

# CAMOC MUSEUMS OF CITIES REVIEW

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## MIGRATION: CITIES (IM)MIGRATION AND ARRIVAL CITIES

SPECIAL  
★ EDITOR ★

# CONTENTS CAMOC MUSEUMS OF CITIES REVIEW

## 03 INTRODUCTION

- Migration:Cities – experiences and future, *Gegé Leme Joseph*

## 08 MIGRATION:CITIES | (IM)MIGRATION AND ARRIVAL CITIES WORKSHOPS

- **ATHENS**  
Museums, Migrants and Social Innovation in the Cities, *Marlen Mouliou*
- **MEXICO CITY**  
Migration:Cities | (Im)Migration And Arrival Cities Workshop, *Catherine Cole*
- **FRANKFURT**  
Migration:Cities | (Im)Migration And Arrival Cities Workshop, *Nicole Van Dijk*

## 14 PARTICIPANTS' CONTRIBUTIONS

- City Museums and migration: towards a better understanding, *Smaro Skoulikidis*
- The active collection as an instrument for inclusion and social change, *Nicole Van Dijk*
- Oral history with refugees: the marriage between community involvement and a museum's primary mission, *Bram Beelaert*
- National Taiwan Museum opens up for (im)migrant communities: adding new intercultural dialogues between museums and (im)migrants, *Emily Hsu Wen Yuan*
- Confusion of an architect: curatorship and space design in a participatory exhibition project, *Elif Çiğdem Artan*
- Towards a new community relevance: the Manitoba Museum and a gallery for the city, *Rachel Ericksson*
- The heritage of immigration: rethinking the museum's role as a mediator in identity building, *Andrea Delaplace*
- How to put migration in a museum? A reflection on the museum representation of migration, *Andrea Delaplace*
- *Angisa on top*, *Annemarie de Wildt*

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ICOM international council of museums

ICAMOC ICOM international committee for the collections and activities of museums of cities

ICR ICOM international committee for regional museums

COMMONWEALTH ASSOCIATION OF MUSEUMS

MIGRATION: CITIES (IM)MIGRATION AND ARRIVAL CITIES

# Migration: Cities | (im)migration and arrival cities – experiences and future

*Gegê Leme Joseph\**

This Special Edition of our CAMOC Review dedicated to *Migration: Cities | (im)migration and arrival cities*, marks the end of a period of three and a half years since 2016, the project's inception and development period as an ICOM Special Project. It seems like yesterday, that Marlen Mouliou, Nicole van Dijk and I sat at a hotel lobby in Glasgow, Scotland in November 2015 to discuss the seeds that would become the backbone of the project we developed.

Since 2015, many of our colleagues at CAMOC, CAM and ICR came together to shape the project to what it is today. I would like to start by thanking the invaluable contribution of Catherine C. Cole, who on behalf of CAM and CAMOC, came on board as a Co-Coordinator, and took many responsibilities in making this project come to where it is today. Also many other colleagues at CAMOC for their invaluable support to this initiative, including Joana Sousa Monteiro, CAMOC Chair, Jelena Savić, CAMOC Secretary, Afsin Altayli, former CAMOC Secretary and now an ICOM Secretariat member of the Council's Museum Definition Committee, Layla Betti, CAMOC Treasurer to date, Smaro Skoulikidis, and so many other colleagues in and beyond the CAMOC Board.

Taking *Migration: Cities* off the paper to its current nascent state was not an easy task. Not only because of the complex subject matter that it discusses, but because between people's time constraints (we are all volunteers) and our lack of resources, as well as the novelty of the initiative, we felt that creating a useful and well thought through tool for museums, migrants and other professionals to discuss and exchange experiences around migration required in-depth discussions and the flexibility to learn from our mistakes, and to adjust as we went along.

The process we adopted was one based on fluidity and on the idea of a living organism. As our Athens Workshop keynote speaker Dr Petros Polychronis posed, we are trying to plant a garden where ideas, connections and new relationships can flourish. Based on that, we quickly understood that three ingredients were key to achieving our goals: (1) a platform for learning and exchange, where our contributors and partners could make their experiences representing, interpreting and discussing migration visible, accessible and part of a larger collective resource from which all of us could learn; (2) key strategic guidelines for the project, that would provide us with direction, serve as a curatorial backbone and a process organiser. This was a challenging process, and one that we know requires many other levels of refinement before it achieves an optimum level; (3) a network of concerned museums, migrants and professionals willing to work together. As we also learned, this too requires tireless work to develop, and is a process we aim to be able to continue in the coming years.

Lastly, we are also aware that *Migration: Cities* needs to live beyond its founding members and committees, so we are currently starting discussions with several possible organisations, agencies and individuals, as well as with ICOM and the committees in which the project started, to discuss a path into the future.

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Board Member of the Committee for the Activities and Collections of Museums of Cities

This publication is a celebration of important achievements of the last three and a half years. It starts by featuring a small report from each of the organisers of our three international workshops: Athens and Mexico City (2017) and Frankfurt (2018). Whereas the proceedings of each one of these workshops can be found at the CAMOC publications resource centre digitally, this publication brings brief highlights and personal impressions on their meaning and results.

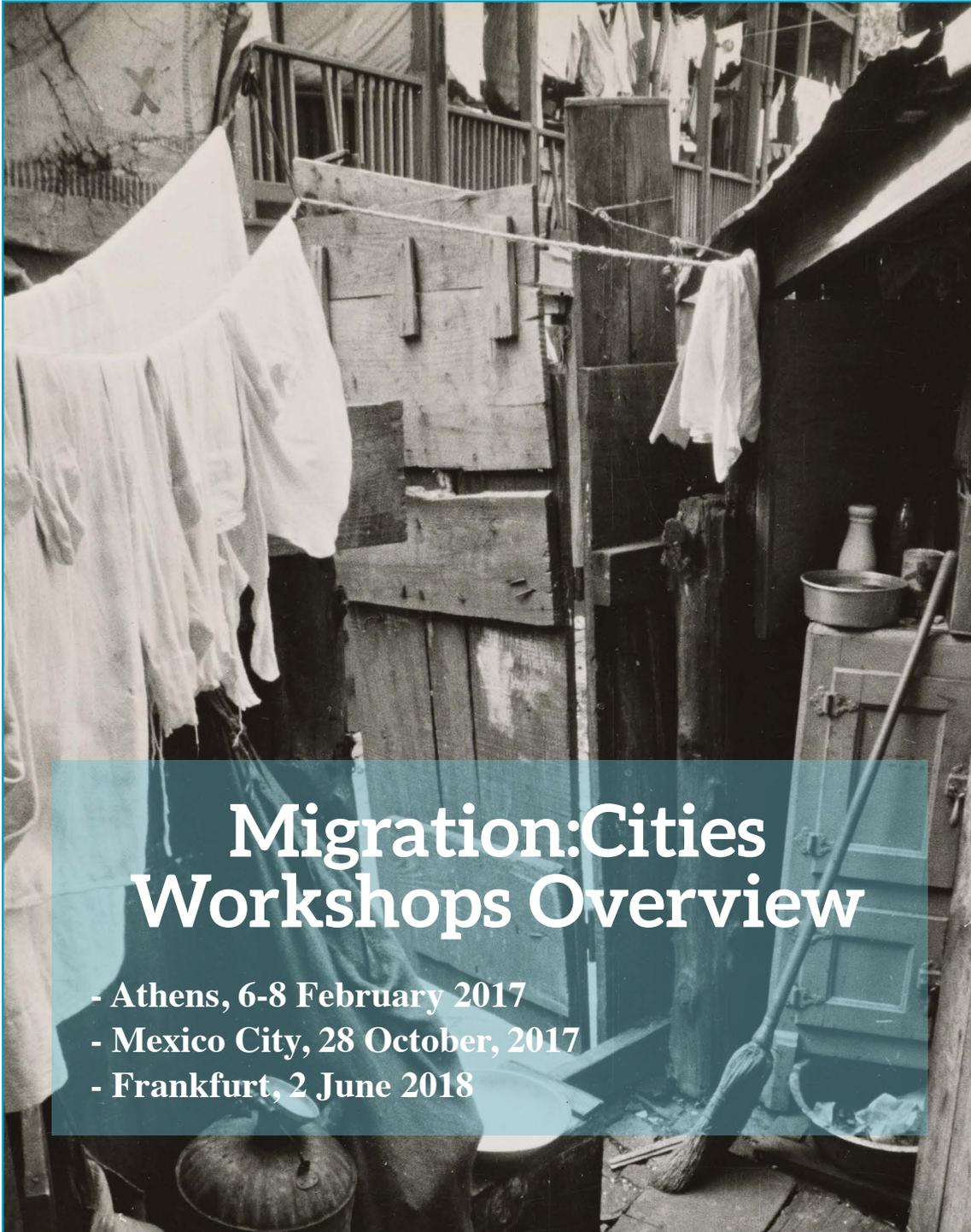
We also delve deep into some definitions and stats around migration, based on UN standards, to help us locate our discourse. We hope this can provide a shared framework and help us reflect about a future path that takes into account dramatic numbers on different migration crisis unfolding around the globe, less publicized but of huge importance for the future of these discussions.

Most importantly, this review brings invaluable articles on our committee members' experiences and projects carried out in the course of the last three and a half years, with a special focus on migrant communities' participation, as well as new ways to look into representation, interpretation, collections and its connections in our museum practice.

As we prepare to embark on a new phase of the *Migration:Cities | (im)migration and arrival cities* project, we hope this publication gives all food for thought, and encourages you to join our next steps as contributors and partners, so we can finally start a movement that will be meaningful and relevant for many years to come!

Hope you enjoy!

Please visit us on [migrationcities.net](http://migrationcities.net)



## Migration:Cities Workshops Overview

- Athens, 6-8 February 2017
- Mexico City, 28 October, 2017
- Frankfurt, 2 June 2018

## Migration:Cities | (im)migration and arrival cities Athens Workshop

Municipal Gallery of Athens, 6-8 February, 2017

*In collaboration with ICOM CAMOC, ICOM ICR and ICOM Greece*

*Marlen Mouliou\**



*Athens workshop attendees gather at the roof of the National Museum of Contemporary Art. © Marlen Mouliou*

Writing again about the first workshop organized in Athens in 2017, in the context of the project **Migration:Cities | (im)migration and arrival cities** has not been straight forward for me. Not because time has long passed since the very beginning of the preparatory work in designing and implementing this first workshop (the clock was set in July 2016 in Milan during the last Triennial ICOM Conference, or even much earlier in November 2015 during the first CAMOC workshop on the subject of Migration: see special 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary events in all *CAMOCnews* published in 2015 and early 2016); thus naturally the stratigraphy of my memory has been then after loaded with more layers of data about other work and life matters. Oddly, my predicament has been mostly related with the virtues of this work and of our plans of how to implement it, as our focus has been right from the start on documenting with detail its contours by publishing regularly step-by-step our proceedings both in written and audio-visual format. For those who have not been present in Athens during the inaugural workshop, a special dossier was made available in *CAMOC Review* (1/2017)<sup>1</sup> that contained the first detailed report of the project, its aims, objectives and methodologies as well the results of our discussions in Athens together with personal reviews signed by the then four grantees of the workshop representing three

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\* Marlen Mouliou, Assistant Professor of Museology, National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, Greece  
Former CAMOC Chair, Co-coordinator of the project *Migration:Cities | (im)migration and arrival cities*

<sup>1</sup> See Mouliou, M., Leme, G., van Dijk, N., 2017, Museums, Migrants and Social Innovation in the Cities A (P)Review To The Project Migration:Cities | (im)migration and arrival cities, *CAMOC Review*, 1, 40-49, [http://network.icom.museum/fileadmin/user\\_upload/minisites/camoc/PDF/Newsletters/CAMOC-REVIEWNo.1-Apr2017FR3.pdf](http://network.icom.museum/fileadmin/user_upload/minisites/camoc/PDF/Newsletters/CAMOC-REVIEWNo.1-Apr2017FR3.pdf). See also in the same issue the Grantees Reports by Aikaterini Dori, Masum Momaya, Wafaa Khattab, Marilia Bonas (p.p. 49-56)

countries (Germany, USA, Brazil). Additionally, all the presentations and discussions filmed during the first day of the workshop have been professionally edited and uploaded on the website of the project in order to be also widely accessible.<sup>2</sup> Last but not least, the annual special project reports submitted in ICOM for evaluation by SAREC have been important classified documents that outline the progressive unfolding of the project in every step of its shaping.



*Keynote speaker Prof Polychronis. © Marlen Mouliou*

So, what remains to be said about the inaugural workshop in Athens?

Perhaps some personal notes that relate to the “before/during/after” times of its realization, as these have been registered in my mind and heart and left an imprint in my work.

So, let me start with the enthusiasm and determination as well as the team spirit and collective knowledge we have always shared in CAMOC. These have been the driving forces that fueled our effort to apply for ICOM funding in order to kick start the project and experiment with the ideas and potentials it represented. In November 2015, CAMOC collaborated with the Open Museum in Glasgow and organized a super successful interactive workshop about the theme.<sup>3</sup> In the evenings, after nurturing our minds and souls with interesting ideas shared during the workshop, I remember working tirelessly with Gegê and Nicole at the cozy lobby of a typical Scottish B&B in order to prepare the first draft of our proposal to ICOM which gradually matured to a successful application.

Then, organising the inaugural workshop in Athens was a puzzle-like task and experience

for me, despite my long career in the museum profession and the organization of dozens of international meetings. Not because of the technical and practical complexities an international meeting entails but because of the timing of this workshop at the peak of the refugee crisis (with Greece being quite at the epicentre of it) and the increased need to give real substance to our work and intentions in order to do something with clear purpose and meaning that would bring change in our working practice. The decision to promote cross-sectorial discussions between museum professionals (academics and curators),

*The meeting venue – the Municipal Gallery of Athens. © Marlen Mouliou*



<sup>2</sup> See [http://www.migrationcities.net/case\\_studies/](http://www.migrationcities.net/case_studies/)

<sup>3</sup> See CAMOC’s Migration Workshop Glasgow Dossier, CAMOCnews 1, 2016, p.p. 25-30, [http://network.icom.museum/fileadmin/user\\_upload/minisites/camoc/PDF/Newsletters/CAMOCNL\\_No.\\_1\\_-\\_2016\\_-\\_January\\_r.pdf](http://network.icom.museum/fileadmin/user_upload/minisites/camoc/PDF/Newsletters/CAMOCNL_No._1_-_2016_-_January_r.pdf)



Top: Workshop group discussions. Bottom: Visit to Melissa Network  
© Marlen Mouliou

social workers and psychologists, specialists in intercultural education, representatives of NGOs and contemporary refugees was daring but absolutely in need. It required intensive preparatory work and a lot of talking to professionals outside our sector; yet, every minute was worthy, as this pre-staged engagement created more solid foundations for cross-sectorial interdisciplinary work and promoted a clearer understanding for the meaning and potential of the project we wanted to set out.

Selecting the right venue for the workshop was also key in the planning, not only in order to have a comfy and well-equipped space, but in order to have the project set out in an urban setting and a museum environment loaded with symbolic meaning. The Municipal Gallery of Athens, at the alternative multicultural district of Metaxourgeio proved to be a very suitable choice. Moreover, the *City Circles* project and exhibition that run during the same time in the Gallery offered further insights to the city of Athens

and the district of Metaxourgeio to both local and international workshop participants.<sup>4</sup> Equally, although very differently, the possibility we had to visit the premises of the Melissa Community Network, located in another multicultural neighbourhood of Athens, and talk intimately with migrant women and the founders of the NGO, has been an experience of deep humane value.

The design of the workshop has been based on the principles of systems thinking and working practice, and much of this wisdom and methodology has been applied both in the team work developed during the workshop and the synthesis that was accomplished at the end of the first day of the workshop, as well as the careful selection of speakers (let alone of the keynote, Dr. Petros Polychronis, an authority in systems thinking in Greece and abroad). All of them exemplified a large network of diverse working methods and cultures.

The workshop itself was an open process, which although based on a structured outline that served as a scaffolding, nonetheless encouraged and welcomed the parallel creation of a polyphonic ground beneath the scaffolding fertilized by the colourful diverse opinions expressed. And although the first day was too long and intensive, there was stamina and drive to continue the conversation beyond the programmed closure of the debate, because the participants were strongly committed to talking and listening and felt that the discussion was so nutritious that the real food dinner could wait.

<sup>4</sup> See Fortuyn, I. 2017, *City Circles Athens*, *CAMOC Review*, 1, 33-35, [http://network.icom.museum/fileadmin/user\\_upload/minisites/camoc/PDF/Newsletters/CAMOC-REVIEWNo.1-Apr2017FR3.pdf](http://network.icom.museum/fileadmin/user_upload/minisites/camoc/PDF/Newsletters/CAMOC-REVIEWNo.1-Apr2017FR3.pdf)

I would like to believe that this first workshop acted as a good fertilizer in many ways, creating a beautifully articulated “garden” of new ideas for the workshops that followed in Mexico and Frankfurt.

On a purely personal level, it also offered me the opportunity to host dear colleagues and friends in my city and my home. How wonderful is that! It also energized me with new ideas and gave me the drive to explore how we can use our professional capacities and networks in order to bring social change in the everyday life of our cities and in of our smaller or bigger communities. For this and the transformative experience that led me to the making of the Museum of Our Discoveries, another text has taken shape to tell the tale in one of the recent issues of *Museum International*.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> See Mouliou, M., 2018, The Museum of Our Discoveries: Empowering young refugees in an urban context, *Museum International* (Museums and Contested Histories), Vol. 70, No. 279-280, p.p. 124-133.

## Migration:Cities | (im)migration and arrival cities Mexico City Workshop National Museum of Cultures, October 28, 2017

*In collaboration with ICOM CAMOC, ICOM ICR and ICOM Mexico*

Catherine Cole\*



Doug Saunders giving the introductory keynote. © Catherine Cole

The second *Migration:Cities* workshop was held in Mexico City on October 28, 2017: 45 delegates from 20 countries participated in the workshop which began with a very thought-provoking presentation by keynote speaker Doug Saunders, author of *Arrival City: How the Largest Migration in History is Reshaping our World*. His presentation was titled *The Museum at the Centre of Arrival*. Saunders provided an overview of migration, emigration and immigration patterns and the potential role of museums, libraries and cultural centres as institutions for inclusion.

It is important for host countries to understand the cultures of immigrants,

and for immigrants to have the opportunity to share their culture with their children and with their new neighbours.

Usually most museums in a city are concentrated in the historic district or downtown core. One of the physical challenges Saunders discussed is social problems created by vacant spaces between housing in districts usually occupied by immigrants – and the potential to create infill in the form of museums that will both make the community safer and provide an opportunity to create more social cohesion through cultural heritage initiatives. These museums may look different than traditional museums, reflecting the cultures of the neighbourhood.

Our second keynote speaker Mexican anthropologist Francisco Javier Guerrero spoke about some of the challenges posed by in-country migration as well as immigration, and the need for greater empathy between peoples. In many ways we are all alike but people migrate for different reasons, and patterns change through time yet there are cultural differences that we need to make an effort to understand. He emphasised the importance of intangible heritage, not just the tangible.

Marlen Mouliou gave an introduction to the *Migration:Cities* project and encouraged participants to contribute to the website and toolkit available at <http://network.icom.museum/camoc/projectsworkshops/workshops/L/8/>. We encouraged participants to consider how migration is impacting their cities and how museums are engaging with migrants and migration support agencies to develop exhibitions and programmes.

We had several presentations by museum workers in different parts of the world about migration-related initiatives in their own museums – whether related to current or past

\* Catherine Cole, Principal Consultant at Catherine C. Cole & Associates  
CAMOC Vice-Chair, CAM Secretary-General

migrations – including a presentation by CAM board member Rachel Erickson about the development of a new exhibition about immigrants in the City of Winnipeg, Canada that will be mounted at the Manitoba Museum, as well as presentations by Annemarie de Wildt about an exhibition under development called *Representing Amsterdam – Music and Migration*; a presentation by Jenny (Chunni) Chiu, Hiromi Takeo and Kaori Akazawa titled *(Im)migration and Museum Trends in Japan*; a presentation by Andrea Delaplace about *Immigration Heritage in São Paulo*; and a video contribution Sara Kariman called *The Functionality and Necessity of a Museum’s Attention to Immigration with a Case Study of Afghan Refugees in Iran*.

Then we had a panel of papers from NGO representatives who focus on migration in Mexico City, including Irazú Gómez Vargas on *Hospitality Response to Migration in Mexico* and Fabienna Venet Rebiffe and Inés Giménez Delgado on *Open Museums: Spaces of Social Participation for Inclusion from Diversity*. Together they provided a good overview of migration issues in Mexico and engagement with museums. They pointed out some of the difficulties in working with migrants – that they are trapped in a position that makes it difficult

for them to think about museum collaborations, that the transient nature of their lives makes any sort of commitment a challenge, that they feel stigmatised by their situation, and are often fearful of potential repercussions of speaking publicly.

We showed a number of videos that have been created for inclusion on the *Migration:Cities* website – and are already available on the CAMOC YouTube channel. The day concluded with a workshop led by Linda Norris of the International Coalition for Sites of Conscience who led participants through a series of exercises designed to increase self-awareness and empathy for migrants. At the end of the day she asked everyone to record what we would do differently in future as a result of the day’s discussions and to write our thoughts on post-it notes. Following an incredible stop at the Day of the Dead parade, we held a reception that night at the Museum of Popular Art which was notable for the fantastic creatures that appeared throughout the evening.

Thank you to the local organisers, particularly Dr Yani Herriman who co-organised the workshop with CAMOC Vice-Chair/CAM Secretary-General Catherine C. Cole. This was a very challenging time so soon after the September earthquakes in Mexico City: 1800 monuments were damaged by the earthquakes and National Museum staff and colleagues are busy determining the extent of the damage and the course for restoration. Thanks to the workshop organising committee comprised of CAMOC board members President Joana Sousa Monteiro, Secretary Afşin Altayh, Treasurer Layla Betti, and Past-President Marlen Mouliou, Gegê Leme Joseph, Nicole van Dijk, Jenny (Chin-nu) Chiu, Renée Kistemaker, and Jelena Savis, Irena Žmuc (ICR), and our ICOM Mexico colleagues who managed the local arrangements under very difficult circumstances: Patricia de la Fuente, Maya Dávalos Murillo, and Maria Inés Madinaveitia Ramirez. And thanks to all of the speakers and participants who travelled to Mexico, some from great distances, to make the workshop such a success.



Above: CAM Board Member Rachel Erickson (L) and CAMOC Vice-Chair/ CAM Secretary General Catherine C. Cole (R) at the Museum of Popular Cultures; Below: The guide giving a tour of an exhibition. © Catherine Cole

# Migration:Cities | (im)migration and arrival cities Workshop

Historisches Museum / Historical Museum Frankfurt  
Frankfurt, Germany 2 June 2018

*In collaboration with ICOM CAMOC, ICOM ICR and ICOM Germany*

*Nicole van Dijk\**

**Migration:Cities | (Im)Migration and arrival cities** is a special project and part of CAMOC's ongoing partnership with ICOM Cam, ICOM ICR and various collaborators and contributors. The first workshop was held in Athens in February in 2017 and the second in Mexico City on October 28. The third workshop of this special project was held in the Historical Museum Frankfurt on June 2, 2018 as CAMOC's pre conference workshop. The workshop in the Historical Museum Frankfurt hosted several experts, professionals and academics in the area of migration and how it reflects on the museum context.

Nicole van Dijk and Incisu Dilem gave an introduction to the *Migration:Cities* project and encouraged workshop participants to contribute to the website: [migrationcities.net](http://migrationcities.net). On this website information can be found about how to contribute. CAMOC and its partners are very interested in learning about any migration-related projects. How is migration impacting cities and how are museums engaging with migrants and migrations supporting agencies to develop exhibitions and programmes. Is this an issue for your museum and **would you be interested in creating a 5-minute video that we could post to the website? We'd like to hear from you.**

The Frankfurt workshop began with a thought-provoking presentation by one of the invited speakers Donald Hyslop, head Regeneration and Community Partnerships at Tate Modern London, with over 5 million visitors a year one of the biggest art museums in the world. His presentation was titled *The Museum and the Movement of People and Ideas*. Hyslop provided a vibrant overview of the curatorial and public challenges generated by diversity. He showed how one of the biggest art museums of the world can engage in the debate of diversity and become

*Donald Hyslop: Street Art: including new groups and engaging in the debate of diversity. © Nicole van Dijk*

a natural place for people to come together and activism.



Another London based presenter was Emma Winch, the Learning Manager for Hackney Museum, a small community history museum in the diverse London Borough of Hackney, with an international reputation for its pioneering community engagement programme. She presented the approach of the Hackney museum, actually changing the political agenda of the local council

\* Nicole van Dijk, Curator and Head of Research & Development at Museum Rotterdam; CAMOC Vice-Chair (2016-2019); Migration:Cities Co-creator and Co-ordinator

by making the voices of the diverse community heard. Both examples from London, TATE and Hackney showed what can be done in larger and smaller scale of museum practices towards including migrants.

The other two invited speakers gave us a clear insight in the way migration in the world is evolving, and the potential role of museums, libraries and cultural centres as institutions for inclusion.

Peter Scholten, Professor of Migration and Diversity Policies at Erasmus University Rotterdam and director of IMISCOE Research Network addressed how contemporary migrations patterns are generating ‘superdivers’ cities, creating new urban narratives. Narratives to be shown, discussed and embraced by cultural institutes as museums.

As commonly mistaken, migrants and refugees are not the same concepts as UN’s Smaro Skoulikidis touched upon. Skoulikidis who has over 25 year experience with the United Nations confirmed and clarified the notions about migration also made by Scholten; migration is a world changing process also affecting Europe but compared with other regions in the world in a less far-reaching way. She emphasised the importance of migrants within Europe and stated that Europe needs to be even more open to higher numbers of immigrants since the work power from these populations is a big source for the sustainability of the European Union.



Emma Winch: Being a platform for LGBTQIA people and changing the local political agenda. © Nicole van Dijk



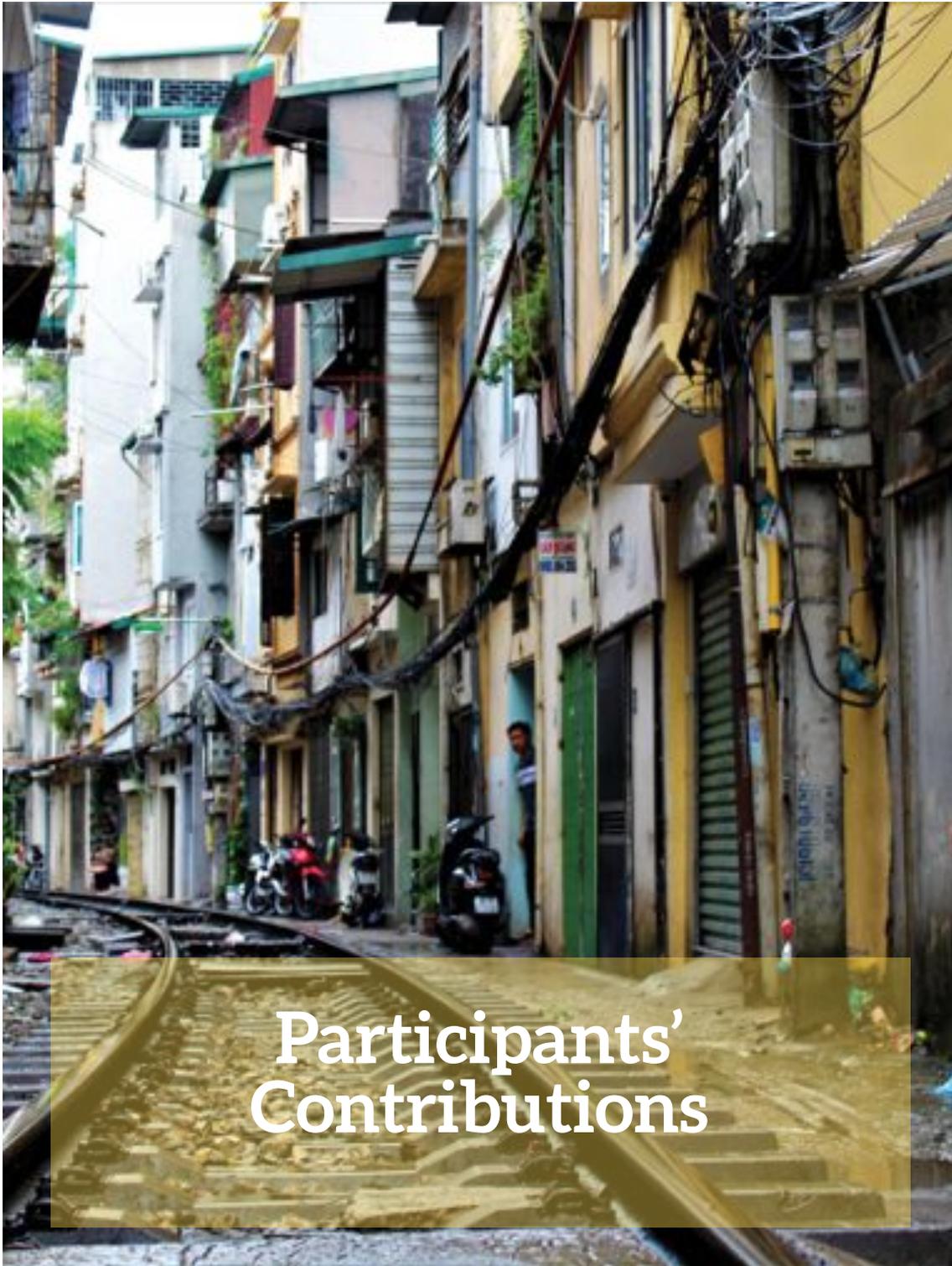
Above: A panel discussion l-r: Nicole van Dijk, Donald Hyslop, Smaro Skoulikidis, Emma Winch and Peter Scholten. Below: Catherine C. Cole and a part of the group debating during the interactive session. © Nicole van Dijk

CAMOC vice-chair Catherine C. Cole created an interactive session where workshop attendants could create a more inclusive museum. They were teamed up in groups and brainstormed to create a new museum practice or an exhibition which could be related to the topic of migration. As planned, it did trigger new ideas and discussions which were carried even to the lunch break.

Topics such as migrant women, migrant representation, breaking taboos and creating a new representation of urban people were emphasised in the overall presentations. The workshop was also important for participants with different backgrounds to transmit their experiences.

For those who weren’t able to attend the Frankfurt workshop the videos of the different presentations are available on the migration:cities website: [migrationcities.net](http://migrationcities.net)

Nicole van Dijk  
Vice-chair CAMOC



DETAIL - RAILWAY IN HANOI CITY, © THUIS DEGENKAMPION UNSPLASH

## City museums and migration: towards a better understanding

*Smaro Skoulikidis\**

Three years ago, the International Committee for the Collections and Activities of Museums of Cities (CAMOC) began to explore current and potential roles of city museums with regard to the critical issue of migration. This led to the creation of a web platform intended as a resource for museum professionals where they could share experiences, exchange knowledge and develop tools and best practices in the area of migration.

This article is a synopsis of a presentation made during the annual CAMOC workshop in Frankfurt, in 2018, which sought to lay the foundations of a structured approach on migration for city museums. It features evidence-based information and statistics, a set of internationally accepted definitions of essential terms, with special emphasis on United Nations standards and Conventions, explores thematic issues for consideration currently affecting the discourse on migration and highlights potential activities for further consideration by city museums.

### **Why migration is important for city museums: The context**

Migration is a constant feature of human history and is associated with significant global events, such as revolution, wars, economic expansion, nation building, political transformation, conflict and persecution.

From a historical perspective, migration has supported the growth of the world economy, contributed to the evolution of societies and nations and enriched cultures.

As cities represent more possibilities for employment and social development, migration is becoming an overwhelmingly urban phenomenon. Over three billion people, or half of the world's population, live in urban areas and half of them live in slums. Cities continue to be a crucial hub for the settlement and integration of migrants, both regular and irregular, including asylum seekers. They bring to the fore issues of citizenship, national identity and cultural heritage.

According to the most recent World Migration Report, nearly half of the international migrants, that is 122 million, reside in ten highly urbanized, high income countries, five of which are in Europe. By 2050, it is estimated that 6.3 billion, or 67 % of the world population will live in urban areas. Virtually all of the expected urban growth will take place in the less developed regions, particularly Asia and Africa.

### **Important Definitions:**

*Migration:* The UN defines an international migrant as a person who crosses a border and stays outside his/her country for at least one year. One can distinguish different types of migrants, including temporary labour migrants (guest workers) who migrate for a limited period; highly skilled expats; irregular migrants (or undocumented/illegal migrants); family members, return migrants, as well as refugees.

*Migrants:* A uniform definition of migrant does not exist at the international level. The description of “migrant” is often used erroneously as an umbrella to cover both refugees and

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\* Smaro Skoulikidis, Senior Advisor in Strategic Planning & Peacebuilding

migrants. However, the terms of refugee and migrant are not interchangeable. Refugees are specifically defined and protected under international law. A migrant is usually understood as someone who crosses a border in search of better economic opportunities, a voluntary process motivated by the need to improve livelihoods. This is not the case for refugees who cannot return to their countries of origin, and are owed specific protections under international law. Equating the two terms may also undermine support for refugees and the institution of asylum. The distinction between legal and illegal or irregular migrants must also be made. The term irregular is preferable to illegal, as the latter carries criminal connotations. Irregular migrants are defined as persons who lack legal status in a transit or host country. According to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, there are at least 5 million or 10% of Europe's migrants who are in an irregular situation.

*Refugee:* The universally accepted definition of a refugee is contained in Article 1 of the 1951 UN Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, which defines a refugee as someone who “owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or.....owing to such fear is unwilling to return to it” The 1951 Convention was geographically limited, as it was exclusively aimed at refugees from post WWII Europe.

In 1967 a Protocol was introduced which explicitly included those from outside Europe in the definition of a refugee. Similarly, in 1969 a convention of the Organization of African Unity extended the definition to include as a reason for refugee status “external aggression, occupation, foreign domination or events seriously disturbing public order in a part or the whole of a country”. Finally, in 1984, the so-called Cartagena Declaration broadened the scope in a similar manner for countries in Latin America.

The 1951 Convention related to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol are considered the cornerstone of the modern refugee protection regime, based on the three fundamental principles of non-discrimination, non-penalisation, and non-refoulement, or forced return/expulsion to a place where he/she fears threats to life or freedom. The Convention further sets out the rights and obligations of both refugees and countries of asylum, which are binding for all signatories. These include provisions that guarantee refugees similar treatment as nationals in terms of protection, freedom of religion, education, employment and justice.

However, the Convention, which was written over sixty years ago, has been widely criticized as being out of touch with the realities of the modern world, where the conceptual distinction between migrants and refugees is becoming increasingly blurred. For example, the Convention focuses on persecution by the state because it was written mainly to protect those who had been persecuted by the Nazis. During the cold war, the definition was applied to those fleeing communism. Today, refugees tend to flee the general insecurity of conflict, particularly civil war, rather than specific political persecution.

In addition, the Convention makes no mention of the environment or those who flee their country as a result of natural disasters and climate change, such as earthquakes and tsunamis. There is no legal basis to protect refugees who seek asylum for environmental reasons and there is currently no international organization with the mandate to protect them.

Furthermore, the Convention does not explicitly cover people persecuted on the basis of their sexual orientation or gender. The definition of a refugee has been interpreted primarily in the context of male asylum seekers. Claims of women asylum seekers often differ from those of men, as women are often subjected to types of suffering unique to their gender, such as Female Genital Mutilation, forced abortions and honour killings.

Regardless of their status, all migrants are protected by international human rights law, as enshrined in the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights. In recognition of the fact that migrants often lack basic legal protections, and are especially vulnerable to exploitation, the General Assembly, in 1990, adopted the UN convention on the Protection of all Migrant Workers and their Families, which came into force in 2003.

### **Global Facts and Figures on Migration**

The past decade or so has witnessed a number of drastic changes on a global scale and rapidly unfolding developments, including the war in Syria, the crisis in Libya, the appearance of ISIS, the conflicts in CAR and South Sudan, continued instability in the DRC and Mali and the worsening repression in Eritrea. All of these factors led to an increase in the number of people on the move, particularly towards North Africa and on to Europe.

In the last five years, the number of international migrants worldwide was the highest ever recorded, surpassing 244 million. However, the majority of migration occurred within, not between, major areas, for instance, within Africa, or within Asia.

The year 2015 saw the highest levels of forced displacement globally recorded since World War II, with a dramatic increase in the number of refugees, asylum-seekers and internally displaced people across various regions of the world, from Africa to the Middle East and South Asia. By mid-2015 there were 15.1 million refugees worldwide, a number which has increased to 22.5 million in 2017/18. Of those, 55% come from three countries, namely, South Sudan, Afghanistan and more than 5.5 million from Syria.

The vast majority of refugees continue to be hosted by developing countries, particularly those that are adjacent to their countries of origin. For instance, the bulk of the Syrian refugee population is hosted by Turkey, Lebanon, and Jordan. Iraq hosts nearly 230,000 Syrian refugees, as well as 3.2 million internally displaced Iraqis.

Top hosting countries worldwide are as follows: Turkey (2.9 million), Pakistan (1.4 million), Lebanon (1.2 million), Iran (980,000), Uganda (940,000) and Ethiopia (791,000).

As was mentioned earlier, most forced displacement globally still occurs within countries' borders, with an estimated 40 million people internally displaced by conflict and violence in 2016/2017, ranging from Iraq to South Sudan, from Syria to the Democratic Republic of Congo and Nigeria. There are currently twice as many internally displaced (IDPs) as refugees in the world. Despite its global scale, the issue of internal displacement remains largely overshadowed, particularly with the current global focus and public attention on refugees and migrants. Internal migration is usually the first step towards international migration.

In addition, in the last three years, natural disasters caused 24.2 million new displacements, particularly in South and East Asia.

There are also 10 million stateless people in the world who have been denied a nationality and access to basic rights. Statelessness may occur for a variety of reasons, including discrimination against particular ethnic or religious groups or on the basis of gender, the emergence of new States and transfers between existing States and conflict of nationality laws. Statelessness is often the product of policies that aim to exclude people deemed to be outsiders. In addition, because 27 States around the world do not allow women to transfer nationality to their children, statelessness can occur where fathers are unknown, missing or deceased. Statelessness due to the dissolution of former states also continues to affect many people, including some 600,000 people in Europe alone.

## Thematic Areas

There are a number of thematic areas of particular relevance and complexity, which could be further explored and addressed by city museums. Those may include the following issues:

**Migration and Urbanization.** The world's migrants, including refugees, are increasingly moving to urban areas, where employment opportunities are considered higher than in rural regions. However, migrants, particularly irregular migrants, are often confronted with a range of risks, such as the threat of arrest, deportation and, exploitation. Urban refugees are often forced by poverty to live in overcrowded accommodation in risky areas where they face difficulties in accessing basic health, education and protection services. In many cases, refugees and migrants they have little alternative but to join the informal economy, where they find themselves competing with large numbers of poor local people for jobs that are hazardous and poorly paid.

**Increasing Feminization of Migration:** The proportion of women among migrants is increasing rapidly. In 2018, nearly half the world's migrants were women. In Europe and North America, particularly, women constitute the majority of international migrants with 52.4% and 51.2%, respectively.

**Causes and Drivers of Migration:** Underdevelopment, lack of livelihood opportunities, overpopulation, poor governance and conflict are major drivers of migration. It is important to note that 80% of the world's population live in poor or middle income countries and over 380 million people survive on one dollar a day. Developing countries are also characterized by high rates of childbirth, and a high proportion of unemployed youth. The political situation in many developing countries is fragile, rule of law is weak and corruption is rife.

**Impact of Migration on Economic Growth and Social Change:** Without labour migration, countries would be unable to sustain current levels of welfare and pensions. Economists maintain that Europe needs to find 120 million additional people by 2040, due to declining birth rates and increasing longevity. Migrants are crucial for European urban economies in cities that have been organized around service industries, including finance, tourism. Indeed, the survival of the world's developed economies depends on migration.

One of the most important contributions to development and poverty reduction are remittances, which continue to increase globally. According to the World Bank, the sum of financial remittances sent by international migrants to their families in origin countries amounted to more than \$586 billion in 2017/18, over 75% of which were sent to low and middle income countries. In developing countries remittances are the most important source of external funding after corporate investments.

Migration has transformed societies and made them more diverse. At the same time increasing diversity can present challenges. Both the positive and negative impact of diversity are most keenly felt in major cities, especially global cities like New York, Hong Kong and London. Migration has become an integral part of the character of these cities, as they rely on highly skilled migration to fuel the boom in finance, business and advertising. They also fill lower skilled jobs in sectors such as hospitality, transportation and construction.

**Migration and Climate Change:** A distinction must be made between slow onset climate change, like rising sea levels and desertification, and rapid onset events like floods. A consensus seems to be emerging that climate change is likely to drive more internal migration and internal displacement.

**Xenophobia and anti-immigrant sentiment in many countries:** One of most recurring fears is that migrants take away jobs from nationals. This is a false assertion, since migrants

are admitted to fill gaps in the local labour market. In reality, the impact on jobs for local populations is at worst neutral and at best positive in that it can create economic growth and more jobs. There is also the perception that irregular migration threatens sovereignty and national identity, with the implication that states are at risk of being overwhelmed by enormous numbers of irregular migrants who undermine the democratic values of western societies.

**In conclusion, City Museums could serve as positive change agents in addressing the socio-political, historical and economic dimensions of migration, highlighted above. By using a variety of tools at their disposal, museums could enhance their educational and outreach mandates by pursuing the following activities in a comprehensive and meaningful manner:**

- Foster understanding and empathy for the plight of migrants on the part of host communities;
- Facilitate cultural dialogue among migrants and communities;
- Serve as a platform to engage the wider community, including members of the diaspora, in discussing policies, needs and solutions to migration challenges in cities;
- Promote policies/attitudes of cultural diversity, tolerance, non-discrimination;
- Contribute to social cohesion and foster inclusion;
- Increase awareness of policies/actions of actors in the field of migration;
- Increase awareness and knowledge of current issues/ trends and developments vis a vis migration, including the causes/drivers of migration;
- Highlight positive contributions and best practices vis a vis migration;
- Contribute to the understanding/application of global concepts/international instruments, such as human rights and international humanitarian law;
- Deconstruct stereotypes and preconceived ideas about migrants/migration;
- Create linkages between national/local authorities, civil society and migrants;
- Advocate on the part of national/local authorities for the rights of migrants;
- Highlight identity issues in countries of origin/arrival;
- Address negative attitudes/hostility towards migrants by communities/authorities.

# The active collection as an instrument for inclusion and social change

Nicole van Dijk\*

The world continues to urbanise with cities functioning as magnets for people looking for better economic prospects, social stability and a future for themselves and their families. As cities grow and become increasingly diverse, in Rotterdam for example people from 176 nationalities are living together, individual and collective identity takes on a new importance. What role can City Museums play in these urban challenges?

In this paper, drawing on my background as cultural anthropologist and my work over the last 10 years in Museum Rotterdam, I seek to define culture through the way people adapt to each other and the environments in which they live. This involves attention to the rules, traditions, networks, customs and everyday rituals we perform in our individual and community lives. These factors are important in understanding place, the pace of the city and finding balance in a new sometimes hostile environment. In this context heritage can become relevant and active. In our work we draw on the past to make sense of the present and seek to use it as an instrument to inform younger generations and to shape social change today.

## Culture and social Behaviour

Cities are increasingly inhabited by people with different cultural, faith and ethnic backgrounds and traditions. This has implications in our social behaviour and can also be seen in a rapidly changing cultural environments. Sociologists have been studying this behaviour and understanding how museums can be actively involved and supportive in this process. In thinking about social behaviour, we can see culture as a primary way people adapt to each other and their environments.

The theoretical distinction of Social Capital by Pierre Bourdieu<sup>1</sup> and build upon by other scholars is a useful start for our thinking. In 1995 a young American sociologist, Robert Putnam, wrote directly after his university education an essay called “Bowling Alone: America’s Declining Social Capital”.<sup>2</sup> In 2000 he published the book “*Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*”.<sup>3</sup> In studies he sees social cohesion declining when diversity rises. The more ethnically and culturally different groups, the more distrust and criminality. Putnam pleads for the development of a new joint cultural identity which can prevent communities from falling apart. Putnam makes a distinction between two kinds of social capital: bonding capital and bridging capital.<sup>4</sup> Bonding occurs when you are socializing with people who are like you: same age, same race, same religion, and so on. But in order to create peaceful societies in a diverse multi-ethnic country, one needs to have a second kind of social capital: bridging. Bridging is what you do when you connect with people who do not seem similar or like you. Putnam argues that those two kinds of social capital, bonding and bridging, do strengthen each other. Consequently, with the decline of the bonding capital mentioned above inevitably comes the decline of the bridging capital leads to greater tensions including around race and faith.

From a different perspective the Indian-English post-colonial scholar and critical theorist *Homi Bhabha*<sup>5</sup> presents cultural difference as an alternative to cultural diversity. In cultural diversity, a culture is a “static object of empirical knowledge” while cultural difference sees culture as the point at which two or more cultures meet, interact and problems occur. He argues that this is a discursively constructed situation rather than pre-given, a “process of enunciation of culture as ‘knowledgeable’.” Enunciation is the act of expression of a culture that takes place

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in what Bhabha calls the Third Space.<sup>6</sup> This space is where two or more persons or cultures meet, connect and exchange. It is through enunciation that cultural difference is discovered and recognized. The enunciative process is of great importance in the articulation of new cultural meanings or strategies.

### **Migration:Cities Conference**

My work and practice in recent years has focused on investigating how we can look at new forms of cultural meaning and strategies. We were able to see other examples where cultural institutions are developing this thinking, during CAMOC's Migration:Cities conference in Frankfurt. For example, Donald Hyslop,<sup>7</sup> head of regeneration and community partnerships at Tate Modern discussed how Tate's Turbine Hall is used by different communities, formally and informally, to make their voices heard and protest visible. The Turbine Hall has become a type of public open zone which corresponds to Bhabha's idea of a Third Space. A place where people interact and enunciate their identities and culture. We also saw through Emma Winch from the Hackney Museum, London, how a more locally based museum can be a space for enunciation and support for minority groups and communities helping them articulate their role in society. For example, the museum launched a crowd sourced project to map, record and share the rich LGBTQI+ history and culture of the municipality. This highlighted a timeline and significant places of personal LGBTQI+ history made in Hackney.

### **Museum Rotterdam**

My work in Rotterdam is particularly focused on the processes of identifying and supporting inclusive strategies and projects. During the last ten years we have evolved a process around these projects which, in the beginning, were organised in places across the city as contemporary participatory heritage projects.

These projects were important in documenting the contemporary city and popular with and in the communities they focused on. However, there were two distinctions and disadvantages. Firstly, as they took place remotely from the museum they were essentially peripheral to the evolution of the Museum and staff. There was little depth of understanding institutionally of this outreach work (an issue common in the sector). Secondly, although the projects were rich in adding texture and knowledge to the history of the city, there was no model to retain and make use of this data at the end of the project.

The logic of traditional object-based methods of collecting creates an anomaly. This means there is an inherent hierarchy, with a primary focus on historic objects for collecting and recording the life of the city. It acts as a blockage to the museum becoming an agent for 'bridging social capital', which Putnam argues is needed for new forms of cultural identity. Furthermore, it does not, through its own prerequisites, allow a long-term evolution where communities develop a sense of ownership of city museums. It is primarily through self-identification and validation of their lives that one can see the development of a civic or 'Third Space' to link past and present to shape the future.

We also face stiff competition for relevance and meaning. We live in a rapidly changing world where competition for people's attention and resources is sometimes overwhelming. Citizens and Communities are increasingly demanding more dynamic, active and participatory forms of leisure experience. Museums are not exempt from this and, if they are to remain relevant, they need to evolve core practice around their collections and public engagement.

### **The active collection**

Drawing on our knowledge and experience on working in the city, we began to discuss how we could make stronger connections between our contemporary work with its important social

capital and stronger links to the core of the museum. In 2016 we were presented with a situation which illustrated this challenge. From 2013 we had been collaborating with the Bulgarian community, researching how this relatively new group were settling in Rotterdam. One of our key partners was Kamen, who represented many of the experiences of this community. As well as working and bringing up his family to Rotterdam he was also a vital connection for the community with family and friends still in Bulgaria. His Volkswagen van (constructed in 1992) had been used to link the communities with journeys transporting people, mail, presents, and medicines. For him the van symbolized a major change in his life as he moved back and forward across Europe. It also symbolized the changing face of Europe and the city of Rotterdam. Traditional museum collecting approaches mean that the primary object reflecting this experience (the Van) in being mass produced and still in use would not easily fit in to a collection. However, it was symbolic and iconic of migrant experience in the city. The solution was for the museum to adopt the van in a new form of active collection. This allowed us to describe the van in a database, support this with an oral history interview with the owner Kamen and add photos and other documentation. In return we supplied a certificate with an accession number (in this case 0001) of Authentic Rotterdam Heritage. This was the beginning of the Museum's active collection.



Top: Authentic Rotterdam Heritage #0001, the Bulgarian Rotterdam van of Kamen Vladimirov. © Joop Reijngoud  
Bottom: Board Authentic Rotterdam Heritage. © Museum Rotterdam

### **Criteria**

This new form of collecting and dialogue enabled us to begin working with new forms of social capital and evolving the museum as a democratic 'Third Space'. The collection is developed with local communities and in a participatory forum.

A board of Rotterdammers working with museum staff oversees the process. This by its very nature is evolving and developing. It seeks to reflect Rotterdam as a superdiverse city, a dynamic hub and future thinking city in Europe. Key to the project is thinking about the way objects, communities and activities are interconnected, linked and part of a wider ecosystem. There is no restriction between for example tangible objects and intangible rituals. The collection can also be a place where new connections begin, stories emerge, and heritage is born. In 2019 there have been approximately 650 nominations towards the collections with 70 being agreed. This is a further example of how a relevant third

space can give new life and dynamic to museums and cultural organisations.

The physical 'Third Space' in the city museum is part of a laboratory which seeks to establish links between the project visitors and the wider public. This is not a traditional museum gallery or workshop but a more informal space of congregation and exchange. It is populated by all kinds of events and meetings which also include a variety of wider partners including college interns and volunteers.

### ***Cultural Fusion***

For example, the *story cafes* where the communities become the ‘experts’ are excellent methods of bonding and bridging social capital. These events which take place both in the museum and on location bring people together to explore and discuss an area of the active collection and city life. For example, the Cape Verdian music scene, a shoe shop as community hub, a care centre and the role of theatre of city life. During the story cafes the traditional roles of a city museum or university are exchanged with the communities and their expertise leading the discussion and dialogue. In some cases where there is a reluctance to speak in public and perform the idea of volunteer storytellers sharing the experiences and stories has been developed.



*Arena Museum Rotterdam. © Museum Rotterdam*

The story cafes have become the space where diverse communities, activists and change makers can articulate their culture, their vision for the city and their dreams for the future. The audience not only listens and learns but actively participates in a lively debate which often creates new connections and possibilities for the future. This is the type of ‘Third space’ where Bhabha envisioned the enunciation and fusion of culture and community.

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### ***The heritage bond***

The development of the active collection and its related activities re-establishes the museum as a bridge in the city. It does this by creating a forum both in the museum and in the city with a set of connected networks, communities and partnerships which help us understand the city and its people as it evolves. It gives the city museum a new form of purpose and civic role. The staff become active agents in the city as well as co-collectors of its past and co-curators of its narrative. The museum becomes an important boost to communities bridging social capital and in doing this contributes to the wider understanding and wellbeing of the city. The possibilities to develop these principles and ideas are limitless, as well as its social importance may also be evidence by city museums that they can provide important tools and forums for the modern city.



*Story cafe Black Heritage. © Arthur Geursen*



## We draw attention on the 70 Authentic Rotterdam Heritage parts and connect groups and activities.

- With the 70 collection partners, 800 participants are directly involved, and they connect about this collection with 3000 citizens
- With this collection we make cultural differences visible. The recognition by being exclaimed as heritage of the city is for many a boost to carry on.
- Stories have an inspiring and connecting role. Until now 20 story cafes have been organised in which 80 stories are being shared with 1.000 people.
- During the cafes the enunciation and fusion of culture happens.
- The story cafes resulted in the story-workshop which is weekly organised wherein 10 participants with a long distance to society are trained to play a bigger role in the project. Until now 45 people have attended these workshops and 15 are still actively involved.
- In special project exhibitions and collaborations, we address issues of importance of collection partners. Museum Rotterdam is boosting this collaboration in shaping a new city culture and the future heritage of the city.

KRACHTVOLUME: POWERWOMEN, © MIGRATONCITIES.NET

### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Bourdieu, Pierre. "The Forms of Capital" (1985), *Handbook of Theory of Research for the Sociology of Education* (1986)

<sup>2</sup> Putnam, Robert D (1995). "Bowling Alone: America's Declining Social Capital". *Journal of Democracy*. 6 (1): 65–78

<sup>3</sup> Putnam, Robert D. (2000). *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*. New York: Simon & Schuster.

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<sup>5</sup> "Post-Colonial Theory and Action Research" (PDF). *Jim B. Parsons, Kelly J. Harding, The University of Alberta, Canada*. Retrieved 20 August 2012.

- Bhabha, Homi K. (2004). *The Location of Culture*. Abingdon: Routledge. p. 55.

<sup>6</sup> Sachidananda Mohanty, *Literary Review: "Towards a global cultural citizenship"*, *The Hindu*, 3 July 2005.

<sup>7</sup> Referring to the abstract of the workshop and presentations of Donald Hyslop and Emaa Winch

## Oral history with refugees: the marriage between community involvement and a museum's primary mission

*Bram Beelaert\**

Founded in 2013, the Red Star Line Museum in Antwerp, Belgium tells the story of the 2 million passengers of the Red Star Line shipping company, who came to Antwerp between 1873 and 1934 to emigrate to the US. Apart from maritime collections that we inherited from other museums in the port city, the focus is very much on personal experiences, stories and collections of individual passengers. The last years, we have started a reorientation of the scope of our collections, which now includes also heritage from more recent immigration movements. In 2017 and 2018, the Red Star Line Museum participated in the Specially Unknown project. Life stories of refugees were recorded in for cities: Antwerp (Belgium), Bochum (Germany), Paris (France) and Turin (Italy). With the Red Star Line Museum in Antwerp and the LWL-Industriemuseum in Bochum, two museums were involved in the project. The project was funded by the European Union's Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund, which meant that the project had a double aim: 1) facilitate the participation of third country nationals in European cultural life, by collecting their life stories, and by co-producing artistic events on the basis of those recorded experiences and documents; and 2) producing a Europeanwide database of oral history testimonies of refugees.

The participating institutions used 'fieldworkers' to collect the interviews, a method developed in the Netherlands and adopted by the other countries during the project. Fieldworkers were recruited in the superdiverse societies of the participating cities. They had the networks and language – skill to reach potential respondents where the museum staff could not, and were able to gain the trust of people who were often still in a vulnerable situation, and had lived through traumatic experiences only recently. The fieldworkers conducted the interviews, and were central in the co-production of four artistic events.

The Red Star Line Museum decided to join the project group because its aim to marry participation with profound research and collection building corresponds with the general ambitions and long term goals of the museum. I will first go into these general goals. In the second part of my text, I will give an account of our experiences during the project. I will focus on the interviews, and how the participative approach relates to our research and collections management. The co-production of artistic events with our fieldworkers based on the collected interviews was one of the highlights of the project. But issues concerning the relationship with traditional museum practices played only a minor part, if any at all.

The Red Star Line Museum tells its story from the viewpoint of the migrants. Memories and personal narratives are central to almost everything we do. This implicates close contacts and cooperation with migrants themselves. They are our primary sources, and almost all contact begins with us approaching them as researchers, and asking for recollections or documentation about a specific research topic. One can hardly call this participation. In my view, real participation is when you form a connection that transcends a mere source-researcher relationship. From a researcher-curator perspective, I think this can be amongst two lines: involvement in the creation of the exhibition or publication, or the assessment of the objects and memorabilia in their possession as important heritage that is worth safeguarding, and that is

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\* Bram Beelaert, Curator and Head of Research at Red Star Line Museum, Antwerp, Belgium



*Permanent exhibition Red Star Line Museum. © Frederik Beyens*

within the scope of our collecting policies. As far as involving the public with the design and development of an exhibition, we are cautious to invite our partners without any limitations. To begin with, this has a lot to do with expectation management. There are always one thousand and one practical reasons (conservation, technical, budget...) that can cause a fantastic and wild idea to falter. As the

professional in the room, it falls to you to bring that message. This results in conversations that are often perceived as negative and leave your partner with the feeling that at the end of the day he or she has nothing to say.

Also, and perhaps more importantly, the museum is always perceived as the ultimate responsible for everything that is presented within its walls, or published under its name, regardless of any participative or cocreative processes. In our experience, this happens even when you are clear about the context and explain the process, eg in a text or with a video. Especially with a controversial and potentially divisive topic such as migration, this matters. At the outset in 2013, and as a city museum, we made the conscious decision to be a 'neutral' and connecting place of reflection and learning for people from all walks of life. Maintaining our credibility as an institution based on scientific research is crucial.

Through trial and error, we have tried to find the method to give our partners the opportunity to add to the museum, or the space for a fresh take on our subject, without betraying the core mission of our museum. All partners should be feeling good about the cooperation. Every (co)creative process is different, but a key aspect is to determine the goals of the project and everybody's role from the outset of the project.

The second form of participation is part of our collections management. It is centered around the personal experiences of migration in the form of interviews, letters, biographies and diaries, along with collections of personal memorabilia such as pictures and travel items. Since the preparations for our opening, we cultivate a relationship with our witnesses and donors on the long term. We work with them (within agreed limitations), on the presentation of their story if an exhibition ensues, and we invite them regularly to specific participatory events for donors, thus forming a community on the long term.

As far as the nineteenth century emigrants who took the ships of the Red Star Line go, collecting is pretty straight forward. The objects that are still in the possession of grandsons and -daughters about that specific episode in their family history are relatively scarce and well defined (ship ticket, steamer trunk, passport, letters, diaries, pictures,...). This changes when you start to think about collecting from more recent or contemporary migrants. The potentially relevant material is becoming more plentiful, but also imposes more careful thinking about what to collect. Museums are more and more conscious about what NOT to collect, and that a clear

and well defined acquisition policy is becoming more important.

Secondly, collecting recent or contemporary migration experiences means dealing with primary sources who are still amongst us. Instead of relying on already existant testimonies, we can interview them ourselves. But also here, several challenges exist. First of all, there are barriers between a museum, and especially a city museum, and recent immigrants. They often have a vulnerable



*Fieldworker Polina Gerelchuk with one of her interviewees, Gohram Khan.  
© Lien Vloeberghs*

position in society and are part of hermetic communities. Second, because of this vulnerability and because of their sometimes temporary legal status, the testimonies can potentially harm your interviewees. They can hark into fresh trauma or cause legal difficulty when they are made public. This also has its impact on the scientific value of the interview. Third, what is the scope of your interview? Do you limit it to the journey? The migration experience, including e.g. an integration process can extend a lifetime. And the decision to emigrate can be the culmination of a years long process, with e.g. social background as determining element.

All these issues were at the core of the Specially Unknown project. The project was specifically aimed at participation of third country nationals. This meant dealing with people who had a very recent and often traumatic migration experience, and whose legal status was still temporary. With the recruitment of our fieldworkers, who are exponents of Antwerp's superdiverse society and who mostly have a migration background themselves, we tried to overcome these issues. A specific part of their role was to use their personal networks to contact potential interviewees out of the reach of the museum team, to gain their trust and to create a safe zone for them to tell an authentic version of their story. This proved to be very time consuming. There was budget (see later) for each fieldworker to do five interviews. The first fieldworker who had her interviews complete, told us that she had contacted nearly 200 persons before four of them agreed to do the interview. Some participants asked for an embargo on certain pieces of their interview. We told them that was possible, but at the same time we had to warn them that we would be obliged to disclose them in the unlikely but theroretical possibility of a court order. This reluctance of people to cooperate can be seen as one of the biggest difficulties of the project. At intervission moments between the four partner cities, it became clear that these problems occured at every location.

At certain points in the interviews, it is obvious that the interviewees are consciously withholding names or specific information about e.g. a route. Question is if this makes an interview less scientific. We discussed this in the steering committee of the project, that included also people with an academic background. The consensus was that these omissions made the interviews less suited for scientific research on specific questions, but that the interviews as a hole remained valuable as documents of the migration experience during the European 'refugee crisis'.

Another issue resulted from the fact that the fieldworkers recruited within their own networks. On one hand, this made the museum connect with new groups. On the other hand this resulted

in a high prevalence of interviewees with the same profile of the fieldworkers, i.e. young and highly educated. So one could argue that the migration experience captured by the Specially Unknown project is one sided or not representative. This was also debated within the steering committee. It is crucial, also with regard to the previous issue, that the context of the project and the metadata of how the interviews came into being are included in the description of the interviews in our collection management system.

That the interviews are valuable and authentic, has a lot to do with the competence, *métier* and dedication of the fieldworkers. We selected them on the basis of their network and language skills, but also on their experience or affinity with research, interviewing techniques and/ or collection management. We provided them with a training in oral history, migration history, interview techniques and archiving techniques. Together we worked on questionnaires and practiced with the cameras. We discussed transcription and archival methods, and talked about how to interact with the interviewee. The training was mandatory for the fieldworkers. Lastly, but far from unimportant, the European project gave us the opportunity to pay our fieldworkers competitive wages for their work, so we didn't have to treat them as the archetypical volunteers of the archetypical participation project. This made a professional setting possible, with defined and stringent responsibilities as to the quality of the interviews, their recordings and transcriptions. Especially the hard labour of transcribing the interviews put some of the fieldworkers off, and resulted in the fact that they didn't complete all of their four interviews.

Wrapping up the Specially Unknown project, we have evaluated it as a positive experience. We recognized the issues as they were described above. But at the end of the day, we feel that we have collected unique and relevant authentic testimonies about the contemporary migration experience. They will be presented in an exhibition at the museum throughout winter 2019-2020. We kept touching base with colleagues and professional partners, amongst others in our steering committee, and called for feedback from a traditional museum and academic point of view. This proved very helpful.

Still, challenges remain. A key issue is about objects. At the beginning, we decided that the fieldworkers would also be asked for objects and memorabilia. But the difficulty in finding respondents just for the interviews was so big, that the quest for objects was pushed to the back a little bit. We aim to keep doing the interviews with fieldworkers after the closing of the project, but we want to select interviewees from a more heritage-based logic. It will be interesting to see how long-term memory will relate to short term memory on comparable experiences. Also, it will give us an opportunity to investigate what objects are kept in families, and passed on through generations. A participatory assessment of these objects looks like another great opportunity to forge meaningful links between participation and the traditional museum approach.

## National Taiwan Museum opens up for (im)migrant communities: adding new intercultural dialogues between the museums and (im)migrants

*Emily Hsu Wen Yuan\**

### **Abstract**

Immigration, (im)migrant workers, foreign spouses from Southeast Asian (SEA) countries have become the 4<sup>th</sup> largest ethnical group in Taiwan. Migrations, from SEA in total, bring in diverse cultures, religious, and languages into the society and changing the composition of various aspects of the country. The conflicts, confusions, and misunderstanding during their adaptation process in the society, work fields and domestically are due to a lack of knowledge about the diverse cultural backgrounds of (im)migrants in Taiwanese.

The Taiwanese government is gradually aware of the phenomenon and trying to focus on how to lower the prejudice in order to break the above mentioned stereotypes imposed on Southeast Asian migrations in Taiwan. Authorities have even officially put migrations' native languages into the regular educational system since 2019.

National Taiwan Museum (NTM) has started and held a series of cross-cultural seminars, activities, events, exhibitions by collaborating with migration communities since 2014. The collaborations with migration communities and (im)migrant-family-based organizations have made NTM a friendly and accessible museum for (im)migrant families and workers. The museum offers tours in migrations' native languages, opens up the museum backyard garden, which most of time it is closed, for multicultural events and constantly curates exhibitions enhancing mutual understanding among peoples with diverse cultural backgrounds.

This research will show the result and the efforts NTM has put into since 2014 accompanied with the interviews, events, exhibitions and collaboration outcomes with migration communities as self-examination as future references for NTM to reach a society with better understanding and tolerance among the fast growing cultural diversity in Taiwan.

**Key words:** museum and city, (im)migrant communities, collaboration, intercultural dialogues.

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At the National Taiwan Museum with the (im)migrant docents. © NTM

Taiwan is currently experiencing an (im)migrant wave that rivals those of the early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries in size and duration. These (im)migrants bring different cultural traditions and forms of expression into our society and need to be understood and comprehend.

**“New Immigrant Ambassador Docents”:  
The Immigrant Docent<sup>1</sup>  
Project, initiated in 2015.**

In order to enhance mutual understanding and intercultural dialogue, National Taiwan Museum (NTM) initiated the special project “New Immigrant Ambassador Docents” to recruit (im) migrants who are capable to acquire knowledge of the museum in mandarin, we first sought help from National Immigration Agency of the Ministry of the Interior. At the same time, due to the (im)migrant docents’ enthusiasm and participation, we established the first successful pilot experience involving (im)migrants as museum tour guides in Taiwan, and have gradually become a role model for other museums and galleries. (Im)migrant docents are helping our museum to reduce language barriers by providing museum tours in their native languages while we are opening up our doors to (im)migrant communities in our society. The (im)migrant docent team even helps to encourage (im)migrant friends from their hometown to visit the museum in groups.

In 2016, the hard work of our (im)migrant docent team has been noticed by the Ministry of Culture and other museums, and we have been assigned (by the Ministry of Culture) to organize two workshops to share the experiences of the (im)migrant Docent Project. These two workshops were presented in National Taiwan Museum in Taipei and National Museum of Taiwan History in Tainan by the (im)migrant docent team members, with the administrative support from NTM.

At the National Taiwan Museum. © NTM



**The obstacles and inspiration during the training**

The training process was never easy. (Im)migrants who are willing and brave enough to join the museum’s training program require the ability to master Mandarin, the official language in our society and museums. Therefore, in the first year, 2015, we have recruited twenty (im)migrants to join the

<sup>1</sup> The term “Docent” has been used by National Taiwan Museum as the meaning of the person who guides and conveys museum knowledge within museum. In this project, the museum keep using the term to for the immigrant guides for them as well convey the knowledge and Taiwanese culture in their native languages.

training program. When the training course was finished, only four (im) migrants passed the final evaluation. Due to this language barrier, even (im) migrants who have been in Taiwan for over 15 years have varying proficiency levels of Mandarin. The (im)migrants who didn't pass the evaluations still remained as part of the (im) migrant docent group, as we believe they have different talents to contribute to



(im)migrant docent team members at the Museum. © NTM

the society, or sometimes just need more time to fulfill the same tasks. As a result, the group increased to 15 (im)migrant docents with very diverse cultural backgrounds, from Southeast Asian (SEA) regions (Indonesia, Vietnam and the Philippines, Myanmar, and Thailand). At the moment, the immigration docent team of our museum has 25 people inform SEA, plus Malaysia and Cambodia. (im)migrant docent team members have university and graduate degrees and are very eager to dedicate time and effort to Taiwanese society, and have a desire to integrate into our society.

### **(Im)migrant's Integration and Contribution**

When (im)migrant spouses, mostly females, started entering Taiwan 30 years ago, they were expected to only integrate and contribute to the family and children upbringing. Most of them were not even allowed to leave the house to work or study, and even their native culture and languages were banned domestically and in Taiwanese society. In the last decade, this phenomenon has enormously changed. (Im)migrant mothers are encouraged by government and NGOs to contribute their cultural and languages advantages in many ways and occasions. (Im) migrants are empowered and carry great energy and networking experiences. When these (im) migrants were recruited by NTM as Docents, they did not only come for training to become museum tour docents, but also brought in (im)migrant connections, networks, and communities with them. Therefore, the (im)migrant docents in NTM help the museum become a hub for cultural diversity and a platform for intercultural dialogue. This way, they can contribute and integrate into society in a more diverse way.

### **Museum and networking**

Networks are crucial in order to promote multicultural equality within the museum. NTM has worked with several (im)migrant communities and NGOs for along time to develop inclusive programmes and activities: :

1. National Immigration Agency (NIA): NIA's functions and jurisdiction are linked to border control, and is subject to the former Exit and Entry Service Bureau. It incorporates duties from various organisations, including the issuance of documents under the Overseas Community Affairs Council, immigration affairs under the Department of Population of the Ministry of the Interior and so on. Since National Taiwan Museum is also a governmental entity, collaborating with immigration policy related public sector is a first priority. The NIA helps us to recruit



National Taiwan Museum and the collaboration network. © NTM

(im)migrants who adjust and integrate well into Taiwanese society to join NTM's (im) migrant Docent Project. One third of the members in the NTM (im)migrant docent team are recommended by NIA.

2. Brilliant Time Bookstore: This very unique bookstore is more than just a bookstore. Its book collections are mostly from SEA regions, and their policy is to only lend its books, rather than sell them as in most bookstores. Unlike a library, there's no return deadline, and



2018 Migration Literature Award Ceremony at the National Taiwan Museum. © NTM

unlike book rental stores, customers get their entire deposit back when they return books. The owner, Mr. Chang Cheng was the first person who showed interest and concern about the (im)migrant's situation in Taiwan in 2005, and in 2014 launched the first "Migration Literature Award" in the country. With the collaboration between the bookstore and NTM, three years' award ceremonies were held in National Taiwan Museum. The lectures related to "Migration Literature Award" are always held in NTM as annual routine. Through this collaboration, more and more (im)migrants are aware that they can not only freely express themselves in their native languages, but can also be honored within a national museum. Their words and thoughts can finally be seen.

3. Indonesia National Open University (UT): This university encourages young (im)migrant workers to make the best use of their free time by furthering their studies instead of getting into trouble with alcohol and fights during their vacation. The student association approached us and requested the collaboration for the "Indonesian National Day and Art Festival" in 2016. They came to us because some of the (im)migrant workers "randomly" walked into NTM and discovered there were museum tours and brochures in their native languages, Bahasa Indonesia. Not only did they find the museum friendly and accessible, they also met more friends from their hometown and expanded their life circle. Therefore, UT student association decided to explore possibilities to present their national day in NTM. We were honored to accept the request and started a collaboration in 2016, with the help of our Indonesian (im)migrant docents as interpreters and bridges to enhance our understanding of the diverse of Indonesian cultures and languages. The museum role in this event is to provide major support on all the administrative work, while (im)migrants determine the schedule of performances and rituals for the one-day event.



*Top and middle: Indonesian National Day Event. Bottom from left and right: Vietnamese Student Association held Vietnamese Cultural Day in the museum, and we invited second generation of Vietnamese immigration taught Taiwanese people to speak Vietnamese in order to get a prize in the next booth. Far right: The International Muslim Student Association of NTUST, they hosted an Islamic Cultural experience camp in the museum. © NTM*

4. Vietnam Student Association and International Muslim Student Association in National Taiwan University of Science and Technology (NTUST).
5. Indonesian Economic and Trade Office to Taipei (IETO) and Malaysian Friendship and Trade Centre, Taipei: These two Economic Representative Offices always support Museum's cultural diversity events. With the long history of collaboration with IETO, we are now working on process of accepting their generous gift, a traditional artifact of Bali panther-like creature, the king of the spirits, leader of the hosts of good and a character in the Balinese mythology.



National Taiwan Museum in collaboration with the International Student Association. © NTM

6. Indonesian Diaspora Network, Taiwan (IDN Taiwan): The members of IDN in Taiwan are mostly white collar workers, professional scholars, graduate students and housewives in Taiwan. The purpose of IDN is to promote, teach and share Indonesian culture. IDN collaborates with NTM on International Batik Festival in one of the MTN branch, the Nanmen Park.

**(Im)migrants’ collaboration with the museum**

Each (im)migrant carries priceless and unique history and cultural background. Due to circumstances, they were forced to integrate into our society. Taiwanese society tends to respect (im)migrants from the Western world but has stereotypes and prejudice towards Southeast Asian (im)migrants. In order to break these stereotypes, National Taiwan Museum first builds up a very closed bond with our (im)migrant docent team, and then works out a series of lectures and events in which they also serve as lecturers and organizers. The transformation of the role from museum outsider to museum organizer of events encourages (im)migrants to have more confidence to work with the museum.



National Taiwan Museum in collaboration with Migration Communities and NGO's. © NTM

The key element to collaborate with (im) migrant communities is to build mutual trust between museum and (im)migrant communities. The following approaches have been adopted by the museum to build trust and then to explore further collaboration:

- The Museum is their second home: The (im)migrant docent team in NTM has privileged to access to the museum for free. They are free to join at anytime when they need to do further studies on any museum subject or attend any activities. Once we establish a friendly relationship with them, the first step is in place to build trust. However, a clear rule of museum is the need to communicate with team members, therefore, team members occasionally assist museum staff to serve international visitors from their native countries.
- The Museum welcomes them and their families and friends as well: Whenever the museum holds events and activities, we do not only invite (im)migrant docent team members, but their family members and friends to join the events and visit the museum. One Vietnamese (im)migrant docent told me that her child is very proud of her being the Vietnamese docent in National Taiwan Museum and that her child spent most of her time memorizing all the narratives of Taiwanese Indigenous people exhibits, and got good grades in school.
- The Museum provides proper assistance to become more accessible and friendly to (im) migrant communities: There are two (im)migrant groups performing arts at NTM: The VIT



Top left and right: Poster for traditional dance and music performance. One of the two immigrant groups, VIT Dance Group performing at NTM. Far right: “The Taste of Hometown: Southeast Asian Flavors” poster. And the contribution of (im)migrants to the Exhibition, bottom left to right. © NTM

Dance Group and Gema Angklung.<sup>2</sup> Before they found us, they could never find a venue or even a corner to practice their hometown traditional dance and musical instrument. Since one quarter of the members are also museum (im)migrant docents, NTM will always find a space for them to do their performances.

- The Museum has (im)migrants to tell their own history and culture: After the museum had created a stable and strong networks with (im)migrant communities, it started to collaborate on further researches. The results will be presented through the exhibition “The Taste of Hometown: Southeast Asian Flavors” – the result and combination of all efforts mentioned previously. (im)migrants contributed their stories and exhibits regarding tableware into this exhibition.

While museums are considering collaboration with (im)migrant communities, the role of museum should be as platforms, assistants and observers of (im)migrant narratives. Museums should allow (im)migrants to show museum professionals narratives from their point of view. And then, museums should use this knowledge to build these narratives in a way that can be presented to public audiences.

<sup>2</sup> Angklung: This term is Indonesian, meaning a set of traditional musical instrument from Indonesia made of a varying number of bamboo tubes attached to a bamboo frame.

## Confusion of an architect: curatorship and space design in a participatory exhibition project

Elif Çiğdem Artan\*

In 2014, the Federal German Migrant Women Association (Bundesverband der Migrantinnen e.V.-GKB) was invited to “Bibliothek der Generationen” project at the Historical Museum Frankfurt. GKB was founded in 2005 in Frankfurt am Main. Today, coming from different regions of Turkey with various ethnical and religious backgrounds and forming active organizations in more than 20 cities in Germany, GKB develops collaborative projects with both German feminist and workers’ associations and also other migrant groups coming from different parts of the world. Their main struggle areas span over women’s social life, working conditions, and migration laws. In the framework of this artistic memory project, in 2017, GKB organized a participatory exhibition at IG Metall-Haus Berlin; in the art gallery of one of the largest German syndicates, where I took role as coordinator and curator of the project. The intention was to display the (her)story of Turkey-origin women living in Germany beyond stigmatized stories. For instance, in many exhibitions concentrating on migrants, suitcases stand for the good old days, but also for the economic and emotional poverty in the home country and for the hope for a better life in hosting country. In this manner, in the exhibition entitled “World from a female perspective!”, we were determined to underline the change of migration stories in time and space by displaying GKB’s struggles throughout the years, achievements in the present day, and goals for the future.

The exhibition team was formed by GKB Berlin volunteers and a professional team of architect, graphic designer, and translator, who are actually friends of GKB and hold also personal

*“World from a female perspective!” Photos by the author*



\* Dr. des. Elif Çiğdem Artan, Coordinator and Curator of the Project

connections. My role, as a participatory exhibition curator, was to collect ideas and comments from the volunteers, discuss them together, and transfer the initial plan to the design team. In other words, I was facilitating the work of two different groups, who were speaking in two different languages regarding design processes. The primary differentiation between the volunteer group and the professional



*“World from a female perspective!” Photos by the author*

team was the problem of visualization. Even though the women have previously organized several exhibitions for their fairs, they were not able to forecast a venue larger than 100 m<sup>2</sup>. Therefore, a moderator was necessary to ‘translate’ requests and demands from one group to the other. Hence, this paper aims to present a reflective discussion on the participatory exhibition project that we held with Turkey-origin women in Berlin from the perspective of curatorship and space design. Similarly, it seeks to interrogate the reconfiguration of telling migration stories in the contemporary era.

Intending to find a mutual language, the volunteer group met with the space designer, Yelta (Köm). The women explained what kind of materials they had to exhibit. Yelta developed certain display methods, which were challenging due to our low-budget. He divided the exhibition area into five sections and we located our previous participatory exhibition ‘ABC of the Federal Migrant Women Association: A Female Dictionary’, ‘photo-album’, GKB’s periodical magazine Women’s covers as ‘A Room of One’s Own’, a desk for flyers, posters, press releases and hand-craft materials as ‘ReMade-ReLive’, and flags and banners as ‘Chest’. In Turkey, a young woman who gets ready for being married, starts establishing a chest composed of hand-made fabric materials and household items. Traditionally, the bridal chest is displayed to the family members and friends before the marriage ceremony. With reference to this tradition, we installed GKB’s ‘household equipment’ in the exhibition room, and it presents the essential interrogation of the difference between participatory curatorship and classical approach to exhibition space design. As the flags and banners were sent from various cities in Germany, it was not possible to foresee any exhibition design regarding the displayed objects. Among the sent materials, the women selected the objects to be exhibited. Additionally, they decided how to place the materials in the exhibition venue. Due to participatory curatorial practices, the section of the ‘chest’ could not have been properly placed in the exhibition design plan.

For example, on the exhibition design plan, Yelta placed GKB’s flags and banners into purple and orange boxes. During our shopping, the women replaced them with wooden boxes. Yelta could only see them via WhatsApp photos and approved as he believed that wooden gets along with space’s rustic atmosphere. However, we had our most considerable disagreement when the women indicated they wanted to place a woman figure in this section. Yelta was strictly against the idea, as he was arguing that the cheesy material of the figure would ruin the rustic atmosphere in the space, which I agreed with him. Our main disagreement was related to our practices. One day, on the phone, he said ‘tell them that the architect does not accept this.’ Obviously, he wanted to take the short-cut. However, the participatory curatorial practice excludes any kind of personal authority. Therefore, I had to explain what worked and didn’t work in each proposal. In the end, the women changed their mind, and we did not place a female



*“World from a female perspective!” Photos by the author*

figure, and nobody had doubts in their mind because everybody knew the reason for the change.

After Yelta provided the space design, the women started to think the materials that should be displayed in each section. As part of participatory curatorship, I was only reminding the priorities regarding the exhibition design process, and the diversity from the perspective of GKB's representation. There was a call to all GKB city groups for sending

materials from their regional activities. We received flags, banners, flyers, hand-made materials, and photos from several regions. In the end, all the final decision regarding the selection of the objects was taken by the women. In addition to shopping together, we all installed the exhibition materials together with the women. During the installation, we made specific changes in the exhibition plan and did not ask Yelta's approval. In the end, he agreed with the changes; but for me, the requests of the women were prioritized. I believe this prioritization is the essential difference between traditional approach and participatory curatorship.

Following the exhibition opening, Yelta published a blog post<sup>1</sup> and told the story from his perspective. In his words, 'I was the one who was making final decisions.' As a response, I also published a blog post<sup>2</sup>, and narrated the details of the process with examples. As another example, in addition to the discussion of installing a woman figure, we changed the place of the welcoming board. The magazine covers took a larger space than we expected, so the assistant architect of the installation suggested another wall to place the board. Indeed, when we were talking before the opening, Yelta enjoyed the idea of 'intervention' to his design. However, in his post, he was confused.

He was already confused when we were preparing the press kit. Back then, he was questioning the idea of putting only his name as the space designer, as many people contributed to design planning. Notably, women developed specific ideas for displaying tools. My reply was clear: "Therefore we keep calling it a participatory exhibition project. The women have also participated in the design process. For instance, a woman developed the photo album regarding the materials sent from the regional activities, and we put her name under that section as 'developed by'. We are writing your name for space design because you were conducting the process. In case you have an alternative wording, we can use it." A few days later, he said that he could not find any better title. Then I started to think about the confusion of titles: How a participatory project is differentiated from a group working? It does not matter the question of how many, but in the end, there was a certain number of women who gave their time for developing the exhibition. In the end, we formed a group. We were a group of women and a professional team to establish an exhibition. Maybe the number of participant women was bigger than in a usual working group. Maybe some of us have never met in person. Some of the women had never been to Berlin and to the exhibition venue. However, they declared their opinions. Additionally, they sent exhibition materials from their regions. Hence, they all participated in the design process and also the exhibition. In this framework, I believe that the confusion originates to the unstructured boundaries between professionals and volunteers. Putting it in another way, it is a confusion between developing the general context of the space design, and also opening the floor for the participants' intervention. In my opinion, this is the main difference between

<sup>1</sup> <https://manifold.press/berlin-notlari-8>

<sup>2</sup> <https://manifold.press/katilimci-sergi-projesinde-mimarin-kafa-karisikligi>

working group and a participatory exhibition project. Even for the professional team there were not predefined, structured roles to play in the process in contrary to a working group, where people usually gather based on their expertise. But in a participatory project, the roles are transitional and open to 'intervention'. For this reason, in a participatory exhibition project, it is essential for professionals to create some 'free space' that participants can also express them 'within the venue.'

Consequently, as the examples above present, the decisions regarding the space design was not taken by one person. Naturally, it could have been improved. For instance, in addition to the meeting with the volunteers, Yelta could have conducted a workshop with all participants, and it might help to solve the confusion. However, I believe that all confusions lead us to the discussion, and all discussions lead us to improve our participatory curatorship practices. Therefore, it was necessary to write a blog post as a response and take the discussion to the public space. Because "World from a female perspective!" participatory exhibition project displays beyond one of the numerous migration exhibitions. This project is one of the unique examples as it covers Turkey-origin women's original voices as was curated by the same women. Hence, this exhibition was a platform for them to tell their own stories. For a very long time, there had been talked 'about' migrants in exhibitions. Participatory exhibition projects present an opportunity to talk 'with' migrants.



*"World from a female perspective!" Photos by the author*

## Towards a new community relevance: the Manitoba Museum and a gallery for the city

Rachel Erickson\*



Welcome to Treaty 1. © The Manitoba Museum

The Manitoba Museum is located in the city of Winnipeg, a sprawling prairie city of about 750,000 people in the centre of the Canada. Telling the story of the province of Manitoba, the Museum takes visitors on a journey from north to south, through biome-based galleries that intertwine stories of human and natural history. In October 2019, the Manitoba Museum will open the city of Winnipeg’s first ever “Winnipeg Gallery,” set to be the only museum or gallery space in the city dedicated to telling urban stories. Though a beloved space for many Manitobans, the Manitoba Museum is thought of by many as what I like to refer to as “endearingly nostalgic” – static, and unchanging, rather than cutting-edge, responsive, or contemporary, despite the many changes and new exhibitions introduced over the years. Since the 2017 Migration:Cities workshop in Mexico City, and as gallery renewals progress, the Museum’s Learning & Engagement team has developed new programming strategies that engage with the “old” spaces, while future-planning for the new galleries. Through new learning programs, we are actively confronting the challenges presented by outdated museum text, while planning for how new gallery content can help foster meaningful connections with Winnipeg’s many new immigrant communities and Indigenous peoples, including those who have migrated to the city from other regions of the province. As we evolve as a museum, we are striving to become an active community hub where Manitobans can connect with their past, and move forward into a positive future.

The new Winnipeg Gallery is part of a larger capital renewal project that will revive nearly half of the museum’s existing gallery spaces, infusing a more contemporary narrative throughout the nearly 50-year old space. The renewal project includes some of the Museum’s galleries that

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have remained virtually untouched since their original install in the 1970s. In the early stages of the new Winnipeg Gallery development, the Museum identified key gallery themes that would help ensure longevity and ongoing relevance for a Museum with a reputation like ours (during gallery planning sessions, the Curatorial team would often joke, “be careful what we do – this has to last 40 years!”). Winnipeg is a city of contrasts, a city of diversity, and a place with a deep history; all themes under which we can rest many diverse stories. Winnipeg has one of the largest urban Indigenous populations in all of Canada, with over 12% of residents identifying as First Nations, Métis, or Inuit. Winnipeg is also home to immigrants from all over the world; though this land has been occupied for thousands of years, Winnipeg was incorporated as a city in 1873 and is therefore relatively young. Consequently, “migration stories” reside within living memory for many, if not most, Winnipeg families: journeys from Ukraine during the “settlement of the West,” economic migrations to Winnipeg from the Philippines within the past 15 years, moving to the city from a northern Indigenous reserve community, and refugee resettlements from Syria less than a few months ago are some of many migration stories that can be found throughout the city.

The new gallery will feature both audio and video oral histories of Winnipeggers, with a key focus on immigrant and Indigenous community stories that had long been absent from other gallery spaces. The oral histories will focus on personal stories that highlight the intersectionality of Winnipeggers, rather than an approach that compartmentalizes interviewees based on ethnicity or cultural background. Ongoing consultation with community groups and advisory committees – including Indigenous and immigrant community members – has helped shape the new gallery content and design approach. The people whose stories we are telling are involved in the exhibit design process, suggesting themes, reviewing text, and contributing new objects to the collection along the way.

Though these new exhibitions are on the horizon, change is not instant, and so our Learning & Engagement team has started to trial new program models, working collaboratively with community experts, Indigenous academics, Elders, and artists. We are finding ways to reinterpret existing 1970s era exhibit text to create opportunities for critical thought and meaningful dialogue; layering, extrapolating, and manipulating narratives in order to tell new stories. Two years ago, we launched a popular workshop series that provides hands-on opportunities to connect with traditional Indigenous art-making practices, facilitated by paid local artists. The workshop model is an example of how Museum’s can operate as “cultural hubs” – the ICOM 25<sup>th</sup> General Conference theme in Kyoto – providing engaging opportunities to connect to traditional practices, while looking ahead to the future and building capacity in communities. Beginning with a tour of the Museum’s collections (both in the galleries and in the storage vaults), each workshop engages with the historical context of the practice while passing on the skills to make new art. The social outcomes of the workshop are meaningful, as they provide an opportunity for intergenerational engagement as participants chat, make, eat, and laugh together.

Another new program for adult learners, called *Welcome to Treaty 1*, also engages with the idea that museums can be spaces for community-level invigoration – reflecting on the past, but helping to shape the future. This new program introduces the history of Treaty-making in what is now Manitoba, between Indigenous communities and later between Indigenous people and European colonial powers, and other immigrant settlers. The aim of this program is to learn about what the relationships between Indigenous communities and migrant European settlers looked like around the time of Canadian Confederation, and for individuals to commit, in the spirit of reconciliation, to making an effort to restore the Treaty relationship today. Through an experiential, dialogue-driven program, participants are invited to contemplate their understanding of the past, to situate themselves personally in the contemporary relevance of these Treaties, and to make a personal commitment to help make things better for their community.

The *Welcome to Treaty 1* program is the most explicit example of our strategy to interrogate old exhibits for new meanings. The most powerful moments of the program take place through the “manipulation” of intended gallery narratives, layered with participatory activities that help to achieve the goal of personal accountability. At one moment in the tour, the program facilitator hands out a selection of small, random objects (a sample of polar bear fur, a rock, a toy car, among others), and asks participants to share a personal story that they are reminded of when looking at this object. After the sharing of stories, the facilitator introduces an exhibition about the Selkirk Treaty of 1817, the first Treaty in Manitoba made between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples. The Museum’s Selkirk Treaty exhibition features a large image of a “psychedelic” Lord Selkirk (a Scottish lord who set up a community along the Red River in present-day Winnipeg); over a meter tall, Selkirk’s face is highlighted by the burnt oranges and mustard yellows classic to the 1970s. There is no mention in the exhibit of the names of the Indigenous signatories to the Treaty, no renderings of their faces, although they are and were known to historians. The facilitator asks participants to contemplate the impact of this one-sided narrative; what impact does the erasure of the Indigenous leaders have on this story? How does this erasure contribute to the perpetuation of stereotypes, and the perpetuation of the myth of the “brave and noble” European “explorer”? The message is made clear: how we tell stories is meaningful. The memories that participants shared only moments earlier help to personalize the message that storytelling is important, and museums exist to help share and shape those stories. When museums leave out important stories or tell stories from only one perspective, they perpetuate the exclusion of marginalized voices.

By being open about our own exhibition shortcomings, we attempt to coach visitors through a reevaluation of what they know; a shift that does not assume guilt or shame for thinking a certain way, but instead points out the ways in which museums, textbooks, and popular history have all contributed to what and how we know about the past. Looking ahead to the new exhibitions, post-gallery renewal, there will of course be many stories left untold. Our goal in the Learning & Engagement team will be to facilitate ways in which communities can take ownership over their stories. This museum exists for Manitobans, and through community partnerships we are working to find ways to represent the many voices of the city and province.

At a time when museums worldwide are being asked to confront their colonial pasts, we are fortunate to be working within an institution that is open to embracing challenging dialogues and inviting difficult conversations into our space. We are working towards becoming a museum where the public can feel comfortable “not knowing,” or feeling like what they know might be “wrong.” We strive to facilitate positive learning experiences where people can feel engaged, excited, and challenged. Like many museums, the Manitoba Museum is far from perfect – but confronting your shortcomings can be a useful strategy for facilitating learning and curiosity, and ultimately become a place where communities can grow stronger together.

### **Biography:**

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## The heritage of immigration: rethinking the museum's role as a mediator in identity building

Andrea Delaplace\*

As memorial institutions, museums play an important role in the construction of identity. The representations of the past and of local cultural heritage are essential for the development of national or regional identity. Today, under the impact of globalization and due to a growing awareness of the positive role played by cultural diversity, museums can no longer claim to represent societies and cultures considered exclusively in national or local terms. The contributions of other cultures are essential to understanding the construction of identity – national or regional. And it is this context that sets up and organizes the study of museums on immigration that belong to the category of museums of history and society.

These museums highlight other narratives, largely ignored in the past, which are also part of a larger narrative, national or regional, complex and differentiated. Consequently, an increased awareness of the importance of an inclusive identity is essential for strengthening social cohesion and mutual understanding in contemporary multicultural societies. Thus, in light of the challenge of representing societies increasingly diverse, multilingual and multicultural, museums are faced with a series of questions:

How can museums represent memory and identity in a multicultural perspective?  
What are the challenges and opportunities faced by museums in their role as cultural mediators?  
How to achieve multivocality in curatorial practice?  
How can museums represent and talk about inclusive identity and multiculturalism?

Given the crucial role that museums play in the narrative of national identities and cultural backgrounds, the goal of my research is to explore the museum practices and its possible renovation in the light of contemporary migration issues as well as its impact on our understanding of identity constructions.

The objective of this article is to question the relationship between memory, heritage, immigration and cultural diversity in an attempt to understand the challenges of museums dedicated to the history of immigration. How have immigration museums institutionalized immigration heritage, and what is this composed of? How to exhibit immigration? What narrative on immigration is created through the permanent exhibition of such museums? Do attempts at representing migrants mirror a national paradigm?

To discuss these topics, I will present different examples of musealization of immigrants' heritage in the city of São Paulo to highlight how the construction of a narrative about immigration actually reinforces the construction of the local identity itself.

Firstly, I will present the project of the Immigration Museum (*Museu da Imigração*) in São Paulo: the history of the building and then the project of the museum itself. Secondly, we will present other examples of museological approaches (in particular community initiatives) regarding the heritage of Immigration. Then raise questions from it and draw hypotheses and lines of reflection on how these different projects constitute an attempt of creating an inclusive narrative on immigration<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> The examples analyzed here present their exhibitions as a way of including immigrant's history in a larger narrative, be that national, regional or local. We will analyze museum initiatives from the government but also from the oldest migrant communities in the city (Italian and Japanese) to show how a narrative on migration can be built in different contexts (private or governmental initiatives).

### **São Paulo: a multicultural city**

In the city of São Paulo, strongly marked by multiculturalism, we can find different examples of museums presenting the “cultural heritage” of immigrants in the city.

The *Museu da Imigração* (Museum of Immigration) reopened in May 2014 after being closed for 4 years (2010-2014) for a complete makeover: new permanent exhibition, new staff and the inclusion of contemporary migrations among the museum thematic. On the site of the museum, one can read the following sentence stated as its mission: “To promote knowledge and reflection on human migrations, in a perspective that privileges the preservation, communication and expression of the cultural heritage of the various nationalities and ethnic groups, contributing to the diversity of the Brazilian social formation.”<sup>2</sup>

The building that was officially proclaimed as a historical landmark in 1982 by the CONDEPHAAT<sup>3</sup> is also a place that still hosts an organization that welcomes refugees and homeless people (*Arsenal da Esperança*). Thus, the *Hospedaria* still has in a way its vocation to be a place that offers shelter for those in need.

However, outside the *Museu da Imigração*, other local museums and “memorial centres” present the heritage of immigrant communities in the city:

- *Museu do Bexiga* (Bexiga Museum) created in 1981, a private initiative of a resident of the district, Armando Puglisi, and the *Centro de Memória do Bexiga* (Bexiga Memorial Centre), created in 2007, also a private initiative of a local collector called Walter Taverna.
- *Museu Histórico da Imigração Japonesa no Brasil* (Historical Museum of Japanese Immigration in Brazil), established in 1978, located in the Liberdade neighbourhood (Japanese district of São Paulo), an initiative of the Japanese community (linked to the Japanese immigration museum overseas).

As we can see, these spaces are differentiated by their breadth and scope of action: immigration in a wider context or focused on a specific community. We will present each of the museums before discussing the commonalities and differences in the heritage processes of each of these institutions.

### **The *Museu da Imigração* (Immigration Museum) and the *Hospedaria***



*Immigration Museum, Sao Paulo. © Museu da Imigração*

The *Museu da Imigração* of the State of São Paulo<sup>4</sup> – former *Memorial do Imigrante* – located in São Paulo, Southeast region of Brazil – is an important centre of documentation and memory of immigration in the context of Brazilian museums.

It consists of a central archive and documentation centre from the state of São Paulo, a museum and a meeting place for immigrant communities (so, a memorial place). The museum was reopened with a new permanent exhibition in May 2014, after

<sup>2</sup> Museu da Imigração do Estado de São Paulo: <http://www.museudaimigracao.org.br/en/> Accessed september 2017.

<sup>3</sup> *Conselho de Defesa do Patrimônio Histórico, Arqueológico, Artístico e Turístico*: Council for the Defense of Historical, Archaeological, Artistic and Touristic Heritage.

<sup>4</sup> Brazil is a federative republic, so each region is actually a state. São Paulo is a state localized in the Southeast region of Brazil and its capital is the city of São Paulo.

being closed for 4 years. The original project has undergone a complete reformulation during this period.

Since reopening in May 2014, its permanent exhibition has widened the discussion on the theme of immigration. By adding other topics to it as for example the slavery and trade of Africans slaves to Brazil, the museum is dealing with a very sensitive heritage that curators are trying to bring into the main museum narrative<sup>5</sup>, all without losing its main objective: to show how different cultural contributions of immigrants are an integral part of the regional identity of São Paulo and that of the city of São Paulo with its 18 million inhabitants (a cosmopolitan city in the national scenario and also in Latin America).

The museum attracts 80.000 visitors and 400 school group visits per month and it is recognized as a forum for discussion among the immigrant communities in the city of São Paulo. It has a very strong memorial character with its building and historic significance for the history of immigration in the region and therefore, the museum is well established in the Brazilian cultural landscape.

#### *History of the building*

*Museu da Imigração* is located in the old building that used to host officially the immigrants who arrived in São Paulo, at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century from Europe or Japan, to work in coffee plantations. The permanent exhibition focuses on how the cultural contributions of these immigrants helped build the regional identity. Opened in 1887, this building was intended for the official welcome of newly arrived immigrants in Brazil. More than 2.5 million people were welcomed to *Hospedaria*<sup>6</sup> *do Imigrante* between 1887 and 1978. Immigrants who arrived at the Port of Santos, on the coast, travelled by train to the *Hospedaria* in São Paulo, capital of the state of São Paulo. At their arrival, they were received there by state agents and had access to several services: official documentation, medical check out, etc.

Afterwards, they were sent directly to their workplace: coffee plantations in the countryside or the flourishing industry, in the city of São Paulo. *Hospedaria* has also hosted migrant workers from other Brazilian states during the 1930s. It lost its original function in the 1970s, becoming rather an archive, and in 1978 it received the last group of Korean immigrants, just before closing. In order to ensure the preservation of its history, the old building has been classified by the Historical, Archaeological, Artistic and Touristic Council (Condephaat) from São Paulo region in 1982.

#### *Institution's history*

Since the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the State of São Paulo followed the guidelines of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs regarding the migration policies. In this light, immigrants' documents were carefully preserved and most of these records were in *Hospedaria do Imigrante*. In 1978, the state of São Paulo progressed in the national migration policies to adopt a specific scheme. Thus, *Hospedaria* closed its doors that year and then stopped to archive documentation on immigrants. The building became a regional archive for the state of São Paulo and one of the institution's directors proposes in 1980 to destroy the archives about immigration which he considered as "unnecessary" and "useless". Midori Kimura Figuti, Japanese descendant and employee of the regional archives, opposed to the idea and was designated to be responsible for the classification of all those "useless files". She alone began to struggle against oblivion, wear and neglect of the evidences about immigrants' passage through the *Hospedaria*. At that time, Midori intended

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<sup>5</sup> Questions such as slavery and racism are part of the history of Brazil but were never discussed in an Immigration museum before. The curators present slavery as a form of violent and forced migration that also contributed to the formation of the national identity. It is interesting to see that more and more museums in Brazil are recognizing this heritage.

<sup>6</sup> In this article we'll be referring to the building that hosts the Immigration museum as *Hospedaria* which means *inn* in Portuguese and it was the name given to the official building that was used to process immigrants at their arrival in São Paulo.

to preserve the memory of immigration because she was aware of the social, historical and cultural importance of this official documentation. However, this is more of a personal initiative than a real conservation project. The idea of developing an immigration museum was not even mentioned, and the government wasn't involved at all in this archive-conservation initiative.

The project was institutionalized in 1986 with the creation of the *Historical Centre of Immigration* as part of the Secretary for Social Promotion of the state of São Paulo. An exhibition with preserved materials was organized in 1988. There were photos and other evidences such as everyday objects that belonged to the immigrants. Meanwhile, the team working within *Hospedaria* began to contact immigrant associations in order to expand its portfolio and thus created a true collection. From that moment on, the building of the *Hospedaria* had already become a memorial centre and exhibition space, but not a museum itself.

Although it was not a museum, *Hospedaria* became a memorial site. Commemorative events were held there as well as folk and traditional musical performances; it was also a meeting place of different immigrants' descendants and migrant associations in São Paulo. Indeed, some associations did not have the resources to finance a place to host their community events and *Hospedaria* became a place of social gathering and meetings for the majority of the immigrant communities<sup>7</sup>. Thus, the building was transformed into a place of preservation of tangible, and transmission of intangible heritage. In 1993, the Secretary of Culture of São Paulo proposed the creation of an official museum institution and created a foreshadowing of the project team with Lois Jussara Ferreira (wife of the Deputy Governor of the state at the time). The proposal that emerged was spectacular: exposing the path of immigrants since leaving their country up to their living conditions in Brazil and the cultural contributions of immigration in Brazilian culture. These were to be collected from heritage preserved in the buildings of the State Cultural Secretariat, in charge of migration policy at the time, furthermore, from the immigrant associations, and from other immigration memorial sites, national or even international, due to a policy of cooperation. This project had the ambition to be the most innovative in Brazil at the time.

This museum should have been extended to three buildings including one that would showcase immigration history to the public in Ibirapuera Park – the green heart of the city of São Paulo. The experts of the project took the *Ellis Island Museum* in New York and the *Museum of Migration* in Australia as models. According to the institutional project of 1993 the museum was created: “with the purpose of telling the story of immigration in São Paulo, protecting from oblivion and preserving its memory, the immigration museum is of unique importance to the understanding of the sociocultural and economic heritage and identity building of São Paulo”.

In 1998, the *Memorial do Imigrante* opened its door within the configuration that we saw until recently: museum archives on immigration, the permanent exhibition focused on the processing of immigrants in the building, clearly highlighting the memorial character of the site, and a meeting space for immigrant associations.

In 2010 the museum was closed for a complete makeover, where the building was fully restored and a new permanent exhibition was created. In 2014, the new *Museu da Imigração* de São Paulo opened its doors offering a new vision of contemporary migrations.

#### *Temporary exhibitions*

In addition to the new permanent exhibition, a new team in charge of the museum prepared temporary exhibitions circulating in various train stations in the city of São Paulo. The aim of

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<sup>7</sup> During an interview in May 2017 with Mariana Martins, head of collections and research at the *Immigration Museum*, she said that the use of the *Hospedaria* as a meeting place for the different migrant communities was a process built over time. During the 1980's, as the project of the immigration museum was gaining force in between researchers and museum professionals, the migrant communities were invited to use the space of the *Hospedaria* and that way create a network of associations and communities that felt linked to the building and its history. A clever strategy to strengthen the memorial status of the building.

staging the theme of immigration in the train stations was to draw attention of the public that could directly identify, and again, make the visitor feel closer to the exhibition because of the location – a “*transit place*”. One of the stations chosen was *Estação do Brás*, located in a popular and central district of the city, very close to the museum. This district, which historically hosted a working population of Italian immigrants during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, still keeps its character of the “*place of arrival*” with its main railway station (train and metro station today). The old railway running alongside the museum building could still be found here.



*Permanent exhibitions at the Immigration Museum © Museu da Imigração*

Since 2013, various temporary exhibitions have been presented to the public in several cultural centres in São Paulo. The temporary exhibition *Travel, dream and destination (Viagem, sonho e destino)* was organized from the 10<sup>th</sup> of December 2013 to the 27<sup>th</sup> of January 2014 at Brás Station Cultural Centre (*Espaço Cultural da Estação Brás (CPTM)*). The history of the former *Hospedaria* is highlighted as each step of the arrival of immigrants is presented: the arrival at the port of Santos, the train trip between Santos and São Paulo, arriving at the *Hospedaria*, the official registry, medical examination, quarantine, etc.

This temporary exhibition presented many photos of the Archive of the State of São Paulo as well as videos with excerpts from interviews with migrants that were processed at the *Hospedaria*. Therefore, it highlighted the “*memorial character*” of the building that actually hosts the museum. Up to the museum opening in May 2014, these temporary exhibitions created expectations among the public interested in the theme of immigration and revealed a little of what would be discovered in the new museum.

Henceforth, the temporary exhibitions became an extent of the actual permanent exhibition and drew attention of the public to the discussion of concepts such as immigration, displacement, transition, transnational, refugees, etc. They were used as a prequel to the actual permanent exhibition that is centered, as it was already mentioned, around the historical importance of the building followed by the discussion on how the contribution of the different immigrants’ communities influenced the regional identity of the state and of the city of São Paulo.

#### *The importance of the building in the museum narrative*

The temporary exhibition mentioned above and the actual permanent exhibition of the *Museu da Imigração* uses the history of the building as the axis for creating a narrative on immigration and the importance of it in the construction of the regional identity of São Paulo. Like other immigration museums the *Museu da Imigração* draws on its building to recreate the “*migrants’ experience*”. *Ellis Island* in New York, as the one of the most visited immigration museums in

the world and whose main force comes from the fact that immigrants were actually processed there at their arrival in the United-States, clearly states on its website: “The immigrant experience comes alive”<sup>8</sup> as a way of saying that by visiting the museum the visitor can experience himself what millions of immigrants have endured when arriving at Ellis Island.

The valorisation of the site as a place of experience of the past is very common in Anglo-Saxon countries. As Isabelle Anatole says in her chapter<sup>9</sup> on Ellis Island: “ This approach, which is specific to the Anglo-Saxon world, tends to differentiate the criterion of historical truth from the use value of heritage ... This approach to heritage conservation led architectural studies for the restoration of Ellis Island ...”.

As Ellis Island became an example for other immigration museums such as the one in São Paulo, we can see this approach to heritage also in non-Anglo-Saxon countries. Thus, the importance of the actual site that processed masses of immigrants at their arrival is the main line for developing the narrative of the permanent exhibition both in *Ellis Island Museum*<sup>10</sup> and at the *Immigration Museum* in São Paulo.

The new temporary exhibition *Hospedaria 130*<sup>11</sup> celebrates the 130 years of the actual building and it presents newly found archives and photographs on the construction of the building and its history through the years. That just reinforces once more the importance of the building in the construction of the museum narrative.

#### *Contemporary migrations and multiculturalism*

The innovation of the new permanent exhibition is the presentation of the contemporary migrations: how different immigrant communities contribute to creating the “multicultural identity” and cosmopolitan character of the city of São Paulo<sup>12</sup>. Old migrant communities from Europe (Italy, Spain, Germany, etc.) and Japan now share their historical neighbourhoods with the new migrant communities. For example, the Japanese neighbourhood called “*Liberdade*” (Liberty in Portuguese) is now also home for Korean and Chinese migrants becoming more of an “Asian neighbourhood” and losing some of its characteristically Japanese traits. It is becoming more of a multicultural area in the city (e.g. the local newspaper in Japanese that used to be sold in the area, now is not the only one having Korean and Chinese versions). That’s the same with *Bom Retiro* neighbourhood that used to have an important Italian community and now has a growing Bolivian<sup>13</sup> community due to the proximity of the textile industry in the area.

The last section of the permanent exhibition, as some of the temporary exhibitions, is willing to discuss the contemporary migrations and its effects in the already multicultural landscape of the city. Topics such as immigrations laws, refugee’s rights, racism and xenophobia are being discussed in temporary exhibitions and educational activities.

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<sup>8</sup> Ellis Island museum website: <https://www.libertyellisfoundation.org/immigration-museum>. Accessed august 2017.

<sup>9</sup> Isabelle Anatole-Gabriel. « La Fabrique du Patrimoine de l’Humanité », Publications de la Sorbonne, Editions de la Maison des sciences de l’homme, 2016, p 255. Original citation: « *Spécifique au monde anglo-saxon, ce schéma tend à différencier le critère de vérité historique de la valeur d’usage du patrimoine [...] Cette approche de la conservation du patrimoine a dirigé les études architecturales faites en vue de la restauration d’Ellis Island...* ».

<sup>10</sup> Nancy Green, “History at large – A French Ellis Island? Museums, Memory and History in France and in the United States,” *History Workshop Journal*, Issue 63 (Spring 2007): 239-253.

<sup>11</sup> The new exhibition opened on August 26<sup>th</sup>. For more info: <http://www.museudaimigracao.org.br/mi-inaugura-exposicao-hospedaria-130/>

<sup>12</sup> São Paulo is the richest city in Brazil and it attracts a lot of internal migration from Brazil –especially from the Northeast region - and also from other countries in Latin America, Asia and Africa.

<sup>13</sup> Most Bolivians that immigrate illegally to Brazil work in the textile industry but as illegal residents they are not protected by the Labor legislation in Brazil and are forced to accept underpaid jobs and live in precarious conditions.

This shows that the museum curators are trying to open the discussion of delicate matters concerning contemporary migrations and multiculturalism, not only in São Paulo but also in Brazil as a whole. Even if we cannot say that the new exhibition achieves multivocality in its curatorial practice, as the different communities are not yet part of the curating process itself, we can say that it achieves a new approach to the history of immigration in São Paulo broadening the scope of its narrative<sup>14</sup> and questioning the multicultural character of the city.

As a conclusion to this first part of the article, the narrative presented through the permanent exhibition of the *Museu da Imigração* relies on two pillars: the historical importance of the building as a memorial site – that used to be the main pillar for the former exhibition of the *Immigrant Memorial* – and the importance of the immigration cultural heritage in shaping the regional identity. The contemporary immigration to São Paulo is presented at the end of the permanent exhibition inviting the visitor to reflect on the contemporary cultural contributions from the immigrants and refugees that “look for a better life” in São Paulo.

### **Bexiga museums and the Historical Museum of Japanese heritage**

Other “memorial centres” present themselves as anchors of the *Paulista* identity in different parts of the city marked by an immigrant heritage. The Bexiga and Liberdade districts, known as the Italian and Japanese districts respectively, are traditional districts of the city created in the 19<sup>th</sup> century with the acquisition of parcels of land (former local farms). The Japanese and Italian communities, being strongly predominant in the city at that time, marked their presence in certain areas leading to the formation of neighbourhoods known today as Italian and Japanese neighbourhoods.



*Museu Memórias do Bixiga. © MUMBI*

These communities still have a strong contemporary presence even if they would be already integrated in the Brazilian society and we would be talking here of the 3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> generations. Newly arrived immigrants from other countries are now settling in these areas. Koreans and Chinese are settling in the Liberdade neighbourhood (that is becoming now more of an Asian neighbourhood – last 10 years) and Bolivians, Venezuelans, Angolans are settling in areas that would have been initially known as Italian districts.

The *Brás* neighbourhood where the museum is located is in a very central area of the city and it is known for its Italian community, as are other districts close to it: *Mooca*, *Bom Retiro*... etc. Today these areas are receiving other contemporary immigrant communities that are transforming these areas in multicultural neighbourhoods. Also, we cannot forget the internal migrants coming from other states of Brazil especially from the Northeast states that are not as rich economically as the Southeast states. They come to São Paulo looking for job opportunities and a better life, as the immigrants do, and they were also received at the *Hospedaria* from the 1930's until its closure in 1978.

Another factor that is interesting to take into account is the gentrification of the *Bexiga* or *Bixiga*<sup>15</sup> neighbourhood, known as the ‘Italian district’: as it is located close to a richer part

<sup>14</sup> The permanent exhibition of the *Memorial do Imigrante* was often criticized for not talking about the internal migrations or the contemporary migrations, hence privileging a narrative on European migration to Brazil

<sup>15</sup> The name of this neighbourhood can be written either way as Bixiga is written phonetically following the way we pronounce the word in Brazilian Portuguese: e is pronounced i. In this article we are going to use both

of the city, it is gradually becoming a *hipster* area and the real estate market is becoming very expensive in the area.

### ***Museu Memória do Bixiga***

The Bixiga Memorial Museum, located in the neighbourhood of the same name and known for its Italian cultural heritage, was originally opened in 1981. It remained closed between 2005 and 2010, due to administrative problems, and reopened its doors to the public on 18 March 2010. The small museum is a private initiative of the collector and occupies a house built at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It was conceived by the “cultural agitator/entrepreneur” of the neighbourhood Armando Puglisi, popularly known as *Armandinho do Bixiga*, and presents objects that tell the story of Italian immigrants in the region. Although little is known about the building that houses the Bixiga Memorial Museum, the house built in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century is listed by the Conpresp (Municipal Council for Preservation of Historic, Cultural and Environmental Heritage of the City of São Paulo).

Among the items exhibited, many of them donated by Puglisi, it is possible to find machines to make pasta and bottles in which the milk was delivered from door to door at the time. Residents of the traditional Italian neighbourhood were also invited to donate objects to the exhibition, such as uniforms of the classic *Vai-Vai* samba association (*escola de samba* in Portuguese), Carmen Miranda’s shoes, weapons of the 1932 *Paulista* Revolution, 1920s dentist’s chair and an extensive photographic collection of Bixiga. The collection consists of 8,000 photographs and 1,500 different items, including objects that belonged to Adoniran Barbosa, famous samba composer and Italian descendant that lived in *Bexiga*.



*Museu Memória do Bixiga. © MUMBI*

These everyday objects mixed with pieces belonging to musical personalities show the “amateur” character of the collection. The objects were assembled without specific criteria (just to have a connection with the neighbourhood) and are preserved in a precarious way.

As mentioned earlier, the Bixiga neighbourhood is known for the strong influence of Italian culture to come with immigrants settling in the neighbourhood. Thus, the museum also presents in its collection documents and photographs related to the Italian immigration in the

district. Even on the website of the museum, we find Italian as a language option (the site is available in Portuguese, English and Italian).

### ***The Bixiga Memory Centre***

Founded in the Bixiga neighbourhood in 1978 by Walter Taverna, SODEPRO<sup>16</sup> - Society for the Defense and Progress of Bela Vista - is a non-profit association fighting for the preservation of the architectural, cultural and historical heritage of Bela Vista – Bixiga district<sup>17</sup>. The restoration and preservation of the cultural centre – Casa da Dona Yayá (Dona Yayá’s house), today a cultural centre managed by the University of São Paulo (USP), is one of the examples of the scope of action of this association.

<sup>16</sup> It is also responsible for community popular celebrations and events such as: São Paulo’s birthday cake, the largest sandwich and pizza in the world, the Miss do Bixiga competition, among others.

<sup>17</sup> The *Bixiga* neighbourhood is officially part of the Bela Vista district.



*Centro de Memória do Bixiga, main room. © CMB*

The Memory Centre of the Bixiga (CMB) is an initiative of SODEPRO which according to the creators aims to “safeguard the history of the neighbourhood”. Chaired by Walter Taverna, this association also preserves his personal collection of memorabilia and is currently based at his own house. It was created in October 2007 by Walter Taverna, grandson of Sicilians and resident of the district since his birth in 1933. With documents and photographs from his personal collection, Taverna gave

the starting point to found the establishment. Throughout his life “Seo”<sup>18</sup> Walter, as he is known, struggled to safeguard the memory, traditions and heritage of the neighbourhood, to such an extent that to remove the real estate developers who surrounded Bixiga<sup>19</sup>, he asked in 1985 the “mise en patrimoine” of the place, which did not happen until 2002.

The collection has its main themes: biography and social contribution of “Seo” Walter to the city of São Paulo; the neighbourhood of Bixiga and its “famous characters” (e.g. Adoniran Barbosa) and its social events and curious anecdotes.

Based on the provision of this information to the public, the cataloguing process of this collection has begun, aiming to collect and make available the above-mentioned themes through a database (an amateur database). A manager with a background in history, rather than museology, welcomes interested visitors to discover the history of the neighbourhood through the collections of “Seo” Walter.

#### *Amateur collections or Memorabilia?*

The two examples that (I have mentioned) we have examined here, have the same functional structure: the private collector who transforms his particular interest in the history of the neighbourhood and Italian immigration to transform his personal collections into “neighbourhood heritage”. Bundled with various textual, bibliographical, iconographic, audiovisual and various objects (trophies of sports competitions or beauty of the district, etc.), these collections present themselves rather as Memorabilia, or ‘modern curiosity cabinets’, than collections of museums.



*Museu Histórico da Imigração Japonesa. © MHIJB*

The Japanese Museum of the History of Immigration (MHIJB), in the Liberdade district of São Paulo, depicts the entire Japanese saga in Brazil, which began on June 18, 1908, with the arrival of the ship Kasato Maru which brought the first Japanese immigrants.

<sup>18</sup> Local expression that means Mister. The accent of the inhabitants of the neighbourhood is said to be influenced by the Italian accent because of the amount of the Italians living in this area in the 1920s-1930s.

<sup>19</sup> As mentioned above, the Bixiga is located close to a very rich area of the city and its central location is very attractive to real estate developers that are looking for areas to build in. Most of the neighbourhood still preserves the old houses and has a quiet atmosphere compared to the rest of the city.

Inaugurated in 1978 in the presence of Prince-heir Akihito and Princess Michiko<sup>20</sup> and the President of the Brazilian Republic Ernesto Geisel, during the celebration of the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Japanese Immigration to Brazil, the museum now houses a collection which shows in detail the 109 years of Japanese immigration history. There are 28,000 documents, including work reports from coffee farms, photos, maps and 4,800 items.

The Historical Museum of Japanese Immigration in Brazil is maintained by Bunkyo - Brazilian Society of Japanese Culture and Social Assistance. The Japanese government also financed part of the museum which is why it is common to see visits from the Japanese royal family during commemorative events such as the 120 years of the *Tratado de amizade entre o Brasil e o Japão* (*Treaty of friendship between Brazil and Japan*) in October 2015.

The permanent exhibition occupies three floors and presents a narrative in chronological order. In part 5 - From shipment to the farms – the visitor sees images of the former immigrant shelter in Kobe, images of boarding, the Immigrant Hostel in São Paulo and pictures of the scenes inside the ship.

### **Conclusion: The museum as a mediator in the construction of identity**

In these examples, we find the construction of the identity of a neighbourhood, a city and a state through the multicultural contributions that accompany immigration.

What is interesting is that we have three very different examples of local identity building: the “memorabilia” collector of his neighbourhood, a museum of the Japanese community with funding from Japan and a ‘classic’ museum on the history of immigration in the state of São Paulo funded by the state government. These “memorial centres” of immigrants in the city of São Paulo present different processes of institutionalization and archiving of “migrants memories”.

We can see that private initiatives have developed their collections in different ways: the Bexiga Museum(s) through the passion of a collector of memorabilia from the neighbourhood in which he was born and continues to live; The Japanese Museum created its collection on the basis of an initiative of the Japanese government and the Immigration museum of the State of São Paulo presents the creation an “institutionalized” collection following governmental policies<sup>21</sup> where objects and personal stories of immigrants who passed through the *Hospedaria* provide the main axis.

Both museums have collections that present objects collected<sup>22</sup> in collaboration with immigrant communities and highlight the importance of oral history and the personal narrative of immigrants, and therefore their objects in which their memories regarding their experiences as immigrants are contained.<sup>23</sup> But the visitors react differently to the permanent exhibitions: the *Museu da Imigração* is the second most visited museum in the city while the other examples tend to attract fewer visitors as they wouldn’t have the same scope of public visibility.

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<sup>20</sup> Emperors of Japan at the time.

<sup>21</sup> The *Museu da imigração* organized recently, October 18<sup>th</sup> 2017, a conference on public policies as guidelines for the constitution of museum collections. Some of the questions raised by this seminar where: What is the heritage of immigration and what is the role of the Museum in relation to it? How to collect the contemporary in the context of a Museum? Is collecting the only way to build and preserve memories? How to construct collaborative / participatory proposals that involve the collection of the Immigration Museum? In what way is it possible to integrate the collections of the Immigration Museum from this new scenario that is designed for the institution and its collection?

<sup>22</sup> Arjun Appadurai, “Introduction: commodities and the politics of value,” in *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective* ed. Arjun Appadurai (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 5.

<sup>23</sup> La *Galerie des dons* in the French *Musée de l’histoire de l’immigration* is a very good example of the will of the curators to highlight the importance of personal narratives in the construction of the national narrative on the history of immigration. Likewise, the Brazilian *Museu do Imigrante* has the old dormitory that used to host immigrant, transformed in a memorial gallery with objects, documents and photos belonged to the immigrants who slept there.

Another point to consider when analysing these different museums is that they have different relations to the city and to the different migrant communities: the *Museu da Imigração* would be talking about immigration in a larger context (presenting a local narrative connected to a wider national narrative on immigration and multiculturalism in the Brazilian society) while the other examples would be aimed to a specific community.

As mentioned above, the memorial site character of the *Immigration Museum* in São Paulo helps to build a strong relationship with its visitors – especially those of foreign origin as their ancestors might have passed through *Hospedaria* – and to create a network of communities that actually support the Museum and its narratives on how the immigrants contributed to the regional identity of São Paulo.

The Bixiga museums and the *Museu Histórico da Imigração Japonesa* on the other hand are presenting a narrative on immigration of a specific community: the Italians or the Japanese community, from a personal or institutional point of view respectively. The choice of location is also very important as they show the memorial (and affective) attachments of the migrant communities to their local neighbourhoods. In other words, even if these institutions are not located in a historical building such as the *Hospedaria*, they are located in geographical areas of the city that has the same memorial value of the *Hospedaria*.

In all the initiatives presented here, we see the construction of patrimonial discourses as a form of consolidation and validation of the construction of local identity (whether neighbourhood, city or region). The museum thus appears as a mediator of identity building, creating a platform for presenting and validating a cultural heritage through personal stories of immigration whether private initiatives, as in the case of the Bexiga collectors, or governmental, as in the case of the *Museu da Imigração* and the *Museu Histórico da Imigração Japonesa*.

From the examples shown here, we can see that they don't simply validate a single identity, but multiple, simultaneous identities (eg. Brazilian and Japanese, Italian and Brazilian, etc). At the beginning of this text we spoke of the need for an inclusive identity in contemporary multicultural societies, but the use of the inclusive term presupposes the duality between inclusive identity and exclusive identity. What leads to the definition of the individual by a single identity? In fact, I believe that each individual has a multiple identity: if we consider identity as a floating notion. In other words, it is not a fixed and static concept, the concept of identity. An individual may feel he belongs to several categories during his or her life without that sense of belonging becoming the unique definition of who it is: its identity.<sup>24</sup> That's why it is perhaps more accurate to talk about 'processes of identification', which are multidimensional, than about 'identity' as a singular construct. And museums are mediators in these processes of identification by creating a narrative that validates multiple identities and heritage. By presenting the heritage of immigrant communities, the museums presented here show the multicultural character of the city of São Paulo and its inhabitants.

As a conclusion, we would like to highlight that Immigration Museums are recent in the international museum landscape<sup>25</sup> but as the topic of immigration is gaining importance in the political international scenario due to the refugee crisis, immigration museums are gaining space in the contemporary discussions on heritage and social inclusion. Even if some argue that the ideal scenario would be to have immigration history included in National History Museums

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<sup>24</sup> According to Michel de Serres, philosopher: "we always make a serious confusion about the notion of identity. I do not like people who talk about "gender identity", "national identity", "cultural identity", and so on. Why? Because they confuse identity with belonging. Thus, when they speak, for example, in the Brazilian identity, French identity, they confuse identity: identity is "A" identical to "A", ie "Michel Serres" is identical to "Michel Serres": it is Identity. The fact that he is French ... It's not my identity, it's my belonging. That's why for Michel de Serres, the concept of national identity is wrong and it leads to situations of prejudice and racism. In "Qu'est-ce que l'identité?", January 1997.

<sup>25</sup> The oldest immigration museums date from the 1980s.

instead of having a museum dedicated to immigration itself, for the moment it is essential to have a platform to discuss and reflect on immigration and the Immigration museums around the world are aiming to be that platform of discussion on social and economic inclusion of immigrants and refugees.

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# How to put migration in a museum? A reflection on the museum representation of migration

Andrea Delaplace\*

## Introduction

Immigration Museums are confronted with the challenge of how to put on display a non-static phenomenon by nature: the continual displacement, the non-place. How to create a museography that shows the inconstancy of immigration?

Can museography render what is continual movement, flux, transformation? How to restore the moving frame; follow a mosaic of destinies to contribute, despite everything, to go from a plurality of crossed memories to a shared memory?

If the reference to a national narrative is not always as explicit in immigration museums, those responsible for the museography were always conscious of the importance of the overall story these institutions were seeking to tell. Narrative and display on immigration museums are essential to create a more understanding society regarding migration and especially at the moment with the ongoing 'migration crisis' in Europe<sup>1</sup>.

Recent work in critical museum studies, has shown that immigration museums can use objects and strategies of display to transmit positive representations of immigration, promoting diversity and a more inclusive national identity as propagating a better knowledge of the subject. The idea is to see the museum as a space for perception of images and representations: What is the representation of immigration that is given to see in these museums?

In this paper I will present different topics that are recurrent when analyzing the permanent exhibitions of different migration museums to try to identify its common structural points and to show how immigration is represented.

The idea is also to see the museum as a space for perception of images and representations: What is the representation of immigration that is given to see in these museums?

Staging and displays are essential to understanding the production of museum discourse. It is the whole spatial arrangement, the layout and presentation of the objects and documents as well as all the texts (and the catalog) that produce a message, a speech to be interpreted by the visitor. In the exhibition, meaning is therefore intrinsically dependent on staging and space as the arrangement of things in order to allow access. Therefore, one can assume that, in examining the exhibition design, it is possible to identify some recurring elements that structure and characterize their display and narrative.<sup>2</sup>

## 1- RECURRING THEMES STRUCTURING THE MUSEUM ITINERARY

The exhibitions analyzed here include different museographies but the topics discussed remain the same when we talk about immigration:

- The Departure

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<sup>1</sup> I will present different examples of museums both in Europe and the American continent and both emigration and immigration museums.

<sup>2</sup> Davallon Jean. L'exposition : un fonctionnement médiatique. - Pourquoi considérer l'exposition comme un média ? In: *Dossier médiomorphose*, p.28. [http://documents.irevues.inist.fr/bitstream/handle/2042/23275/2003\\_09\\_27.pdf?sequence=1](http://documents.irevues.inist.fr/bitstream/handle/2042/23275/2003_09_27.pdf?sequence=1) (accessed 23/03/2018).



Entrance to the Palais de la Porte Dorée that houses Cité Nationale de l'Histoire de l'Immigration. Photos by the author, 2015

- The Journey (and border crossing)
- Arrival and sorting process with local authorities (medical visits, refusal or acceptance of entry into the host country)
- Adaptation (or not - 'rooting or not') in the host country
- Contemporary migrations

These themes basically function as threads for the museum's narration recounting the experience of migrating.<sup>3</sup> Maps and chronological context (such as timelines) are also presented to the visitor as historical support but the

main chronological narration is that of the voyage.

## Departure

The permanent exhibition of the *Musée national de l'histoire de l'immigration* - MNHI focuses on the departure (name of the first part of the exhibition *Repères*) and precisely on "small objects slipped into the pocket" before departure. A strong emphasis is placed on individual memories and personal narratives of departure and travel: the migration experience is presented at an individual level (especially when we look at the Galerie des Dons).

Different from the permanent exhibitions of the Ellis Island Museum in New York and the *Museu da Imigração* de São Paulo, which support their museum narrative on the building history and the path of the immigrant upon his arrival in these places of passage that constitute these institutions (the governmental institutions of "sorting" immigrants), the *Repères* exhibition, is organized around concepts, of key words one could say, which guide the migratory experience. Thus, it is logical that the exhibition has as a starting point the very idea of *Departure*.

## The Journey

Another master theme central to the migrant experience is the grand narrative of the journey. The voyage is the 'rite of passage' that transforms and conditions the very status of the individual who migrates. To migrate is to cross a sea, an ocean, a desert, a mountain: the journey, sometimes dangerous, to reach a new unknown land (which will become his new home). Like the myths in which the hero makes an initiatory journey: even if he returns to his point of departure (his native country), he is profoundly transformed by this experience.<sup>4</sup>

For example, in the Ellis Island Museum<sup>5</sup> there is a 'grand' narrative focused on the voyage. But is not a chronologically consistent one as visitors travel through different times before and after through the different permanent exhibitions that the museum presents.

Still, the narrative the museum conveys most powerfully is the drama of passing the inspection process and making it through Ellis Island's gate. The inspection drama begins as visitors climb the restored stairs to the Great Hall<sup>6</sup>, which immigrant climbed on their way in to be processed,

<sup>3</sup> Baur, Joachim. 'Commemorating Immigration in the Immigrant Society. Narratives of Transformation at Ellis Island and the Lower East Side Tenement Museum', in: König, M./Ohliger, R. (ed.), *Enlarging European Memory. Migration Movements in Historical Perspective*, 2006, 137-146.

<sup>4</sup> We are thinking here of the myth of Ulysses and his journey told by Homer in the *Odyssey*.

<sup>5</sup> For more information read: Baur, J. 'Ellis Island, Inc.: The Making of an American Site of Memory', in: Grabbe, H. J./Schindler, S. (ed.), *The Merits of Memory. Concepts, Contexts, Debates*, 2008, 185-196.

<sup>6</sup> If the visitor chooses to use an audio-guide, the itinerary will be the one following the footsteps of migrants and the challenges they faced when arriving at Ellis Island. The exhibition "Through America's Gate: processing Immigrants at Ellis Island from 1892 to 1924", is set in a series of rooms which were historically used as processing rooms.

observed as they climbed on their way in to be processed, observed as they climbed by doctors looking for possible weakness of heart, limb, or mind.

Another museum that structures its exhibition around the path of a migrant from its departure to its arrival in the new country is the *Galata Museo del Mare* in Genoa, Italy. Using full scale reproductions of the housing where migrants used to live in Genoa, passing through reproductions of the ships accommodation during their voyage and the houses they would live at their final destination, the visitor is invited to follow every step the Italian migrants had taken before and after the ‘crossing’.

### Human Diaspora or Immigration as a Human phenomenon

The issue of migration as part of human nature is often presented to the public to highlight the “human” nature of migration. The Museu da Imigração, for example, dedicates the first module of its exhibition to this theme under the name of ‘*Diaspora Humana*’ (‘Human Diaspora’). They present a video where the visitor can see the different migrations routes that humanity used since prehistorical times to populate the earth.

The Red Star Line Museum also presents a chronology from antiquity to today to show how human migrations have always existed and how cultural exchanges are essential for humankind.

### Workforce - Labor

The theme of Labor is also central in immigration museums since the vast majority of immigrants leave their country in search of a better life and this goes through finding a new a paid position of regular employment. Workplaces, formal or informal, remain the most important places of integration for migrants/refugees in their new country. Therefore, it is through work that the first socialization takes place in the new social and economic context.

In its permanent exhibitions the *Musée national de l’Histoire de l’immigration* and the *Museu da Imigração*, show the importance of work in creating a new network for the newly arriving migrants. By presenting working tools among other artifacts, these museum points to the relevance of migrants as a working force helping to build economic prosperity in their new home country.

## 2- ICONIC OBJECTS: THE IMPORTANCE OF THE OBJECT AS A MEMORIAL SUPPORT

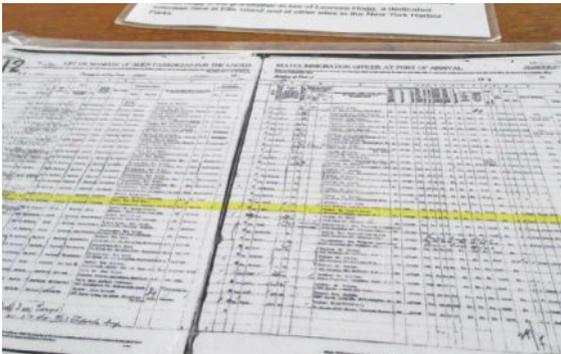
These themes presented above are often linked visually to the staging of a series of iconic objects, usually personal items such as luggage, travel documents (passports), migrants’ letters, passports, clothes or toys for babies and children<sup>7</sup>. These objects are frequently used for their effective visual impact and their immediate connection with the themes of the exhibition. They are rarely of historical or artistic value in themselves still they embody the memory of migration and have a strong visual impact.

In exhibitions dealing with the theme of immigration, whether temporary or permanent, we find a recurring *mise-en-scène* that evokes the “migrant experience”. This presentation of objects is characterized by a desire to immerse the visitor in the museum



Dolls from the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Museu da Imigração, São Paulo. Photos by the author, 2015

<sup>7</sup> The book published by the Migration museum in São Paulo *Peça a peça* highlights the common and daily objects that are part of the Museum collection.



Top: Museu da Imigração. Bottom: Ellis Island Immigration Museum. Photos by the author, 2015

narrative and thus create a sensory link between the displays and the visitor. The suitcase remains the iconic object of immigration *par excellence*: whether presented alone or in support of interactive devices, it represents the ‘magic box’ that contains the objects chosen by the immigrant during his departure and who will accompany him on his journey to always remind him of his origins.

The moment of departure is crucial for those who decide to leave, to leave their country and to embark on the unknown that is the ‘journey’, dangerous in many cases, to access a new life.

Once the sorting of memories and objects to bring with oneself<sup>8</sup>, the suitcase presents itself as the “sacred” receptacle of these precious memories of a world which will remain in the past of those who leaves:

Thus, the suitcase would be this container that contains “memory objects” chosen by their personal symbolic importance, real relics that are supposed to recall and, to a certain extent, put in contact the one who possesses them

with his past and his family. The crossing to the unknown is done with his suitcase and the relics it contains: symbol *par excellence* of the traveler and also that of the immigrant, the exile.

One of the activities offered to visitors of the 19 Princelet Street project in London is to ask the public what would be the object they would choose to bring with them if they were to leave their home / country forever. This choice is very personal and intimate but some objects are quite common such as: family photographic albums.

### 3 – AN EVOCATIVE FRAMEWORK: WHEN ARCHITECTURE SUPPORTS THE MUSEUM NARRATIVE

The architectural context of migration museums often complements the visual communicative apparatus of these exhibitions and further amplifies their impact<sup>9</sup>. These museums are usually located in places that have a history related to migration, such as docklands, border or departure towns, and neighborhoods which have suffered intense migration flows. Furthermore, some museums are located at historical buildings connected with stories of migration and bearing itself a memory of migration making them very emblematic buildings<sup>10</sup>.

It is necessary to historicize these *lieux de mémoire*<sup>11</sup> (memorial spaces) and *lieux de passage*<sup>12</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Debary, Octave et Turgeon, Laurier (direction). *Objets et mémoire*. France: Éditions de la Maison des sciences de l’homme – Paris, 2007.

<sup>9</sup> Lanz, Francesca. « Staging Migration (in) Museums – A reflection on Exhibition Design Practices for the Representations of Migration in European Contemporary Museums. » In *Museum & Society*, March 2016.

<sup>10</sup> All the three museums that I analyse in my thesis research are located at important historical buildings: the *Palais de la Porte Dorée* in Paris, the *Hospedaria do imigrante* in São Paulo and the Ellis Island Museum in New York.

<sup>11</sup> Nora, Pierre (direction). *Les lieux de Mémoire*. France : Editions Gallimard, 1992.

<sup>12</sup> Green, Nancy L. « Trans-frontières : Pour une analyse des lieux de passage », *Socio-anthropologie* [En ligne], 6 | 1999, online le 15 janvier 2003, consulté le 25 juin 2019. URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/socio-anthropologie/110> ; DOI : 10.4000/socio-anthropologie.110

(transit spaces such as ports, train stations, airports but also temporary constructions created to hold and control migrants) while releasing their deep socio-anthropological sense. These spaces of waiting and conflict where migrants were processed and had their destinies changed forever are now 'monuments' to the memory of immigration. It is very paradoxical to have those impressive buildings, once abandoned facilities, turned now into Museums dedicated to the history of immigration (a *non-lieux*<sup>13</sup> phenomenon).

### Conclusion:

Artworks, personal items, audio-video testimonials, real scale reconstructions, common iconic objects such as suitcases and passports, and highly scenographic and interactive displays, are often used in the *new museography* presented by immigration or emigration museums and are undoubtedly efficacious: they have a strong visual impact that makes it easier to understand and remember what's on display. All these exhibit solutions are largely characterized by the intention to stimulate empathy<sup>14</sup> in the visitor toward the story told and aimed at achieving a greater visitor involvement.

Also, the visual language adopted is different when the exhibition deals with contemporary migrations rather than with historical migrations. Museums dealing with contemporary migration<sup>15</sup> frequently resort to more temporary displays where artworks, videos, and graphic design play an important role. On the other hand, museums presenting historical migrations, often the big migration waves from Europe to the American continent at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup>, would involve more permanent galleries and full scale reproductions to immerse the visitor in that specific period in the past.

Both undoubtedly work in creating a strong synergy with the museum narrative and the collection. Nevertheless, by repeating the same thematic approaches and using the same iconic objects, exhibitions may create an oversimplification and ultimately be unable to raise questions or foster other perspectives or dissent, thus failing to create the context for reflection and serious contemplation that the topic of migration deserves. Hence, migration museums should encourage more multivocal projects and exhibitions, engaging different migrant communities to collaborate with them.



Entrance to Ellis Island Museum, New York. Photos by the author, 2014

<sup>13</sup> Augé, Marc. *Les Non-lieux – Introduction à une anthropologie de la surmodernité*. France : Editions Seuil, 1992.

<sup>14</sup> Landsberg, Alison. "Memory, Empathy, and the Politics of Identification" in: *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society* Vol. 22, No. 2, Special Issue: Memory and Media Space (June 2009), pp. 221-229.

<sup>15</sup> I organized two conferences on the subject, called « Heritage, Immigration and Temporary Fabrications » in November 2016 at Beaconsfield Gallery London (<http://blog.apahau.org/journee-detudes-heritage-immigration-and-temporary-fabrications-londres-19-novembre-2016/>) and in January 2017 at Université Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne in Paris (<https://hipam.hypotheses.org/83>).

## Angisa on Top

Annemarie de Wildt\*



Gerrit Schouten, *Diorama of Slavedanse*, 1830. © Rijksmuseum Amsterdam

Since the unveiling of the National Slavery Monument in 2002, the *Keti Koti* (Break the Chains) Festival has been held annually on 1 July in the *Oosterpark* in Amsterdam. From the town hall a procession moves to the park with music groups and hundreds of *kotomisis*: women in Surinamese costumes. *Koto* is the Sranan word for the multi-coloured wide dress and a *misi* is a woman. The women wear an *angisa* on their heads: an artfully folded headscarf.

For years I have been fascinated by this clothing and especially by the stories that are told about it. My very first introduction was a small exhibition in the early 1980s in the International Archive for the Women's Movement. In 2013 I was in Suriname for the first time and I visited Christine van Russel-Henar. After a long bike ride through Paramaribo I arrived in the suburb of Livorno, where she had set up a small *Koto* museum in the yard of her home. Her mother, Ilse Henar-Hewitt, had started researching and collecting traditional creole women's garments in the late 1960s and Christine followed in her footsteps. Both women gathered knowledge from older women, who told them, among other things, about the names of the cloths and the binding methods of the scarfs.

### Slavery

Christine wrote the book *Angisa Tori, the secret language of Suriname's headscarves*. *Tori* means story. This narrative of the unique Surinamese costume touches on the history of slavery. The *koto* is surrounded with many conflicting stories. The wide dress would have been devised by the jealous white wives of the plantation owners, who could not keep their hands off the beautiful female slaves. A source from around 1820 speaks of the "Concubines of the white man

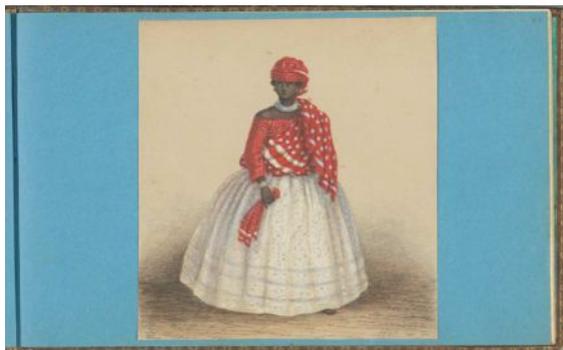
\* Annemarie de Wildt, Curator at Amsterdam Museum

or the missis” with whom the Dutch settlers showed off in the streets of Paramaribo.<sup>1</sup>

The drawings of P.J. Benoit from around 1830 show beautifully dressed enslaved women on their way to church or a party. The field slaves on the plantations usually wore, just like women in West Africa, only a *pangi* (loincloth) and a headscarf, which, in addition to keeping the sun out, also helped to balance the things they wore on their heads. The word *angisa* appears for the first time in writing in 1840. In those days there is also talk of headscarves with spells, also an African custom.<sup>2</sup>

### Covered breasts

The increasingly wider skirts of the *koto* have a kinship with the enlarging of hips and buttocks of African women through clothing, but also with the 19th century *queue de Paris* with which European women accentuated their rear. The *yaki* (short jacket) of the *koto* is truly European. In 1879 a new criminal regulation came into existence in the colony. Women were forbidden to walk around with bare torso any longer. This was part of the Christianization and civilization campaign of the Dutch after the abolition of slavery in 1863.



Top: RP-T-1994-281-35 *Vrouw in koto misi*, Jacob Marius Adriaan Martini van Geffen, 1860. Bottom: *Marketwomen at Heiligenweg*, Eugen Klein (attributed to) 1900 – 1905. © Rijksmuseum Amsterdam

Around 1900 was the flowering period of the *kotomisi*. Photos of the streets and markets of Paramaribo show Creole women wearing a *koto* and *angisa*. The square cloths of 90 by 90 cm the *angisa*'s are folded with, are also called *angisa*. Every new design that appeared in stores was given a name, such as “*atibron e gi berouw* - anger brings repentance”. This referred to a relationship between two women, one of whom had run away angry. The collection of the *Koto Museum* also includes *angisa* cloth about the birth of triplets, the self-confidence of prostitutes, the discovery of gold, migration and political power struggle. There are also cloths on the subject of the Dutch royal family, the commemoration of the abolition of slavery and independence (1975).

Not only the names and design of the cloths, but also the method of binding communicates messages. The well-known model “Let them talk”, for example, means: let them gossip, I don’t care. If the points are up it is clear that the wearer is angry. From the 1930s onwards, the *koto* became more and more exclusively the daily wear of working class creole women. Middle-class black women wore the dress only during festivities, such as July 1 and on birthdays, especially *Bigi Jari*, the crown years.



Part of the Slavery trail through the Golden Age exhibition, 2013. Quote of winti-priestess Marian Markelo about the unpaid labour of her ancestors that helped create the Amsterdam canalhouses. © Amsterdam Museum



Cornellie & Euridyce Park (left) and Jane Dundas (right) on July 1st 2013 at the Ketu Koto festival in the Oosterpark. © Amsterdam Museum

## Cultural heritage

Ilse Henar's quest began in the late 1960s with a question from American expats about the history of *koto* and *angisa*. Ilse realized that she knew nothing about it, and started her research, inspired by her grandmother, who had been a *kotomisi* all her life. The investigation of this cultural heritage was not limited to clothing but also focused on the feasts for which the enslaved women dressed up as best as they could. Twice a year there was a feast on the plantation, around the distribution of fabrics and tobacco.

The two or three days and nights of singing and dancing were led by the *Sisi*, the main house slave, often also the owner's concubine.<sup>3</sup> On the drawings of Benoit the *Sisi* can be seen with a hat, because it was more chic than a headscarf.

Such parties, so-called Du's, were also held in the city of Paramaribo. Christine Henar and other researchers of the culture of the enslaved also began to stage Du's from the 1970s onwards. Sisi Slijngaard played an important role. She was not only a professional embroiderer and *angisa*-folder, but also keen on collecting knowledge and passing it on. Sisi and Christine were also the driving forces behind the theatre performance *Na Gowtu Du* in 1998. These performances also came to the Netherlands and in particular to Amsterdam, where there has been a large Surinamese community since independence in 1975.<sup>4</sup>

## Let them talk

The visit to the Koto museum inspired the design of the slavery trail through the Golden Age exhibition at the Amsterdam Museum in 2013, the year 150 years of abolition was commemorated.

Descendants of enslaved now living in Amsterdam reacted to objects and texts from the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century, when Amsterdam was co-owner of Suriname. Their statements referred to the forced labour that contributed to the Amsterdam circle of canals and the biased image of the paintings. We printed these quotes on material from the Koto museum, crowned by a "Let them talk" *angisa*. With this the Amsterdam Museum wanted to spread the message: listen to the sadness and anger that descendants still feel about slavery. In 2013, the Amsterdam Museum also conducted field research into contemporary Amsterdam *koto*'s and *angisa*'s. On July 1, during *Ketu Koti*, we set up a photo studio in *Oosterpark* and we photographed more than 150 people in their festive clothes. A large group of museum colleagues and volunteers conducted short interviews asking them: what do you wear and why? Photos and stories are stored on the website.<sup>5</sup>



Fotostudio Amsterdam Museum at Ketu Koto festival, 2013. © Annemarie de Wildt

## Intangible heritage

In the meantime, both *koto* and *angisa* have been included in the Intangible Cultural Heritage inventory in both Suriname and the Netherlands. There is a lively interaction between the Netherlands and Suriname. Some women go there to have their *koto*'s and *angisa*'s made, but there are also designers and *angisa*-folders in the Netherlands. Afro-Surinamese women in the Netherlands are more inclined to experiment. A good example is Jane Steward-Schubert who

came to the Netherlands at the age of 16. When she was about 30 years old she was asked: what is so beautiful about Surinamese culture? She had no answer, but started her own journey of discovery, participated in *Koto* shows and went to Suriname to learn the art of *angisa* folding from elder women, such as Sisi Slijngaard. I recently made a video portrait of her.<sup>6</sup> She explains that she also started making *angisa* hats, using similar folding techniques. She is especially proud of the model “*Angisa on top*”. It is her reaction to the Sisi figure, the darling of the master, who had to wear a hat over her *angisa*. In Jane’s model, the *angisa* is put “on top.”



Jane Steward-Schubert with the book *Let Them Talk*. © Annemarie de Wildt

## Connections

A beautiful explanation of heritage is: “a connection in time between people”.<sup>7</sup> The women who are now learning from each other to fold *angisa*’s and make *koto*’s are part of a web of connections between Africa, South America and Europe. My *tori* about *angisa*’s also shows how inseparable material and immaterial heritage are, and how women have been passing on knowledge of matter and techniques to each other for centuries.

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## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Cited in: L. van Putten en J. Zantinge, Let them talk; de historische ontwikkeling van de kleding van de Creoolse vrouw (Paramaribo 1988) p. 24

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<sup>3</sup> Michiel van Kempen, Een geschiedenis van de Surinaamse literatuur. Deel 2. (Paramaribo, 2002) p. 258 online: [https://www.dbnl.org/tekst/kemp009gesc02\\_01/kemp009gesc02\\_01\\_0020.php](https://www.dbnl.org/tekst/kemp009gesc02_01/kemp009gesc02_01_0020.php) retrieved July 17, 2019

<sup>4</sup> Ko van Geemert, Thea Doelwijt, Blog Caraïbisch Uitzicht, <https://werkgroepcaraibischeletteren.nl/thea-doelwijt-het-blijft-een-kick-kritisch-en-muzikaal-werken-in-suriname/> retrieved July 17<sup>th</sup>, 2019

<sup>5</sup> <https://hart.amsterdam/nl/page/27652/keti-koti-krosi> retrieved June 10<sup>th</sup>, 2019

<sup>6</sup> ‘Angisa on Top’, a portrait of Jane Steward-Schubert by Annemarie de Wildt <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lipFavKEIQU> retrieved July 17<sup>th</sup> 2019

<sup>7</sup> Alex de Vries, Peter van Mensch en Susan Legêne, “Cultureel erfgoed is van iedereen en van niemand: Peter van Mensch in gesprek met Susan Legêne in: Jan Brand et al., Cultureel goed! (Arnhem 2004) p. 49.



GROUP OF PEOPLE STANDING © GOA SHAPE ON, UNSPLASH