Museums, minorities and recognition: memories of North Africa in contemporary France

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Abstract:

This article uses a case study from the *Musée dauphinois* in Grenoble, France to explore the way museums are called upon to act as 'authorities of recognition' for minority communities. Studies of public recognition have often focused on political and legal measures, such as reparations, rather than considering questions of public representation. In satisfying demands for recognition on the part of minority groups do museums contribute to social cohesion or do they generate competition between groups that may heighten existing tensions? This question is particularly pertinent in the French case where the philosophy of republican universalism traditionally discourages acknowledgement of group identities. Drawing on work on recognition by Feuchtwang and Dufoix this article argues that a more complex model of recognition needs to be elaborated for museums in order to take into account the multiple actors involved in the development and reception of exhibitions.

Key Words: Recognition, representation, France, immigration, cultural diversity

> Shortly after 9pm about twenty people, according to witnesses mostly young men, some of whom were armed with baseball bats or knives hanging from their belts, burst into the museum through the main entrance and invaded the lecture room, where they proceeded to damage some of the furniture and shout death threats and racist abuse.

> Pamphlets signed by a so-called 'autonomous nationalist committee' expressing similarly racist views, such as the recurrent 'France for the French' or the more unusual 'tax thieves' were thrown in the air whilst one of the demonstrators, clearly the group leader, wearing a hood and a Celtic cross, performed what appeared to be a mock religious ceremony… in front of a horrified audience. (*Le Dauphiné libéré*, 19 November 1999)[1]

The *Musée dauphinois* in Grenoble is an unlikely setting for a violent racist incident. Housed in a seventeenth-century convent, on a hillside overlooking Grenoble's historic centre against a backdrop of snow-capped Alpine peaks it is more often the subject of postcards than press reports. Yet on 18 November 1999, a lecture by the Algerian historian and former member of the FLN (*Front de libération nationale*, the Algerian pro-independence movement), Mohammed Harbi was disrupted in the shocking manner described above. The lecture was part of a series of events accompanying an exhibition entitled *Pour que la vie continue…D'Isère au Maghreb: Mémoires d'immigrés* (henceforth *Mémoires d'immigrés*) which took place from 1 October 1999 to 31 December 2000 and concerned the history of Grenoble's population of North African origin. And worse was to come. The directors of the North African community association, ALIF (*Amitié-lien France-Maghreb*), which had collaborated with the museum over the exhibition, began to receive racially motivated death threats. Then in February 2000, the day before both an important court hearing linked to the attack and another instalment in the museum's lecture series were due to take place, Madame D, the wife of ALIF's director, was the victim of a horrific

racially motivated attack in her own home, where she was tied up, tortured and sexually abused.[2] The police inquiry, which does not appear to have resulted in any convictions, was unable to establish a clear link between the two events. However, in the words of the museum's director, Jean-Claude Duclos:

> For me, the two events are completely linked. I don't see how you can dissociate them. Monsieur [D] received letters containing serious threats after Mohammed Harbi's lecture. You can't avoid making a link. (Interview with Jean-Claude Duclos, *L'Humanité*, 31 March 2000)

In describing these traumatic events my intention is neither to be sensationalist, nor to reopen painful wounds. However, they provide a salutary and compelling reminder of the extent to which museums have the potential to function not just as 'contact zones' (Clifford 1997) but also as 'zones of conflict' (Hutchinson 2004). Much has been made of the idea of the museum as a space for the reconciliation of competing claims; as Richard West, director of the National Museum of the American Indian in Washington D.C., recently put it museums are ideally 'a safe place for unsafe ideas.'[3] However, the example of the *Musée dauphinois* reminds us that they can also provoke violent reactions and perhaps even exacerbate the conflicts they seek to appease; the 'culture wars' can turn violent and even revive past conflicts in all their brutality. Moreover, there has been little theoretical reflection on how, in empowering one group, museums may be seen as disenfranchising another. Yet as Duclos admitted 'the museum team probably underestimated the fact that the expression of these memories, on this occasion the memory of immigrants, might be so painful to others.'[4] Hence one of the aims of this article is by means of a case study to explore how, in satisfying demands for recognition from minority communities, museums can negotiate these claims successfully in order to achieve a positive outcome.

       This discussion is pertinent not just to museum studies but also more generally to the growing field of memory studies; despite the centrality of the public institution of the museum, according to Susannah Radstone 'the articulation of memory within the institutions of the public sphere has remained under-emphasized in the field [of memory studies]' (Radstone 2005: 138). In order to address this she suggests a number of areas for research including 'the question of relations between recognizing authorities' and 'the place of empathy and affect in the articulations of memory within the public sphere' (2005: 145). The concept of memory deployed in this article is derived from Nancy Wood (1999), who sets aside the epistemological issues about the pertinence of 'collective memory' as a category of analysis to focus instead on its performativity: memory narratives acquire form through 'conduits' which she terms 'vectors', and which for her include 'commemorations, historical narratives, political debates or other cultural forms' (Wood 1999: 2). This article extends the idea of the 'vector of memory' to include museum exhibitions.[5]

       The idea of the museum as a 'recognizing authority' will also be explored in order to draw attention to the way its institutional complexity and internal differentiation allows it to perform this function more supply than many other actors in the public sphere.

       This article is based on a case-study of two exhibitions at the *Musée dauphinois* in Grenoble, France. The first is *Mémoires d'immigrés*, as described above. The second, *Français d' Isère et d' Algèrie*, ran from 21 May 2003 to 21 September 2004 and concerned the '*pied-noir*' community in the Isère region, '*pied-noir*' referring to the French citizens 'repatriated' from Algeria at Independence in 1962.[6] For in addition to the violence the exhibition engendered, in January 2000 it also became the subject of a heated exchange of letters with the President of *la Maison du rapatrié*, a federation of local *pied-noir* associations.[7] The idea of the second exhibition, *Français d' Isère et d' Algèrie,* emerged as a direct consequence of their dispute. The scheme seems to have been present as early as January 2000; Jean-Claude Duclos suggested a second exhibition as a way of addressing their criticisms in his first letter in response to the *Maison du rapatrié* (Duclos 2000).[8]

       The material contained in this article is derived primarily from a series of interviews conducted in May-June 2006 with members of the museum staff and the key interlocutors from the communities involved.[9] The focus, therefore, is primarily on the way that claims for

recognition were negotiated in the planning and preparation phases rather than on a reading of the exhibition texts as semiotic objects or on the public response to them. Such an analysis would in any case be difficult to undertake so long after the event.[10]

Case study: the Musee dauphinois, Grenoble, France

The *Musée dauphinois*, Grenoble, which celebrated its centenary in 2006, is not easy to classify; indeed, its own publicity makes a virtue of what might be described as its disciplinary ambivalence.[11]

As a 'museum of society' the *Musée dauphinois* covers a vast swathe of rural and urban life from pre-history to the present day. Its mission has been described as 'showcasing the diversity and richness of all the cultures that make up the region and the city of Grenoble' ('Corato-Grenoble' in ARALIS & Cité nationale de l'histoire de l'immigration 2005: 117). It is therefore unsurprising that since the late 1980s the museum has devoted a series of exhibitions to the region's immigrant cultures. Political factors have also been important in orientating the museum's choices and defining its mission. The museum was rescued from near closure and transferred to its present site in the 1960s by the socialist mayor of Grenoble, Hubert Dubdedout, who controlled the city from 1965 to 1983. Dubedout massively increased the city's budget for culture, tripling it between 1964 and 1968. His action was governed by a firm belief in the utility of cultural activity as a means to address social inequality. In this context the role of the museum was to provide the historical context for understanding contemporary problems (Parent & Schwartzbod 1995: 126. See also Antoine 1977). The first exhibition at the museum to represent Grenoble's immigrant communities, *Le Roman des Grenoblois* ('The story of the people of Grenoble'), took place in 1982 as a result of a direct demand from the local authorities that the museum present an exhibition tackling the modern urban environment in addition to its more traditional ethnographic work on the Alpine heritage. Moreover, the first exhibition to focus exclusively on a single community of immigrants, *Corato-Grenoble* in 1989,[12] was also a response to a political demand arising in the context of a year of events celebrating the links between the two towns of Corato and Grenoble. These political initiatives then generated more spontaneous demands from other groups who wished in turn to have their place in the museum; first the Greeks and then, in 1993 in response to this new project, the Armenians. Recognition of one group thus created an imbalance and a feeling of an injustice which could only be rectified by further exhibitions. Nevertheless, in so far as the actual staging of the exhibitions is concerned the museum seems to have retained almost complete autonomy, using its political clout to resist various demands from the communities in question and the goodwill it enjoys in political circles to fend off political pressure and to defend its freedom of action in the interest of safeguarding its credibility. As the Director Jean-Claude Duclos emphasized, the museum owes both its longevity and its success to its awareness of the importance of sustained political backing, guaranteed by keeping open permanent channels of often informal communication between the museum and the authorities.[13]

Since 1989 most of the exhibitions on Grenoble's minority communities have occurred as a result of a direct demand from the community concerned. With regard to the exhibitions with which this article is concerned, the project for *Mémoires d'immigrés* was launched following a screening of the film *Mémoires d'Immigrés* by Yamina Benguigui at the museum in 1997 (Benguigui 1997), that seeks to tell the forgotten story of post-war North African immigration to France. The screening was organized on the initiative of the director of the association ALIF (see above) who approached the museum partly because he was aware of the work that had been done with other local communities. The positive response to the film-screening led to a more sustained collaboration between the museum, ALIF and other local organizations, culminating in the 1999 exhibition. The film-screening was not however the first contact between the community and the museum; in our interview Duclos confirmed that he had for some time been hoping to do something on the North African community in Grenoble, but had not previously felt the time was right. This helps explain why the exhibition project developed so readily out of the screening.

Unlike the first exhibition, where the framework for recognition was broadly positive, the circumstances surrounding the initiation of *Français d'Isère et d'Algérie* (see above) immediately

established the exhibition as an act of reparation, beginning from a negative premise.[14] The story of these two exhibitions suggests questions that go beyond the particular working practices of the *Musée dauphinois* to begin to interrogate the power relations engaged in all articulations of memory. How do museums channel the desire for recognition? Might such gestures of reconciliation in fact be counter-productive? These questions are particularly pertinent in the context of French government policy which, since the 1980s, has championed the idea of 'integration', wherein cultural differences are subordinated to the idea of a universal citizenship. '*Communautarisme*', or the fragmentation of society into specific cultural groups with differential rights, is often represented as a major threat to republican values (Hargreaves 1995, Silverman 1992).[15] The showcasing of different cultural groups in the museum thus becomes a profoundly political gesture in that, superficially at least, it appears to be at odds with official policy.[16] And whilst its 'liminality' (Duncan 1995: 8-20) assures the museum a certain freedom of movement, the passions it arouses cannot be divorced from the wider political context.

The situation in Grenoble is of additional interest since the city can be seen as a microcosm of the wider national conflict over the memories of Algeria, dubbed the 'memory wars' (see Savarèse 2005; Liauzu (ed) 2003; Stora 2003). During the war Grenoble was home to active networks of supporters on both sides (Kayser 2000a). It was also chosen by Bertrand Tavernier as the location of his 1992 documentary based on interviews with surviving protagonists of the war, *La Guerre sans nom*, on account of the presence of a very wide range of opinions and personal trajectories amongst the city's residents. And the events of 1999-2000 go to show that for some *Grenoblois* the war is far from over.

The museum as 'authority of recognition'

In order to analyze the various ways in which the museum intervened in Grenoble's own 'memory war' the role of museum as an 'authority of recognition' (Feuchtwang 2003: 78) must first be explored. There are a number of reasons why museums in particular may be called upon to perform the work of recognition. First, as a devolved agency of the state, museums are seen as conferring legitimacy, an idea which will be explored in more detail below. Secondly, they can provide a relatively neutral space for the negotiation of competing claims. And thirdly, within the museum, groups position themselves in relation not only to each other but also with regard to multiple heritages; the possibility for both spatial and temporal positioning is one of its specificities. Jean-Claude Duclos has explained the continued appeal of the museum by the fact that since 'it is already a site for storing buried memories' it enables 'everyone to find their own place, in their own time and space, with regard to those that came before' (Duclos 2001). The development of the museum as a space for recognition has been seen as a result not just of pressure from politicians or community groups but also of a shift in the epistemology of the museum as an institution. Dominique Poulot for example argues that in France - and his argument could apply throughout the developed world - the didactic museum has given way to the museum as facilitator, a trend that can perhaps be linked to the loss of confidence in grand narratives associated with postmodernism.[17] The traditional history museum has been replaced by 'a museum of "living" memory, exalted in proportion to the degree of (re)cognition it can offer a community' (Poulot 1988: 81). However, the fact that museums continue to be solicited precisely for their authority would seem to call this argument into question.[18]

The structure of public recognition developed by Feuchtwang (2003), admittedly in the context of the limit case of the Holocaust or Shoah, allows us to return to the question of precisely how museums act to confer legitimacy. For Feuchtwang, the demand for acknowledgement of a grievous loss 'is often a grievance described and treated in terms very like that of debt, something which needs redemption. Recognition here implies recovery by means of what is often a new status, that of acknowledged victim' (Feuchtwang 2003: 77). As well as conceptualizing the position of the injured party, Feuchtwang also describes the role of the authority: 'the authority of recognition includes a judgement that there has indeed been a loss that is worthy of recognition' (Feuchtwang 2003: 78). This is the very first step on the route to redemption; without the consent of the authorities the claim cannot move forward. Feuchtwang suggests that there could be a variety of different sorts of authority, each with 'its own conditions of existence

as an ordering practice, a kind of communication, or a way of entering into and being "heard" (or "seen") in a public space' (Feuchtwang 2003: 78). Indeed, few authorities correspond so closely to this description as the museum, both a visual and often aural medium (although there is a debate to be had about its 'publicness' since, with the exception of school children, its public is entirely self-selecting). These performances of recognition by the authorities, of which an exhibition would be a good example, 'screen a personal sense of loss. They prompt it but transmit it in a standardized form. They make possible projection, transmission and recognition. But they have their own character and force that directs whatever is projected into them' (Feuchtwang 2003: 78); as the anthropologist Mary Douglas puts it, institutions, 'direct individual memory into forms compatible with the relations they authorize' (Douglas 1987: 92). This is particularly true of exhibitions, whose narratives act to structure the testimony on which they are based. Tensions between museums and 'source communities' are very often the product of conflicts over the understandable unwillingness or inability of museums to relinquish their control or, in other words, their tendency to make 'whatever is projected into them' – loss, grievances, fears, desires – fit their own mould.

However, recognition is a two-way process and the museum does not call all the tunes:

> Recognition is a mirror-structure in which the griever and the personal grievance are magnified and focused by authority. But note that this is truly a mirror structure because it also works in the other direction, from authority to potential grief petitioner. That which authorises and recognises, itself demands recognition. (Feuchtwang 2003: 78)

In the context of the *Musée dauphinois* Feuchtwang's shrewd observation leads us to remark that whilst the museum performed a validating function for each of the groups by which it was approached it also accrued to itself new importance in the process. Indeed, its willingness to stage such exhibitions has increased the museum's national standing; on account of the expertise developed over the course of these exhibitions Jean-Claude Duclos was appointed to the 'scientific and cultural committee' of the *Cité nationale de l'histoire de l'immigration*[19] and was invited to a speak at an international conference on the subject in December 2004.[20] Each intervention has the potential to validate: to make a reflexive point, even this article represents a (limited) contribution to the enhancement of the museum's status and therefore its value as a recognizing authority. And so the cycle continues: the more the museum offers recognition and the more it becomes known as a recognizing authority, the more groups solicit its intervention.

One potentially controversial aspect of Feuchtwang's framework is that there is no possibility of resolution: recognition simply engenders further demands, not just from rival groups but also from within the group. There are two reasons for this. The first consists of an unwillingness to relinquish a special status: 'the victim gains through recognition a certain dignity; the ideal closure would be that now by due recognition the status of victim can itself be given up. But this ideal is frequently a cover for a defended grievance, a treasuring of the status of victim' (Feuchtwang 2003: 77). This corresponds to Nietzsche's definition of memory as the refusal to let go, 'a desire to keep on desiring what has been, on some strange occasion, desired' (Nietzsche 1994: 39). The second reason concerns the process of making-public which is intrinsic to the initial demand for recognition and is at the heart of the museum's work. The object or event of recognition, in this case the exhibition,

> …encapsulates but at the same time heightens what required recognition […] Closure enlivens recall. Yet at the same time it threatens, makes it vulnerable to challenges of fact and reinterpretation […] Each promise of closure bears the threat of betrayal. But that is the chance of further mediation by some more inclusive, external authority. And so it goes on. (Feuchtwang 2003: 87)

In other words, once a particular account enters the public sphere it opens itself to public contestation, the pain of which is ironically underscored by the account's newly enhanced status.

In the case of a museum exhibition a group may feel that it has been betrayed not just in the public response after opening but also in the questioning and compromise that

characterize the encounter with the museum in the preparation stage. Members of the group may feel that certain parts of their story were downplayed or important aspects omitted. One possible 'chance of further mediation', to use Feuchtwang's phrase, would be a new exhibition, this time led by the group, in order to correct the misunderstanding perpetuated by the first exhibition (which it had been hoped might provide closure). This was certainly the case with *Français d'Isère et d'Algérie* where some sections of the *rapatrié* community felt that the *Musée dauphinois* had paid insufficient attention to France's 'civilizing mission' (or '*oeuvre française*') in Algeria.[21] They also disagreed with the way the use of torture during the Algerian War was presented.[22] The *Maison du rapatrié*'s solution was to launch its own exhibition project in the *Ancien musée-bibliothèque*, a municipal facility on the Place de Verdun in the centre of Grenoble the following year. This exhibition reused certain panels from *Français d'Isère et d'Algérie* but also included new material. Moreover, whilst the *Maison du rapatrié* was very pleased to have been given access to this prestigious municipal venue it is far from certain that their demands for recognition were satisfied even then. In response to the question of whether the exhibition had changed anything with regard to the way his community was perceived M, the President of the *Maison du rapatrié* replied, 'No. We are still not listened to.'[23]

Towards a new model of recognition for the museum

Feuchtwang's model requires some modifications if it is to be applied to museums; the last part of this article will attempt to use the Grenoble case study to identify these. First, Feuchtwang's model implies the singularity of both the 'seeker for recognition' and the 'authority'. Museums are complex institutions, structured internally through processes of bargaining and negotiation (see Douglas 1987: 29) that rarely speak with a single voice. Museum ethnographies have been particularly effective in highlighting the plural nature of museum discourse, often hidden beneath glossy marketing campaigns that present a united front (see for example MacDonald 2002; Handler & Gable 2002). The idea of the museum as a composite and internally differentiated social organization is essential in any attempt to understand its operation as an 'authority of recognition', since during the preparation stage members of the group seeking recognition will necessarily find themselves engaging with various members of staff, from researchers to press officers to the director, who will all have slightly different conceptions of the nature of the project and may be seen as more or less sympathetic. For example, the use of a researcher from a *pied-noir* background was an enormous asset in preparing the second exhibition ('Her parents are *pied-noir*, *rapatriés*, so she was very good' (interview with M).However, when she left the project on maternity leave her replacement reportedly had a lot more difficulty working with the community ('Maybe she was less sensitive' (interview with P)). In addition, it is also important to remember that the group seeking recognition may well also represent a loose confederation of interests; it may therefore be necessary to identify a spectrum of responses to the moment of recognition rather than just one single stance.

   Furthermore, in the case of a museum other players need to be incorporated into the model: the visitors. As we have seen, Feuchtwang's model is based around the model of the mirror, implying a binary relationship between recognized and recognizer. However, a museum model must also make room for the gaze of the visitors. Visitors may include members of the group seeking recognition but who were not directly involved in the exhibition process. In this instance they will expect to be able to identify with the museum's representation but may have a different affective relationship with the exhibition. They may, for example, be less attached to the cultivation of a victim status. A visit to the exhibition may instead represent an opportunity for inter-generational communication, detached from any demand for recognition (interview with P).[24] In addition, the response of the visiting public, be they group members or not, will also impact on the group's interpretation of the exhibition. Even if certain members feel that their demands remain unfulfilled they may be forced to modify their position in the face of a positive response and increased recognition from the public, whose capacity to grant recognition in some respects transcends that of the museum.

   In addition to illuminating the multi-polar character of museum meanings, this case study helps to illustrate the extent to which different groups seek different forms of recognition in the museum. In order to identify these it is useful to refer to a recent typology established by

Stéphane Dufoix (2005). Dufoix identifies 'eight "R"'s' which he sees as the main aspects of a politics of recognition: repentance, reparation, re-balancing ('*rééquilibrage*'), restitution, requalification, remembering ('*remémoration*'), reconstitution, reconciliation. Each demand for recognition may entail more than one of the 'R's. In general terms, whilst the *rapatriés* sought recognition as victims, the community of North African origin was more concerned with acquiring the status of actors. As Savarèse explains, the transformation of their memory into official history has become the primary objective of the majority of *pied-noir* activists (Savarèse 2005: 135). Such a transformation would entail their collective exculpation from the crimes of the colonial era and the reversal of their current collective image as perpetrators in favour of the position of righteous victims. In our interview M explained how he tries to communicate this idea to his grandson, whom he does not wish to see stigmatized for being of *pied-noir* descent:

> My grandson asks me, "Grandad, tell me what it was like over there, tell me your story." So I tell him we weren't big colonizers (*gros colons*), we were simple workers, we were craftspeople. […] And France is mixed now (*une mélange*), at school they are with… France is a hybrid (*métissé*) country now… And so they want to know why, when we say *pied-noir*, we get funny looks. Tell us why. So we tell them why. We tell them who the *pieds-noirs* were. […] I tell them that when my great-grandfather first went to Algeria he worked down a mine.

This strategy corresponds to Dufoix's category of 'requalification': petitioners demand that the past be 'requalified in order for it to be recognized as traumatic' (Dufoix 2005: 144).[25] The new status would legitimize their grief over the loss of their homeland, a stance which the existing public view of the community, dominated by the idea of their responsibility for the oppression of the Algerian people and a long drawn-out war, makes it hard to adopt. The radical discrepancy between this position and the attitudes to Algeria of the majority of the French population, not to mention the historical record, underlines the improbability of the *rapatrié* community (or at least its more militant wings) ever achieving all of its goals.

The objectives of the representatives of the North African community were very different. First, they were far less concerned with the validation of a particular historical account. Instead, museum recognition was a means to address a lacuna in the collective memory concerning the presence of North Africans in Grenoble. This second form of recognition corresponds to Dufoix's category of 're-balancing': 're-balancing' is not geared towards reparations or repentance but rather seeks to 'highlight discrimination in the past as well as its continuation in the present' (Dufoix 2005: 143). 'Re-balancing' generally deploys a strategy of increasing visibility and raising awareness, for which museums are arguably ideally placed. In the postcolonial context the link between collective memory and recognition is well established. As Abdul JanMohamed and David Lloyd, drawing on Fanon, explain:

> One aspect of the struggle between hegemonic culture and minorities is the recovery and mediation of cultural practices that continue to be subjected to 'institutional forgetting', which, as a form of control of one's memory and history, is one of the gravest forms of damage done to minority cultures. (JanMohamed & Lloyd 1997: 239)

Thus for certain minority cultures, recovering a heritage and establishing a genealogy – what might be described as a work of 'counter-memory' – is essential in the struggle for equality with the dominant culture. To recognize and hence to valorize a hidden or suppressed past is to legitimize the presence in society of its inheritors. Memory is perceived as a mode of resistance to exclusion, past and present. The extent to which the link between memory and recognition, past and present, is common currency underlined by the planning report for the *Cité nationale de l'histoire de l'immigration* (see note 9), which lists 'recognizing' ('*reconnaître*') as one of its key objectives:

> Recognizing this history, restoring the history of immigrants to its rightful place in the construction of the French nation, is of course to make a statement about France today and to prepare France and French society for the future. (Toubon 2004: 17)

For minority groups gaining recognition of the past is therefore often seen as a means to assert the reality of contemporary diversity, in opposition to all those who seek to protect ethnic homogeneity on the basis of an incompletely understood history.

This clarifies the comment made by D that the exhibition was 'important symbolically'. However, his notion of its importance was twofold. D was concerned not just with how this community is perceived from outside but also in terms of self-image. The museum had a double function; it was a weapon in a struggle against racism but it was also a means to enact a shift in the group's collective imaginary towards a self-image as cultural agents – that is, as legitimate consumers and producers of culture – rather than simply as victims of economic circumstance and prejudice inherited from the colonial era.[26]

 The desire for recognition as actors is arguably more readily satisfied than that which depends on a victim status. Although the act of recognition may set in motion further demands, the cycle is more likely to be positive with group members seeking further opportunities to showcase their cultural inheritance and skills in addition to their hidden history.

Feuchtwang's model is further complicated by the fact that the act of recognition represented by the staging of an exhibition is a multi-stage process. In between the demand for recognition and its performance, there is a protracted preparation stage during which aspects of the demand may be met well before the exhibition is opened to the public. For whilst the preparation process happens behind closed doors it is not entirely private; outside actors are involved (such as historians or outreach workers) and large numbers of group members may be involved in a process that in fact hovers somewhere between the public sphere and the fully private.

In the case of *Mémoires d'immigrés* the demand for recognition (as actors) was to a great extent met during the preparation stage. The lack of objects available for display meant that it was evident from the start that the museum would have to develop an innovative museographic strategy in close collaboration with the community. Moreover, the fact that very few of the subjects of the exhibition were regular museum visitors meant that the *Musée dauphinois* had to work hard to build up trust. There is a hint of this difficulty in Jean-Claude Duclos's introduction to the catalogue for *Mémoires d'immigrés* where he comments on the initial scepticism of many young people with regard to the museum's work (Duclos 1999: 6). However, over time collaborative work in a context of mutual respect for cultural difference and reciprocal recognition of expertise can break down barriers (Hooper-Greenhill 1997: 8). The length and depth of contact involved in preparing the exhibition has been underlined by Annie Marderos (1999: 113). Accompanied by volunteers and staff members from ALIF, little by little the museum built confidence and established a working method. The decision was taken early on that the exhibition would be a space in which group members would have the opportunity to express themselves and to communicate their experiences as directly as possible to the visitors. This idea corresponded to a great extent to the desire of the group for recognition as actors. The idea of empowerment and self-expression was at the heart of the preparation process, which was based around the collection of oral testimony and also the institution of creative writing workshops (often linked to literacy classes) in which participants were encouraged to find ways to express their experiences in texts that would subsequently be used in the exhibition (see Poli 1999). For many, the process of 'bearing witness' may have been as empowering as the final outcome.[27] As D testified,

> At first people were half enthusiastic, half baffled. Because they didn't really believe in it…But at the same time they wanted to fight. They were very keen to talk and once you got them on the subject of their families or their neighbourhood they were unstoppable.

Moreover, the experience was made all the more empowering by the fact that the contact was also clearly highly valued by the museum staff who seem to have found the experience unusually enjoyable and productive ('Rarely has the preparation of an exhibition been so rich in moving encounters and powerful moments' (Duclos 1999: 6); see also Poli 1999).

Recognition demands were also met during the preparation stage in the case of the second exhibition, *Français d'Isère et d'Algérie*. Whilst the circumstances of the project's initiation meant that relations between the museum and the community were clearly somewhat

tense at the start working conditions improved over the course of several meetings. The *Musée dauphinois* used the 'scientific committee' model, derived from the working practices of the ecomuseums, to structure the participation of both outside experts (in this case historians) and the source community. The committee is an advisory body that meets at regular intervals during the preparation stage to debate the proposals put forward by the museum and to offer its expertise; this approach is underpinned by an idea of the 'expert-inhabitant' whose knowledge is as valuable – if not more so – than that of outside 'experts'.[28] Whilst some representatives of the *rapatriés* were clearly extremely hostile to professional historians, ('The histories are all written by historians. But the historians, hardly any of them experienced these events. So they don't understand.'[29]) the very fact that they were being invited to participate in this forum was a gesture of recognition of the legitimacy of their stance.

If the demands of the two groups were already partially met in the preparation stage what happened when the doors opened? According to D, for the people of North African origin represented in *Mémoires d'immigrés*, visiting the exhibition was

> …fantastic, because it was the first time they had been in a museum – as subjects of an exhibition that is, the first time that they were really valued. That they were treated… not as categories and that they were able to see themselves as if reflected in a mirror. It was a moment of great pride.

The warmth of the exhibition's reception is corroborated by an anecdote related by Françoise Kayser (writing on behalf of the cultural administration of the region); according to her during the exhibition's run one elderly man appreciated it so much he visited it every week 'religiously' in the same way as he attended the mosque, in order to gather his thoughts and pay his respects ('*se recueillir*') (Kayser 2000b: 55).[30] However, the minutes of the meeting of 27 May 2003 make it clear that the response of the representatives of the *rapatriés* to their museum presentation was rather different: several of the participants described themselves as 'shocked' and 'disappointed.' Yet over the course of time, their attitude appeared to change in the light of favourable responses both from the public and from a visiting delegation from the *Haut Conseil des rapatriés* (HCR).[31] Today, M describes his reaction as 'quite pleased' when he saw the exhibition *Français d'Isère et d'Algérie* for the first time, a phrase that does not correspond to the tone of the letter he wrote to the museum shortly after the opening (M 2003). Moreover, one of the visiting dignitaries from the HCR, whose initial response had been less than enthusiastic, had changed his mind to such an extent by the time he returned for a second visit, that he reportedly refused to believe that nothing had been changed. This change of heart can no doubt be attributed to the public goodwill toward the exhibition and the favourable press coverage (e.g. Saint-Hilaire 2003).[32]

Conclusion

The different modes of reception of the exhibitions can be attributed to the different forms of recognition demanded by the two groups, as described above. What is most notable however is that the attitude of certain *rapatriés* did not remain static after the opening of the exhibition. The determining factor in this process of reassessment seems to have been the response of the museum-visiting public. This case study suggests that in the case of the museum Feuchtwang's model of recognition as a 'mirror structure' needs to be broadened to encompass reflections in mirrors held up by more than just the 'petitioner' and the 'authority', notably the visitors. The 'mirror-structure' of the exhibition space should perhaps be seen more as a kaleidoscope, in which a play of perspectives generates complex responses that perhaps begin to break the cycle of recognition's restrictive binaries.

Feuchtwang's model therefore requires modification in four respects if it is to be applied to the multi-dimensional site of interaction that is the museum. First, it must take into account the existence of multiple forms of the demand for recognition (i.e. not just as victims). Secondly, it must recognize the museum as a complex entity: a plural rather than singular authority. Thirdly, it must find ways to conceptualize the role of the observing public. And finally it needs to consider recognition as a multi-stage process, not as a singular event. But the museum context perhaps also offers some hope that is not found with Feuchtwang's model. Feuchtwang,

as explained above, does not acknowledge the possibility of breaking the cycle and hence of avoiding closure. Fortunately, the evidence from the museum seems to suggest grounds for a little more optimism. Whilst neither of the groups in question were satisfied to the point that they were prepared to give up their status as 'petitioners' – both groups went on to stage further exhibitions[33] - the generally positive relations maintained between the groups involved and the museum, even some time after the exhibition, would seem to suggest that they were broadly pleased with the outcome of their cooperation.[34]

      Moreover, I would suggest that the vulnerability to betrayal to which the recognition act exposes the group, identified by Feuchtwang as the factor that drives the quest for a new 'more inclusive, external authority' (Feuchtwang 2003: 87) may *already* be acknowledged in the choice of the museum as a recognizing authority. For the lure of the museum is ambiguous; its relatively new role as a recognizing authority equipped to intervene in contemporary debates coexists with an enduring perception of the museum as a traditional heritage site. That which is housed in the museum is seen as belonging to the realm of 'History' and existing beyond the domain of current political controversy. It is therefore open to debate in a different sphere, that of measured scientific reflection. Indeed, Dufoix argues that one possible dimension of a demand for 'recognition' may be an appeal for 'reconstitution', that is, the modification of received historical wisdom – the 'collective memory' - in order to incorporate the hidden or forgotten experience (Dufoix 2005: 145). This demand is however one of the most ambiguous since it requires the group to hand over control of their memory. Yet to return in conclusion to our case study, it may be that some groups are prepared, albeit reluctantly, to accept the openness to debate a museum representation entails in exchange for the 'normalization' and temporal categorization ('this belongs to the (common) heritage') that only museums can offer.

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Notes

1   All translations from French are the author's own unless otherwise indicated.

2   For more details of the attack and the subsequent inquiry see Le Dauphiné libéré (19-22 November 1999, 11-13, 15 February 2000), L'Humanité (31 March 2000), Lyon capitale (1 March 2000), Le Monde (15 April 2000). Given the press coverage surrounding these painful events it is hard to disguise the identity of the protagonists. However, in order to protect them from unnecessary additional exposure all informants will be referred to by initials only in this article.

3   Unpublished contribution to the round-table debate 'Memory and Universality: new challenges facing museums', 5 February 2007, UNESCO headquarters, Paris.

4   Document presented at meeting, 14 December 2000

5   Indeed Wood's terminology was originally developed in a French context, since she adapts it from Rousso (1987). The idea of the museum exhibition as a 'vector of memory', characterized by its performativity, rejoins Sheldon Annis's now familiar notion of the museum as a 'staging ground for symbolic action' (Annis 1986).

6   It should be noted that the term '*pied-noir*' is widely used both by the community in question
        and throughout French society. In this article it is used interchangeably with '*rapatriés*',
        which has more formal, legalistic overtones but it is also less emotive.

7   It should be stressed that there is no evidence whatsoever of any link between the attackers
        and the Maison du rapatrié, which was quick to publicly condemn the attack on Mme D in
        a comment published in the newspaper Le Dauphiné libéré on 13 February 2000.

8   The following phrase, which appeared on a wall near the entrance to the first exhibition, was
        a particular bone of contention in the dispute: 'La France est restée 132 ans en Algérie et
        pendant 132 ans les Algériens attendaient le soleil' ('France stayed in Algeria for 132 years
        and for 132 the Algerians waited for the sun') (Cited in M 2000), the implication being that
        colonization was an exclusively and universally negative experience for the colonized, a
        view many rapatriés dispute.

9 The fieldwork for this article was conducted in the context of research for a PhD thesis on the
        representation of immigration in French museums more generally, and specifically on the
        project for a national museum of immigration, scheduled to open in Paris in June 2007 (for
        more information see <http://www.histoire-immigration.fr>). Five semi-structured interviews
        were conducted: three with museum staff (the director Jean-Claude Duclos (13 June 2006),
        a researcher (C) and an outreach worker (P) contracted for the second exhibition, now a
        permanent employee (both 30 May 2006)) and two with representatives of the respective
        community organizations (D, 30 May 2006 and M, 31 May 2006). Access was also granted
        to the archives of the Musée dauphinois. In addition, the exhibition catalogues include
        several essays on the exhibition preparationprocess. See for example Poli (1999) and
        Marderos (1999).

10   This research was however conducted at the time. The reception of both exhibitions has
        been the subject of masters theses supported by the Musée dauphinois: Mémoires
        d'immigrés was studied by Chewasit Boonyakiet (2000) and Français d'Isère et d'Algérie
        by Mathieu Lartaud (2003: thesis not available for consultation). The reception of Mémoires
        d'immigrés has also been explored in a more sustained investigation by Linda Idjéraoui
        (2002) who conducted 50 extended interviews with visitors to the exhibition between June
        and December 2000.

11   'Classified alternately as a regional museum of mankind and a museum of society, a space
        of museographic experimentation, a site of memory and history of the Alps in the Dauphiné,
        a place of conservation, restoration and communication, the centre for Heritage conservation
        in the Isère Département, the centre for the ethnology of the Alps and home of the journal
        'The Alp', or as a historic monument, the Musée dauphinois cannot be summed up in a single
        p h r a s e ' h t t p : / / w w w . m u s e e - d a u p h i n o i s . f r / m d / i n d e x / n u m / 3 / l a n /
        1?PHPSESSID=9a4ae6e2fb414c4ae296474b769efcd9>, accessed 9 June 2006.

12   Corato is a town in the south of Italy with historic trading ties to Grenoble and to which the
        majority of Grenoble's Italian community can trace its origins.

13   'If something succeeds it's because a political decision has been taken. […] We understood
        that very early on. But in a lot of museums that's not understood. Politics is seen as the
        enemy or as an authority to fight against or as a nuisance or as something dubious. But in
        fact the opposite is true' (interview with Jean-Claude Duclos). It is important to note that this
        approach has allowed the museum to continue to prosper both under the return to power
        of the Right in Grenoble in 1983 and the transfer of the museum to departmental rather than
        municipal control in 1992.

14   The idea of reparation was also a factor in the first exhibition, although in this instance it was
        a question of wronging an injustice perpetrated by society as a whole, not just by the
        museum.

[15] For evidence of the anxieties aroused by 'communautarisme' see L'Observatoire du communautarisme, <http://www.communautarisme.net/>.

[16] The choices made by Musée dauphinois can be interestingly compared with the debates that have taken place in the planning stages of the new national museum of immigration, the Cité nationale de l'histoire de l'immigration (see note 9), about how particular communities should be represented. The idea of a thematic and chronological narrative, without separate spaces for different communities quickly achieved a consensus (Toubon 2004).

[17] MacDonald (2002: 47) notes that this change in the museum's function corresponds to the shift for intellectuals and mediators in the public sphere from 'legislators' to the more circumspect 'interpreters' identified by Zygmunt Bauman (1989).

[18] For Jean-Claude Duclos it is however important that the museum retains a degree of authority, without which it would lose its legitimacy as a mediator (interview). For a discussion of the tension between the idea of a museum as a public space and its authoritative operation see Ashley (2005).

[19] <http://www.histoire-immigration.fr/index.php?lg=fr&nav=116&flash=0>, accessed 9 June 2006.

[20] <http://www.histoire-immigration.fr/index.php?lg=fr&nav=258>, accessed 9 June 2006.

[21] Minutes of meeting held at the museum with partner organizations on 27 May 2003.

[22] Whilst he did not deny that torture took place M was keen to emphasize the fact that, in his view, first that it was initiated by the 'rebels' and secondly that it was necessary in order to protect civilian lives. He would have preferred the exhibition text to refer to 'intensive interrogations' (interrogatoires poussés) (interview with M). See also M (2003). In order to avoid controversy and assert its authority the museum put its foot down over this section of the exhibition, which, unlike all the other sections, did not include any personal testimony.

[23] It should be noted that M's position in this regard was ambiguous. In order to illustrate the sentiment that the views of his community are not listened to he cited the experience of France's troubled urban suburbs and suggested that the government would have done well to heed the warnings of the pieds-noirs who, in his view, have been saying for twenty years that 'immigration… it's going to explode one day. Be careful.' In M's discourse a perceived lack of political influence was often conflated with the absence of a memory discourse and it was sometimes hard to untangle the two. Indeed, in our interview he concluded this excursion into contemporary politics with a remark that could have been read as a non-sequitur: 'Today our memory is all we're fighting for.' Later on he acknowledged that visiting the exhibition did cause some people to change their views of the pied-noir community. But without an accompanying political shift the 'memory work' is perceived by M to be incomplete.

[24] For more on the reception of Mémoires d'immigrés see Idjéraoui (2002).

[25] It should be noted that Dufoix cites the 1999 'requalification' by the French government of the 'security operations' in Algeria from 1954-62 as a war as an example of this category: a legal-discursive measure. Nevertheless there is no reason why it should not be equally applicable to the demands of the rapatriés even if their demand is less formal (there is no request for a change in nomenclature).

[26] Interview with D.

[27]   For a discussion of the link between testimony and empowerment for minority communities see Thomson (1999: 31).

[28]   For more on the ecomuseum model see Poulot (1994).

[29]   Interview with M.

[30]   Szekeres tells a similar story about the appropriation of the Migration Museum in Australia by representatives of the local Vietnamese community (Szekeres 2000: 150).

[31]   The Haut Conseil des rapatriés is a governmental body, set up in 2002 and composed of 43 members, that advises the inter-ministerial commission on the rapatriés. For further information see <http://www.premier-ministre.gouv.fr/acteurs/premier_ministre/les_services_premier_ministre_195/haut_conseil_rapatries_284/>, accessed 9 June 2006.

[32]   Interview with Jean-Claude Duclos.

[33]   ALIF, like the Maison du rapatrié, also staged its own exhibition in the aftermath of the Musée dauphinois exhibition. The main difference was that it was more explicit about its function as a tool in the anti-racist struggle (interview with D).

[34]   The interview with D took place in the foyer of the museum at his suggestion. During the interview he was greeted warmly by several members of staff and when our discussion had finished he went off to meet other friends amongst their number. And throughout his interview M spoke of the museum's director, Jean-Claude Duclos in the warmest possible terms: 'I take my hat off to him, we'd never have been able to do it without an interlocutor like him', 'I'm really very grateful to him, he really listened to us.'

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