

# The Universal Museum

## HOW THE NEW GERMANY BUILT ITS FUTURE ON COLONIAL AMNESIA

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**H**ow we remember, as individuals and as collectives, depends on how we perceive the now and where we envision ourselves going: memory discourses make the past legible for our present, but they also define the limits of the imaginable future. Our understanding of our past, thus, is always contested and malleable, depending on our contemporary conditions, while also shaping them. Usually, however, this process of creating historical narratives remains invisible, as history seems to unfold automatically and inevitably; the present necessarily follows a past that logically leads to exactly this here and now. Cracks in this process, its constructedness, become obvious when our perception of the present changes dramatically and abruptly, when the dominant logic of historical development collapses and it seems uncertain what will take its place.

The end of the Soviet empire and the German reunification in 1990 represent such disruptions of a taken-for-granted continuum. They required a rewriting of national and continental memory in reaction to drastically new constellations: the construction of a neoliberal European unity out of decades of East-West antagonism posed a serious



Model bust of Nefertiti,  
from the workshop of  
Thutmosis, ca. 1350 BCE,  
Egypt, 18th dynasty.  
Painted limestone, h. 48 cm.  
Photo: bpk Bildagentur/  
Ägyptisches Museum and  
Papyrussammlung, Berlin/  
(Sandra Steiß)/Art Resource,  
New York

challenge to the emerging Pan-European identity and so did the rapidly growing influence of Germany within the union. After all, the nation's desire for European dominance had long been considered the driving force behind two world wars devastating the continent. Three decades after reunification, Germany's position as the continent's economic powerhouse and political decision maker is largely undisputed. More than that, with the isolationist course of the current US government, the German chancellor increasingly sees herself positioned as the "leader of the free world" guaranteeing global stability in an increasingly chaotic world.

I argue that this process nonetheless was not nearly as smooth and successful for Germany and Europe as it might seem. In the transition from the Cold War logic to the current world order, the chance for real change was missed on all levels. The consequences are already felt and will be felt more so in the future: instead of creating a pluralistic model of European identity that allows for a variety of positionalities—and, thus, for diverse European memory discourses, encompassing the histories of various populations—Germany and Europe reproduce again what Stuart Hall calls the continent's "internalist story," based on an essentialist definition of a white, Christian Europe whose identity and history remain neatly separated from the rest of the world:

This has been the dominant narrative of modernity for some time—an "internalist" story, with capitalism growing from the womb of feudalism and Europe's self-generating capacity to produce, like a silk-worm, the circumstances of her own evolution from within her own body.<sup>1</sup>

This narrative necessarily produces a tunnel vision by ignoring and suppressing alternative narratives (including those of Europeans descended from the continent's formerly colonized). It leaves a residue of denied truths and unresolved conflicts that remain unnamable within the dominant discourse but continue to haunt it. The resulting constant pressure on the coherence of the pervasive model leads to regular—and largely predictable—crises.<sup>2</sup> Here, I am particularly concerned with the repetition of racial crises in post-unification Germany, invariably caused by the seemingly sudden and overwhelming appearance of the foreign, from the racist panic

around Roma refugees in 1989 to, more recently, the so-called "refugee crisis" of 2015, which quickly moved from *Willkommenskultur* (culture of welcome) to the fast rise of the openly racist *Alternative für Deutschland* (Alternative for Germany) party. I argue that memory—or its absence—is key to this cycle, and in what follows I explore the role of archives, both hegemonic and alternative, in making visible or invisible the connection between crisis and colonial past—and their potential in making possible a different future than the one that emerges from the crisis discourse.

I center my exploration on Berlin's Museum Island, in the city's heart, right on the former East-West divide. Not a site that is usually linked to the idea of racial crisis, the island is a UNESCO world heritage site and one of the city's major tourist destinations. It houses five state-funded museums: the Old National Gallery, which presents nineteenth-century European art; the Bode-Museum, which features Byzantine Art; the Old Museum, focused on Greek and Roman antiquity; the Neues Museum, which houses a collection of ancient Egyptian art (including the Nefertiti bust, currently valued at three hundred fifty million Euro); and the Pergamon Museum, home to Islamic and Near Eastern art, most spectacularly the Ishtar Gate, entrance to the ancient city of Babylon. The vast majority of the more than one million annual visitors to the island are drawn to the latter two museums.<sup>3</sup>

In 2015, at the height of the so-called refugee crisis that brought nearly one million people to Germany, largely from Syria, Iraq, and Afghanistan, the five museums and the nearby German Historical Museum started an initiative titled "Multaq: Museum as Meeting Point—Refugees as Guides in Berlin Museums," which offered free tours in Arabic to refugees from Iraq and Syria, conducted by guides who had themselves been refugees. The museums defined the project goals as follows:

The Syrian and Iraqi artefacts exhibited in the Museum für Islamische Kunst and in the Vorderasiatisches Museum are outstanding testaments to the history of humanity. Through experiencing the appreciation which the museum shows to these cultural objects from their homelands, we hope to strengthen their self-esteem and promote the confident and constructive introduction of the refugees into our society.

The guided tours in the Skulpturensammlung und Museum für Byzantische Kunst make reference to the inter-religious roots and the common origins of the three world religions of Islam, Judaism and Christendom. Cultures in the Eastern Mediterranean region were characterised over the centuries by religiously and ethnically plural societies, which today are under threat. Museums are memorial sites of a common past.<sup>4</sup>

The initiative thus followed a clear pedagogical goal, that is, integration into German society through an education in tolerance and appreciation of humanity's common heritage. With this, the Multaqa initiative aligns with the dominant narrative around the refugee crisis, which frames Europe as a peaceful island of civility, stability, and prosperity, surrounded by chaotic regions: a Middle East increasingly succumbing to radical Islam, a permanently underdeveloped and war-torn Africa, and an aggressive Russian empire threatening the continent's East. The refugee crisis originating in these regions suddenly and unexpectedly reached Europe, which is being pulled into it and must find imminent solutions to overwhelming challenges (as it so often had to through the course of world history). This narrative is convenient, but it ignores Europe's culpability, not only in allowing the situation to escalate to this point, but in creating many of its sources.

The narrative around the refugee crisis is nonetheless convincing, because it builds on a larger hegemonic narrative, that of Europe, and in particular its Northwest, as the origin and natural home of human rights and Enlightenment; whatever might be wrong here, so the story goes, it is certainly worse everywhere else. This self-image, however, was not reflected in the continent's migration or refugee policies. Europe, never considering itself a continent of or for migrants, in many ways still takes a restrictive approach to immigration, and hesitant steps in a different direction, such as Germany's quite recent self-assessment as an "immigration nation," are undone in a rapid and often chaotic retreat from any notion of open borders since the summer of 2015, when the so-called refugee crisis began to dominate national and continental debates, producing dramatic shifts within the European Union, from closed borders to Brexit and the continentwide rise

of a xenophobic right (in 2015 alone, Germany saw more than one thousand attacks on refugee centers).<sup>5</sup> The term *refugee crisis* that initially referenced the unprecedented mass arrival of non-Europeans fleeing violence and poverty increasingly is meant to indicate the fundamental threat these newcomers pose to European values and stability.

In Germany, the Willkommenskultur, which Germans continue to be proud of, was quickly replaced by heated public debates about the danger that almost one million largely Muslim refugees present to a society allegedly grounded in values such as gender equality and religious tolerance—values that Muslims, not having gone through the Enlightenment experience, are assumed not to share or even to be openly hostile to. In this context, the Multaqa project, representing the best of these Enlightenment values and aiming at educating Muslim refugees in this tradition rather than excluding them, received positive media responses. Almost all coverage in the national and international press featured tours in the Pergamon Museum, with the Ishtar Gate as the favored backdrop (the refugees themselves preferred tours of the German Historical Museum).<sup>6</sup> Media reports tended to have a similar hook: the emotional meeting between the refugees and the beautiful art from their war-torn home countries. There is an inevitable pattern to this encounter. A *Guardian* article cites one of the tour guides: "The first question we usually get asked is: how did all this end up in Germany?"<sup>7</sup> Interestingly enough, this question is never answered (and only the international press hints at larger controversies around stolen colonial art).<sup>8</sup> Instead, the typical and convenient response, here presented by the *New York Times*, is: "Often, the visitors say the art is probably better off in Berlin because so much in Syria has been destroyed by the war and the Islamic State."<sup>9</sup> The *Guardian* quotes the director of the Museum for Islamic Art: "Some objects have a complicated history."<sup>10</sup>

My interest here is not to criticize the Multaqa project but rather the "complicated history" it is embedded in and the reasons why this history remains unaddressed, both within the project and in general. Absent from the concerted rewriting of European twentieth-century history after the end of the Cold War, which combined postfascist



View of Museum Island from the Humboldt Forum, Berlin. © 2019 Fatima El-Tayeb

and postsocialist narratives into a Western capitalist success story, was a third factor in dire need of reassessment: Europe's colonial past. The refusal to engage with this past as internal to Europe's history also shaped the continent's vision of its future, manifest in a steadily growing postcolonial population that remains "un-European" and in futile attempts to once and for all define and fortify Europe's physical, political, and identitarian borders. Borders, which are imagined to be self-evident, stable, and natural but which are—as the representation of the "Mediterranean" art on Berlin's Museum Island strikingly shows—malleable, shifting, and largely imaginary, though very real nonetheless.

This malleability is particularly obvious in the perception of refugees and undocumented migrants, especially those classified as "economic migrants" (primarily North and West African Muslims and East European Roma) whose death by the thousands at Europe's southern (and increasingly eastern) border is willingly accepted.<sup>11</sup> By classifying the vast majority of contemporary refugees as "undeserving," the focus is turned away from the abject moral and political failure of Enlightened Europe (strikingly similar to the European handling of earlier refugee crises after World War I and during World War II). Instead, immobilization—in refugee centers, detention camps, and ghettos—becomes

a normalized response to the presence of “mobile” populations, be they refugees, migrants, or diasporic minorities such as Roma and Sinti, their supposed state of eternal and essential not-belonging offering sufficient justification for their punitive treatment.<sup>12</sup> In order to understand the interdependence between this externalization of racialized populations and “enlightened” integration initiatives such as *Multaqa*, it is necessary to ask how the colonial past manifests itself in the postcolonial metropolis and how it impacts the positionality of racialized communities. These questions, however, are hardly ever asked, especially in Germany, which believes itself largely untouched by Europe’s colonial history.

This brings me back to Museum Island, more specifically to its official website, which traces the island’s history from the opening of the “Old Museum” in 1830 to that of the Pergamon Museum a century later, and proclaims that “the initial plans for the construction of the Museumsinsel Berlin were driven by the humanistic ideals of the Enlightenment that prevailed in the early 19th century.”<sup>13</sup> In the historical overview that follows, there is no reference to the National Socialist regime or the fact that until the unification, the museums were on the territory of the German Democratic Republic, embedded in an entirely different narrative of history. In light of these strategic omissions, it is hardly surprising that colonialism is not mentioned at all; instead, the island is introduced like this:

Situated in the very heart of the city, the Museumsinsel Berlin is one of the country’s major sights, attracting hundreds of thousands of guests from all over the world each year. This unparalleled museum ensemble was the cradle of today’s Staatliche Museen zu Berlin and is where it showcases its magnificent collections of art and cultural artefacts spanning several millennia from Europe and the wider Mediterranean region.<sup>14</sup>

This sneaking inclusion of the wider Mediterranean into Europe’s cultural heritage is especially grating, since currently the Mediterranean stands for a cultural, economic, religious, and political divide that literally marks the world’s deadliest border. In the German imagination, the Mediterranean has come to represent an immutable civilizational divide, manifesting the incompatibility of Islam and Europe. This is, for example, reflected in increasingly popular references to the continent’s

Judeo-Christian history, which erases both the endemic European antisemitism (which, instead, is projected onto European Muslims as something they bring in from outside) and the shared Judeo-Christian-Islamic culture projected onto the Eastern Mediterranean, which then is claimed as proto-European in the museum narrative. In contrast, in its immigration policies, Germany seems hard-pressed to see commonalities with the Syrian and Iraqi nations that it otherwise feels so connected to when claiming the region’s cultural productions.

These claims are far from uncontested, of course. Egypt, for example, has demanded the return of the Nefertiti bust since 1925. When Germany rejected this demand for the last time in 2011, the undersecretary of culture declared, “Art is part of the universal human heritage and—wherever it is—should be made accessible to as many people as possible.”<sup>15</sup> This accessibility happens to be given in Berlin rather than Cairo and Bagdad—accessibility at least to the people who count, since much of the world is not allowed into Europe, especially people in the regions from which this “universal” art was stolen.<sup>16</sup>

The issue of stolen cultural artifacts is a small but significant part of the debate around the colonial legacy, and this process is not over. Art is becoming an increasingly important investment for the ultra-rich but also for multinationals directly involved in neocolonial exploitation. Iraqi curator Rijin Sahakian eloquently unmaskes the supposedly apolitical humanism of the universal museum:

History is, in fact, shared. If we, as a community of artists, educators and citizens of the world hope to understand what is taking place in our education systems, governments and the mechanics of the arts and accessibility, then we must take this global site into consideration and look at what our information—or lack thereof—says not simply about Iraq but ourselves and the systems we take part in every day.<sup>17</sup>

The enlightened encyclopedic museum was only possible because European powers could acquire art for nothing, and they continue to profit from it. The Neues Museum without the Nefertiti and the Pergamon without the Ishtar Gate would constitute significant blows to Berlin’s tourism industry and to its status as a global cultural capital. That these museums are concentrated in the Global North is not due to its humanism but its colonial theft,

which directly links them to the question of reparations. Apart from the immense financial value of pieces like the Nefertiti, it should not be forgotten that colonialism included systematic brainwashing: in state and missionary schools the “natives” were taught European superiority and their own inferiority and lack of culture. Meanwhile, the colonizers systematically raided the supposedly nonexistent cultural artifacts. This is directly addressed in the 2013 Caribbean Community (CARICOM) invitation to Europe to enter a “reparative dialogue” on settler colonialism, slavery, and their aftermath.<sup>18</sup> The Caribbean organization’s ten-point statement prominently addresses the cultural impact of racist European rule and the ongoing effect of its politics of remembrance:

4) **Cultural Institutions:** European nations have invested in the development of community institutions such as museums and research centers in order to prepare their citizens for an understanding of these CAH [crimes against humanity].

These facilities serve to reinforce within the consciousness of their citizens an understanding of their role in history as rulers and change agents. There are no such institutions in the Caribbean where the CAH were committed.

Caribbean schoolteachers and researchers do not have the same opportunity. Descendants of these CAH continue to suffer the disdain of having no relevant institutional systems through which their experience can be scientifically told. This crisis must be remedied within the CRJP [CARICOM Reparations Justice Program].<sup>19</sup>

In order for Europe to take up this call, it must finally understand colonial history as its own. This is obvious when we return to Museum Island and its current expansion via the nearly completed construction of the Humboldt Forum, adjacent to the island. The forum is key to the 2005 “masterplan for Berlin’s center as a place of universal enlightenment, a place of global art and global competency through Berlin’s state museum as the largest existing encyclopedic museum, the Humboldt Forum,” said Peter-Klaus Schuster, then director of State Museums Schuster. He continued to state that “the European collection on the museum island will enter a unique dialog with the non-European collections in the castle area in Berlin’s heart.”<sup>20</sup>

Leaving aside the question why Berlin of all places should be predestined for this (other than the fact that thousands of African artifacts are already stashed away in Berlin-Dahlem), the art on Museum Island has now become entirely European, despite its partial origin in Syria, Iraq, and Egypt.<sup>21</sup> This is no coincidence. The “non-European” collections in the Humboldt Forum represent “primitive” art and cultures from different regions and time periods, but all are characterized by their static status as Europe’s Other. In contrast, the “European” art on Museum Island tells a story of progress through space and time, from ancient Babylon to nineteenth-century Europe. This story is largely represented by art from civilizations that, despite being outside of Europe’s supposed political and cultural borders, are implied to be more closely related to, and thus owned by, Europe than to that region’s current (Islamic) culture. In other words, these regions, or rather their ancient cultures, are integrated into an internalist European narrative, while their contemporary inhabitants and those Europeans descending from them are denied this integrated (or “integratable”) status.

The Humboldt Forum is not only controversial because it will house tens of thousands of pieces of stolen art. Additionally, in order to build it, the East Berlin *Palast der Republik* (Palace of the Republic) had to be torn down. The building, home to the German Democratic Republic parliament, the *Volkskammer*, was a visible reminder of something that had little space in the new future-oriented Germany: the forty-year history of the German Democratic Republic. Accordingly, the question of whether or not to tear down the palace became representative of a highly charged debate on how the united nation would deal with its state socialist heritage. The political decision not to keep the palace as a site of memory and its replacement with an older, less-loaded version of Germany is symptomatic of the way the united Germany dealt with the nation’s shared history: whether Berlin’s center would be facing toward the future or the past appeared as a moral question and one about Germany’s prospect role in the world. A restored Palace of the Republic would have kept alive the memory of more than one Germany, of the existence of more than one version of Germanness. The newly designed city center, in



Humboldt Forum, east and south façade, Berlin, November 2019. © Stiftung Humboldt Forum im Berliner Schloss/Stephan Falk

contrast, was meant to symbolize the new united and forward-facing Germany.

It is relevant that the reference point for this new Germany is the fifteenth-century City Palace (the Prussian and then imperial residency), severely damaged in WWII and destroyed by the German Democratic Republic government in 1950. Its restoration as part of the Humboldt Forum is highly symbolic; it is meant to represent a new direction after Germany's twentieth-century missteps back to a tradition of poets and philosophers supposedly more representative of the nation than the decades of national socialism and communism. Both the outside of the Humboldt Forum, through the restored castle front, and the inside, via the encyclopedic collection, do not remind us of what vanished with the unification but, rather, what was

reestablished through it: German normalcy, away from the memory of national socialism, war, and holocaust toward an unburdened future in the tradition of enlightened Prussianness.

If the destruction of the Palace of the Republic is read as the decision to push a positive memory discourse, whose reference to the past does not mean shame and guilt but the evocation of a proud tradition of Enlightenment symbolized by the brothers Humboldt, then it was also the decision for a singular linear narrative of the past in which there is no room for plurality, for versions of Germanness diverging from the dominant one: the reality of a German normalcy that encompasses a variety of positionalities and histories was not only not recognized but actively repressed. This is highly problematic, as the new German reality is not only



Billboard for exhibition *Beyond Compare: Art from Africa in the Bode-Museum*, Berlin, October 27, 2017–November 24, 2019. © 2019 Fatima El-Tayeb

determined by the East-West conflict of memory, but also by the extreme power imbalance between white/Christian and minoritized Germans.

Balance can only be restored if the roots of this inequality are addressed rather than negated, as in Europe's internalist story. This leads us back to the question of collective memory and how it is constructed. Past, present, and future intersect in the rebuilding of Berlin's center after the unification, from

the redesign of the Potsdamer Platz to the destruction of the East German Palace of the Republic, to the ongoing construction of the Humboldt Forum, reclaiming the nation's humanist past by creating "the world's largest encyclopedic museum." There has been considerable controversy around the forum and its message, in part because the colonial link is so obvious: between 1880 and 1914, when Germany lost its colonies, the collection of African

art had grown from a few hundred to forty-seven thousand pieces. More disturbing, among the collection are human remains, including those of the Herero people, murdered in Germany's genocidal war in Namibia 1904–07.<sup>22</sup> Protests against the forum were spearheaded by a multiracial, anti(neo) colonial coalition, No Humboldt 21!, which in its 2013 founding resolution makes explicit the link between the internalist narrative, the archive, colonialism, and racism at home:

We demand that the work on the Humboldt Forum in the Berlin Palace be ceased and that a public debate be held: the current concept violates the dignity and property rights of communities in all parts of the world, it is Eurocentric and restorative. The establishment of the Humboldt Forum is a direct contradiction to the aim [of] promoting equality in a migration society.<sup>23</sup>

No Humboldt 21! is linked to a global movement focused on the repatriation of remains and artifacts stolen during colonialism. The transnational movement mirrors the transcolonial trade of not only art but human bodies, bringing Herero remains to New York and native Hawaiians to Berlin. It also reflects a growing movement of artists and activists addressing the complicity of museums, galleries, and other cultural institutions in (neo)colonial exploitation.<sup>24</sup>

An early example of this is the 1998 film *Die leere Mitte* (*The Empty Center*) by Japanese German artist and theorist Hito Steyerl. *Die leere Mitte* shows that it is possible to use Berlin's center to tell a very different story about Germany and its colonial past. The experimental documentary focuses on another post-unification prestige project in Berlin's center, the transformation of the Potsdamer Platz, a space whose neoliberal redesign even more radically suppressed the many layers of history present there than the construction of the Humboldt Forum. Steyerl's film uncovers these layers through the stories of those considered "unGerman" in various historical periods, from Jews kept out of Berlin's nineteenth-century city center by a customs border, through migrants from Germany's African colonies hustling to survive in the Weimar Republic, to Vietnamese contract workers in East Berlin and the undocumented Polish laborers hired cheaply to build the new Potsdamer Platz in the early 1990s. Their stories were erased from the national memory, but they

left traces that have been uncovered by a growing movement invested in building alternative archives and, through them, a different European narrative.

Steyerl begins her film with a quote by Jewish German cultural critic Siegfried Kracauer: "To found a tradition of lost processes, to give a name to the formerly nameless."<sup>25</sup> Kracauer's words are echoed in queer African American poet Audre Lorde's reflection on poetry as an essential tool of survival: "Poetry is the way we help give name to the nameless so it can be thought. . . . And where that language does not yet exist, it is our poetry which helps to fashion it. Poetry is not only dream and vision; it is the skeleton architecture of our lives."<sup>26</sup> Both statements resonate with the resistance to a singular, internalist story of Europeanness and the creation of the skeleton architecture for a different Europe.

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### Notes

- 1 Stuart Hall, "Europe's Other Self," *Marxism Today* 35 (1991): 18.
- 2 As anthropologist Ghassan Hage recently observed, the "state of permanent crisis seem[s] to have become the very way in which capitalist economies and societies ensured their reproduction." Hage argues that the notion of crisis is not tied anymore to the likelihood of change (possibly for the better) but to endurance, that is, crisis as something that signifies the undesirability or impossibility of change. Ghassan Hage, *Alter-Politics: Critical Anthropology and the Radical Imagination* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2015), 74.
- 3 Stiftung Preußischer Kulturbesitz, "Jahrespressekonferenz 2016 der Stiftung Preußischer Kulturbesitz. Anhang: Besucher-, Nutzer- und Bestandszahlen im Jahr 2015" (Annual Press Conference of the Foundation Prussian Cultural Heritage. Annex: Visitor, User and Inventory numbers in 2015), press release, January 2016, [www.preussischer-kulturbesitz.de/fileadmin/user\\_upload/documents/presse/pressemitteilungen/2016/160126\\_JPK\\_02\\_Zahlen.pdf](http://www.preussischer-kulturbesitz.de/fileadmin/user_upload/documents/presse/pressemitteilungen/2016/160126_JPK_02_Zahlen.pdf).
- 4 Museum für Islamische Kunst, "Multaq: Museum as Meeting Point—Refugees as Guides in Berlin Museums," [www.smb.museum/en/museums-institutions/museum-fuer-islamische-kunst/collection-research/research-cooperation/multaka.html](http://www.smb.museum/en/museums-institutions/museum-fuer-islamische-kunst/collection-research/research-cooperation/multaka.html) (accessed September 10, 2019).
- 5 dpa, "BKA-Chef warnt vor Gefahr neuer rechter Terrorzellen" (Head of BKA Warns of Danger Posed by New Right Wing Terror Groups) *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, June 25, 2016, [www.sueddeutsche.de/panorama/kriminalitaet-bka-chef-warnt-vor-gefahr-neuer-rechter-terrorzellen-dpa.urn-newsml-dpa-com-20090101-160625-99-447306](http://www.sueddeutsche.de/panorama/kriminalitaet-bka-chef-warnt-vor-gefahr-neuer-rechter-terrorzellen-dpa.urn-newsml-dpa-com-20090101-160625-99-447306).
- 6 "Multaq: Museum as Meeting Point."
- 7 Philip, Oltermann, "Berlin Museums' Refugee Guides

Scheme Fosters Meeting of Minds,” *Guardian*, February 27, 2016, [www.theguardian.com/world/2016/feb/27/berlin-museums-refugee-guides-scheme-fosters-meeting-of-minds](http://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/feb/27/berlin-museums-refugee-guides-scheme-fosters-meeting-of-minds).

8 See Rachel Donadio, “Berlin’s Museum Tours in Arabic Forge a Bridge to Refugees,” *New York Times*, February 28, 2016, [www.nytimes.com/2016/02/29/arts/design/berlins-museum-tours-in-arabic-forge-a-bridge-to-refugees.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2016/02/29/arts/design/berlins-museum-tours-in-arabic-forge-a-bridge-to-refugees.html).

9 Donadio, “Berlin’s Museum Tours.”

10 Oltermann, “Berlin Museums’ Refugee Guides.”

11 See the ongoing crisis around NGOs, which have largely taken over the humanitarian work of rescuing migrants from drowning in the Mediterranean. Not only are their vessels denied entry into European waters, against international law, leaving them and hundreds of refugees stranded, these organizations as well as private citizens engaged in rescue efforts are criminalized as human traffickers. See Megan Specia, “Hundreds of Migrants Stranded in Mediterranean in Standoff Over Aid Ships,” *New York Times*, August 12, 2019, [www.nytimes.com/2019/08/12/world/europe/mediterranean-migrant-ships-italy.html?rref=collection%2Ftimes-topic%2FDoctors%20Without%20Borders&action=click&contentCollection=timestopics&region=stream&module=stream\\_unit&version=latest&contentPlacement=3&pgtype=collection](http://www.nytimes.com/2019/08/12/world/europe/mediterranean-migrant-ships-italy.html?rref=collection%2Ftimes-topic%2FDoctors%20Without%20Borders&action=click&contentCollection=timestopics&region=stream&module=stream_unit&version=latest&contentPlacement=3&pgtype=collection).

12 Fatima El-Tayeb, *Undeutsch. Die Konstruktion des Anderen in der postmigrantischen Gesellschaft (UnGerman. The Construction of Otherness in Postmigrant Societies)* (Bielefeld, Germany: Transcript, 2016).

13 Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, “Museumsinsel—Profil” (“Museum Island—Profile”), [www.smb.museum/museen-und-einrichtungen/museumsinsel-berlin/ueber-uns/profil.html](http://www.smb.museum/museen-und-einrichtungen/museumsinsel-berlin/ueber-uns/profil.html) (accessed September 10, 2019).

14 “Museumsinsel—Profil.”

15 Presse- und Informationsamt der Bundesregierung, “Kulturstaatsminister Bernd Neumann eröffnet Ausstellung ‘Im Licht von Amarna: 100 Jahre Fund der Nofretete’” (“Undersecretary of Culture Bernd Neumann Opens Exhibit ‘In the Light of Amarna: 100 Year Discovery of Nefertiti’”), December 5, 2012, [www.bundesregierung.de/breg-de/bundesregierung/staatsministerin-fuer-kultur-und-medien/kulturstaatsminister-bernd-neumann-eroeffnet-ausstellung-im-licht-von-amarna-100-jahre-fund-der-nofretete-428448](http://www.bundesregierung.de/breg-de/bundesregierung/staatsministerin-fuer-kultur-und-medien/kulturstaatsminister-bernd-neumann-eroeffnet-ausstellung-im-licht-von-amarna-100-jahre-fund-der-nofretete-428448).

16 The universal museum argument is not specific to Germany or Europe. See James Cuno, CEO of the Getty Trust (the Getty is the world’s richest museum) and author of several books in defense of the encyclopedic museum: “By preserving and presenting examples of the world’s cultures, they offer their visitors the world in all its rich diversity. And in doing so, they protect and advance the idea of openness and integration in a changing world.” James Cuno, “Culture War: The Case Against Repatriating Museum Artifacts,” *Foreign Affairs* 93, no. 6 (2014), [www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/africa/culture-war](http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/africa/culture-war). This rejection of nationalism in favor of enlightened cosmopolitanism applies to artifacts but is not extended to contemporary migrants, who are as irrelevant to high art universalism as the producers of artworks stolen during colonialism.

17 Iraq was raided not only during the nineteenth century, but also after the 2003 US invasion. While the protection of pre-Islamic art from ISIS provides additional legitimation for the West, the lucrative trade with Iraqi and Syrian art sold primarily to Europe, the United States, and the Gulf states remains as unexplored as the destruction of historical sites to build US bases. See Eunsong Kim and Gelare Khoshgozaran, “Politics as Currency and the Souvenirs of War: Reflections on Rijn Sahakian’s Statement on the Closing of Sada for Iraqi Art,” *Contemporary*, April 18, 2016, [contemporary.org/politics-as-currency-and-the-souvenirs-of-war-reflections-on-rijin-sahakians-statement-on-the-closing-of-sada-for-iraqi-art](http://contemporary.org/politics-as-currency-and-the-souvenirs-of-war-reflections-on-rijin-sahakians-statement-on-the-closing-of-sada-for-iraqi-art).

18 “The Caribbean Community (CARICOM) is a grouping of twenty countries. . . . It is home to approximately sixteen million citizens . . . from the main ethnic groups of Indigenous Peoples, Africans, Indians, Europeans, Chinese, Portuguese and Javanese.” CARICOM, “Who We Are,” [caricom.org/about-caricom/who-we-are](http://caricom.org/about-caricom/who-we-are) (accessed October 23, 2019).

19 “10-Point Reparation Plan,” Caricom Reparations Commission, [caricomreparations.org/caricom/caricom-10-point-reparation-plan](http://caricomreparations.org/caricom/caricom-10-point-reparation-plan) (accessed October 28, 2019).

20 Peter-Klaus Schuster, “Das universale Museum: Europa und die Welt—vom Betenden Knaben über Nofretete zum Humboldt-Forum” (“The Encyclopedic Museum: Europe and the World—from the Praying Boy to Nefertiti and the Humboldt-Forum”), Berlin.de, August 12, 2005, [www.berlin.de/aktuell/ausgaben/2005/dezember/ereignisse/artikel.230267.php](http://www.berlin.de/aktuell/ausgaben/2005/dezember/ereignisse/artikel.230267.php). My translation.

21 Larissa Förster, “Nichts gewagt, nichts gewonnen: Die Ausstellung ‘Anders zur Welt kommen. Das Humboldt-Forum im Schloss. Ein Werkstattblick’” (“No Pain No Gain: The Exhibit ‘Coming to the World Differently. The Humboldt-Forum in the Castle. A Workshop Perspective’”), *Paideuma: Mitteilungen zur Kulturkunde* 56, (2010): 241–61.

22 Andrew Zimmerman, *Anthropology and Antihumanism in Imperial Germany* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001).

23 No Humboldt21!, “Moratorium für das Humboldt-Forum im Berliner Schloss,” [www.no-humboldt21.de/resolution/](http://www.no-humboldt21.de/resolution/) (accessed September 10, 2019). The advisory committee for the forum tried to address the criticism by suggesting naming the square in front of Humboldt Forum after Nelson Mandela, an idea to which the South African embassy reacted with the hope that “Mandela’s integrity and legacy will be considered in the decision making process, in particular with regard to his principled position on topics such as colonialism, racism, slavery, cultural and material exploitation as well as with respect for the cultural legacy of the people and nations of Africa.” See No Humboldt21!, “Mandela ist kein Preussischer Kulturbesitz” (“Mandela is no Prussian Cultural Heritage”), press release, December 16, 2013, [www.no-humboldt21.de/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/PM-NoHumboldt21\\_ISD.pdf](http://www.no-humboldt21.de/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/PM-NoHumboldt21_ISD.pdf). The suggestion was subsequently dropped.

24 See “Editorial Note to Feature #2,” ed. Eunsong Kim and Gelare Khoshgozaran, *Contemporary*, September 29, 2016, [contemporary.org/editorial-note-to-feature-2](http://contemporary.org/editorial-note-to-feature-2).

25 *Die leere Mitte*, directed by Hito Steyerl (Munich: University of Television and Film Munich, 1998). My translation.

26 Audre Lorde, “Poetry Is Not a Luxury,” in *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (Berkeley, CA: Crossing Press, 1984), 36–39. Shortly after the volume’s publication, Lorde temporarily moved to Berlin (primarily to seek cancer treatment), where she became an important mentor to the fledgling Black Germans movement, which in turn has been central to the struggle to recognize the genocide German troops committed in Namibia (then German Southwest-Africa) in 1904.