



## ***The Museumization of Migration in Paris and Berlin and Debates on Representation***

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**Abstract:** In this article, the author takes an ethnographic approach to the museumization of migration in Paris and Berlin by focusing on the French migration museum, the *Cité nationale de l'histoire de l'immigration*, as well as in various examples in Berlin—such as neighborhood museums, art institutions and ethnographic museums. By looking at these examples through the perspective of social movements which have taken place in the United States and which unleashed debates around civil rights, the representation of racial/ethnic minorities, knowledge formations and the design of academic curricula, this article explores the ways in which actors engage in representing migration in museums and exhibits. The ethnographic cases show arenas of conflict and interaction between “makers” and “participants,” in which the making of representations is contested. At the same time that the topic of “migration” in a museum can be used for a politics of multiculturalism, it can also open up spaces for political interventions “from below.” The first part of the article discusses the strategies employed by the *Cité nationale* to represent migration “from above,” showing the internal fractures and the conflicts which emerge when “immigrants” appear as visitors in the museum. The second part of the article shows ethnographic cases in Berlin, focusing on how the body of the “immigrant” as well as “immigrant communities” are used by museum curators as objects of display in neighborhood and ethnographic museums. The third part explores an exhibit in Berlin, which shows how actors of an immigrant association represented themselves and their community in an art institution and in their own terms. The last part compares the exhibits on migration in both cities and describes the political intervention of the *Sans Papiers* movement, which took the *Cité nationale* between October 2010 and January 2011 to fight for their legal status from within the museum.

### **I. INTRODUCTION**

In this article, I will focus on the museumization of migration in Paris and Berlin as a continuum of debates on representation, which had a focal point (but not only) in the cannon battles that took place

in the United States of the '80s (Cusset 2003). These “battles,” which are closely related to issues of migration, unleashed important debates in all fields concerning representation: the formation of academic knowledge and teaching curricula (Fassin 1993; Beverley 1999), the practice of ethnographic writ-

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ing (Kaschuba 2006), debates on citizenship, migration and racial/ethnic minorities (i.e., Chicano and black movements), as well as on “national” identities. These debates reflect the battleground within the “ethnic studies” in the United States which is nowadays caught between multiculturalism, disciplinary colonialism and de-colonial studies (Grosfoguel 2007). They have reached the domain of museums and have naturally impacted the making of representations (Chakrabarty 2002). Museum landscapes worldwide have become important fields of research, as they are arenas where the crisis of the nation is discussed face to face with demands of social representation of immigrant and non-immigrant minorities as well as diasporas, and with questions arising from the fields of post-colonial and de-colonial studies. In my view, the migration museum in Paris, as well as exhibits on migration in Berlin, are examples of how these issues and debates from the other side of the Atlantic have emerged and become “visible” in both European cities. They also show the potential of the debates which can be unleashed around the museum which, in the case of both countries, concerns also the creation of images of Europe and of a new politics of migration.

I will present ethnographic cases in progress, which are the result of my traveling back and forth between Paris and Berlin from July 2009 to October 2010. During this period I have mainly conducted interviews with the actors involved in the museums and exhibits, aimed at finding relevant arenas of conflict. The cases presented here can be regarded as “objects” which have emerged through my interaction with the field of migration in museums and its actors. These objects are related to spaces in which established knowledge formations and social representations are contested.

## II. THE “ENTRANCE” TO THE *CITÉ NATIONALE DE L’HISTOIRE DE L’IMMIGRATION*

My research began with the *Cité nationale de l’histoire de l’immigration*. Inaugurated in Paris in 2007, it is the first national migration museum in Europe. The museum is actually an enormous institution in which visitors can lose themselves as if in a labyrinth. Instead of offering answers about migration issues, the museal space opens up a field for infinite questioning regarding the making of representations in contemporary societies. After two years of observation, all I can grasp at the museum are notions of the complex dynamics of the institution. This can be due to the fact that the museum has no “centre” and it is made up of fragments: it is loaded with different contents, actors and controversies, and its structure is very weak. To give an example, neither President Sarkozy nor other important representatives attended the museum on the day of its opening, on October 9, 2007. In France, all national museums are inaugurated by the prime minister and the representatives of the ministries which financially support the institution.<sup>1</sup>

The *Cité nationale de l’histoire de l’immigration* has a very liminal, or marginal, existence, since it is a project to represent immigration—which is complex enough—unfortunately landing in a very difficult historical and architectural context: at the “Palais des colonies,” at Porte Dorée, which was specially built for the colonial exhibition in 1931. I think such a heavy history carved in such huge stone confronts visitors with a complex juxtaposition of elements. And this occurs way before visitors enter the museum. Visitors are either encouraged to go on asking questions, or they are blocked by the historical overload.

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<sup>1</sup> In this case, the ministries of immigration, culture, education and scientific research.

I will begin by showing an example of how confusions may arise: on Monday, the 21<sup>st</sup> of June 2010, I attended the “Fête de la musique,” at the *Cité nationale*. The museum had announced its participation and engaged two groups to perform outside the building, in the courtyard of the “Palais des Colonies.” When the “Fête de la musique” started, at around 7 p.m., the access to the exhibits and the museum was already closed. All that visitors could see was the entrance made of huge stone carvings and the logo of the *Cité nationale*.

The first group performed a piece about “dressing up” and, just after that, there was a music group. Both came from “Africa” or were associated with “Africa.” The music was “African,” the representation “African,” and the visitors saw these evocations of “Africa” just outside the building, so the only thing they could link to it was the colonial history. The project of the *Cité nationale*, the permanent exhibit “Repères,” which strives to change the images of immigrants in France, was hidden in the second floor of the (closed) museum. Thus, the logo of the *Cité nationale* was associated with the colonial history (the building and its stone carvings) and to contemporary diasporic and ethnic images of “Africa.”

Beyond this example, it is important to say that, when the museum is open, visitors are immediately confronted with huge colonial frescoes—just behind the reception, on the first floor of the former Palais—depicting images of colonization, which justified the enterprise at the time. These frescoes have been declared world-heritage by *UNESCO*. At both ends of this first floor, visitors can see the former working place of two colonial officers in the style of “art deco.” Third, if visitors decide to go to the basement before climbing to the second floor, they land in the aquarium, where the fish are classified and contextualized in their habitats in ways that are reminiscent of how “non-European” peoples were

displayed during colonial exhibits (Blanchard et al. 2002). With this, I would argue that the project of the *Cité nationale* is surrounded and oppressed by the history whose meaning it is supposed to change.

The scientific committee behind the *Cité nationale* (i.e., the historian Gérard Noiriel) had the aim to transform the meaning of colonial heritage through the making of a new project—by juxtaposing the exhibit and museal activities with the building, thus transforming the oppressive historical patrimony into a positive reflection of the past. Nevertheless, this history proves to be all too big and maybe unchangeable. Although there are actually activities in which schoolchildren, students, and other visitors are introduced into the history and the project, thus having very positive results (Gasó Cuenca 2010), the venue of the “Fête de la musique” was, in my eyes, a good example of how the project of the *Cité nationale* tends to disappear, eaten up by the building.

Nevertheless, if we do arrive at the museum’s upper floor and look closely “inside” the project, we can see that the *Cité nationale* embodies the convergence of many departments—history, social organizations, art, anthropology, museography, cultural activities and pedagogy—which seem to work quite independently from each other. The project is quite large and open and, at the same time, the coexistence of such different departments and areas renders its existence very conflictive. During my fieldwork, I have talked with most of the main actors behind each department / area: with historians who took part in the scientific commission to make the *Cité nationale* and who decided to resign their duties in mid 2007, due to the opening of the “Ministry for immigration, national identity and co-development”—which, until November of 2010, financed half of the budget of the museum.<sup>2</sup> Further, I spoke with staff engaged by the museum and in charge of the departments / areas of

history, anthropology, contemporary art, the collection of 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century objects and with arguably the most important department of the museum: the network of immigrant and social associations (the “réseau”). There is huge work involved in each department, and the different backgrounds and aims of each section collide with each other at the moment of negotiation, thus provoking internal conflicts. This situation renders the tracing of a linear “history” of the museum’s concept and trajectory very complex—but here lies also the great potential of this museal arena.

Below, I want to describe the small, temporary exhibit “Football et immigration. Les initiatives du réseau” which was organized by the network of social institutions and staged by the designer who was also in charge of the permanent exhibit of the museum. The exhibit “Football et immigration. Les initiatives du réseau” was located in the “Hall Marie Curie,” which embodies the passage between the colonial frescoes and the “Médiathèque Abdelmalek Sayad”—the museum’s library, which gathers works and key publications about migration. This small exhibit focused on social work. It was, actually, a miniature version of the main exhibit “Repères” in that its space worked as a platform for the intersection between many areas. The first area contained collaborative work of schoolchildren and art students: the schoolchildren had made up images of football and immigration, while art students had taken these images and fashioned a bigger collage—a representation—for the exhibit. The second area was made up of contemporary art works, which reflect also on the

<sup>2</sup>The “Ministère de l’intégration, de l’identité nationale et développement solidaire” began its existence in 2007, thus being responsible of half of the budget of the *Cité nationale*. The ministry was abruptly closed in mid November 2010, and immigration affairs were transferred to the “Ministère de l’intérieur” (Sperrfechter 2010).

main topic. Objects of plastic art, photography, drawings, collages and video-installations were spread through the exhibit between the works of the other areas. A third aspect would be the representation of social projects in France and “development” projects in Africa, which intersect with football. Near the entrance to the “Médiathèque Abdelmalek Sayad,” an electronic guest book, about one meter high, took the role of an object of the exhibit. Outside the “Hall Marie Curie,” in the room with the huge colonial frescoes, visitors find two permanent brown cabins. One of them was bound to the exhibit. Here, visitors could access an intranet space to research about the social and immigrant organizations which participated in this exhibit.

The intersection between the areas was solved by the means of design—optic and spatial ways of organizing diversity and difference in the museal space. The exhibit was small, but elaborate. It showed the mixture between various representational techniques: first, avant-garde representations of depicting “otherness” (in this case, the images of “Africa”); second, “art deco” to organize heterogeneity in a national space (Rosenfeld 2005); third, baroque, as the representation of “migration” is bound to images of excess, proliferation and labyrinths—thus preferring curves rather than lines. Social work was also successfully incorporated to the design. By the way of repetition, this “design” elaborates a way to depict migration in the French context. This repetition has the potential to inscribe such images in the viewing practices and memories of the visitors.

Now, I will turn to the main exhibit “Repères.” Here, design is worth mentioning, as it is not only what visitors might take in emotionally, through image viewing, representation techniques (installation in the space) and the audio-guide (which is also part of the spatial and visual ensemble), that needs to be considered. The

design organizes knowledge and tries to fill up the voids of interdisciplinary work, discussions and (thematic as well as temporal) conflicts.

For example, concerning “history”: chronologies and historical documents—like press articles, magazines, videos and migration laws—are organized in small tables, which correspond to the ten topics of the permanent exhibit, each one placed in the corresponding thematic area: “migrating,” “facing the nation-state,” “welcoming land, hostile France” “here and there,” “living spaces,” “at work,” “roots,” “sport,” “religions” and “cultures.” Important to note is that this strategy was adopted contrary to some historians’ wishes, who would have preferred a chronological sequence to structure the exhibit’s narrative. The designer, Pascal Payeur, worked much closer with the political representative of the museum, Jacques Toubon, than with the individual departments—the pressure to finish the museum in a period of political uncertainty was their main goal (Interview Payeur, 30.09.2010). This provoked tensions with different ways of documenting and displaying the collection.

Throughout the exhibit visitors can see personal objects and interview excerpts on video screens. These were collected by the anthropologist Fabrice Grognet for the permanent exhibit. Grognet has a perspective of defining migration which—contrary to historians who prefer the juridical definition—relies more in the self-representation and self-definition of people themselves as “immigrants.” He did not only choose the objects as such, but he selected interview partners who were to leave their testimonies and biographies in the museum. He has a set of criteria through which he collects temporary or permanent donations (objects) from people for the museum.

Next, the art department would be engaged to choose contemporary art works for the exhibit. Throughout “Repères,” visi-

tors can see photography (artistic and documentary), painting, objects of plastic art, film and art installation. These pieces are inserted between historical facts (history tables) and the personal (immigrant’s) objects. This department relies on other—aesthetic and thematic—criteria to choose what will be exhibited as art and naturally contrasts with Grognet’s work, as it does not take people’s self-definitions as the point of departure. Artist’s origins or biographies are not supposed to play a role in the criteria. The department selects the works relying on the depicted themes and their relevance for the exhibit, and presents them to a higher commission, which attests their aesthetic quality and approves their inclusion into the museum (Interview Renard, 08.03.2010).

Having described this, I would like to comment on the difference between the work of the anthropologist and the art department. Based on a conversation with Grognet, I will show how conflicts arise between different (disciplinary) ways of collecting, displaying and producing knowledge.

In March of 2010, I met Grognet in one of the big meeting rooms of the *Cité nationale*. At one point in our conversation, he mentioned the temporary exhibit of contemporary photography, “Ma Proche Banlieue. Photographies 1980—2007,” which was shown at the *Cité nationale* in 2009. This exhibit of Patrick Zachmann’s photographic work in a specific banlieue had been organized by the art department. Grognet criticized neither the photographic works nor the exhibit as such, but the fact that it was placed at the *Cité nationale*. The exhibit showed pictures of a poor “banlieue,” thus stigmatizing all “banlieues” and, further, the photographed people. The juxtaposition of the pictures’ content with the *Cité nationale* proved to be counterproductive, as it puts the museum’s aim at risk. Instead of changing prejudices against immigration, the museum would

have actually achieved the contrary effect and thus reinforced the existing prejudices.

And here comes the interesting point, as exhibits do not end within the doors of the museum, but are also tied to people and to their bodies. With this exhibit, the museum was not showing contemporary artistic photography of anonymous people, but rather of real French citizens who live in Paris. So, what happened next? One day, according to Grognet, some of the photographed persons recognized themselves and complained to the museum. Why? Because they argued that they were not immigrants. They were, in administrative terms, “French,” and did not want anything to do with the museum’s narrative.

Here, artistic criteria had incidentally reversed the museum’s aim: instead of taking immigrants out of mainstream discourses and making them look better in the French nation, it had turned “French” people into immigrants (!)<sup>3</sup>. This situation makes clear that the word “immigrant” has, in France, a negative connotation, which in turn makes the museum a political space of social struggle and contestation. Also following this example, we can say that the exhibit would go against the juridical / administrative definition of migration which, according to Amar (Interview, 02.2010) was agreed by the committee of historians at the *Cité nationale*. This is what Grognet meant when he expressed his unease that skin color might lead to false classification: immigrants are, as according to Amar, only those who are not “French” in juridical terms. This incident is very important, as it shows differences between anthropological collecting—which links images and objects to bodies and tries to reflect on this—and the dynamics of the contemporary art market and its

<sup>3</sup> This reverses the title of Eugene Weber’s book: *Peasants into Frenchmen. The Modernization of Rural France 1870–1914*, which appeared in 1976.

difficulties when juxtaposed to the French migration museum. Grognet emphasized that, what troubled him, was that anonymous people were classified as immigrants because they had a somehow “different” skin color. He posed the following questions: “who was making them into immigrants? What if the photographed people came from the Antilles and were thus French? The museum is labeling people. And, unfortunately, the *Cité nationale* is not seen as a sacralized place like, for example, the *musée du Louvre*.”

This incident points to the role of immigrants as persons and bodies and their role in museums as images, objects and actors / performers. In the following examples I will go deeper into these questions.

### III. MIGRATION AND MUSEUMS IN BERLIN: WHEN IMMIGRANTS BECOME PERFORMING ACTORS, COLONIAL HERITAGE AND / OR POSTCOLONIAL CURATORS

As I argued in the previous chapter, “people” and their “bodies” end up taking a central role in museal representations of migration—either as objects, as actors or, as we will see, as museum staff and curators—thus dissolving the border between established notions of “selves” and “others.” In this second part, I will give three examples of the representation of migration in museal spaces in Berlin, which are closely related with this issue. I will take on three separate cases at three different levels, as Germany does not have a national migration museum and Berlin does not have a centralized space to exhibit migration. Nevertheless, there are numerous disseminated stages where migration is depicted—either directly or indirectly. In these arenas, the relationship between bodies, objects and museal stages becomes tense. The figure of the immigrant as a person who is represented in the museum,

opens many questions concerning representations. Like in the case of the exhibit “Ma Proche banlieue,” in the *Cité nationale*, the distance between represented images and represented persons tends to disappear, which means that the representations can be directly contested anytime. This “open field” leads me to think about the complexity of the crisis of representation, and about the social structures out of which this crisis possibly originates.

### *A. Immigrants as Curators and Performing Actors*

The first example is a small museum in Berlin, the *Jugendmuseum Schöneberg*, which addresses children and young people in the district of Tempelhof-Schöneberg. The aim of the museum is to represent the history and contemporary society of the district together with two other small museums (Stadtteil Museen) which make up a local museal complex. Since 2002, it shows the exhibit “Villa Global,” which aims to represent the cultural diversity of the district’s “neighbors.” I take this exhibit because of the way it engages with the community of the district in its curatorial practices. Conceived from museum pedagogy, social work and intercultural dialogue, this exhibit has opened a small theatrical and social space, in which the display of “otherness” has acquired important dimensions.

“Villa Global” is a “house” with 14 rooms occupied by people of different origins who are residents of the area of Tempelhof-Schöneberg. To set up the exhibit, the museum worked with “real neighbors” of the area. The museum director and staff chose people with “migration background.” The participants designed their own rooms, freely, choosing the topics, the objects and the representational strategies they wanted, and each participant made his/her own “installation.” This opened very important questions about social participation in the museum. More-

over, this complexity increased at the moment in which some of the curators were incorporated to the museum as guides of “Villa Global.”

In one of my visits to the museum in the Spring of 2010, I wanted to know more about the effect of “self-exotization” which had taken place in some of the rooms. For example, in the “Peruvian” room of “Mr. Rodríguez,” I was confronted with many pictures of Machu Pichu hanging on the walls. The room was full of Peruvian and Latin-American symbols like Che Guevara, many CD’s (salsa and afro rhythms), as well as a baroque altar with a saint. This particular room seemed more like a museum than a place to live. Also in “Mr. Odgesou’s” room there was a great deal of tradition, but at least the visitor could sit down in a couch comfortably and watch a TV-series from Ghana.

Walking through the hostel, I asked the woman in charge of the exhibit about who exactly had curated each room and how. Her answer was: “well, many people... like, for example, myself.” “Ms. Dubinina” had curated the “Ukrainian” room. She showed me the objects and I had the feeling that I was actually in “her” room. We picked up the phone and listened to a conversation in her mother tongue. Afterwards, she told me where she had bought each and every object and the stories behind how she had taken them all the way to Berlin. As we went out of the room I asked her if I could see someone else. In that moment, a man who crossed our way turned to be the curator of the “Iranian/Persian” room. He had come back to the museum to check and replace some objects. We went into his room which was also full of many very traditional objects—which could also be, actually, pieces of an ethnography museum. “Mr. Bahadoran” made a performance with some of the objects while we talked about revolutions and exile.

Each room had a proper name. All names were pseudonyms, except for one:

“Layla,” who also worked for the museum on the weekends. On the day of my next visit, “Layla” was standing at the entrance hall welcoming visitors, wearing an outfit with a headscarf—her usual clothing. She was not pretending to be someone else. She kindly showed me the exhibit and especially her room, which was a very intimate sphere, very elegantly decorated to display the story of her marriage and wedding party. She showed me a collection of headscarves, which she would usually show to schoolchildren and, also, her wedding pictures, one by one.

Afterwards, she took me to “Yücel’s” room. This room is a very traditional, “Turkish” place, but at the same time very real—so it seemed to me. It had a little tea room, a bed, and objects and pictures of a circumcision ritual and feast of “Yücel’s” own son. After the visit, Layla agreed to make the contact between “Yücel” and myself and, as “Yücel” was not engaged by the museum, I went to visit her boutique in another district of Berlin. There, we met and talked for some time about the display of intimacy and other topics. For example, it turned out that her son, some years after the opening of the exhibit, had kindly asked her to dismount the circumcision ritual, as this was beginning to become too intimate for him as an adult. We kept on chatting about how immigrants develop different personalities. The personality she had left in the museum’s room was only one aspect of her; it was her traditional self, through which she lives some aspects of her life. But this image did not wholly describe her being. And, for this reason, she had her boutique, which offered a modern image of an independent woman. But this was also just one aspect among others. When she was asked to make the room for the museum, she had thought that the best would be to show a compact version—a collection—of her “traditional” self.

My trip to the museum brought me closer into the intimacy of people’s lives

and took me all the way to the other side of Berlin. Entering the museum in Schöneberg, I came out in the district of Wilmersdorf-Charlottenburg. I was quite surprised by this journey which started with coming into contact with a display of the real. The bodily presence of the makers in their own rooms opens up a contact zone, a space of performance between the spheres of curation, of the represented objects, learning processes, and every-day life. This is a stage in constant movement.

During an interview with the museum’s director, Petra Zwaka (11.08.2010), we discussed the risks and advantages of this stage. The risk of self-exotization and the over-display of intimacy could become a problem, as the makers can easily lose the sense of the border of what to display and where to display it: a “carnival” effect. A further and very important problem was the generational gap. While the older generations tended to focus on tradition, young people showed other ways to represent their memories. This was visible in the selection of everyday-life objects, where older generations distinguished themselves by displaying traditional furniture while the younger ones preferred to bring items from Ikea. This generates an inter-generational tension between different ways of displaying otherness and images of the self.

Zwaka had tried to bring change in the exhibit by asking new people to move in as other participants moved out. Nevertheless, she was not happy with this and has plans to change the project.<sup>4</sup> The exhibit at

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<sup>4</sup> This statement is very similar to what the director of the museum of the district of *Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg*, Martin Düspohl, told me in Nov. 2009 regarding the permanent exhibit “ein jeder nach seiner Façon? 300 Jahre Zuwanderung nach Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg” (“everyone his/her own way? 300 Years of Migration to Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg”). Although it has been successful, he is also unhappy about it: something has to change. The exhibit was officially closed at the end of 2010.



the *Jugendmuseum Schöneberg* has existed for nearly eight years, and the representations and performances are beginning to look dated. This instability is partly related to the generational gap, but also to the nature of migration exhibits, which have to be in constant transformation in order to make sense. Migration exhibits might have a short life, especially when they are closely tied to communities which are in constant change. Changes in identity and in the relations between transnational spaces mean also changes in representation.

### *B. Colonial Imaginations in Liminal Spaces: "Africa" at the "Carnival of Cultures" and at the Museum*

The second example is a project of the Africa-department of the *Ethnologisches Museum* in Dahlem. This project stems from a bigger project specially conceived by Peter Junge, the head of the Africa-department, for Berlin's future *Humboldt-Forum*. In contrast to Paris, Berlin is a capital city "in the making," which is still re-organizing a whole range of representations and museal collections around the creation of the *Humboldt-Forum*, which will be located at the city's centre.

I see this re-organization through the perspective of the shifts which took place in France / Paris as collections moved prior to the creation of the *musée du quai Branly*. For it was this re-organization which, in Paris, paved the way for placing the *Cité Nationale* project at the building in Porte Dorée. As collections moved from Porte Dorée to the *musée du quai Branly* and to Marseille, the palais at Port Dorée was empty and could host the project of the migration museum. Now, a big contrast with Berlin is that the project for the *Humboldt-Forum* does not contemplate including the topic of "migration." Migration is, until now, a blind spot, a fact which has been heavily criticized in academic circles.

However, the topic of migration—

although not mentioned—"filters" through the walls of the *Humboldt-Forum* by way of actors, bodies and objects. The Africa-department of the museum developed a project especially for the *Humboldt-Forum*, which is extremely interesting as it works with the notion of community, but under the image of a diaspora in Berlin. This project contrasts with other departments of the *Ethnology Museum* in Dahlem, which prepared projects for the *Humboldt-Forum* that engage with local, traditional, and ethnic communities in, for instance, Alaska or Mexico. The Africa-department seems to be working with a Nigerian community, but is actually working with people who moved demographically from Nigeria (their place of birth) to Berlin, that is, with immigrants who are officially associated in Berlin and engage in the cultural life of the city. Nevertheless, the museum does not want to name the immigrants. Junge explicitly rejects to make this shift, although he himself accessed a very important piece for his project in a place, which is permeated by migration processes: the *Karneval der Kulturen* ("Carnival of Cultures") in Berlin.

To transform the African colonial heritage of the museum for the *Humboldt-Forum*, some steps were taken since 2006: the first one was to present ethnographical objects as art ("Kunst aus Afrika"/"Art from Africa," 2006). The second, to extend the project with the exhibit, "Ijele. Zeitgenössische Kunst. Bamum. Benin" ("Ijele. Contemporary Art. Bamum. Benin") (September 2009). This new stage begins with a small room in which a big and colourful object is shown: the "Ijele Mask." This mask was made in Nigeria, especially for the "Carnival of Cultures" in Berlin and it is contextualized as part of the intercultural work of the association *Ikuku-Berlin*<sup>5</sup> at the Carnival.

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<sup>5</sup> *Ikuku-Berlin's* aim is to promote Nigerian culture in Berlin/Germany. It was grounded in 2006 as a German/Nigerian initiative.

To acquire this mask, Junge had negotiated with John Durumba, the head of the Nigerian association *Ikuku-Berlin*. I was very surprised to know that the negotiation had taken place so easily, and that it had been the will of both—Durumba and Junge—that the mask be shown at the museum. Regarding this issue, I interviewed both actors and there seems to be no evidence of big tensions during the negotiations. During a conversation with Durumba (2009), which took place at *Ikuku-Berlin*, I asked him if he had gone to the museum or if the museum had called him. He answered the following:

The museum saw the presentation during the carnival (...). So Dr. Junge (...) came to see the mask and took some pictures of it. And about three or four months later we had a contact, I got a call from (...) the “Karneval der Kulturen” director (...). So she called on me, then I went to her, we had a discussion, she brought the proposal, if it would be good to present it at the *Ethnological Museum*—and I said “actually that was my intention, that was my idea” (...). So that is how Herr Junge comes, and then we start a discussion (...). We lent it (the Ijele mask) to them for one year (...). (Durumba, Nov. 9, 2009)

Junge’s version is similar. When I interviewed him on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of April, 2010, he narrated how he had seen the “Ijele mask” at the carnival and how he wanted to show it in the museum. This mask would be a rarity and he had only seen one outside of Nigeria. He had been surprised. Sometime after the carnival, while he was wondering how to get the mask, he had received a call from *Ikuku-Berlin*.

What is important here is the meaning of the institution of the “Carnival of Cultures” in Berlin as the contact zone

between museums and social / immigrant organizations. The carnival was the place where the “Ijele mask” was shown for a Berlin audience. This means, that the object was already mediated for a specific public. And it was the carnival which made a quick contact possible between *Ikuku-Berlin* and the Africa department of the *Ethnologisches Museum*. The carnival played the role of a successful mediator between both take-holders.

Nevertheless, the ambivalence implied in the acquisition of the mask is what makes the representation of *Ikuku-Berlin* as “diaspora” very contested. The carnival is, on the one hand, an important place for social participation and for the display of cultural “differences.” The roots of this type of carnival in Europe are usually traced back to the *Notting Hill Carnival*, in London. The *Karneval der Kulturen* in Berlin would embody its rhizomatic extension. But, on the other hand, it is also the place for self-exotizations in which objects made in Berlin could be seen as the “other.” It offers a collecting platform for museum curators—among others. The carnival is thus a market of primitivism, which keeps representations in the stable place of “otherness.” During the long weekend of celebrations, the carnival naturalizes participants and objects as “others.” And it is in the context of this liminality in which the negotiation of objects begins. Besides the example of the Africa department of the *Ethnologisches Museum* I could grasp other examples, like the *Stadtteilmuseum Neukölln*, which displays a carnival mask from Colombia in its newly opened exhibit. And it is also in the context of the carnival in which Nigerian culture can be linked to Germany’s colonial heritage—by the way of an object.

In the example of the “Ijele mask,” I think people who have lived a long time in Germany are presented as a diaspora and in juxtaposition with colonial collections, thus silencing migration processes which

anyhow threaten to emerge at any moment.<sup>6</sup> When migration lies at the background of a cultural process, it tends to leak through the representations and emerge in the margins of cultural politics or cultural productions, even in the contexts where it is not wanted. It can always emerge and make the whole ensemble of representations very unstable. This point has been criticized with regards to the *Humboldt Forum*. In her work, ethnologist Beate Binder describes how the planning of the *Humboldt Forum* announced a “dialogue of cultures” with a picture of an exotic woman dancer of the *Karneval der Kulturen* (Binder 2009:292). The carnival seems to have the most important role in regard to the representation of images of “otherness” in the *Humboldt Forum* project, and will thus acquire important visibility in Berlin and Germany. Emerging in Notting Hill, London, and travelling to Berlin, the carnival dynamics have been appropriated by local/national projects. The *Karneval der Kulturen* might fulfill the role of making and securing a peripheral space for the display of otherness, and of making this place stable enough to stage “temporary” performances—in which acts of participation can be simulated.

This is a very important phenomenon, because it can be compared to the dynamics of the contemporary art market which has been flourishing in Berlin for years. Returning to the exhibit “Ijele. Zeitgenössische Kunst. Bamum. Benin”: If we go beyond

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<sup>6</sup> This silencing of “migration” is a constitutive part of Germany’s nation-building process. Kaschuba (2008) describes how the dramatic experience of migration has been normally blended, migration thus being conceived as “otherness.” The psychological and social problems related to it are silenced, and so remembering often becomes taboo, and memory a trauma (Kaschuba 2008:310). This silencing process—where migration and transformation are taken to be shameful—can be seen in the experiences of “German diasporas,” “guest-workers” and the “integration” of the former GDR after “reunification” (see Ibid.:295-329).

the small room where the “Ijele Mask” is placed, we land in a space called “Contemporary art / Africa.” Here, there is a clear relation between the museum and the art market—galleries and art biennales. The latter mediate images of otherness and make the contact between artists and ethnological museums possible. In the work shown in the exhibit, it is not clear through which criteria this art is representative of “Africa.” The art market is a process by which art is mediated into museums and thus plays a similar role as the institution of the carnival (simulating participation of “Africans” in the exhibit).

But, on the other hand, there also exist art institutions in Berlin which play an important role in changing these dynamics. As I will show in the next example, democratic art institutions offer a stage in which “new” actors (not the traditional museum curators) can depict community work, transnational identities and migration in their own terms.

#### IV. THE IMMIGRANT ASSOCIATION *KORIENTATION AND THE NEUE GESELLSCHAFT FÜR BILDENDE KUNST*

To focus on the role of artistic spaces for the representation of migration, I will describe an exhibit that took place in an art institution, the *Neue Gesellschaft für Bildende Kunst (NGBK)* or “New society for plastic arts.”<sup>7</sup> The exhibit was called “Shared. Divided. United” and was inaugurated in October 2009. The exhibit embodied the convergence of the immigrant organization *KorIENTATION* and this art institution, the *NGBK*, of which practically anyone can be a member. At the *NGBK*, the rule is that five members of the curatorial board have to support a project in order for it to be

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<sup>7</sup> The *NGBK* has been financed by the *Stiftung* (Foundation) *Deutsche Klassenlotterie* since 1969.

approved. Five members of *Korientation*—“first” and “second” generation, some with academic backgrounds, who define themselves as German-Korean—joined the democratic art institution and worked out a concept for an exhibit. It was approved. With it, an interesting representation of their work came to life.

The exhibit was complex and carefully elaborated. It also showed a continuity with concepts and work done in Germany over the past few years. When I interviewed one of the curators, Sun-Ju Choi, she confirmed that she and another member of the curatorial board had been part of “Projekt Migration” (2005–2006). “Projekt Migration” has been the biggest exhibit on the topic of migration in Germany, which heavily relied on contemporary art as a medium of expression. The importance of “Projekt Migration” is huge, because it brought together actors from many different disciplines. An example is the enormous exhibit catalogue, where the international selection of authors represents the academic disciplines of sociology, history, post-colonial studies, gender, and art. The catalogue gives space to images of art and documents related to migration. The texts were published in the original languages with translations. The publication/catalogue *Projekt Migration* shows similarities with avant-garde magazines like *Documents*, *October* or *Lettre Internationale*. “Shared. Divided. United” was a unique exhibit in terms of the representational strategies it showed. The exhibit’s narrative was built in the way of an art installation, as it created history out of objects collected from the people themselves who had lived the migration experience between a divided Korea and a divided Germany. It mixed works of plastic art with documentary pieces (video) and relied on the epistemologies of post-colonialism and gender. This was visible in the style of narrating the history of Korean guest-workers to Germany and on pictori-

ally representing the gender division of labor.

Nevertheless, the exhibit “Projekt Migration,” which took place in the open urban space of the city of Köln, had lacked much more participation from “non-German actors” within German society or, using the mainstream political language, actors with “migration background.” This was the statement made by Choi during our conversation on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of November 2009. I think this has to be noted and reflected upon, as this problem comes up very often when interviewing “non-German” actors, and the issue will intensify in the coming years. The members of *Korientation* had felt underrepresented at the time of the making of “Projekt Migration” and this would be one of the reasons which inspired them to make their own exhibit. Choi stated that, although they had played the role of scientific researchers in “Projekt Migration,” the decisions—the selection of historical materials, the “look” of the exhibit—had been taken by the “Mehrheitsgesellschaft” (members of the German social majority).

Thus, “Shared. Divided. United” can be described as a project of “continuity in difference,”<sup>8</sup> as it stems from the “German” project *Projekt Migration* and takes its representational strategies and conceptual framings to depict their narrative. But, at the same time, it develops differences and specificities. As Choi pointed out, “Shared. Divided. United” was conceived by German-Koreans only—all coming from the socialization of postcolonial studies—and from its natural counterpart, gender studies. Also, the exhibit relies much more on post-colonial epistemologies<sup>9</sup>, gender

<sup>8</sup> I take the phrase “continuity in difference” from Gayatri Spivak’s conference at the *Freie Universität zu Berlin*, on June, 2010.

<sup>9</sup> This was clear in the terminology used at the exhibit: the emphasis in „in-between spaces“ and “shared histories/narratives” refers to the work of Homi K. Bhabha and Shalini Randeria.

perspectives and art (installation) as representational strategies than “Projekt Migration” and is a statement about lack of participation, affirming difference.

To come to an end, I want to make two last observations. Surprisingly, this last example makes me think about phenomena which I have been observing in Paris. The first one is: “Shared. Divided. United” was inaugurated at the time of the commemoration of the 20th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall. It could be seen as an example of the engagement of immigrant associations in representing their histories and their contributions in the context of national commemorations. This shows a big parallel to what happened in France as the preparations for the commemoration of the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the French Revolution took place in 1989. The association and archive *Génériques*, in Paris, created the exhibit “France des étrangers, France des libertés. Presse et communautés dans l’histoire nationale” (1989), which was made specifically for the commemoration festivities. Here, we can see how immigrant associations have inscribed social and cultural work as well as their memories in the national landscapes / memories through participating in commemorations of the “history with a big H.”

My second observation is that, in both countries, some of the political activists and representatives of immigrant associations I have talked to show not only affinities with post-colonial and gender epistemologies, but rely explicitly on the example of social movements, which took place in the United States: the civil rights movement, the Chicano movement, the “teatro campesino” (El Yazami, 31.05.2010) and / or take events like the Obama election as crucial acts concerning political representation—which are far away from taking place in Europe (Brandalise, 28.04.2010). In my conversations with members from *Génériques* as well as with the representa-

tive of the *Migrationsrat Berlin Brandenburg*, it was clear that their work is based in transatlantic bonds and transnational networks.

In the field of representation, these bonds are presented through the means of plastic art and performance to build up in-between narratives. This is the way “immigrant” (“non-German” or “non-French”) actors have taken to represent migration, their communities and their transnational bonds, as well as to empower and become curators in the scene.

## VI. CONCLUSIONS

The projects in Paris and in Berlin show important points of convergence when seen through the perspective of the debates on representation and, also, when related to the fact that immigrants, simultaneously understood as actors, bodies and objects of “western” history, have found different ways to act and change the established narratives of migration.

The *Cité nationale* (2007–2010) as well as *Projekt Migration* (2005–2006) have developed representational strategies which have established ways of organizing diversity. Nevertheless, these strategies are made up from the standpoint of national perspectives, as immigrant groups and individuals are hardly represented in the overall making of the exhibits. All museal staff holding relevant posts in France and Germany lack “migration background.”

Plastic art and design are crucial to creating spaces of communication and to including “otherness” into national and European narratives. Also, interdisciplinary approaches and the de-centering of the museum—making exhibits outside the museum, in the urban city spaces (like in Paris and Köln)—as well as community work are relevant representational practices. The display of “migrations” is based on a mix of visual and auditory technolo-

gies and the representation of biographies and oral history; this type of work intersects with ethnographical interview methods. Further, two European traditions of depicting “otherness” and displaying images of the “avant-garde” play key roles in “filtering” images of migration. These are “white / European” representations of the history of “Jews” and the “Shoah,” as well as “Africa,” “blackness” and “slavery”—these two being the most dominant diasporic representations in Europe (Vergès 2007). All migration—or the performance of migration—tends to be filtered through these “white or European-constructed” perspectives, thus running the risk of freezing on their way to singularity.

Beyond design and frozen images of the “other,” which are also related to the geopolitical construction of the “third world,” we have seen how actors and communities empower, thus establishing a continuity in difference (as curators). One important actor in this field is the association and archive *Génériques*, in Paris, as it engages in collecting documents, safeguarding memories of immigrant associations, producing knowledge (as an ensemble) and displaying migration through exhibits—and always in tension with official representations. In Germany there exists a similar archive, *DOMID*<sup>10</sup>, which is not located in Berlin but in Köln and strives for a similar aim as *Génériques* (with much less success). As I commented in regard to political activists and this type of archive, it is important to observe their transnational ties with minority movements and transatlantic transfers of knowledge. Although the exhibits (as final products) may be presented as “French” or “German”—as they are shown in national contexts, are partially or fully state-

<sup>10</sup> *Dokumentationszentrum und Museum über die Migration in Deutschland e.V.* („Documentation Centre and Museum of Migration in Germany“).

financed and even juxtaposed to national commemorations—they emerge from transnational and transatlantic exchanges.<sup>11</sup>

Although the main difference between Paris and Berlin is that France has a national migration museum and Germany does not (one field being centralized, the other fragmented), the fields are not so divergent if we take into consideration that, even if the *Cité nationale* embodies a “center,” the museum has no stability and no linear narrative—nowhere to hold on. The building, the departments, the various ministries which finance it, everything points to a structural weakness. It seems as weak as the small and temporary projects in Berlin.

In both countries, we find work between the museum and the communities. Here, the *Cité nationale* and the *Jugendmuseum Schöneberg* (as well the other Bezirk or Stadtteilmuseen) converge in their aims to work with communities and to think new ways of participation. The *Cité nationale* has given the space of the small “Hall Marie Curie” for associations like the (now disappeared) Turkish cultural association *ELELE*<sup>12</sup> to organize temporary exhibits (in 2009). Also, the Spanish association *FACEEF* mounted an exhibit with the *Cité nationale* (in 2007), but in this case it happened “hors les murs.” This means, that they re-routed their visitors to the premises of the Spanish association, thus extending the scope of the museum to the urban space (Gasó Cuenca, 04.10.2010). The association *Génériques* played a much bigger role at the *Cité* in the big gallery

<sup>11</sup> A networking between different fields of knowledge reminiscent of the international character of the avant-garde. For the linking between Migration and avant-garde see Römheld (2007).

<sup>12</sup> *ELELE* disappeared surprisingly in April of this year (2010), as the *Ministry of Immigration*, decided to cut its financial support. All associations have been affected by this abrupt and unjust decision, but not all have disappeared from one day to the other, like *ELELE*. (Petek, 29.09.2010)

space dedicated to temporary exhibits, located just beside “Repères.” They managed to present a bigger narrative (in time) with the exhibit “Génération, un siècle d’histoire culturelle des Maghrébins en France” (2009–2010).

Overall, one can argue that while the *Jugendmuseum Schöneberg* showed individual self-representations in “Villa Global,” the *Cité nationale* showed this process at the level of social and immigrant organizations (as cultural units). We can observe how the museal structures open special—rather small and temporary—spaces for the performance of migration. Although individuals and immigrant associations perform, they do not enter the big stage of decision-making, as the concepts are made and knowledge produced by representatives of the national societies. From another point of view, this is a very contradictory situation: in the national landscapes, migration museums and exhibits on migration—although made mostly by “nationals”—also occupy the most peripheral places within these landscapes and have the lowest budgets.

The second convergence between the fields Paris / Berlin is the re-organization of collections and projects to stage a transformed revival of the colonial heritage. In both cities, colonial heritage is sought to be transformed and prepared for a new era. At the *Cité nationale*, this concentrates at the “Palais des Colonies” and poses a big crisis of representation for the museum itself. In Berlin, the Benin collections (like the Benin bronzes) are also displayed in “transformed” landscapes—designed for the *Humboldt Forum*—but are also very problematic as they link the performance of an associated group of people to a colonial history which is not critically examined. Like in the case of the previous examples, the German-Nigerian association does not impact the concept or decision-making of the exhibit. The project does not show “immigrant” presence but rather links

them to their mythical origins and thus displays frozen images of “otherness.” With this strategy, controversy and debate around colonial issues and German colonial history are silenced, as the project cannot be linked to debates of contemporary migration.<sup>13</sup> Still, this debate threatens to emerge at any moment in the grounds of the coming exhibits in Berlin.

The *Cité nationale* has always existed in a very threatening context, imprisoned between the Immigration Ministry and the history of the palace.<sup>14</sup> Since its grounding in the Spring of 2007, the Immigration Ministry applied an aggressive migration policy in the national and, in 2008, also at a European level (as France took the European presidency for that year)—thus going against the work and the initial aim of the French migration museum. Towards the end of 2009 and until the beginning of 2010, the Ministry launched a debate on “national identity” which threatened to revive ideas and sentiments coming from the far right. Further, the plans to build a *musée de l’histoire de France* (Thiesse 2010) threaten to dismount the autonomy of the *Cité nationale*, should the financial support for the *Cité* be rerouted in another direction.

<sup>13</sup> Kaschuba explains how this silencing is linked with a process in which immigrants are kept only in the area of “communicative memory”—gathered around immigrant associations, sport clubs and ethnic restaurants—but out of the area of the production of “cultural memory” (Kaschuba, 2008:315). Like in the case of carnivals and some co-operations with museums, immigrants are in “in-between” and temporary spaces, in the periphery and in the areas of “communicative” (Halbwachs 1991) and “performative” memory, associated with bodily practices and rituals, as Connerton (1989) points out. But these spaces do not impact the production of cultural memory (Assmann 2007), which is closely related to museums and objects, or knowledge (as stressed by postcolonial theory). The breaking of these taboos would unleash new debates on subalternity, power and representation.

<sup>14</sup> Since the beginning, there have existed critical voices who have argued for the use of the palace for a museum of colonial history (i.e. Pascal Blanchard).

In 2010, Sarkozy's racist campaign to expel the (European) Roma with the support of this / his Ministry, took the crisis of national representation to a European (regional) level. The Ministry closed abruptly in November of 2010. Consequently, the budget of the *Cité* will be administered by a different ministry.

Further, the *Cité nationale* was occupied between October 7<sup>th</sup> 2010 and January 28<sup>th</sup> 2011 by the labor union (*CGT*) and the *Sans Papiers* movement in their demands for the promises of regularization that were made to them. The *Cité nationale* became their political forum. The museum remained open and adjusted itself to its new "visitors" and, during this period of "occupation," the gap between museums, colonial history and civil society practically vanished. Compared to this major event, the examples described in this paper look minor. The 500 *Sans Papiers* experienced their everyday-life in the museum, inhabiting the *Cité nationale*—sleeping, eating, washing and organizing their "dossiers" in the museum—(Sperrfechter 2010). And they also played the role of visitors, as the staff seems to have prepared tours of the exhibit "Repères." As Sperrfechter (2010)<sup>15</sup> has noted, they made an important political and symbolic presence—as the men (mostly from Africa) as well as the women and children (mostly Asian) have been mainly photographed in front of the colonial frescoes—thus naturally going all the way to colonial history and reviving old debates on representation and exclusion.

During my fieldwork, it was clear that the *Cité nationale* was not pulling much public.<sup>16</sup> But it has a public which comes naturally to it. When exhibits open their doors they bring people in—their bodies

<sup>15</sup> Ute Sperrfechter works at the *Cité nationale*, in the department which organizes the cultural activities and events. She reported on the experience between the museum and the *Sans Papiers* in a conference in Vienna on November 19, 2010.

and their political presence flow into the museal space. As the place of struggle and contestation, the *Cité nationale* became the forum for demands of labor and citizenship: these debates reached the museum and its staff, making it an explicit platform for demands on representation. Now, the solutions are no more in the domain of curators, but extend to the general field of social / national representations and to the domain of politics<sup>17</sup>. It might be that the most the important political activity of the museum has been to offer the *Sans Papiers* space and support to prepare their *dossiers*, demand their regularization and, hopefully, acquire a "legal" status.

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<sup>16</sup> Some interview partners said that the public was made up by researchers and PhD students, like me. I would be the ethnographer, fan and public of the *Cité nationale*—all in one.

<sup>17</sup> The occupation opened important debates between the museum and the ministries. It was the first time that a museum remained open and engaged with the demands of the "occupants". Nevertheless, it did not have a "happy end"; it seems that the debates which were unleashed increased the conflicts between actors and institutions.



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