DISCUSSING HERITAGE AND MUSEUMS: CROSSING PATHS OF FRANCE AND SERBIA

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THE HERITAGE OF IMMIGRATION: RETHINKING THE MUSEUM’S ROLE AS A MEDIATOR IN IDENTITY BUILDING
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THE HERITAGE OF IMMIGRATION: RETHINKING THE MUSEUM’S ROLE AS A MEDIATOR IN IDENTITY BUILDING

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Biography:

Summary:
The Heritage of Immigration: Rethinking the Museum’s Role as a Mediator in Identity Building

Public sites increasingly harbor the memories of migrants in their diversity and specificity, making audible and visible versions of the past that had been occluded or simply neglected. Museums increasingly believe that you empower immigrants by remembering and redeeming their memories, which have often been absent from national narratives. Henceforth, the transformation of old facilities that used to receive and accommodate immigrants – such as Ellis Island in New York – into sites that revive their histories. This shows a transformation in attitudes towards immigration, which has changed the status of “diaspora” and has given visibility to a range of cultural identities. Changing migrants’ relationship with their identity: from overseen and transitory memories to recognition and empowerment. The integration of migration history continues to be a challenge within museum spaces and narratives even though it is an increasingly notable feature of the international museum landscape. Thus, it raises a lot of questions such as: What is an
immigration heritage? How to exhibit immigration? Do attempts at representing migrants mirror a national paradigm?

**Résumé:**
Patrimoine et immigration: le rôle du musée comme médiateur dans la construction de l’identité

THE HERITAGE OF IMMIGRATION: RETHINKING THE MUSEUM’S ROLE AS A MEDIATOR IN IDENTITY BUILDING

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 understand 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, 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?
• Paradoxically, does giving minorities a voice actually marginalize their cultural diversity from the mainstream national citizens?
• 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 immigration museums institutionalized immigration heritage and what it is 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 two case studies of immigration museums to try to prove how the construction of a narrative about immigration actually highlights the construction of the national or regional 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 draw a timeline of the French Immigration Museum (Musée national de l’histoire de l’immigration) at the Palais de la Porte Dorée in Paris, followed by an analysis of this museum’s missions that are defined in its project. Then raise questions from it and draw hypothesis and lines of reflection on how these two different projects constitute an attempt of creating an inclusive narrative on immigration.

The Immigration Museum (Museu da Imigração) in São Paulo, Brazil

The Museu da imigração of the State of São Paulo – former Memorial do Imigrante – located in São Paulo, Southeast region of Brazil – is an important center of documentation and memory of immigration in the context of Brazilian museums. It consists of a central archive and documentation center 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 being closed for 4 years. The original project has undergone a complete reformulation during this period.

In this article, it will be considered how this museum is an attempt to recognize the immigration heritage as a regional heritage. At first, I will present a timeline of the history of the building. Then, I will discuss the creation of the museum and its transformations over the years and finally, the “new museum” with its new permanent exhibition from 2014.

History of the building

The Immigration Museum is located in the old building that used to host officially the immigrants who arrived in São Paulo, at the end of the 19th century from Europe or Japan, to work in coffee plantations. The permanent exhibition

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1 Both museums analysed here present their exhibitions as a way of including immigrant’s history in a larger narrative, be that national or regional.
2 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.
focuses on how the cultural contributions of these immigrants helped building 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 the Hospedaria do imigrante between 1887 and 1978. Immigrants who arrived at the Port of Santos, on the coast, traveled 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. The 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 19th 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 the Hospedaria do Imigrante. In 1978, the state of São Paulo progressed in the national migration policies to adopt a specific scheme. Thus, the Hospedaria closed its doors that year and then stopped to archive documentation on immigrants. The building became 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 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

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3 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.
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 Center 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 the *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* has already become a memorial center and exhibition space, but not a museum itself.

Although it was not a museum, the *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 the *Hospedaria* became a place of social gathering and meetings for the majority of the immigrant communities 4. 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*

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4 During an interview on 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.
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”.

Immigrants played a key role in the development of the State of São Paulo coffee plantations in the 19th and early 20th century, as well as in the industrialization and urbanization of its capital. It would be surprising, if not disturbing, that the state has done nothing to preserve this piece of history that still resonates today in the hearts and memories of the Paulistas. The São Paulo state needed to invest considerably in the preservation of its historical and cultural heritage. Yet, if this memorial policy seemed of significant importance, the so far implementation of the Immigration Museum was not easy. The museum is created, but is restricted to one building: the Hospedaria itself.

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.

The Immigrant Memorial (Memorial do Imigrante)
When speaking of the Immigrant Memorial, it is the expansion of the functions of the Immigration Museum that opened in 1993. In addition to the museum’s activities, the memorial is committed to preserve the memory of the building and its documentation as well as those who passed through its halls. So, the first scientific project of 1993 is transformed and restructured in 1998 to ensure that the memorial character of the museum and its collections – especially the intangible heritage of immigrants – is highlighted and preserved. According to Ana Maria da Costa Leitão Vieira, former director of the Immigrant Memorial “... it was restructured in 1998 to collect, preserve, organize, study and promote

5 Paulista means someone who is born in the state of São Paulo.

6 When analyzing the archives of the original project from 1993, we can see clearly that the Hospedaria was destined to actually hold the archives and the technical reserves of the museum. The actual permanent exhibition was intended to occupy the new building at the Ibirapuera park. But by 1995-1996, as the project of opening this new building wouldn’t take off, the museum staff working at the Hospedaria decided to present the permanent exhibition at the Hospedaria itself. From this point onwards, the project of the immigration museum is concentrated in one building (the Hospedaria) and the permanent exhibition is downsized considerably from the original.
the documents and stories on immigration history and the memories of the immigrants that arrived in São Paulo from 1820 onwards.\textsuperscript{7}

Another interesting point in this new scientific project was the will to preserve the remains of the old railway system in the surrounding area of the museum. Having in mind the close historical links between the railway system and immigration, a contract is signed with the Brazilian Association of Railway Preservation (body that manages and maintains the Brazilian railways) to incorporate an old locomotive in the museum collection. The later reproduced part of the journey that the immigrants used to take after arriving at the port of Santos and it was the “favorite attraction of visitors.” It also recalled the story of the coffee crop in the state. In addition, it was a tribute to immigrants and their contributions to the city and state of São Paulo.

Furthermore, the memorial was the research center for people interested in their ancestors and obtaining dual nationality, getting their names rectified or resolving inheritance problems. In addition to its own records and archive, it exceeded its physical limits by offering references and information online. It was also an important center for academic research. The institution aimed to become a reference in the field of immigration research, by becoming a place of cooperation between the academic, governmental and non-governmental spheres. To ensure better sharing of information and a resonance at national level, the Immigrant Memorial contributed to the creation of the Brazilian Network of Organizations and Institutions for Immigration Studies (RBOIEI). With the participation of UNESCO and the IOM (International Organization of Migration) the memorial became the part of the Migration Museums Network International.

Thus, one can say that the institution has an unrivaled prestige in Brazil. Indeed, in the southern states (Santa Catarina, Paraná and Rio Grande do Sul), the migratory flow from Europe has been as important as the one in São Paulo, but their documentary resources, memorial sites and museums, even in the states capitals – Curitiba, Florianópolis and Porto Alegre – are not as developed and successful as the results found in São Paulo.

The closure of the former Immigrant Memorial and the new Museum of Immigration

The museum remained closed due to renovation works, between 2010 and 2014. The building went through a thorough restoration – it was the first time

that the building was fully restored since its opening in the 19th century – and the adequacy of its archives and collection spaces as well as restoration and digitalization of documents and artworks, was achieved. The museum scientific project also went through a reformulation – it broadened the scope of its narrative about immigration by widening its discussion on the construction of a regional identity shaped by the cultural contributions of immigrants, and also by bringing new approaches into analyses of contemporary immigration in São Paulo. The name of the museum was also changed from Immigrant Memorial (Memorial do Imigrante) – that highlighted the memorial site as mentioned before – to Museum of Immigration (Museu da Imigração8).

In the new scientific project of the Museum was stated9: “The new museum will be inaugurated on the 31st of May 2014 on the occasion of the Feast of Immigration (Festa do Imigrante) which takes place every year at the end of May or the beginning of June. It is a festival that brings together all the different communities of origin immigrated to São Paulo (Italian, Polish, Russian, Portuguese, Bolivian, Japanese, etc.).” This represented the will of the museum not only to be a historical site, but to be a part of different immigrant communities’ gatherings and festivities, becoming the part of their lives and therefore creating an emotional bond and network between memorial site and these communities. The initiative of creating a supporting network between the museum and the surrounding immigrants’ communities has also been visible in others immigration museums like the French Immigration Museum (as we will see later in this article) which clearly states in their scientific project that the museum should be a forum for discussions and becomes a link in a network of immigrants’ communities in Paris and in France.

Mariana Esteves, head of collections and research at the Immigration Museum, explained during an interview that the São Paulo government has established a contract with the same museum staff that is also in charge of the Coffee Museum – Museu do Café – in Santos and that will create a link, over time, in between the two museums – as most of the immigrants that arrived in the Port of Santos and passed through the Hospedaria actually worked in the coffee plantations.10

The museum followed the steps of museums like the Football Museum and the Portuguese language Museum, which are among the most visited

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8 In this part of the article, we are going to use the name of the Museum in Portuguese – Museu da Imigração – as a way of differentiating it from the previous projects.


10 Mariana Esteves, Interview with Andrea Delaplace, Personal Interview, São Paulo, January 2014 and February 2015.
museums in São Paulo. These museums introduced interactive experiences, which would enable visitors to have a more immersive experience. So the new team in charge of the Museu da Imigração saw it as a way of making the visitors feel closer to the hardships immigrants’ went through when arriving at their local destination. It could be argued that relying on an entirely interactive and high-tech exhibition platform, could easily dislocate the focus on the actual narrative of the museum focused on the history and importance of the building within the immigration history of the region of São Paulo. But that’s not the case, the museum managed to create an interactive exhibition without losing sight from its main goals. The interactive activities are there as additional supports for the main narrative.

**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 staging the theme of immigration in the train stations is to draw the attention of the public that could directly identify, and again, to make the visitor feel closer to the exhibition because of the location – a “transit place”. One of the stations that have been chosen is 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 20th 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.

Since 2013, various temporary exhibitions were presented to the public in several cultural centers in São Paulo. The temporary exhibition *Travel, dream and destination* (*Viagem, sonho e destino*) was organized from the 10th of December 2013 to the 27th of January 2014 at the Brás Station Cultural Center (*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, the 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 the attention of the public on 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” 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 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

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the permanent exhibition both in *Ellis Island Museum*\textsuperscript{13} and at the *Immigration Museum* in São Paulo.

The new temporary exhibition *Hospedaria 130*\textsuperscript{14} 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 the different immigrant communities contribute to creating the “multicultural identity” and cosmopolitan character of the city of São Paulo\textsuperscript{15}. The 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 the *Bom retiro* neighbourhood that used to have an important Italian community and now has a growing Bolivian\textsuperscript{16} 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.


\textsuperscript{14} The new exhibition opened on the 26\textsuperscript{th} of August. For more info: “*Hospedaria 130 – Museu da Imigração*,” accessed August 30, 2017, http://www.museudaimigracao.org.br/mi-inaugura-exposicao-hospedaria-130/.

\textsuperscript{15} 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.

\textsuperscript{16} 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\textsuperscript{17} 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.

The Museum of Immigration History (Musée de l’histoire de l’immigration) in Paris, France

In the first decade of the 21\textsuperscript{st} century, France has undergone a profound transformation of its museum landscape. With the creation of the Musée du Quai Branly, a reorganization of anthropology collections and the museum system in this field occurred. The National Museum of the Arts of Africa and Oceania (MAAO) closed its doors in 2003, the National Museum of Popular Arts and Traditions (ATP) in 2005 and the Museum of Man in 2008. Their collections were transferred to other museums respectively: the Quai Branly Museum, opened in 2006, and the MuCEM in Marseille, opened in 2013\textsuperscript{18}.

In this context of renewal, the National Museum of the History of Immigration - former Cité nationale de l’histoire de l’immigration (CNHI) and since 2013 Musée national de l’histoire de l’immigration (MHI) - opened its doors in October 2007 after a long gestation period and without the presence of the President of the Republic at the time, Nicolas Sarkozy at the opening day. Its opening thus

\textsuperscript{17} The permanent exhibition of the Memorial do Imigrante was often criticized for not talking about the internal migrations or the contemporary migrations, hence privilegiating a narrative on European migration to Brazil.

remained discreet and unofficial. The official ceremony of inauguration only occurred seven years after its opening, on the 15th of December 2014, when François Hollande did an important discourse about immigration. 19

The MHI 20 is a national museum, a public institution under the supervision of two ministries: the Ministry of Culture and the Ministry of Education and Research. A national museum has a very important role in France for it is seen as institution of the State and the national collections that are held by this institution are imprescriptible and inalienable goods that belong to the nation. Thus the discourse developed by a national museum would portrait the way the nation represents itself, in other words, how museum representations mirror the nation.

Historical background
The idea of a place dedicated to the history of immigration has been defended by associations that deal with immigration and academia for a long time. In 1992, the project of creating a museum was the mail goal of the Association for the Immigration Museum (association of historians and activists) that brought together many historians including Pierre Milza, Gérard Noiriel, Dominique Schnapper, Emile Temime and Patrick Weil.

In 2001, following the request of Prime Minister, Lionel Jospin, a first report was written by Driss El Yazami, CEO of the Generic Association 21, and Rémy Schwartz, head of requests at the Council of State 22, about the form that might take a place dedicated to the history of immigration. The report called for the creation of a national center for history and cultures of immigration and made several proposals: a national center, a network of partners, a place open to the university, a museum open to the public, etc.

In 2002, the project of a national museum dedicated to the history of immigration has been announced in the Jacques Chirac program, and was revived in the broader context of the Interministerial Committee for Integration of the 10th of April 2003. One of the decisions of the Committee concerned the establishment of a new mission, chaired by Jacques Toubon, foreshadowing a center of resources and memory of immigration 23. Taking into account the lessons of the report of El Yazami and Schwartz, and referring to the means

20 In this article we will use MHI to refer to the Musée de l’Histoire de l’Immigration.
22 This is the literal translation of maître des requêtes au Conseil d’État.
and expertise of the Agency for the Development of Intercultural Relations (GipAdri), this mission has put in place the tools necessary to achieve an institution of cultural, new social and educational purposes, intended to recognize and highlight the role of immigrants in the building of the French nation. In 2004, after a year of work and carried by a university and associative thinking for several years, the project of the National Museum of the History of Immigration was officially launched on the 8th of July 2004. National Museum of the History of Immigration was established the 1st of January 2007, following publication in the Official Journal of the 17th of November 2006.

The choice of the building – Palace of the Golden Door (Palais de la Porte Dorée), was controversial because it was built in 1931 by Albert Laprade and inaugurated during the 1931 Colonial Exhibition. It was, as well, the site of the former Colonial Museum (Musée des Colonies). Thus, the “historical importance” of the place fed the fear that the theme of the history of immigration in France would be mixed with that of colonization in a stigmatizing way for the new museum. Yet the discourse of historians in charge of the MHI’s project defended the idea that the missions of the new museum would be to transform the colonial imaginary around the building and that it should become a cultural institution that illustrates the decisive contribution of immigrants in the construction and identity of the French nation.

The museum also had the challenge of starting a collection from scratch and in a very short period of time, because it had not inherited any initial collection. For the first time, a national museum in France was created with no previous collections. The challenge of an “empty page” (la page blanche) was one of the main points during the discussions of the Scientific Committee that created the main discourse of the permanent exhibition Points of Reference (Repères).

The opening has been announced for spring and summer 2007 but finally took place on the 10th of October 2007. However, the museum was not fully completed during its opening and in years to come a number of other contributions were added to the initial project: the library Abdelmalek Sayad specialized on migration, a café as convivial space at the entrance of the museum, restored rooms from the Palais de la Porte Dorée dating from the colonial period, a permanent exhibition on the second floor on the history of the Palais built for 1931’s Colonial Exhibition.

In addition, the last two years have been marked by the change of name of this institution that officially became Museum of Immigration History in 2013 and re-opened in 2014 the permanent exhibition Repères and the Donation gallery (Galerie des dons). But we have to ask ourselves: Why a museum that opened in 2007 took 7 years to be officially inaugurated and why all of these
changes happened in such a short period of time? Has the MHI managed to implement the objectives present in its scientific project?

**Missions**

In its scientific and cultural project, the CNHI (*Cité nationale de l’Histoire de l’immigration*) and now MHI (*Musée de l’Histoire de l’immigration*) reveals its mission and its museum character. From the four major objectives advanced by the designers of the project, the first two show very clearly the commitment of the CNHI to heritage:

- Develop and manage the national museum of the history and cultures of immigration, an original museum and cultural complex, responsible for preserving and presenting to the public representative collections of the history, arts and cultures of immigration.  
  

- Preserve, protect and restore on behalf of the State cultural properties inscribed in the inventory of the national museum of the history and cultures of immigration which has custody of them and contribute to the enrichment of the national collections.  
  

Thus the MHI is defined primarily as a national museum of history and culture of immigration, whose goals are to preserve, protect and enrich the national collections and to present them to the public. The choice of vocabulary used here is essential to understand the desire to highlight the MHI’s heritage character of creating a museum and collection about immigration.

According to Marie-Hélène Joly, head of curators (*conservatrice générale du patrimoine*): “The MHI might not have been a museum: called “Resource and memory center” (*Centre de ressources et de mémoire*) in 2004’s report that foreshadowed the mission. Its present name was the subject of several hypothesis, each revealing intentions and different symbolism positioning. However, its museum mission was clearly stated in all creative texts of the institution certainly partly for economic reasons during the research for funding, but it is not irrelevant that the associations at the base of the project wanted this registration, thereby revealing an attachment to the enduring nature of the institution “museum”. The existence of heritage empowers an institution: heritage
clearly demonstrates the existence of a phenomenon and also we cannot make disappear with the stroke of a pen a monument nor a collection.”

Heritage remains a way to preserve the memory of immigration that strengthens its perennial nature by creating a collection and a museum. If the MHI’s project was a resource and memory center, as recalled Marie-Hélène Joly, the weight and scope of the institution would have not been the same.

The process of transforming immigration into heritage has its purpose in the will to act in the society and in its representations. In other words, the heritage recognition and tools can lead to a change of reality through a change of representations of a culture or a community. Thus, the national museum of the history and cultures of immigration displays this desire for recognition of cultural diversity linked to immigration in the name itself: *National museum of the history and cultures of immigration* (*Musée national de l’histoire et des cultures de l’immigration*).

Yet, with the change of the logo of the CNHI in 2013, this reference to cultural diversity disappeared. The CNHI became *Museum of the History of immigration – MHI*. This change took place with a new communication campaign that focused on developing immigration as a national heritage that concerns most part of the French population. Some of the sentences used as the slogan in this marketing campaign included: *One in four French is of immigrant origin* (*Un français sur quatre est issu de l’immigration*) and *Your grandfather in a Museum* (*Ton grand-père dans un Musée*)

The museum defends the position that the personal stories and memories of immigrants build the history and heritage of immigration as part of the national History. On the museum’s website one can read that through the messages that engage the general public, with a simple hook, direct and humorous, this campaign will stress that immigration history is the story of all, a part of the history of France.

However, this memory cannot obviously be unique, as immigrant communities differ on how they think their memory should be represented. One association wants to gather the memories of immigrants from different origins; another conceives the memory and heritage of immigration as the uniqueness of the history of a particular community. As a result, the issue of cultural diversity in heritage remains a complex debate considering a national point of view versus a community point of view. When talking about issues of memory

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it’s easier to talk about the memory of a group of people, a culture in particular. One may wonder if there is not a certain artificiality to want to talk about memory or immigration heritage, which presupposes a discourse based on the nation-state design, while the migration phenomenon finally obeys a transnational logic, but also a collective identification with a specific migration situation that brings together extremely diverse realities. Therefore, can immigrants relate, or alternatively, do they want to be related to the same History, the same heritage as proposed by the MHI, born from the desire to give a “place for immigrants” in the great national narrative?

The process of transforming immigration memory into heritage remains very delicate especially because of the multicultural nature of this phenomenon, which goes against the unity of the heritage discourse. This is problematic in France where the national identity is very strong and the pressure for integration into this identity is strongly felt by immigrants. By approaching nation-building discourse indirectly through migration – a concept counterpoised to and at the same time constitutive of the nation – the museum shows how migration mirrors the nation through representation.

Without oversimplifying, one could sum up the ambition of this project as the one to show how the foreign immigrants, the “others”, gradually integrate the national identity, the “we”. However, there is the same problem that was mentioned earlier: the republican approach in France to heritage faces various obstacles when it comes to immigration; the main one is the non-inclusive conception of national identity that goes against the idea of cultural diversity within the society.

The construction of the French heritage in connection with the construction of the national identity leaves little room for the immigration heritage that concerns a cultural heritage linked to the history of a particular group, or a heritage in connection with the migratory journey: as both refer to the fear of communalism and a postcolonial imagination full of stereotypes. Therefore, we can say that the MHI project is based on an inclusive national vision of immigration where the immigrants are shown as integrated in the French society and do not really speak about the real problems concerning immigration in France today. Maybe that’s one of the main reasons for the strong critiques


29 Here when we use the word non-inclusive it means that the French Republic would expect migrants to adjust to the French national identity and cultural traditions. They have to merge in the national identity which is very different from an inclusive identity that would be willing to create a new “we” by accepting that the “we” is composed of different cultural communities.
that the museum received since its opening in 2007 and the lack of identification of most “immigrants” or French citizens with immigrants origins with the permanent exhibition.

In other museums, for example, the notion of community seems to be more present in the heritage process, which comes from the fact that in these countries, perhaps, the state is less present in the heritage initiatives. Meanwhile, this is the first time in many decades that the French State engages in a national museum project with social and political interests so strong like the MHI.

Conclusion
These two examples represent the challenges that museums are facing when representing the heritage of increasingly diverse, multi-cultural and multi-lingual societies. The objective of my research is to explore museum practices and their eventual renovation in the light of multivocality as a key to building an exhibition about immigration and its subsequent impact on our understanding of national identity, belonging and citizenship. But do the two different projects that were presented in this article achieve the goal of creating a multivocal and inclusive exhibition in curatorial community practice?

Both museums have collections that present objects collected 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. But the visitors react differently to the permanent exhibitions: in São Paulo the Immigration museum is the second most visited museum in the city while in Paris the Musée de l’histoire de l’immigration is struggling to reinvent its presence and attract more visitors.

The Immigration Museum of São Paulo has a very strong memorial character with its building and historic significance for the history of immigration in the region. Since its reopening in May 2014 its permanent exhibition has

30 The present article is just a short presentation of my ongoing Ph.D research and some of the ideas pointed here are going to be analyzed more closely in my thesis.


32 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.
widen 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 narrative \(^{33}\), 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. Therefore, the museum is well established in the Brazilian cultural landscape.

When analyzing the first seven years of the Museum of History of Immigration (Musée de l’histoire de l’immigration), we can see a museum that has continued to evolve because it is struggling to find its space in the French museum landscape. Perhaps the identity crisis of the museum is linked to the tensions and problems of French society related to the question of “national identity”. The resignation of eight members of the Scientific Council of the MHI in May 2007 to protest against the creation of a Ministry of Immigration, Integration, National Identity and Co-Development shows the contradictions visible in the heritage process of immigration in France.

If heritage creation may be a matter of state, as in the case of the MHI, it should question the narrative on what constitutes the nation and what defines the national identity itself. Does the inclusion of immigration in the heritage policy of the state leads to a consideration of the “multicultural” character of the French society (or French identity)?

The non-inclusive conception of national identity – and even assimilation – stops any possibility for cultural diversity inside the national discourse on identity. The national community defined as completed, as the group to which the immigrants must merge into, is opposed to the image of an inclusive nation that just accepts the different communities inside its own society.

Another important point to analyze is how the museum stands regarding the image of immigrants and the discourse that is conveyed through its permanent exhibition Repères. Creating a collection from scratch was a challenge to MHI, which literally built the immigration heritage based on the memorial objects and stories collected by the museum: photos, videos, works of art, 

\(^{33}\) 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.
archival documents, various objects donated by immigrants\textsuperscript{34}. It is certain the museum remains as an attempt to influence the society and its representations through the heritage recognition of immigration. However, its permanent exhibition was not at all unanimous with the public and the academic world since it opened in 2007\textsuperscript{35}, and accordingly it tries to “reinvent itself” with recent changes to the permanent exhibition and the \textit{Galerie des dons} (both reopened to the public in 2014).

Another point to consider when analyzing these two museums is that they have different relations to its respective buildings: the building helps creating a bond with the visitor and the immigration history in the Brazilian case, but, on the contrary there is a gap between the museum’s permanent exhibition and the memorial importance of the building in the French case. As mentioned above, the memorial site character of the \textit{Immigration Museum} in São Paulo helps to build a strong relationship with its visitors – especially of foreign origins as their ancestors might have passed through the \textit{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.

On the other hand, in the French case, the museum’s narrative on the subject doesn’t inspire the same identification and most of the visitors of foreign origins would not feel connected or represented by the permanent exhibition. As the museum is not located in an immigration memorial site – the \textit{Palais} is a memorial site when we look at Colonial history – it doesn’t have the same appeal that other museums like the \textit{Ellis Island Museum} in New York might have. It is actually located in a building with a strong colonial heritage that brings other delicate memories into play. Therefore, the museum has been struggling to find its voice and its public. Maybe with time the \textit{Museum of Immigration History} (\textit{Musée de l’histoire de l’immigration}) will find ways to connect to and create a network of immigrants’ communities that would feel fully represented by its narrative and the immigration heritage will have its place recognized in the French museum landscape.


As a conclusion, we can say that both museums aim to build an inclusive narrative on immigration, highlighting the contribution of immigration to the national identity and culture. However, as discussed during the article, their attempt to create a multivocal and inclusive permanent exhibition is not fully achieved as their permanent exhibition still presents a narrative that wouldn’t really speak of the contemporary challenges faced by immigrants neither the struggles to feel “integrated” in the new society. Questions such as multiculturalism are not fully discussed either even if cultural contributions are celebrated (gastronomy, art, etc.).

But temporary exhibitions for both museums analysed here and the Galerie des dons in the French case demonstrate a real attempt in creating curatorial community practices. By inviting immigrants to donate objects and tell their personal stories, it creates an actual multivocal narrative on immigration as different narratives and voices present the challenges, struggles but also successes that immigrant experienced when arriving at their final destination.

Immigration museums are recent in the international museum landscape 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 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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36 One of the latest temporary exhibitions at the Museu da Imigração, called Migrações à Mesa (Migrations on the table), developed a collaborative project with different immigrants communities to create a narrative on how culinary recipes are transmitted from generation to generation and how they influence the regional gastronomy in São Paulo.

37 The oldest immigration museums date from the 1980’s.
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