

Shaping Mediterranean geographies: The museum of European and Mediterranean civilisations in Marseille and the making of identity

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Abstract

In recent years several new ‘musées de société’ have opened in France and provide a rich way of understanding society-wide debates about what France is and what it should be in the new millennium. Of particular interest is the opening in 2013 of the first national museum in France to be located outside the capital city Paris, the Musée des Civilisations de l’Europe et de la Méditerranée in Marseille. This museum provides a revelatory way of understanding how France sees itself within the context of the Mediterranean and the Mediterranean’s subsequent connection to Europe. This paper explores the permanent collection, exhibiting techniques and location of this museum in order to consider the extent to which one of France’s newest museums has aligned its collection – originally part of a French vernacular museum – with twenty-first century transnational perspectives on cultural spaces. It argues that the museum’s narrative on the Mediterranean is grounded in the local and that the local shapes the transnational focus of this museum.

Engaging with local and transnational narratives

In 2013, the Musée des Civilisations de l'Europe et de la Méditerranée (MuCEM) opened in the port city of Marseille located in the south of France. This museum is dedicated to exploring and shaping the narratives about countries in the Mediterranean. Work on the Mediterranean is not new. Indeed, this geographic zone has come to be described in various ways. Former diplomat Jacques Huntzinger refers to it as made up of 'peuples de la mer' and characterised by mobility, trade and migration (2010, 22, 24). Philosopher and sociologist Edgar Morin describes it as representing 'unité', 'diversité' and 'oppositions', referring to once cosmopolitan societies in the Mediterranean that have increasingly been torn apart culturally and politically by ethnic differences and religious beliefs (1998-99, 34). With the opening of a national museum on Mediterranean civilisations in Marseille, the MuCEM is contributing to the ongoing dialogue about the practices and peoples of this area.

As the title of the MuCEM suggests, the focus of the museum is on Mediterranean civilisations but it also evokes the connection the Mediterranean has to Europe. According to museum practitioners, this is the first museum devoted to collections and programmes on Mediterranean cultures (Colardelle, 1999, 21; 2002, 19; Dossier de presse, 2012, 4). Described as a cultural space at the entrance of the old harbour, the MuCEM houses a permanent collection, presents temporary exhibitions, conferences, films, and audiovisual material. It also has an outdoor garden, restaurant, research centre and lookouts.

The decision to open this museum, defined as a 'musée de société',¹ was made in the context of French policies that have traditionally recognised cultural institutions

¹ The MuCEM describes itself as a *musée de société*, a term that appeared in France at the end of the 1980s following earlier changes to museum approaches in Europe and North America integrating narratives on social transformations and First people representations (Watremez 2013). The *musée de société*, is as historian Denis Chevallier frames it, a place where museum goes acquire the tools 'pour vivre entre autres' (2013, 17). What is implicit in this approach with regard to the MuCEM is the concern for cultural diversity within plural and transnational social contexts as well as technological

as ‘powerful identity-defining machines’ (Duncan, 1991, 101). Indeed, the MuCEM fits into a larger political plan conceived in the mid-1990s to enhance the ailing economy and rundown infrastructure of Marseille, by strategically playing on the Mediterranean characteristics of the city to regenerate the city centre and port area (Vigouroux, 1994a).

Meanwhile, since the 1990s certain museums, particularly those located in Western Europe, have increasingly de-emphasised national differences, compiling rather, narratives highlighting the social diversity and cultural pluralism that exists within societies and between countries (Krangenhagen, 2011; Mazé, 2014).² The emergence of European museums examining transnational narratives coincides with political, economic and social developments in the European Union that have sparked numerous debates on international relations and ethical responsibilities. For instance, over the last two decades, foreign and security policy makers in the European Union (EU) have considered the EU’s global responsibilities, with responsibility beginning, ‘wherever it may end’ with those ‘closest to the EU’ (Bulley 2009, 63). EU countries have been developing policies benefiting EU members while also emphasising ethical responsibilities towards neighbouring countries in terms of human rights as well as political implications of EU borders (Bulley 2009, 64). While the nature and objectives of such responsibilities remain ambiguous (Bulley 2009, 69, 76), these

and demographic transformations (see also Watremez 2013).

² Anthropologist Camille Mazé’s work highlights the growing number of museums focusing on the idea of Europe, such as the Musée de l’Europe in Belgium, the Museum Europäischer Kulturen in Berlin, the Musée Européen Schengen in Luxembourg and the future Maison de l’Histoire Européenne in Belgium. According to Mazé, some European countries are rethinking the way they present their national collections in ethnographic museums, stating that narratives presenting a national identity are viewed upon negatively in some European countries and are therefore being re examined or recycled into new museum spaces (Mazé 2014, 8). Similarly Kerstin Poehls’s work on European museums refers to how traditionally museums were detached from contemporary political debates and how today exhibitions can be closely linked to transnational discourses and concerns (Poehls 2011, 350).

debates highlight nevertheless the blurred nature of the relations the EU has with neighbouring non-EU countries.

Similarly, the MuCEM reflects evolving attitudes towards local concerns as well as European integration that have to a certain degree affected museum practices. The museum attempts to address local and national priorities by presenting a ‘pluralist story of France’ (Lebovics, 2014; 295) while emphasising France’s relation to the Mediterranean and to Europe (Mazé, 2014). The ambivalent nature of local and transnational perspectives is, however, evident in the varying attitudes towards the museum. A recent French government report titled *Le MuCEM: une gestation laborieuse, un avenir incertain*, criticises the national leanings of the museum’s collection stating that:

...le projet du MuCEM s’est heurté, et se heurte encore, à la difficulté originelle de faire coïncider une collection essentiellement française, centrée sur la société préindustrielle, avec un projet scientifique et culturel (PSC) désormais axé sur les civilisations de l’Europe et de la Méditerranée (Cour des comptes 2015, 103).

Yet in 2015, the MuCEM was awarded the Council of Europe museum of the year prize for making a ‘significant contribution to the understanding of European cultural heritage’ and exploring ‘the Mediterranean as the birthplace of civilisations and a crossroads of both European and Arab cultures’ (Council of Europe).

In the face of discussions that oppose the local to the transnational, this paper builds on and contributes to work on local and transnational paradigms. It locates this work in the Mediterranean to argue that perspectives on this geographic area are

grounded in the local and that the local shapes the transnational focus of the museum. In order to explore this aspect, the chapter presents a case study of the MuCEM's permanent collection, curatorial production and geographic location. Although research to date on museums of society has identified that these institutions often fail to present transnational narratives about specific geographic areas constructing rather 'universal' perspectives (Poehls, 2011; Mazé, 2009, 2014), there has not been an extended study on the way local interests in cultural practices influence transnational discourses with regard to the understanding of a geographic area.

The opening of the MuCEM in 2013 coincides with Marseille as host of the yearlong European Union-led initiative *European Capitals of Culture* (ECOC) program when the city showcased Mediterranean themes interpreted by locally and internationally acclaimed artists. The relation between a national French museum (the first outside of the capital city Paris) and a European Union-led cultural program focuses attention on the MuCEM as a discursive construction of transnational narratives that are tied to 'parochial' conceptions of urban space (Lazarus 2011). Indeed, a 'parochial outlook values the local, its culture and solidarities, as a moral starting point and locus of ecological concern and a site for the development of virtues including commitment, fidelity, civility and nurture' and is defined against and with global perspectives (Tomaney, 2013, 659). In the context of the Mediterranean, the global has resonance with Morin's description of this area at the close of the twentieth century and our understanding of the transnational. For him, the Mediterranean is: 'tout ce qui s'oppose dans la planète : Occident et Orient, Nord et Sud, islam et christianisme (avec l'interférence aggravante du judaïsme), laïcité et religion, fondamentalisme et modernisme. Richesse et pauvreté' (1998-99, 34). Furthermore, Morin reiterates that in order to face the challenges that exist in the

Mediterranean ‘il faut des réponses à la fois mondiales, régionales et locales’ (47). Similarly, the MuCEM is anchored in national history but its geographic location creates bridges that extend to other Mediterranean places creating a dialogue between communities at both a local and global level.

This paper is divided into three main sections. Firstly it outlines the historic and political context of the museum. Then it reviews the museum’s physical positioning as a site for the pluralisation of curatorial narratives. The final section explores some of the ‘figures of a common history’ (Rancière 2007) as they are presented through the eyes of a national institution. It does this by analysing discourse in institutional and media produced documents on Marseille in the context of the MuCEM published between the mid-1990s and 2015 as well as personal observations of the museum conducted in Marseille in 2012, 2013 and 2015.

From French vernacular to European and Mediterranean civilisations

The current collection now housed in the MuCEM, once sat in the national museum of popular arts and traditions in Paris – le Musée National d’Arts et Traditions Populaires (MNAPT). Its journey is one that is closely tied not only to political ideologies and social changes in France, but also to the relation between local priorities and wider transnational relations.

While the present focus of the MuCEM is centred on Mediterranean civilisations, the history of the museum’s collection tells another story. Indeed, when the collection was first housed at the MNAPT in Paris between 1937 and 2005, the museum was a legacy of le Front Populaire, the first left-wing coalition to come to power in France (1936-1938). The MNAPT reflected the social ideology of le Front Populaire that sought to give France’s working class people a sense of themselves

through everyday objects (Colardelle, 1999; Poirrier, 2000). The scope of this museum's collection was vast, with the media describing the objects and audiovisual material as a reflection of 'la "douce France", ses folklores, ses fêtes, sa magie, voire sa sorcellerie (...). Il raconte la vie des Français de l'an mil à aujourd'hui' (Jaeglé, 2013). In 2005, the MNAPT closed its doors. The last director of the MNAPT and the MuCEM's first director (2005-2009), Michel Colardelle, described the museum of popular traditions in its final years as a 'musée en crise' (2002, 15). Aspects such as French rural life, festival rituals, regional dress and so on no longer attracted visitors to the museum in its final decade (2002, 15). Yet the collection was viewed as historically and culturally valuable but in need of reinvention with regard to contemporary political and social developments (Colardelle, 1999).

Following the deepening European integration in the 1980s (German unification, Maastricht, single European currency), the transnational potential of the MNAPT's collection was identified. Rather than the telling of national narratives, the collection could be enhanced and used to construct transnational stories. Colardelle's (1999) report on the MNAPT's future underscores the moral responsibilities of ethnographic museum practices in terms of social and cultural changes taking place in Europe at the time. Referring to the increase in extreme right wing nationalism in Europe in the 1990s (22) and the ongoing failure of transnational European business collaborations (23), Colardelle connects a 'méconnaissance des cultures européennes' with the need for a museum featuring a cosmopolitan view 'qui se voie par rapport à l'autre, par rapport à d'autres espaces et ouvert aux courants extérieurs' (Colardelle 1999, 23). Meanwhile, Colardelle is also conscious of the problem a museum on Europe generates relating that 'il ne faut pas que l'on construise une identité européenne qui soit génératrice d'un nouveau conflit avec l'autre' (Mazé, 2014, 132).

These two viewpoints evoke the dilemma inherent in the creation of a museum that, on the one hand, seeks to break down cultural barriers and misunderstandings within Europe, while on the other, runs the risk of representing a ‘repetition of the nationalization processes of the nineteenth century under post-national conditions’ with regard to who is European and who is not (Krankenhausen, 2011, 270).

In the late 1990s, discussions on European integration did however raise awareness on the role of the Mediterranean and the EU’s policies on neighbouring countries. Morin, for instance, argued for the reconceptualisation of the Mediterranean and its relation to Europe. According to Morin ‘Les notions d'Europe et de Méditerranée sont deux notions en interférence : la seconde n'est pas la frontière de la première. On ne peut retrouver la Méditerranée qu'en cessant de la percevoir comme frontière et qu'en la considérant comme bien commun et grande communicatrice’ (1998-99, 43). These statements underscore the challenges facing our understanding of the Mediterranean. The ‘interference’ referred to by Morin reminds us of the historic cultural, political and economic ties of non-EU countries with Europe. Similarly, philosopher Etienne Balibar’s work on the borders of Europe refers to the blurred space between Europe and the Mediterranean when he refers to Europe’s ‘overlapping peripheries’ that are influenced from ‘all other parts of Europe and from the whole world’ (2009, 200).

The choice of Marseille as a site for the new museum creates a palpable dialogue between the notion of the Mediterranean and its relation to Europe for numerous reasons. Over the last two centuries, Marseille’s population has been defined by the settlement of political refugees from various parts of Europe and by

migrants predominantly from France's former colonies in Africa.³ Representations of the city entail narratives of passage (ancient traders, crusaders, colonisers, migrants) and a north south dichotomy (Europe/Africa, Europe/ Middle East, France/colonies, Christianity/Islam).

Furthermore, the building of a museum of European and Mediterranean civilisations in Marseille coincides with a major local and national political plan initiated in the mid-1990s to counter the city's perceived public image as poor, dirty and dangerous (Boura, 2001; Peraldi et al., 2015). Titled the EuroMediterranean project, local policy makers in Marseille selected the concept of the Mediterranean in their strategy to increase tourism, encourage the development of the creative industry and attract foreign investment to the city, as well as to suggest that the EU orientate its attention towards the Mediterranean. Throughout the 1990s, strategic papers and promotional brochures present the national and local ambition of this project, describing it as 'l'ambition de la prééminence de la France au cœur de la politique méditerranéenne de l'Union Européenne et de sa position centrale et structurante sur l'axe méditerranéen.' (Euroméditerranée à Marseille, 1996, 4). (see also Vigouroux, 1994a ; Euroméditerranée, 2). The advantage of Marseille over other Mediterranean cities was justified because it could contribute 'au nécessaire rééquilibrage entre une Europe qui se construit au Nord et les pays du bassin méditerranéen (Vigouroux, 1994b, 1) (see also Conseil d'Etat, 2). This strategy shifts the EU focus away from the north of Europe (and other political capitals such as Paris) and directs it towards the Mediterranean as a potential space for transnational dialogue.

³ According to historians Blanchard & Boëtsch's work on Marseille the number of people with migrant origins in Marseille total around 52% with a large proportion of these migrants from Algeria, Comoros and Armenia (2005, 217). Sociologists Peraldi et al. refer to the predominantly North African ethnic make up of Marseille's migrant population in their sociological study *Sociologie de Marseille* (2015, 74).

This local ambition for a Mediterranean plan in Marseille received national attention. Under Nicolas Sarkozy, then president of France (2007-11), the MuCEM was seen to play a key political role in the relation between Europe and the Mediterranean. The museum would be the cultural face of Sarkozy's plan for a French-led Mediterranean Union.⁴

It is difficult, however, to separate the national scope of the museum from a broader international agenda as well as from local urban priorities. In 2009, the government directive was to create 'le grand musée des cultures de la Méditerranée' (Mazé, 2014, 61) despite the name of the museum referring to the civilisations of both Europe and the Mediterranean. One of Sarkozy's presidential speeches highlights the cultural role France could play in the dialogue amongst peoples of the Mediterranean:

...il faut évoquer nos politiques culturelles aux abords de la Méditerranée, dont plus que jamais je crois impératif de rapprocher les peuples. La France a porté le projet de l'Union pour la Méditerranée. On voit bien aujourd'hui combien il est nécessaire que les peuples de la Méditerranée, juifs, arabes, européens, se rencontrent, dialoguent. Ils sont condamnés à vivre ensemble (Discours de M. le Président 2009).

In the lead up to the opening of the MuCEM, the theme of the Mediterranean both within Europe and beyond took on an increasingly significant importance.

⁴ A proposal to establish a 'Mediterranean Union', consisting mainly of countries around the Mediterranean, was part of the election campaign of Nicolas Sarkozy during the 2007 French presidential campaign. During the campaign Sarkozy said that the Mediterranean Union could mirror the European Union with common institutions as well as offer a space for dialogue between Israel and its Arab neighbours. Some EU members such as Germany felt that this project ran the risk of dividing the EU. Subsequently, the plan for an autonomous Mediterranean Union was dropped and in its place the 'Union for the Mediterranean' was created in 2008 to enhance multilateral relations in Europe and the Mediterranean (see Lebovics 2014).

Colardelle's successor as director appointed during the Sarkozy presidency, Bruno Suzzarelli, (2009-2014), focused specifically on the Mediterranean, stating in 2013 that the MuCEM's objective was to create 'une nouvelle vision de la Méditerranée, qui n'impose pas un point de vue européeniste' (Freschel, 2013). This statement implies not only a predominantly Mediterranean focus but a 'new' way of conceptualising the Mediterranean (see also Figure 1). For this director, the new Mediterranean is a space with its own distinct identity centred around 'des grandes questions qui agitent la Méditerranée: la mobilité, la religion, les guerres, l'environnement' (Zibeline, 2013).

[Figure 1. goes here]

Figure 1: A billboard sized poster placed at the exit of Marseille's main train station Saint Charles features information on the Euromediterranean project. At the top of the poster a reference to the 'new Marseille' echoes the 'new' Mediterranean evoked in the the objectives of the MuCEM. The poster's caption 'Bienvenue dans le nouveau Marseille' [Welcome to the new Marseille connects the Euromediterranean project with urban development around the old port that includes the MuCEM visible on the lower left and the historic port entrance on the right. October 2015. Photo A. Giovanangeli © A. Giovanangeli.

Ethical and political considerations of how to present the Mediterranean have therefore been a key feature of the MuCEM. For the first director, Colardelle the Mediterranean was to inform visitors about the intercultural relation between Europe and the Mediterranean. For his successor the approach shifted from a European perspective to a new way of presenting the Mediterranean as a geographical entity first and foremost, with contemporary concerns that are associated with European and

non-European issues. Subsequently, Jean François Chougnet, the present director elected in 2014, is maintaining the focus on the Mediterranean but connecting this to local participation. In a media interview he related that ‘Le musée doit mieux s’insérer dans la vie culturelle locale’, while also taking on a position of moral responsibility with regard to presenting contemporary events taking place in the Mediterranean (Rof, 2014).

Narratives of Geographic and Curatorial Space

The connection between the museum’s engagement with the local and a concern for the transnational has been integrated into the architecture of the museum as well as its geographic location and curatorial production.

The museum’s location on the water’s edge is significant. In cultural geographer Mike Crang’s scheme of things, the landscape is part of a symbolic system ‘shaped according to the beliefs of the inhabitants and the meanings invested in that landscape’ (1998, 27). The MuCEM’s positioning is emblematic of Marseille’s evolving connection with the Mediterranean and the notion of passage alluded to earlier.⁵

The MuCEM’s architect Rudy Ricciotti defines this museum as:

une casbah verticale, un carré parfait de 72 mètres de côté, tenu par des structures arborescentes élancées, protégé par une enveloppe brise-soleil tel un

⁵ Specifically the notion of passage in Marseille can be seen through: the legendary arrival of the Greek sailor Protis and the foundation of Marseille in 600BC; the starting point for the exploration and colonisation of Africa and more distant places; the first place of contact for the repatriation of the exiled from Algeria during decolonisation; the gateway into Europe for numerous waves of migrants; and the chosen site for the Euro-Mediterranean project.

moucharabieh. Minérale, tout en béton fibré, de couleur poussière mate, c'est une architecture de la maigreur, étirée comme les muscles tendus d'un coureur de fond, armée d'une délicatesse puissante et féminine. Elle renvoie à la métaphore de l'espace méditerranéen (Maliszewski, 2012).

What stands out in this passage are the references to North Africa, as if the MuCEM throws out a net from Marseille across the Mediterranean to embrace North African culture, rather than present itself as a museum in Marseille in isolation or an outpost of centralised Paris-based French culture. The main building is a large rectangular block of dark glass enveloped by dark grey concrete that from afar looks like lacework: this brings a sense of lightness to the enormous block shape. Behind this building and a part of the museum is the Fort Saint Jean, the historic stone fortification dating back to 1660. There is an ambivalence with regard to how the new building can be read in the landscape. For instance, Ricciotti's reference to the space and architecture of the Arab world is taken further in the work of historian Herman Lebovic who likens the MuCEM to a 'massive black stone of the Kaaba in Mecca, where pilgrims from all over the world come in peace and unity' (2014, 295). That it could be read as a place of prayer as Lebovic mentions, is an idea that has resonance with Duncan's definition of museum spaces as places for contemplation and learning (1991, 91) similar to religious temples or shrines, however the fusion of Arab and Western features is also an acknowledgment of the European and African characteristics of Marseille as well as the Mediterranean area. Furthermore, the MuCEM is located alongside other significant landmarks in the city: military fortifications, cargo and cruise ships, dockyards, and the most iconic reference to Marseille's port and prominent references to the city's Catholic heritage: the basilica Notre-Dame de la Garde and the Cathédrale de la Major. Michel Peraldi and Michel

Samson's 2006 sociological study of Marseille points out that the image of Notre Dame de la Garde is intricately tied to a hierarchical representation of the city, which favours the Catholic identity of its locals, but fails to acknowledge the migrant heritage of its residents (2006, 278). Since 2013, however, the juxtaposition of the MuCEM alongside other iconic Marseillais symbols not only grants the museum local status it also adds a new reading of the city's cultural heritage as Ricciotti's desired 'metaphor of Mediterranean space' (Maliszewski 2012) and ethnic diversity in Marseille (see Figure 2). Likewise, Lebovics' points out that 'the concrete act of pluralism in locating France's first national museum (...) outside Paris in this diverse city [Marseille]', is created in the context of France's necessity to reinvent itself as a nation framed 'by its ties to Europe and its near neighbours around the Mediterranean' (2014, 295).

[Figure 2. goes here]

Figure 2. The iconic presence of the Catholic cathédral de la Major (left) at the entrance of the historic port is now in dialogue with the MuCEM (centre) as a distinct architectural presence of Marseille's symbolic landscape. December 2012. Photo A. Giovanangeli © A. Giovanangeli.

The relation between the local and the transnational is further reinforced architecturally and metaphorically by two long, narrow, dark bridges. One bridge links the block shaped building to the historic fortifications, while another bridge connects the fortifications to the old quarters of the city (see Figures 3 and 4). If the depiction of the urban landscape expresses beliefs about society and life (Crang 1998, 49), this design gives the viewer a sense of continuous flow between the historic, iconic features of Marseille and the new museum space that projects itself towards the

sweeping blue horizon of the Mediterranean sea and sky. There exists a connection between the old stones of Marseille's port and the new Mediterranean narrative evoked by the glass and concrete of the museum. Furthermore, the bridges of the MuCEM can also be seen as connections and traverses, to borrow a notion from Deleuze and Guattari, with regard to the routes (as opposed to static notions) of identity that flow in the Mediterranean space (Deleuze & Guattari 1987).

[Figure 3. goes here]

Figure 3. View of one of the bridges linking the MuCEM (right) to the historic fortifications, Fort Saint Jean (left). June 2013. Photo A. Giovanangeli © A. Giovanangeli.

[Figure 4. goes here]

Figure 4. View of the other bridge linking the fortifications (right) to the old quarters of Marseille (left). In the background one of the most iconic features of Marseille, the Catholic basilica Notre Dame de la Garde can be seen at the top of the hill overlooking the port's entrance. June 2013. Photo A. Giovanangeli © A. Giovanangeli.

Inside the dark block building of the MuCEM, the architecture echoes the external features of the museum. Organic grey shapes reflect light through glass panelled walls (see Figure 5). In the exhibition spaces, grey transparent curtains prevent the intense Mediterranean light and glare reflecting off the water from damaging the displays inside, yet allow visitors to catch glimpses of the Mediterranean sea outside. The permanent collection is housed on the ground floor extending around three sides of the building and is titled 'The Gallery of the

Mediterranean'. Themes identified in the permanent collection explore the invention of farming, the ancient presence of gods, the birth of monotheism in Jerusalem, citizenship, human rights and sea exploration. In terms of curatorial choices, the diverse themes are not divided by walls but rather by ceiling to floor partitions made out of sheer white fabric. While visitors can follow a themed route, there is no set direction in the exhibition and it is possible to zigzag through various sections (see Figure 6). Boundaries in the display spaces of this floor are not explicitly delineated. One cannot help but relate these curatorial features to Morin's vision of a Mediterranean that has no borders and is a space that acts as an agent of communication and shared knowledge (1998-99, 43), or to Balibar's Europe as 'overlapping peripheries' which are influenced by 'other parts of the world' (2009, 200).

[Figure 5. goes here]

Figure 5. The interior space of the museum features organic shapes and reflections of natural light. Through the glass panels the Mediterranean sea and sky are visible. October 2015. Photo A. Giovanangeli © A. Giovanangeli.

[Figure 6. goes here]

Figure 6. The MuCEM permanent collection space. Transparent curtains are a feature of the divisions between displays as well as the internal and external spaces of the museum. October 2015. Photo A. Giovanangeli © A. Giovanangeli.

The permanent exhibition comprises a variety of displays, including material objects, audiovisual installations projected on large or small screens, art works and

contemporary installations. Some objects are displayed in glass cabinets while others are presented uncovered - a display method that adds to the concept of boundaries, the separation of territories and where lines meet and end. For Balibar, there is a duality associated with borders in that they are both local and global - each line reflects a 'global order' and confers a 'universal' meaning upon local difference (2009, 200). In the context of the MuCEM's permanent collection, the absence of precise lines or demarcations around some of the objects highlights questions about the Mediterranean with regard to how to qualify a space that is not easily quantifiable.

The 'Figure of a Common History'

The museum's permanent collection is framed within the idea of the 'new' Mediterranean, as stated earlier by the museum's director Bruno Suzarelli. Indeed, the MuCEM's 2012 press release refers to 'une manière nouvelle de considérer la Méditerranée comme un espace d'ouverture et de partage, d'envisager une histoire commune, percevoir le dialogue des civilisations [...] façonner un nouvel espace public' (Dossier de presse, 2012, 4). Meanwhile, Suzarelli also believes that the role of a museum of society, such as the MuCEM, is to present a dialogue between the local and the global: 'cette dialectique de l'identité et de l'altérité, du local et du global, qui caractérise nos sociétés à l'heure de la mondialisation et de l'ère numérique (Suzarelli 2013, 9). These notions highlight the relation between the local and the transnational but also mirror what French philosopher Jacques Rancière refers to as 'the future of the image', that is, the possibility of finding new paradigms to account for the relationship between objects and a common history.

The museum's quest for 'une histoire commune' is apparent throughout the exhibition. For instance, at the entrance a short film on a large screen presents the four

distinct aspects characterising the Mediterranean and sets the context of the permanent collection: the honouring of plants and animals in the most ancient temple found in Turkey; the beginnings of monotheism in Egypt's Mount Sinai; the origins of citizenship in Athens and the exploration of new routes beyond Morocco. Different Mediterranean places are mentioned in the film. Countries of origin are also indicated in the texts adjacent to each object on display. Despite these references to geographic sites, specific places are not singled out, rather the collection is imbued with a general sense of the Mediterranean. Ancient and more contemporary earthenware pots on display in the section on agriculture are from France, Greece, Turkey and Serbia yet they serve to illustrate their use with regard to shared eating practices in the Mediterranean: bread, olives and wine.

Adjacent to this Mediterranean narrative, however, exist the multiple junctions of the local and the transnational. In this same section on agriculture, alongside the earthenware pots stands a contemporary installation by Israeli artist Sigalit Landau titled *Water Meter Tree* created in 2011.⁶ Made out of water meters and metal water pipes in the shape of a tree, it refers to the problem of water management in the contemporary world that threatens food crops and the livelihood of farmers. Clearly the message of this installation is grounded in a Mediterranean narrative but also a distinctly global setting. On the other hand, local references are found in the short film not far from this installation on fishing in the Mediterranean. The message of the video echoes the ecological issues in the installation by referring to the decreasing number of fish in the Mediterranean, yet makes a clear reference to Marseille when a local Marseillais fisherman in the film provides the viewer with advice on a distinct local seafood dish - the bouillabaisse - stating that 'au printemps il faut manger une

⁶ An image of this installation can be viewed at <http://www.mucem.org/fr/water-meter-tree>.

bouillabaisse, c'est ça la valorisation des produits'.

As one of the MuCEM curators Emilie Girard states, the meaning of the objects on display in the MuCEM is generated 'par le regard et le discours donnés aux objets'.⁷ For Girard, the discourse of the collection is designed around the principle that objects are 'like words in a sentence' and are therefore 'manipulated' to present an idea. This discursive approach has similarities with some of Rancière's writings. In the *Future of the Image*, Rancière tells us that 'by drawing lines, arranging words or distributing surfaces, one also designs divisions of communal space' (2007, 91). It is thus by shaping the meaning of objects that a narrative is created around the Mediterranean.

These 'communal spaces' can be understood with regard to the connections they create with the local and the transnational. In the context of the MuCEM collection, these spaces have parallels with what social-cultural anthropologist Arjun Appadurai refers to in his *Modernity at Large* as a 'dialectical play between national and transnational allegiances' (1996, 167). From this perspective, locality creates contexts that extend ideas to broader areas and collective understandings. A further example of this relation between local and transnational concerns is evident in the museum's display on citizenship and human rights. The concept of citizenship is illustrated through various objects, installations and videos such as vases from the ancient world of Athens, portraits from the merchant city of Venice, a contemporary video titled 'Istanbul, Istanbul' referring to the plight of exiles in Turkey. Here the evolution of democratic principles is situated in the Mediterranean space but evokes a dialogue between global questions on citizenship such as the passage of migrants and

⁷ Thanks to Emilie Girard for her time and for her courtesy in answering the questions I had prepared for her during two one hour interviews, the first conducted in Paris in 2012 and the second in Marseille in 2013.

the notion of European belonging. Indeed, the effects of contemporary migratory practices playing out at the geopolitical margins of Europe and the Mediterranean put migrants at the very centre of the Europeanisation processes and ‘migrants bring questions of citizenship and human rights’ (Poehls, 2011, 340). Meanwhile, adjacent to these questions on citizenship, a significant proportion of this section is dedicated to the French Revolution. Iconic French objects such as the cockade, the Phrygian cap, the guillotine and a Marianne statue from Marseille are placed alongside each other. While universal in their outlook, the strong national as well as Marseillais dimension are present.

The MuCEM’s narratives are clearly anchored in the local yet also present a transnational perspective that includes Turkey, North Africa, Europe, Israel and the intersection between Islam, Judaism and Christianity. This is further emphasised by one of the MuCEM ethnologists who explains that while the museum examines EuroMediterranean perspectives, its outlook will always be determined by the museum’s location in Marseille : ‘c’est quand même vu de Marseille, vu de France, donc on reste quand même d’une certaine façon pris dans la problématique du lieu d’où l’on regarde les choses qui est le nôtre’ (Mazé, 2014, 163). Clearly, this indicates that the transnational perspective of the MuCEM cannot be examined without including the local context of the museum.

A ‘new’ Mediterranean

The symbolic positioning of the MuCEM on France’s Mediterranean edge substantiates what Crang argues as the political and contested nature of cultures – that is, cultures ‘mean different things to different people in different places’ (1998, 4). Clearly, power and meaning are written onto and through the landscape. The local

objective of the MuCEM is driven by Marseille's urban metamorphosis yet the museum also encapsulates the strategic role Marseille could play in connecting Mediterranean peoples and cultures, shifting European focus towards a geographic south.

Indeed, present day urban strategies invest in building a local identity in Marseille around a symbolic centrality to the city's mythology of migrant flows and cultural interfaces in order to add legitimacy to the establishment of a modern economic city that is locally connected to its inhabitants. This locally constructed cosmopolitanism is illustrated by the Mediterranean as both a part of a local heritage and a narrative existing outside of France. Accordingly, the Mediterranean presented in the MuCEM embodies a 'parochial outlook' that 'values the local' (Tomaney, 2013, 659) as the site for reflection of a space inherently linked to transnational narratives around notions of mobility, citizenship, the environment and religion. The MuCEM identifies shared practices and rituals that go back to antiquity and predate the EU, while presenting a 'new' way of defining the Mediterranean as a borderless area possessing its own identity alongside and beyond Europe.

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