting peace, freedom, justice, equality, stability and prosperity. Although the films show a Europe that is falling short of these ideals, they also evoke a sense of promise: *The Gulf* ends on an understated but hopeful note of serenity and peace as Selim and a motley group of people gather on a hill above the city (fig. 2).

The third cluster of topics relates to issues of identity, which also include individual and collective past and history, as well as the question of the purpose or meaning of one's life, reflecting the continued debate about what it is that characterises collective European identity, the historical memory that shapes it as well as the purpose that orients its future. A range of aspects of identity, faced in particular by young protagonists, appear across the films, from gender (a significant topic; e.g. in *Pari* [Siamak Etemadi, GR/FR/NE/BG 2020]) to sexuality (especially queer sexual identities; such as in *Radiant Sea* [*Lichtes Meer*, Stefan Butzmühlen, DE 2015]), ethnicity (often in the context of migration and the tensions between different cultures or traditions;

<sup>87</sup> Source: <https://vimeo.com/281059048> (accessed September 26, 2022).

e.g. in *What Will People Say?* [*Hva vil folk si?*, Iram Haq, NO/DE/SE 2017]), religion (*Djeca* [*Children of Sarajevo*, Aida Begić, BA/DE/FR/TR 2012]), class (especially lower/working class and middle class with their respective challenges; *Archipelago* [Joanna Hogg, GB 2010]), and to a limited degree, physical and mental ability (*Oasis* [*Oaza*, Ivan Ikić, RS/SI/NE/FR/BA 2020]). In several films, characters seem to experience a sense of aimlessness and seek meaning and purpose (e.g. *Lifelong* [*Hayatboyu*, Aslı Özge, TR/DE/NE 2013]). Some protagonists attempt to deal with this question of identity and meaning by revisiting their past in order to understand their present (and perhaps future; e.g. in *Family Tour* [Liliana Torres, ES 2013]). More rarely (which is somewhat surprising given the importance of history in discourses about Europe), films engage the question of identity on the collective level, exploring the past of a society or nation (e.g. *Caracremada* [Lluís Galter, ES 2010]).

*The Man Who Surprised Everyone* and *Antonio One Two Three* focus on different sub-themes in this cluster. In *The Man Who Surprised Everyone*, set in Siberia, Egor is diagnosed with terminal cancer, and given that neither modern medicine nor shamanic rituals offer any hope, he is inspired by the folk tale of a drake who disguises himself as a female duck to escape Death. Like the drake, Egor dresses as a woman without offering any explanation in a kind of ritualistic silence. The village community reacts to his/her transgressive behaviour with exclusion – symbolised in frequent shots of fences marking the boundary between the community and the outsider (fig. 3) – and physical as well as sexual violence. Only eventually – yet even more significantly because she is still not given any explanation – does his wife accept Egor's new identity, and in the end, the effectiveness of Egor's mythical transformation with its sacrifices is affirmed when his tumor disappears. While the film critiques a society afraid of and reacting violently to otherness and diversity in particular with regard to gender identity, it also suggests that even in traditionally patriarchal societies, there are elements that encourage a more fluid understanding of identity, thus underlining the subversive power of mythologies.

*Antonio One Two Three* deals with the question of identity and meaning in a poetic way as Antonio meanders through his life, love relationships, and city (Lisbon) without a clear sense of direction. The film's non-linear treatment of time and narrative – spiralling, perhaps, through different times or

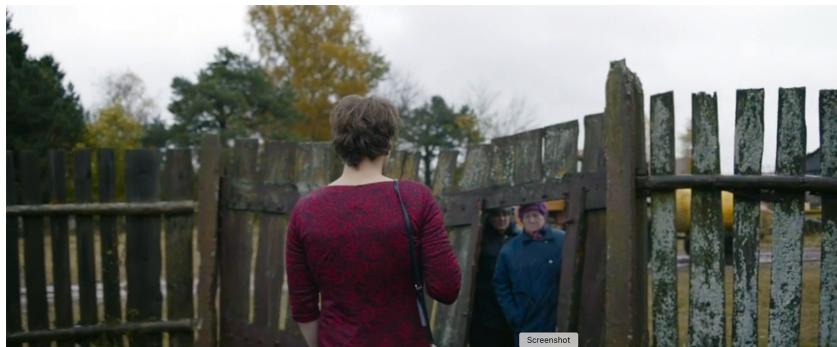


Fig. 3: Fences as markers of being an outsider. *The Man Who Surprised Everyone* (Natasha Merkulova/Aleksey Chupov, RU/EE/FR 2018), film still, 1:06:16.<sup>88</sup>

sequences of events, or representing time as synchronicity – suggests that the narrative of one's life is not a causal sequence of events with a clear connection between a past that shapes one's present and leads into a well-defined future. Its focus on performance and theatre indicates that perhaps all identity is performative, and reality only another version of theatre.

The films echo thus the struggles with identity and belonging, as well as experiences of exclusion and violence, that shape discourses about Europe, emphasising in their treatment of these questions the dignity of all persons, and diversity as a gift, not a problem. In this negotiation of identity and difference, these films, and cinema more broadly, play an essential role, as Thomas Elsaesser notes, because of »that capacity so unique to cinema, of seeing through the eyes of others into the mind of the self.«<sup>89</sup>

Formal elements are noted more rarely in the film synopses, yet both the few mentions present and the films screened for this study confirm the festival's focus on art or auteur films. Noticeable is a shared preference for realist filmmaking, yet with elements of formal abstraction or surrealism, which together create ambiguous, open texts requiring the engagement of viewers in their interpretation(s). The films reflect the European arthouse tradition in distinction from Hollywood cinema mentioned above: they show a preference for long takes, little camera movement and slow editing, complex yet elusive characters, and plots that are concerned with the exploration of

88 Accessed on Amazon Prime.

89 Elsaesser 2005a, 511.

dilemmas rather than their solution. Rather than offering an all-seeing perspective, they tend to emphasise the limitations of the viewer's position in front of the screen, for example through a frontal camera position during dialogue scenes or by using the off to create a sense of not-knowing in viewers and to allow characters the autonomy to move as if unrestrained by the frame. The resulting misalignment of sound and image can also express a socially subversive shift in attention, used very effectively in *The Gulf*, when in several scenes the camera focuses on secondary working-class characters (a server, maid or housekeeper) while the conversation among the middle-class protagonists – supposedly the centre of both social and narrative attention – continues in the off.

Close-ups or medium close-ups focus attention on a character or object through which the story is told, but their effect is ambiguous: they invite immersion into the story and identification with characters, but because the acting is mostly understated with minimal facial expressiveness, despite the visual closeness to a character, their feelings or psychological motivations are difficult to »read«. In addition, close-ups may result in a sense of disorientation because they make it hard to situate characters in space. Thus, somewhat paradoxically, the close-ups have the same effect as the more distanced camera position used in some films of refusing an immersive film experience and yet inviting viewers to explore and try to understand the characters. Frequent shots through doorways or windows as well as the motif of fences create a frame-within-the-frame which boxes the character in and emphasises a sense of separation, but at times also suggests that there might be other possibilities for them, beyond the frame. Given these framing preferences, the occasional totals are even more effective as they expand the horizon, for example for the protagonist in *Quit Staring at My Plate*, whose narrow life between work and family seems to open up with new possibilities in a total across the city and sea.

The realist, even documentary-like approach is emphasised by on-location shooting (especially noticeable in *Crater* where in the cramped spaces of the family home the camera seems to invade the personal space of the characters, reflecting the father's attempts to groom his daughter into a child star in the Neapolitan music scene without much regard for her own ambitions), hand-held camera, minimal additional lighting, and the somewhat bleached colours that also emphasise the not always picture-perfect reality

in which the protagonists live (especially in *Antonio One Two Three* and *Quit Staring at My Plate*, both of which are set in tourist destinations, Lisbon and the Croatian seaside town of Sibenik, yet focus on parts of the city tourists do not usually see). In addition, the use of non-professional actors and, in some cases (such as *Crater* and *Light as Feathers*), their participation in the development of the scripts blur the distinction between documentary and fiction without dissolving it.

However, the films do not pretend to simply show reality »as it is«, but their realist, observational style of filmmaking is combined with noticeable artifice. The films represent a reality that is very clearly constructed, their images are carefully chosen and sometimes designed like tableaux that have an independent value beyond just being a tiny part of a visual narrative – for example the concluding shot of a lemon tree in Antonio's backyard, shot through the open door of his room in a beautiful arrangement of objects and colours (fig. 4) – and the restrained camera movement and slow editing focus attention in a meditative quality. In addition, the films sometimes include surreal elements – in *The Gulf*, for example, a turtle appears twice incongruously in a mall, contrasting the animal with the bright artificiality of the shopping centre – or use exaggerated, caricatured characters next to psychologically nuanced ones, as in *Quit Staring at My Plate*, where the director consciously uses the grotesque to temper the bleakness of the reality she shows.<sup>90</sup>

Through these formal elements, the films elude definitive interpretations: they show but do not explain, they observe but do not judge. Expositions are minimal, often leaving the viewer unsure for a while about characters or even what the film is about, causalities are unclear, psychological motivations are not explained, endings remain inconclusive. The films allow for multiple interpretations, and even demand them: because the film does not provide an explanation or evaluation, viewers have to engage with it, draw their own conclusions and take responsibility for them. And yet these conclusions will remain necessarily provisional because of the ambiguities of plot and characters.

In spite of the diversity of topics and formal approaches, the films screened at the festival thus reflect the two characteristics of European film mentioned above, a rootedness in the arthouse tradition of European filmmaking and a

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90 Jušić n. d.



Fig. 4: Still life with lemon tree. *Antonio One Two Three* (Leonardo Mouramateus, PT/BR 2017), film still, 1:34:15.<sup>91</sup>

focus on topics of concern to Europe, in particular questions of family and relationships, crises and conflicts, and identity and meaning. In their treatment of these issues, the films emphasise the perspective of those at the margins, either geographically, in films set at the margins of Europe, or socially, by focusing on protagonists experiencing social exclusion, economic hardships, or prejudice. With their formal emphasis on realism and open-ended narratives, the films encourage viewers to take responsibility with regard to the issues raised in a film and thus contribute to the promotion of values such as dignity, social justice, solidarity, diversity and the common good, which may be considered as shared »European« values.

In the next section, I will focus specifically on the role of religion in these images of Europe and the values promoted through the films.

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91 Accessed on Amazon Prime.

## 5. Religion in Europe's cinema: A close-up

The (relatively few) films whose synopses mention religion explicitly as a central plot element focus on various Christian denominations and Islam (with the noticeable absence of references to Judaism). At first glance, this might be taken as a reflection of discourses about Christianity as the root of European identity and values, and about Islam as Europe's threatening other. Chiara Bottici and Benoît Challand note this »biased and selective use that can be made of religion as a *positive* marker of an alleged European community by stressing a *negative* view of an other«.<sup>92</sup> However, as will be seen in the more detailed discussion below, the films screened at Crossing Europe complicate this neat dualism and instead show that either religious tradition has positive and problematic aspects, may provide a sense of belonging, identity and moral structure, or be the source of conflict or restraints that delimit an individual's agency.

Screening a cross section of films (winners and special mentions) for this study rather than a pre-selection of those focusing, according to the synopsis, on religion, allows one to notice another way in which religion is present, namely as an unmentioned background motif that functions as an element in the description of the characters' social and cultural context or as an implicit frame of reference. This second mode of religious presence reflects the mostly unconscious role that religions play today in the development of European culture, identity and value. This is the case, for example, in *Light as Feathers* where a casual moment of prayer before dinner and a maypole in the form of a cross signal the predominantly Catholic culture of Poland where the film is set, without making religion a prominent dramaturgical device. In fact, the director, Rosanne Pel, explicitly resists the religious interpretation of the story of guilt, responsibility and forgiveness she explores in her film: »Yes, that was a clear choice. I'm not religious, and I don't view forgiveness as an act of God that occurs outside of human actions. Instead, I see it as something that is only possible between human beings.«<sup>93</sup> Nevertheless, it is noticeable that in the final scene, just before Eryk meets the baby conceived when he raped his girlfriend – a scene which might, very cautiously, be described as the beginning of forgiveness – he is shown pausing at the

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<sup>92</sup> Bottici/Challand 2013, 163 (emphasis in the original).

<sup>93</sup> Economou 2018.



Fig. 5: Forgiveness? Eryk pauses at the maypole. *Light as Feathers* (Rosanne Pel, NL 2018), film still, 1:21:21.<sup>94</sup>

cross-shaped maypole (fig. 5). This suggests a possible reading to me that is open to a transcendental dimension of forgiveness, even if its agents are clearly human, reflecting the Christian theological understanding of forgiveness at the intersection of the human and divine.

A closer analysis of two recent winners dealing with religion in an explicit way provides a better sense of how the films complicate discourses about the presence and role of religion in Europe.

### 5.1. *Beginning*: Religion as a source of oppression, inequality and violence

Dea Kulumbegashvili's feature debut opens with a long, static take from the back of a room apparently serving as a religious space. First a woman and some children enter, and then members of the congregation. The service begins with a sermon on the story of Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac, until it is interrupted when molotov cocktails are thrown into the room and the congregation desperately tries to get away from the fire. Several key elements are introduced in this first sequence: on the formal level, the prevalence of

<sup>94</sup> Source: courtesy of Family Affair Films (<https://www.familyaffairfilms.nl/>).

long, static takes and the use of the off, and on the thematic level, the theme of violence and religious discrimination (the community is identified implicitly as Jehovah's Witnesses), of punishment (the children are made to stand facing the wall because they got their clothes dirty), and of sacrifice, obedience and faith (the sermon). Yet the religious tensions as a source of this initial act of violence fade into the background and are mentioned only in passing in the rest of the film which instead focuses on Yana, the pastor's wife.

In fact, the director notes in an interview that the film is not about religion but about a woman's existence.<sup>95</sup> Religious elements and theological motifs nevertheless play a major role in it. Religious discrimination and violence serve as a frame for Yana's experience of being twice an outsider;<sup>96</sup> both as a member of the community, whose difference from the village population is visualised through the spatial distance of the prayer hall located somewhere out of town, and within her community: even though as the pastor's wife, she is at the centre of her community, welcomes the congregants and leads the religious instruction of the children preparing for baptism, there is also a sense of distance, dissatisfaction and alienation, emerging especially in her conversations with her husband.

The film traces Yana's vulnerability and exposure to patriarchal violence, most obviously by Alex (who might or might not be a detective investigating the attack), who harasses Yana at first verbally and then escalates to rape, as well as, less intensely, by other men: her husband, David, for whom she gave up her career as an actress and who »created« her, as he says, or, when she was a child, her father who threw mother and baby out of the house on a cold February night because Yana was crying too much.

Although patriarchal power and gendered violence are not directly religiously justified in the film, it still draws that connection with its emphasis on the theological themes of sin and punishment, good and evil, temptation and obedience. It is apparent that Yana has internalised these moral expectations also for her self-understanding as a wife and mother. Made palpable through the box-like Academy ratio of the film, she is locked in by religious and her own gender role expectations and the fatal progression from temptation to guilt and punishment.<sup>97</sup> Given this frame of understanding,

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<sup>95</sup> Romney 2021.

<sup>96</sup> Romney 2021.

<sup>97</sup> Girish 2021.

it seems unavoidable that when David is sent a recording of Alex harassing Yana, he is angry at her, not Alex, for failing his expectations, and her only reaction is to ask for punishment. Forgiveness does not seem to be a possibility, neither on the religious nor the personal level: while David wants to forgive Yana (even though one might well argue that it is not she who needs to be forgiven), Yana resigns: »You won't be able to.« Thus the only way out seems to be a sacrifice as the ultimate act of faith, obedience and punishment, closing the circle to the opening scene with the sermon about Abraham and Isaac:<sup>98</sup> calmly, Yana prepares a smoothie, adds a bottle of pills to it, and gives it to her son, whose innocence had been stressed before through shots of him sleeping in white night clothes. However, the film does not end with this sacrifice but opens up a space of perhaps divine justice or transformation when in the enigmatic concluding scene, Alex is shown lying down on a sandy surface cracked by dryness, and – in contrast to the otherwise realistic even if stylised form of the film – slowly turns into sand and then trickles into the ground until only a very small heap of sand is left of him.

Not only the ending but the film as a whole is ambiguous and inconclusive, with gaps and uncertainties created through the narrative as well as its visual form: often, it is difficult to identify the characters in a scene because of low lighting or the framing, with things happening in the off but not shown or explained. According to the director,<sup>99</sup> this reflects the experience of not-knowing that marks everyday life, but it also creates a sense of mystery that invites viewers into the film, to engage with the ethical and theological problems it poses and negotiate values such as gender equality, justice and religious tolerance with its story of the internalisation of a patriarchal gender order, punitive theology and unmotivated violence. The film is also challenging on an aesthetic level with its extremely slow rhythm and visual form. The long, static take of the rape scene, even though filmed at a distance, is hard to bear, perhaps even harder because of the contrast between the brutality of what is happening and the beauty of the river where it happens, with purple flowers standing out in the foreground in the otherwise blueish-dark image. And yet with its slow rhythm, the film also develops a sort of meditative power, culminating in a six-minute shot of Yana, lying unmoving on the ground in a forest or park, when diegetic elements such

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98 Schenk n. d.

99 Romney 2021.

as her son asking what she's doing or the sounds of birds slowly fade away leaving only the image of her still face shot from above, perfectly centred in the frame, exuding – at least to me – a sense of calm serenity. Thus the film functions, on an experiential and intellectual level, as a meditation on existence and its fragility and an exploration of the social and religious conditions that may exacerbate this fragility or protect it.

Although – or perhaps because – as a Georgian (and French) production by a Georgian director and set in Georgia, the film is situated at the geographical margins of Europe, it participates in the discourse about Europe in several ways. Most remarkable, perhaps, is the small European flag – the only time a visual symbol of the EU appeared in any of the European films screened for this study – placed on the desk of the local chief of police (fig. 6) which appears out of place given that Georgia is not a member state (although it submitted its application for membership in spring 2022, following Russia's invasion of Ukraine).

In addition, the director explicitly discusses her understanding of the role of religion in European culture in the context of her film:

In contemporary Western society, most of us tend to think that we're not religious at all. But I think European culture is based on the Christian religion, it still cannot exist without it, because there's so much – our morals, our understanding of good and evil, how we relate to life. At the same time, it's irrelevant, because there is no one who requires [Yana's] sacrifice, there is no one who will stop her when she performs the act of sacrifice.<sup>100</sup>

As the film affirms the importance of religion as a source of values, identity and community for Europe, it also emphasises the problematic role of religion in legitimising inequality, alienation and violence. Implicitly, thus, the film seems to suggest that a secular frame of reference might be more beneficial to individuals, especially to women as they negotiate their identity and existence in a world still marked by (also religiously justified) patriarchy and violence. And yet, oppressive morality is not all there is to religion: with its meditative character – in particular in the long static take of

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100 Romney 2021.



Fig. 6: Visualising the EU. *Beginning* (Dea Kulumbegashvili, GE/FR 2020), film still, 1:36:33.<sup>101</sup>

Yana's face, which the director herself describes as »ecstatic«<sup>102</sup> – the film also acknowledges the importance of spiritual experiences in human existence.

### 5.2. *Oray*: Religion as a source of identity, community and structure

In Mehmet Akif Büyükkatalay's feature debut, *Oray*, the themes of otherness, religious morality and gender roles are also prominent, but here, religion plays a different role in negotiating them. Islam is one of the markers of otherness<sup>103</sup> of the protagonist and his family and friends, all with a migration background among the non-Muslim majority of Germany, but here, it primarily provides a sense of belonging, community and orientation for the protagonist, Oray. In spite of the image of an uncompromising Islam presented in the opening sequence – Oray's video testimonial of his conversion to piety

101 Accessed on Amazon Prime.

102 Romney 2021.

103 Interestingly, the director mentions in an interview (Caruso 2020) that Oray's experience of (religious) otherness resonated also with a viewer who is a Jehovah's Witness, echoing Yana's experience in *Beginning*.

in prison and the support his faith has given him since then – the film offers a nuanced representation of Islam, not as »pure doctrine« but as continuously and variously interpreted both by religious »specialists« and, with a generous dose of self-irony, by other characters as they negotiate their religious commitments with other aspects of their lives.<sup>104</sup> The film presents a complex picture of the migrant community through its representation of Islam as a plural tradition and by including both religious and secular characters, showing their close relationships (most prominently between the pious Oray and his secular wife Burcu) and potential sources of conflict. One such conflict – the one that sets the film's narrative in motion – is Oray's pronouncement of *talaq* in a fit of temper, which in a strict interpretation of Islamic law means divorce, a requirement that Oray has to negotiate with the fact that he and his wife are still in love with each other. Refreshingly, the film thus disrupts two expectations about Muslim migrant characters in film, their representation as radicalised fanatics, and their representation as victims: one of Oray's friends promises, »I'll be the first Turkish chancellor«, jokingly, but also with a sense of rightful belonging in German society.

As Oray attempts to live up to religious requirements by separating from his wife and establishing a new life for himself in Cologne, finding an apartment and work and joining a mosque, the film explores questions of religious, cultural and gender identity, community, and otherness. Oray's self-description as a »gypsy with Macedonian-Ottoman roots« ironises the question of European identity, referencing a marginalised region of Europe (Macedonia) and Alexander the Great's »proto-European« empire, together with Europe's »other«, the Muslim Ottoman empire, and Sinti and Roma, next to Jews the quintessential European »other within«. Religion, ethnicity and culture are perhaps the most prominent aspects of identity explored in the film through its use of language (characters often mix German, Arabic phrases and Turkish or comment on each other's accents), significant objects (such as a Turkish flag or decorative oriental rugs) or practices (drinking tea rather than alcohol). But the film also examines gender identity, in particular masculinity, which is represented as aggressive, forceful and loud, but also quite fragile, in some contrast to the female characters in the film which, although overall secondary given its focus on Oray, are strong and self-confident. The film

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104 Buder n. d.



Fig. 7: Playing with foreground/background and shifts in focus express the dynamics between Oray and Bilal. *Oray* (Mehmet Akif Büyükkatalay, DE 2019), film still, 53:42.<sup>105</sup>

also complicates the either/or of heteronormative gender roles by intentionally depicting Oray's friendships with other men in a nearly homoerotic way as intimate and affectionate, not replacing but complementing the heterosexual intimacy between Oray and Burcu.<sup>106</sup>

In Oray's struggles over identity, his religious community plays a major role by offering emotional and practical support, as well as providing moral guidelines and a sense of direction and meaning. Oray does not only benefit from this himself as he states in his testimonial video but also extends the same kind of support to others when he brings a young petty thief, Ebu, into the fold of his mosque. The sense of community provided by shared faith even crosses ethnic boundaries when Oray and Burcu celebrate Eid with Ebu's family. Yet the film also shows that this sense of community is precarious. A very well-executed scene shows the dynamics of jealousy between Oray and the imam of his mosque, Bilal, when they greet other congregants after the service, with the camera first following Oray and then resting on him in the foreground as he continues to hug and joke with the others, while Bilal in his white traditional shirt remains alone, a small, lonely figure in the background (fig. 7). And not long after this moment at

105 Source: courtesy of filmfaust GmbH (<https://filmfaust.org/>).

106 Caruso 2020.

the height of Oray's popularity and new-found stature in life, things begin to unravel around him, shown in a sequence of relatively short scenes that have him lose his job, hide from his landlord because he can't make rent, steal food, and betray his values when he drinks and smokes dope with his secular friends, finally falling apart crying.

Given that the camera tends to stay close to Oray, the one total towards the end, when Oray had an accident on his way back to Burcu and is shown as a small figure in a snowy field, creates a sense of isolation and loneliness. Although viewers do not know it, it seems as if he decides to start over in that moment: the next cut takes us back to the mosque and a conversation between Oray and Bilal where they admit their respective short-comings, Bilal extends Islam's promise of a new start, and Oray is welcomed back into the community as they move to the other room to pray together with the others.

The film's nuanced approach, together with its realistic style (limiting the use of additional lighting, shooting on location, and working with lay as well as professional actors), gives it a sense of »authenticity« as it deals with the negotiation of multiple identities, experiences of otherness and belonging, and the role that religion can play in this by providing structures and community. The »European« character of the film on the thematic level with issues of migration, identity, the encounter of different traditions and religions, the search for belonging and a moral framework, is echoed on the formal level, as the director explicitly situates himself in a European tradition of auteur filmmakers, citing the Dardenne brothers, Fassbinder, and Romanian cinema as influences and singling out Pasolini as a »role model« with his realist, aesthetic and political filmmaking.<sup>107</sup> In this European space, where identity is negotiated in the encounter between different cultures, religious and secular worldviews, Islam is presented as one – but not the only – source of community, identity and values and as a living tradition that is continuously developed by its adherents in the context of their lifeworlds.

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107 Caruso 2020.

## 6. In conclusion

Unsurprisingly, this study of festivals of European film as a space where ideas of Europe are negotiated and discussed does not result in a clear image of Europe. The festivals, in particular Crossing Europe and the films screened there, represent a Europe marked by complexity, with elastic geographical boundaries and a range of issues at stake. In the thematic and formal diversity of European films, auteur or arthouse cinema appears as a common reference point, as an aesthetic style and a socio-politically committed tradition of filmmaking that directors draw on to engage with the larger issues of concern to Europe today by way of close attention to clearly situated, personal stories. The films' treatments of questions of family and relationship, experiences of crisis and conflict, and the search for identity, community and meaning, emphasise values of solidarity, justice, respect for diversity, dignity and equality, especially of those at the margins of society. The image of Europe presented is, thus, one of expansive inclusivity – even of those »others« like Russia or Turkey – appreciation of diversity, and concern for social justice.

In these filmic explorations of life in Europe today, religion – while not a prominent theme – appears in two ways, as a central plot element and a background element. When central to the plot, religious traditions are depicted ambiguously as both a source of conflict, exclusion and discrimination, and a source of community, identity and moral compass. And even when present as a background element, religion serves as an indirect frame of reference with its historical impact on the development of norms and values, and especially the social justice traditions of religious communities that resonate with the films' concerns with solidarity, justice and dignity.

The presence of religion in the public sphere of the film festival thus complicates discourses about the role of religion in Europe and European identity in two ways. First, the films' depiction of religious traditions as central to the lives of the characters or as an important if implicit frame of reference for values and social justice indicates that the secularisation narrative of superstitious religion superseded by objective rationality in the Enlightenment, which implicitly shapes official representations of Europe,<sup>108</sup> is not sufficient to capture the role that religion plays in the lived reality of Europe

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108 Bottici/Challand (2013, 151–153) note that religion appears only once in the relevant treaties of the EU.

today. Second, the representations of both positive and negative elements across religious traditions that may both empower or oppress, create injustice or promote equality, contributes to the dissolution of the dualism of »good« Christianity and »bad« Islam. Religions are shown to be complex and not always coherent, with teachings, practices and affective dimensions that impact the lives of individuals in different ways. As living traditions, they themselves change in the encounters with diverse worldviews and lifeworlds, and as *Oray* shows, not only religious »specialists« but all believers play a role in these developments. While there is much to be criticised in religious traditions – as in *Beginning* – the films indicate that is important to take seriously the presence and functions of religions in Europe today. The festivals thus provide a public space where religions are able to add their voice to discourses about Europe, and are challenged themselves by other voices.

## Filmography

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*Archipelago* (Joanna Hogg, GB 2010).  
*Before Sunset* (Richard Linklater, US 2004).  
*Beginning* (Dasatskisi, Dea Kulumbegashvili, GE/FR 2020).  
*Caracremada* (Lluís Galter, ES 2010).  
*Chrieg* (Simon Jaquemet, CH 2014).  
*Crater* (Il cratero, Silvia Luzi, Luca Bellino, IT 2017).  
*Der Schuh des Manitu* (Michael Herbig, DE/SP 2001).  
*Djeca* (Children of Sarajevo, Aida Begić, BA/DE/FR/TR 2012).  
*Dying* (Morir, Fernando Franco, ES 2017).  
*Eat Sleep Die* (Äta Sova Dö, Gabriela Pichler, SE 2012).  
*Fallow* (Brak, Laurent Van Lancker, BE 2015).  
*Family Tour* (Liliana Torres, ES 2013).  
*Irina* (Nadejda Koseva, BG 2018).  
*Lifelong* (Hayatboyu, Aslı Özge, TR/DE/NE 2013).  
*Light as Feathers* (Rosanne Pel, NL 2018).  
*Martesa* (The Marriage, Blerta Zeqiri, AL 2017).  
*Oasis* (Oaza, Ivan Ikić, RS/SI/NE/FR/BA 2020).  
*Oray* (Mehmet Akif Büyükkatalay, DE 2019).  
*Pari* (Siamak Etemadi, GR/FR/NE/BG 2020).  
*Quit Staring at My Plate* (Ne gledaj mi u pijat, Hana Jušić, HR/DK 2016).  
*Radiant Sea* (Lichtes Meer, Stefan Butzmühlen, DE 2015).

*Saf* (Ali Vatansever, RO/DE/TR 2018).

*The Gulf* (Körfez, Emre Yeksan, TR/DE/GR 2017).

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