

## *Immigrant Communities, Cultural Institutions and Political Space*

### **The Success of the Immigration Museum in Melbourne, Australia**

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**Abstract:** This article explores the concept of immigration as it is processed by the Immigration Museum in Melbourne, Australia, through the analysis of an investigation that was conducted on public museum, and the presentation of several interviews with the manager of Immigration museum, the senior curator and the manager of the Community Exhibitions. It examines how the relationship between the museum, immigrant communities and the political context establish the Australian immigration museum as a recognized social actor.

As a country, Australia is unique in that it is the smallest continent of the world. It involves a territory that is isolated in the Asia Pacific and belongs to the *Commonwealth*<sup>1</sup> as a former British settlement colony. This dual attribute, both geographical and political, has been consequential for the role played by immigration in Australia's social and cultural development with its specific colonial history. It is therefore not surprising that one of the oldest museums dedicated to immigration is the Immigration Museum in Melbourne, located in the State of Victoria. This

museum was created with the initiative of the State Government of Victoria, who in the 1980s brought together actors to found

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<sup>1</sup> *Commonwealth Secretariat*. 2004. The Commonwealth yearbook. June 2004, p.2: "The Commonwealth is an association of sovereign nations which support each other and work together towards international goals. It is also a 'family' of peoples with their common heritage in language, culture, law, education and democratic traditions, among other things. Commonwealth countries are able to work together in an atmosphere of greater trust and understanding than generally prevails among nations. By the end of 2003, there were 54 member countries in the Commonwealth."

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a museum of immigration, and took the decision to set up a special section dedicated to immigration, one that remains attached to the National Museum of Victoria.<sup>2</sup>

The aim of this paper is to explore the social role of the museum of immigration in a context of multicultural policy and inter-community dialogue, and present the results of investigations carried out on the public museum between November 2009 and February 2010.

## I. THE AUSTRALIAN MUSEUM CONTEXT

The Immigration Museum in Melbourne opened in 1998 in the former customs office<sup>3</sup>, a symbolic place of immigration control and registration of new arrivals. This inauguration endorsed a significant socio-cultural dimension in a state that is

one of the most culturally diverse in Australia. Almost a quarter of its population is foreign born, and 43.5% of the people, when they do not themselves come from abroad, have at least one parent who was not born in the Australian soil.

<sup>2</sup> The Museum of Victoria includes the Melbourne Museum, the Immigration Museum, the Scienceworks and the Royal Exhibition Building. Further information is available on the official website of the museum. URL: <http://museumvictoria.com.au/> (Visited on November 8<sup>th</sup>, 2009)

<sup>3</sup> "The Customs House building is one of Melbourne's most important 19th century public buildings. In this building customs officers recorded all goods entering or leaving Victoria; the customs duties they collected formed the backbone of government revenue. Customs officers also controlled immigration, recording every arrival, and administering a White Australia Policy that excluded immigrants on the basis of their race. Customs officers were also in charge of censorship, determining what material might offend mainstream social values." Source: <http://museumvictoria.com.au/customshouse/> (Visited on September 6<sup>th</sup>, 2010)

Population comes from more than 200 different countries, speaks over 180 languages or dialects and joins more than 110 religious faiths.<sup>4</sup>

Australia, therefore, brings together in the same area a group of multiethnic and multicultural communities, making migration a situation of great complexity.

Yet, even though Australia now practices a multicultural policy, it has been in place only since 1972<sup>5</sup> when it came about as a result of repealing an immigration policy based on criteria of racial discrimination and exclusion. Indeed, *Terra Australis*<sup>6</sup>, which was primarily a penitentiary

<sup>4</sup> SEBASTIAN, P. 2007. *Mobiliser les communautés et transmettre leurs histoires: le rôle du musée de l'Immigration dans l'une des villes les plus multiculturelles du monde*. In *Museum International*, N°233/234, vol.59. N°1/2, UNESCO, p.157. (Translation: SEBASTIAN, P. 2007. *Mobilizing Communities and Sharing Stories: the role of the Immigration Museum in one of the most multicultural cities in the world*. In *Museum International*, No. 233/234, vol.59. No. 1 / 2, UNESCO).

<sup>5</sup> DUTTON, D. 2002. *One of us: a century of Australian citizenship*. Sydney, UNSW Press, p.75: "The end of the White Australia policy eventually came from the Labor Party and its group of anti-racism reformers when Whitlam won government in December 1972. The Party's platform called for a non-racial immigration programme and ratification of the *International Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (1966)*. This had become party policy in mid-1971 at the biennial National Conference, culminating a long crusade to reform Labor policy from within."

<sup>6</sup> BALBI, Adrien. 1833. *Abrégé de géographie*. Paris, éditions Jules Renouard, p.38: Dans cet ouvrage l'auteur explique comment dès le seizième siècle, toutes les terres connues sont partagées en trois monde: "le *Monde ancien (orbis vetus)* qui embrassait l'Europe, l'Asie et l'Afrique; le *Monde nouveau (orbis novus)* qui comprenait l'Amérique; et la *Terre australe ou magellanique (terra australis ou magellanica)*." (Translation: BALBI, A. 1833. *Abridged of geography*. Paris: Editions Jules Renouard, p.38: In this book the author explains how in the sixteenth century all the known lands are divided into three worlds: "the *Former World (Orbis vetus)* that embracing Europe, Asia and Africa and the *New World (novus orbis)*, which included America, and *South Land or Magellanic Land (terra australis or magellanica)*".

destination<sup>7</sup>, quickly became an extra British colony in the French and British conquest. Great Britain and Ireland were the two main sources of settlement for over a century and a half, immigration policy having then focused on creating an ideal society homogeneous and white<sup>8</sup>. Subsequently, other European countries have fueled settlement migration, the criteria for entry to the territory being still based on the ethnicity of immigrants, according to White Policy<sup>9</sup>. "Practiced today, such a policy would lead to disapproval and certainly even indignation."<sup>10</sup>

It is precisely international opinion, new university exchanges, and the geographical reality that led Australia to revise its immigration policy in a progressive manner. When the Labor Party<sup>11</sup> won the elections in 1972, it repealed the White

Policy and implemented a policy modeled on social diversity<sup>12</sup>, but mostly and implicitly allowed the recognition of the rights for Aboriginal people<sup>13</sup>. Multiculturalism is a policy that applies not only to immigration but also to all Australians. Beyond the cultural and ethnic diversity of Australia, it is a set of policy measures that respond to the cultural variety of Australian society.<sup>14</sup>

The creation of the Immigration Museum contributes to the implementation of a multicultural policy<sup>15</sup>. The musealization of immigration allows the identification of new areas of discussion of immigration issues, and presents the diversity of items offered or loaned by immigrants to tell their stories. The museum becomes a "social actor embedded in a territory with legitimacy and guaranteeing

<sup>7</sup> VERNAY, J-F., BEN-MESSAHEL, S. 2009. *Des frontières de l'interculturalité: Etude pluridisciplinaire de la représentation culturelle: Identité et Altérité*. Villeneuve-d'Ascq, Presses Universitaires du Septentrion, p.18 : « L'Australie avait été la dernière colonie britannique à accepter des bagnards entre 1850 et 1868 ». (Translation: VERNAY, J-F., BEN-MESSAHEL, S. 2009. *Borders of interculturalism: Multidisciplinary study of cultural representation: Identity and Otherness*. Villeneuve d'Ascq, Presses Universitaires du Septentrion, p.18: "Australia was the last British colony to accept convicts between 1850 and 1868").

<sup>8</sup> PONS, X. 1996. *Multiculturalism in Australia*. Paris, L'Harmattan, p.32: "Especially, for nearly two centuries, Australia was desperately trying to preserve a "pure" racial society which is a fantasy rather than reality" (Original version in French: PONS, X. 1996. *Le multiculturalisme en Australie*. Paris, L'Harmattan).

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, p.63 : « the White Australia Policy would be for more than half a century, an article of faith for the vast majority of Australians (...) to prevent the entry of Asian immigrants but mostly to expel some ethnic minorities. " See reference: *Press Release, Immigration*, William McMahon Prime Minister, 4 May 1972, in series A1838, item 1531/1 part 10, NAA. Cité par DUTTON, D. 2002. *One of us: a century of Australian citizenship*. Sydney, UNSW Press, p.77: « The aim of immigration policy remains the preservation in Australia of an essentially homogenous society ».

<sup>10</sup> PONS, X. 1996. *Multiculturalism in Australia*. Op. cit., p.32.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, p.98: "As a convinced anti-racist and anticolonialist, Whitlam believed that the Conservative policy on immigration was harmful to the country, partly because it was filled with intolerance; 'it should not be discrimination based on race, color or nationality,' he declared in 1971. It remained for him to gain power in order to pass his noble ideas into reality. In December 1972 the Labour Party won the parliamentary elections and Whitlam became Prime Minister. He would soon launch the entry of Australia into the era of multiculturalism."

<sup>12</sup> JUPP, J. 2007. *From White Australia to Woomera. The story of Australian immigration*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, Second Edition, p.23: "Even before multiculturalism had been effectively entrenched as official policy, there were already very large language communities in Australia."

<sup>13</sup> PONS, X. 1996. *Multiculturalism in Australia*. Op. cit., p.99: « During the postwar, The Aborigenes's integration in the Australian society always encountered many difficulties. (...) We did not any longer considered their imminent extinction, but we did not resigned to the extent for them and their culture, a place that is dignified and equitable in a country that was theirs yet."

<sup>14</sup> Hawke, B. 1990. *Foreword*. In *National Agenda for a Multicultural Australia – The Year in Review August 1989-July 1990*. Canberra, AGPS, p.69. Quoted by PONS, X. 1996. *Multiculturalism in Australia*. Op. cit., p.125 : « It is a policy that manages the consequences of cultural diversity in the interests of the individual and society as a whole ».

the broadcast content and a spatial-temporal framework of citizenship.”<sup>16</sup> The Australian case shows clearly that the museum is a political tool in charge of defending the government's multicultural policy and maintains an ongoing dialogue with communities in the State of Victoria. The policy is “intended to encourage the development of cultural minorities in the majority so as to create an atmosphere of mutual tolerance, a social body that knows how to combine diversity and homogeneity, which is not a simple mosaic of race or religion, where ethnic groups coexisted without actually meet and even fewer understand.”<sup>17</sup> The museum exhibits embraced both the collective and political histories that shaped the Australian immigration while integrating the individual experience of each Australian, through ongoing collaboration between the actors of the museum and immigrant communities.

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<sup>15</sup> SAUVAGE, A. 2008. *Between law and science: Australian museums dealing with aboriginal critique*. In LAGAYETTE, P. (dir.). 2008. *Rencontres australiennes. Regards croisés sur l'identité d'un peuple et d'une nation*. Paris, Presses de l'Université Paris-Sorbonne, p.58: “Museums have always proved to be closely linked to the politics of the day, both reflecting their society and providing them which cultural and scientific justifications so as to legitimate economic and social policies. Their recent restructure, both through renovating and building new museums, testify to the wind of change that is operating under the auspices of a globalised reflection on colonial heritage and its racial classification of people.” (Translation: In LAGAYETTE, P. 2008. *Meeting Australia: crossing perspectives on the identity of a people and a nation*. Paris, Presses de l'Université Paris-Sorbonne).

<sup>16</sup> VIDAL, G. 2006. *Contribution à l'étude de l'interactivité: Les usages du multimédia de musée*. Bordeaux, Presses Universitaires de Bordeaux, Collection L@byrinthes, p.52. (Translation: VIDAL, G. 2006. *Contribution to the study of interactivity: The uses of multimedia in museum*. Universitaires de Bordeaux, Collection L@byrinthes).

<sup>17</sup> PONS, X. 1996. *Multiculturalism in Australia*. Op. cit, p.24.

## II. THE IMMIGRATION MUSEUM IN MELBOURNE

The Immigration Museum in Melbourne aims to introduce and explore the history of immigrants in the state of Victoria.<sup>18</sup> Featuring also a Discovery Center<sup>19</sup>, it allows visitors to share their stories, but also access a database on immigrant communities in the state. As for the permanent exhibition, it presents the history of immigration since the arrival of settlers, the fate of Aboriginal people, the different immigration policies, the major historical waves of immigrants, and the integration of newcomers into the host society, with the desire to embody every story.<sup>20</sup> There are various objects that illustrate the permanent exhibition, as tools of work, family memories, cultural products, traditional handicrafts, decorative items or everyday objects such as clothing, shoes, accessories, etc. Each object is placed under a window that marks the different waves of migration and the diversity of newcomers and introduces visitors to what is immigration.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Presentation text of museum available in the official website: “The Immigration Museum explores the stories of real people from all over the world who have migrated to Victoria.” URL: <http://museumvictoria.com.au/immigration-museum/about-us/> (Visited in September 18<sup>th</sup>, 2010).

<sup>19</sup> Ibid: The Discovery Centre allows “delving into our rare collection of books in the reference library and exploring our online and multimedia resources to learn more about migrant communities and your own migration history. You can also read migration stories, or write your own, on the Share A Story database.” URL: <http://museumvictoria.com.au/immigrationmuseum/discoverycentre/visit-our-our-site-centre/> (Visited in September 18<sup>th</sup>, 2010)

<sup>20</sup> “From the reasons for making the journey, to the moment of arrival in a new country, and the impact on indigenous communities, these stories are sometimes sad, sometimes funny, but always engaging.” Presentation text of museum available in the official website. URL: <http://museumvictoria.com.au/immigration-museum/about-us/> (Visited in September 18<sup>th</sup>, 2010)



The first theme of the permanent exhibition is entitled "Leaving Home"<sup>22</sup> and introduces visitors to the different reasons why men and women, sometimes whole families, are leaving their country of origin to settle in the State of Victoria. This exhibition consists of both sounds, objects, moving images and video projected to explore both the motivations causing people to immigrate, but what these people have brought with them.<sup>23</sup> The sounds recreate the atmosphere of marine ports that receive thousands of immigrants. The objects are those that immigrants brought with them, starting with their suitcases. The moving images are a series of photographs projected rapidly (20 frames per second) so as to create a movement. It shows men, women and children of all ages who are getting on with a suitcase. The videos are also projected showing the reality of migration routes and testimonies of the different life stories of immigrants,

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<sup>21</sup> Introductory text to the first permanent exhibition of immigration from Melbourne, Victoria, entitled "Leaving Home": "Luggage lies at the heart of the migration experience. It is a symbol of both what is brought and what is left behind. It contains people's hopes and fears, as they leave one life and begin another." © *Immigration Museum*, Melbourne, Victoria. (November 2009- February 2010)

<sup>22</sup> Presentation text of the exhibition available in URL: <http://museumvictoria.com.au/leaving-home> (Visited in January 7<sup>th</sup>, 2010): Event Type: Permanent Exhibition: "What would it take to make you leave your homeland and travel thousands of miles to another country? People have migrated to Australia for many reasons. Some flee from the ravages of war, hunger, religious persecution or political repressions. Others have been lured by a sense of adventure, by the prospect of a new beginning, of owning land, of making a fortune, or to be reunited with love ones. Many arrive with keepsakes, precious reminders of loved ones or special places. The experiences of arriving in a new country vary from person to person. Using sound, objects, still and moving images we explore the reasons why people left their countries to come to Australia and what they brought with them." © *Immigration Museum*, Melbourne, Victoria. (November 2009- February 2010)

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

ranging from forced migration (due to war) and selective immigration (to have a better life) (see Photo 1). The texts that accompany each and every part of the permanent exhibition highlight the diverse origins of Australian immigration.<sup>24</sup>

Other theme make up the permanent exhibition<sup>25</sup> and thus has various tools that demonstrate the skills of newcomers, as well as clothing and costume traditions from their countries of origin, and various administrative documents tracing their travels since leaving until they arrived in Victoria.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Presentation text of the exhibition "Crossing the globe" in the Immigration Museum in Melbourne, Victoria: "World events have resulted in significant waves of migration, drawing many people to Australia for more than 200 years." © *Immigration Museum*, Melbourne, Victoria. (November 2009- February 2010)

<sup>25</sup> These themes are: "Leaving Home, Immigrant stories and timeline, Journeys of a Lifetime, Customs Gallery, Getting in, Station Pier: gateway to a new life, Ancient Hampi." URL: <http://museumvictoria.com.au/immigrationmuseum/whatson/current-exhibitions/> (Visited in January 7<sup>th</sup>, 2010)

<sup>26</sup> Presentation text of the exhibition "Immigrant stories and timeline" available in URL: <http://museumvictoria.com.au/immigrationmuseum/whatson/current-exhibitions/immigrant-stories/> (Visited in January 7<sup>th</sup>, 2010): Event Type: Permanent Exhibition: "Immigration is about us all—those who were here and those who came. Settling into a new country is not easy. Immigrants have to adapt to an unfamiliar environment and lifestyle, while maintaining aspects of their previous culture and way of life. Many newcomers spent their new lives in limbo, spending months in temporary migrant accommodation, committed to two year labour contracts. For others, settlement has been far easier because they spoke English, or government had offered assistant land or home scheme. Generations of immigrants have had to adapt to a new climate, new landscape, new language, new currency, and new lifestyle, especially those who have settled in rural areas. Each immigrant has their own unique story to tell. Whilst for many it was difficult, the vast majority eventually found their feet. This gallery explores why they came, where they settled and how they started a new life in Victoria. Around the walls of the gallery is an immigration timeline that highlights key events in the history of immigration."



Photo 1: Thematic Presentation at the Entrance to the Immigration Museum in Melbourne  
(©Ilham Boumankhar 2010)

The various reasons<sup>27</sup> leading people to immigrate to Australia are surveyed upon entry to the museum, and are accompanied by different types of objects to illustrate each historical period, such as a box of the Red Cross<sup>28</sup> on display to illustrate the International conflict or a gun of World War II<sup>29</sup> to illustrate the war. An entire floor of the museum is devoted to the Victoria harbour “Station Pier,”<sup>30</sup> which is a symbolic place of the passage of all immigrants. An important part of the exhibition is devoted to immigration policy in Australia; the various tests of passage were

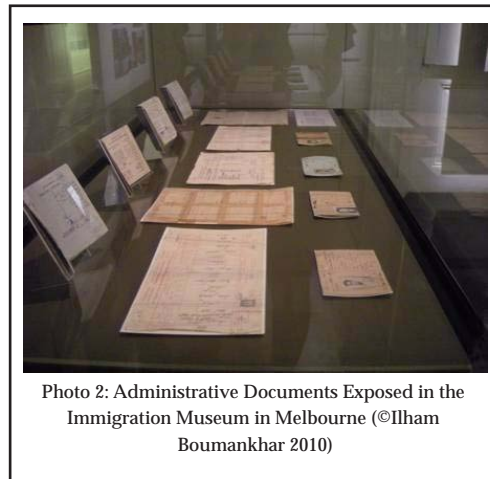


Photo 2: Administrative Documents Exposed in the Immigration Museum in Melbourne (©Ilham Boumankhar 2010)

<sup>27</sup> Presentation text of the permanent exhibition: “Why did you or your family come to Australia? People have migrated to Australia for many different reasons, from many different places. Freedom, A better life, Disaster, Family, War, Conflict..., etc.” ©*Immigration Museum*, Melbourne, Victoria. (November 2009- February 2010).

<sup>28</sup> Information listed on cartels: “*International Red Cross First aid container*, used during the conflict in Bosnia, 1992-95. The box originally contained beans, sugar, oil, corned beef, cheese, yeast, soap, detergent and toothpaste. (On loan from Australian Red Cross).” ©*Immigration Museum*, Melbourne, Victoria. (November 2009- February 2010)

<sup>29</sup> Information listed on cartels: “*World War Two German helmet. Chinese Type 56 rifle* commonly used in conflicts such as Vietnam, Cambodia and Korea during the 1950s-1970s. (©*Museum Victoria collection*).”

subjected to immigrants, and the paperwork provided by the customs office (see Photo 2).<sup>31</sup>

A history of government measures related to immigration policy is presented,

<sup>30</sup> Presentation text of the exhibition “Station Pier: gateway to a new life” available in URL: <http://museumvictoria.com.au/immigrationmuseum/whatson/current-exhibitions/station-pier/> (Visited in January 7<sup>th</sup>, 2010) Event Type: Permanent Exhibition: “The exhibition provides an historical overview of Station Pier, including its early days as Railway Pier in the 1850s, and its upgrade in the 1920s in response to the growing needs of the city and port of Melbourne.”

through various administrative documents that reflect the different periods of the measures (such as passports, identity papers and travel documents).

Four sections share the history of immigration policy in Australia: first is the period between 1840 and 1900<sup>32</sup>, representing Australia as the second British Empire, since the settlers came mainly from Great Britain. The second period was between 1901 and 1945<sup>33</sup> and corresponds to the application of the Immigration Restriction Act (or White Policy), which is the law implementing the access to Australian territory through ethnic criteria. The objec-

tive of this policy is the preservation of a white society. The third period is between 1946 and 1972<sup>34</sup>, which corresponds to the relaxation of immigration policy after the Second World War, and allows trade with neighboring countries that are mainly Asia and the Middle East. And the fourth period is more recent and is between 1973 and 2006<sup>35</sup>, and is the policy of multicultural Australia, where the question of national identity is still ongoing. This last part emphasizes the policy of opening cultural and ethnic diversity of Australian society, which does not solidify the concept of identity in a definition, but adapts to the diversity of individuals in the Australian multicultural society.

Thus in the section "Immigration and National Identity," migration history experienced by Australia raises various issues

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<sup>31</sup> Presentation text of the exhibition "Getting In" available in URL: <http://museumvictoria.com.au/immigrationmuseum/whatson/current-exhibitions/getting-in/> (Visited in January 7<sup>th</sup>, 2010): Event Type: Permanent Exhibition: "More than 9 million people have migrated to Australia since 1788. Countless others have tried and failed. Find out why... This permanent exhibition documents the immigration policies that have shaped Victoria and Australia since the 1800s and how these policies have been a significant factor in forming a national identity. This confronting exhibition utilises images, historical objects, a computer interactive and personal stories to explore the impact of these policies and the resulting cultural diversity in Victoria. Getting In was developed in response to market research conducted at the Immigration Museum that found visitors wanted to know more about the process of getting in to Australia, what people went through, who was accepted and who wasn't, and the effect this had on society. The exhibition does this by exploring the history of immigration policy and how it has changed dramatically over the past two hundred years. Four timeframes outline the main threads in immigration policy: the gold rush days of the 1840s to 1900, Federation to the end of the Second World War (1901 to 1945), then post-war to the early seventies (1946 to 1972) and finally 1973 to the present day."

<sup>32</sup> Presentation text: "1840-1900: Old England and the New." "During the nineteenth century most immigrants came from Great Britain. (...) Immigration policy was governed by Great Britain, although the Australian colonies began to introduce their own immigration acts in the mid-nineteenth century, following the end of convict transportation. These acts aimed to control the massive influx of people during the gold rushes." © Immigration Museum de Melbourne. (October 2009- March 2010)

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<sup>33</sup> Presentation text: "1901-1945: One nation, one people, one destiny." "(...) The newly federated Australian Government quickly introduced national legislation to protect its security and asserts its identity as a member of the British Empire. One of the first acts passed was the Immigration Restriction Act—known as the White Australia policy." © Immigration Museum de Melbourne. (October 2009- March 2010)

<sup>34</sup> Presentation text: "1946-1972: Encouraging immigration." "Extending the invitation: many immigration assistance schemes were established in the post-war period. (...) The 1950 Colombo Plan allowed students from developing countries to study in Australia, some of whom were later accepted as permanent residents." © Immigration Museum de Melbourne. (October 2009- March 2010)

<sup>35</sup> Presentation text: "1973-today. 'Australia for tomorrow'": "Since the early 1970s Australia's immigration levels have been dramatically reduced and the composition of the intake has changed. The proposition of European immigrants has declined while immigration from Asia and the Middle East has increased. Despite this, in 1999-2000 the largest number of immigrants came from New Zealand; the second largest number came from Great Britain. Australia today accepts immigrants from any country, based on their ability to meet criteria determined by the Government according to Australia's economic, social political needs. In 2001, nearly one in four Australians was born overseas." © Immigration Museum de Melbourne. (October 2009- March 2010)

related to the societal definition of national identity: “For over two centuries immigration has raised questions about national identity. What kind of society do we want? Is Australia a southern outpost of British culture? Or is its identity bound to Asia and the Pacific? Is there a ‘typical’ Australian? Or does the very idea of ‘typical’ deny the diversity of our society? How does Aboriginal identity fit into the idea of Australia as an immigrant nation? Can different cultures maintain their identities while participating in a ‘national identity’?”<sup>36</sup> And the museum to clarify that the immigration policy is fluctuating according to “the increasing population, developing a work force, responses to global humanitarian needs that have been tempered by the preferences of particular nationalities and cultures.”<sup>37</sup> The museum takes a constructivist position focusing on openness to diversity and invites visitors to question concepts such as identity, nation, immigration, culture, race or ethnicity.

Stories of individual immigrants, administrative difficulties they went through to settle in Australia, obstacles they encountered in integrating into Australian society, and different modes of adaptation, whether on the professional, social and cultural level, are explored. With the desire to immerse visitors in the experiences of immigrants, many facilities are also introduced, such as dictation test<sup>38</sup>, which was part of the systems used to select immigrants based on their ethnic origins. Thus, the entrant must write a dictated text in a European language and

<sup>36</sup> Presentation text: “Immigration and national identity.” “(...) The selection of immigrants over time has always been influenced by the sort of nation that governments and special interest groups have wanted to create. Issues such as increasing the population, developing a workforce and responding to global humanitarian needs have been tempered by preferences for particular nationalities and cultures.” © Immigration Museum de Melbourne. (October 2009–March 2010)

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

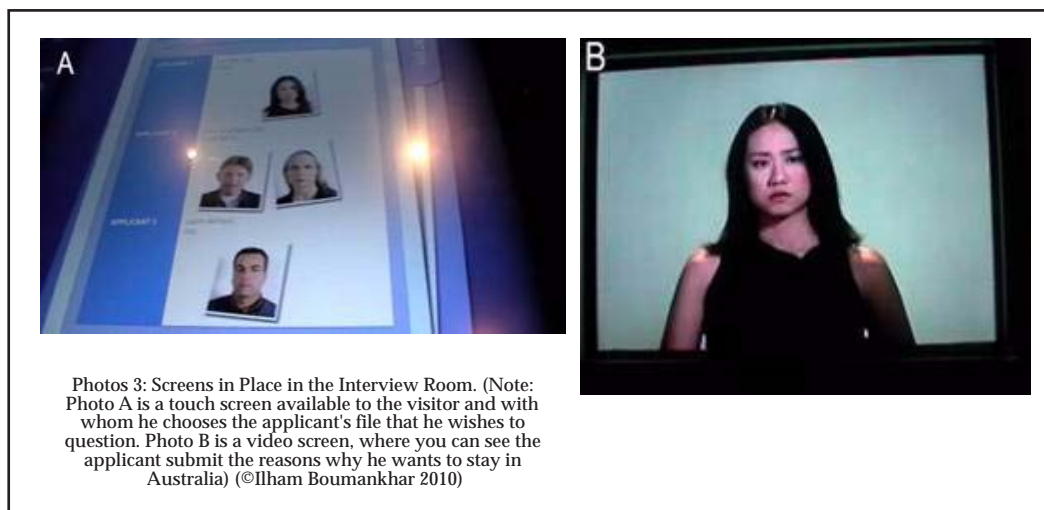
was denied access to the territory in case of failure.

Similarly, an interview room equipped with interactive screens allows the simulation of an interview between an officer of the Immigration Control and various applicants to entry visa (see Photos 3). The viewer is positioned in place of the screening officer, and has a detailed sheet that must be completed, while at the screen, an immigrant presents the reasons why he wants to stay in Australia. The visitor is instructed to decide, through a touch screen, if the candidate is authorized to obtain an entry visa to Australia.

The ambition for the museum is to explain to visitors the various evaluation criteria for immigration agents over several periods that marked major changes in immigration policy in Australia. The exhibition is set based on an inclusive approach, allowing each visitor to feel involved in the issue of immigration. The “Community Gallery”<sup>39</sup> allows visitors to participate in exhibitions, sharing content objects, photographs, memorabilia and personal stories. Maria Tence<sup>40</sup>, manager of the National Museum of Victoria, responsible for community exhibitions, works with community representatives, associations or families belonging to the community presented. If there are on average three communities that are exposed in the year, very often the choice of communities is related to comprehension difficulties

<sup>38</sup> Exposition “1901-1945 The closed door.” Presentation text: “The dictation test was intended to conceal the fact that Australia had a policy of outright racial discrimination, which would have been diplomatically unpopular. It aimed to stop non-European immigration in an indirect way—by refusing admission to those who failed to pass a test given in a foreign language. Dictation tests were intentionally confusing, even when read in English. About 50 words long, they had to be written down in a prescribed language. If an applicant did manage to pass the test, it could be conducted again in other languages until the applicant failed.” © Immigration Museum de Melbourne. (October 2009–March 2010).





encountered in relation to their stories and their cultural practices. The year 2009-2010 was devoted to the communities in which developments in their country remains tense and sometimes hopeless, such as Palestinian communities, Kurdish and Timorese. The role of the gallery community is to maintain dialogue with communities in the State of Victoria but also to establish exchanges between communities. There are also cultural festivals communities<sup>41</sup> that aim to promote these exchanges.

<sup>39</sup> Presentation text: "Community Gallery." "Community Gallery exhibitions are developed by Victoria's culturally, linguistically and religiously diverse communities in collaboration with the Immigration Museum. These exhibitions are community generated and represent stories, photographs and objects of significance to them. These exhibitions allow Victorians communities to share their culture and heritage through their immigration stories. In sharing the stories of Victoria's multicultural communities we contribute to the understanding of modern Australian society. The museum's collections are enriched with artefacts and stories from these exhibitions, for future generations to learn from and be inspired by." © Immigration Museum de Melbourne. (October 2009- March 2010)

<sup>40</sup> Maria Tence, *Manager, Community Exhibitions*, was among those interviewed in the fourth part of this article.

### III. INVESTIGATIONS CONDUCTED AT MELBOURNE MUSEUM

Between November 2009 and February 2010, I conducted a series of investigation on both audiences at the Melbourne Museum and during the reception of the exhibits under the theme of immigration and management of the museum about the organization exhibitions related to the diversity of migratory origins.<sup>42</sup>

In this section, I study firstly the results

<sup>41</sup> Presentation text about the "Community Cultural Festivals" available in the museum official website: "The Immigration Museum presents three community cultural festivals per year. The festivals celebrate and promote Victoria's rich cultural diversity. Festivals are developed and presented in partnership with representatives from a particular culturally diverse community and include contributions from organizations and individuals." URL: <http://museumvictoria.com.au/immigrationmuseum/about-us/community-engagement/cultural-festivals/> (Visited in September 19<sup>th</sup>, 2010)

<sup>42</sup> This work is part of a research thesis [by?] in Cultural Studies at the University of Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne, under the provisional title: "Receipt process of material object in society's museum: comparative study between the Immigration Museum in Melbourne and the National Museum of the History of Immigration in Paris."

of a questionnaire distributed to the public to analyze quantitative data that informs us about the profile of visitors and reception of exhibitions. And secondly, I present the summary of the three interviews conducted with Padmini Sebastian, Manager of the Immigration Museum in Melbourne, Maria Tence Manager of the Community Exhibition Gallery, and Moya McFadzean, Curator Senior of the Immigration Museum in Melbourne.

### *A. Presentation and analysis of questionnaire results*

The questionnaire consists of 20 questions that aim to investigate the profile of visitors, their circumstances and goals of their visits and their “impressions” on the treatment of immigration by the Melbourne Museum. It consists mainly of closed questions<sup>43</sup>, which gives the possibility of completing the answer when the frame of predetermined response is inadequate, but also some open questions<sup>44</sup>. This survey, mainly quantitative, contributes also, thanks to the open questions, to refine knowledge on the profile of visitors, to assess their relationship with immigration, to understand the circumstances of visits, and to clarify the extent of their interest in the museum of immigration and expectations regarding the information disseminated. I collected 247 questionnaires completed by visitors between December

2009 and February 2010. Prior to the analysis of questionnaire results, I inserted a question allowing the visitor to check the age to which he belongs. 26% of visitors, who completed the questionnaire, are in the age group 25-30 years, 23% of visitors 50 years and older, 19% are between 15 and 25 years, 17% are between 30 and 40 years and 15% are between 40 and 50 years. Thus we can see a good distribution of the age group of visitors who completed the questionnaire.

The content of the questionnaire is divided into four parts. The first part gives us information about the visitor: “Is he an immigrant? What is his country of origin? Did any members of his family immigrate to Australia? Who? Did they find it difficult to integrate into Australian society? Why did they decide to immigrate in the first place? Did they intend to return to their country of birth?”

The second part informs about the motivations for visiting the museum: “What is the main reason you have decided to come to the museum of immigration? (Your own history; family history; genealogical research; or curiosity, etc.) Did you find the immigration museum interesting? If not, why? Is this your first visit?”

The third part brings us into direct relationship with the visitor experience with exhibitions: “What was most memorable for you? (Explanatory Materials and Talks, The Artifacts, Your general experience of the Museum, Other lasting impressions.) Did you find objects related to your own history? Or did you find information linked to your story? Did you keep cultural practices in relation to your home country?”

The fourth part is more about the opinions of visitors on the immigration issue: “Do you believe in a multicultural society where immigrants retain their native culture, traditions and speak the language they want? If yes, do you think this society is Australia? Generally speaking, has immigration had a harmful or a beneficial effect

<sup>43</sup> LANGENDORFF, F. 2007. *Individu, culture et société: Sensibilisation aux sciences humaines*. Paris, Publibook, p.141: « Une question fermée propose un cadre de réponse prédéterminé, que ce soit: oui/non ou des catégories de réponses parmi lesquelles la personne interrogée fait son choix ». (Translation: LANGENDORFF, F. 2007. *Individual, Culture and Society: Awareness of social sciences*. Paris, Publibook, p.141: “A closed question offers a predetermined answer, either yes / no or different response categories of which the respondent makes his choice.”)

<sup>44</sup> Ibid, p.141: “An open question “opens” a lot of freedom in the response, it often starts with “what do you think of”....”

on your way of life? Do you think that the Museum deals well the immigration question? If not, can you explain?"

This survey provides us, with both quantitative data that are numbered, but also qualitative data that shed light on connections between the visitor and his relationship with immigration. Therefore, to the question "Are you an immigrant in Australia?" responses are shared with 105 visitors who answered "yes" and 142 who answered "no." It is a sharing, almost equal, that is yet not visible in the responses to the question that follows. Indeed, if the visitor answered "yes," he should complete the following question No. 2, which is "what is your country?" And if he answered "no" skip to question No. 3. But over 247 questionnaires collected, there are 238 visitors who responded to the question about country of origin (No. 2) while logically, only 105 visitors were asked. This reflects the fact that the term "immigrant" means every person in Australia with immigrant history. If in France a "settler" or "immigrant" is clearly someone who was born in a foreign country, which makes the "quality of immigrants as permanent"<sup>45</sup>, in Australia, immigrants, formerly designated by the word "settler" which means "founder of a colony" means all those with an immigrant story. It is also a concept that

is intergenerational, because a person born in Australia considers himself as an immigrant if his parents or even his grandparents were not born in Australia. This may be related to the fact that one of the peculiarities of the Multiculturalism Act is to encourage immigrants to live in Australian society by importing their own culture.<sup>46</sup> Australians with immigrant backgrounds are always connected to their country of origin, and define themselves as Australian with another origin. This explains that 96% of visitors answer the second question about the country of origin. This is an issue that highlights the diversity of countries of origin of visitors, and emphasizes the multicultural nature of Australian society, and Melbourne in particular. And the countries of origin that are predominantly present in the diverse origins of the visitors encountered, are Italy, New Zealand, Greece or England and Wales. Beyond these mentioned countries, countries of origin are divided between other European countries and also Asian countries. Question No. 3 is about the family migration route<sup>47</sup>: "Is that one or more members of your family who immigrated to Australia?" A large majority of visitors answered "yes," confirming that the term "immigrant" is part of a family trajectory. Question No. 4 focuses on members of the family visitors who immigrated to Australia.

98 visitors say it is their parents who immigrated to Australia and 111 visitors answered that it was their grandparents. Therefore, a large majority of visitors are the second or third generation immigrant

<sup>45</sup> "According to the definition adopted by the French High Council for Integration, an immigrant is a person who is born abroad and who resides in France. French people who were born abroad and living in France are therefore not counted. Conversely, some immigrants have become French, the other remaining foreigners. People who are foreign and immigrant, do not fully coincide: an immigrant is not necessarily foreign and conversely, some foreigners were born in France (mainly minors). The quality of an immigrant is permanent: a person continues to belong to the immigrant population even if he is French by acquisition. It is the country of birth, not nationality at birth, which defines the origin geography of an immigrant." URL: <http://www.insee.fr/fr/methodes/default.asp?page=definitions/immigre.htm> (Visited in September 26th, 2010)

<sup>46</sup> JUPP, J. 1997. *Immigration and National Identity: Multiculturalism*. In G. Stokes ed. *The Politics of Identity in Australia*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 132-144. The author outlines the objectives that are contradictory to the law about multiculturalism, which is that for every individual to preserve its own identity already established, and adding a multicultural identity that emphasizes adherence to the values, institutions and forms of behavior rather than to belong to one culture (British-Australian white) uniform.

in Australia. Question No. 5 addresses the difficulties of integrating immigrants into Australian society (including visitors and their families). To the question “Did they find it difficult to integrate into Australian society?” more than half of the visitors viewed answered “no.” This demonstrates an ease in integration, whatever is the country of origin of immigrants in Australian society<sup>48</sup>. In Question No.6, “why did they decide to immigrate?” two responses to the four choices dominate; “economic reasons” and that “to join another family member.” The “political reasons” came in third place and “discovering a new country” in last place with little variation. This is an indicator of the health of the Australian economy that “is experiencing certain prosperity. (...) It is the service sector, not agri-

<sup>47</sup> FORLOT, G. 2008. *With his language in his pocket: trajectory of French emigrants in Canada (1945-2000)*. Louvain-La-Neuve, Louvain University Press, p.77: “The migration trajectory is more a synonym for “path.” It includes four phases. The first phase, the pre-migration, is not necessarily generating a migration plan, even if it is intrinsically linked subsequently. It is first coined by the collective and individual history of everyone, it contains events related to the country of origin or destination (war, economic recession, the socio-political crises ...) and to migrants themselves (for example, family tensions (...) meeting ...). (...) In addition to these events, which is found throughout the trajectory, everyone is subject to representations of what is possible with migration and what can be the country of destination. (...) This first phase is composed of two basic components: the substrate and the contact. (...) The second phase, the migration project, comes both from this personal and collective story pre-migratory and a will power—or obligation—to live a different experience. (...) The path or trajectory is the third phase (...) it precedes a fourth phase, the migration experience, where migrants become immigrants—but still emigrating as he arrives with his references and his history, lives a strong personal development of many events and an adaptation process that takes several forms.” (Original version in French: FORLOT, G. 2008. *Avec sa langue en poche: parcours de français émigrés au Canada (1945-2000)*. Louvain-La-Neuve, Presses universitaires de Louvain).

<sup>48</sup> That we relate to the policy of selective immigration based on professionals, students, linguistic, and financial criteria.

culture, which is driving the Australian economy. Tourism and education in particular are an important source of revenue for the country.”<sup>49</sup> Adding that “to join another family member” is a motivation that may go hand in hand with the “economic reasons.” Question No. 7 deals with the intentions of these immigrants (including the visitor and his family): “Did they intend to return to their country of origin?” This question is deliberately vague about the nature of return: temporary or permanent. However, a large majority of visitors (235) said they did not intend to return to their countries of origin. Immigration concerned is permanent.

This first part of the questionnaire shows the personal and subsidiaries relations that visitors have with the concept of immigration. In this case, in the Melbourne Museum, most visitors are immigrants or descendants of immigrants who have no difficulty integrating into Australian society and also to designate themselves as immigrant.

The second part of the questionnaire informs us about the motivations that led the visitors to come to the Immigration Museum in Melbourne. To the question No. 8: “What is the main reason you have decided to come to the museum of immigration?” many visitors replied for “family history” and for “genealogy.” Indeed, the Immigration Museum in Melbourne has a genealogical center<sup>50</sup> allowing visitors to conduct genealogical research from administrative records or patronymic information. Other responses of visitors are for “their own history,” or “curiosity” or “other.” In the questionnaire, if the visitor replied “other,” he has the opportunity to complete the nature of his response. Over 9 visitors who checked “other,” 4 did not complete the answer. But 5 visitors

<sup>49</sup> PONS, X. 2005. *Words of Australia*. Toulouse, PU Mirail, p.38 (Original version in French: PONS, X. 2005. *Les mots de l’Australie*. Toulouse, PU Mirail).



mentioned “tourist map,” “random,” “on the advice of someone,” and 2 others have written “research school.” 206 visitors said they came for personal reasons related to their own history, their family and genealogical research. This question highlights the success of the main mission of the Melbourne Museum which is to “create a strong relationship with the various communities in the State of Victoria.”<sup>51</sup> The next issue (No. 9) is about the visitor's interest at the end of their guided tour. “Did he find the immigration museum interesting?” 229 visitors answered “yes.” The question (No. 10) allows the visitor if he answers “no” to give his reasons. Over 18 visitors who answered “no,” 12 gave a reason: 6 visitors responded that “there was too much information, too much text to read.” 2 visitors responded that the “museum is sad. The stories and testimonies do not give a happy feeling.” A visitor noted on his questionnaire that he had “migrated for love.” 2 others said: “thousands of objects without interest” or “useless objects.” 1 visitor said: “The Chinese community is not represented in a positive way” and another visitor said, “Immigration is not enough update.” The nature of negative responses is a criticism from visitors to the museum, about the exhibition content and the overall impres-

sion (atmosphere, feeling) that they retain during their visit experience.<sup>52</sup> It is interesting that some criticism about handling of immigration is based on family history or individual origin, seeking to position their own story from the global content broadcast by the museum. Question No. 11 is about the number of visits, “Is it your first visit?” 220 visitors answered “yes” and 27 responded “no.” For the vast majority of visitors, it was their first visit to the Immigration Museum in Melbourne.

This second part of the questionnaire helps to define the framework of motivations for visiting. The result is that for 89% of visitors, it was the first visit to the museum, with 84% of visitors who came for personal reasons (their own history, their family history and genealogy research). And 7% of visitors expressed opinions about the museum. This confirms, in a sense, both the attractive informative and social function of Immigration Museum in Melbourne.

The third part of the questionnaire focuses on the visitor's interest related to the content of the exhibitions at the museum. So the question No. 12, focuses on what marked the visitor and is a multiple choice question. These choices are: “explanatory materials and talks, the artifacts, your general experience of the museum, other lasting impressions.” The visitor could complete his answer if he checked off

<sup>50</sup> “The Genealogy Centre. The Helen Mcpherson Smith Genealogy Centre is the home of the Library's Genealogy Collection. The centre holds a wide variety of material on microfilm, microfiche, CD-ROM and online, and a number of genealogy-related books and journals. It has computers providing access to the Library's catalogue, databases and the internet, as well as printing and downloading facilities.” Information collectée sur le dépliant de la *State Library of Victoria*. 328 Swanston Street. Melbourne 3000. URL : <http://slv.vic.gov.au/> (Visited in February 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2010)

<sup>51</sup> Text available in the official website of the Immigration museum: “Developing strong relationships with Victoria's culturally diverse communities.” URL: <http://museumvictoria.com.au/immigrationmuseum/> (Visited in February 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2010)

<sup>52</sup> The visitor experience is a set of cognitive and affective activities of the museum-goers when visiting exhibition. We speak of museum experience to consolidate these activities in the museum. See reference: FALK, J.H., DIERKING, L. D., 2009 (1992). *The museum experience*. Michigan, Mellen Candage (ed.), p.67: “As they move through museum spaces, visitors selectively look at and examine objects and labels in exhibits. They asks questions about what they see, hold discussions with each other, and attempts to personalize and make sense of what they see. The important aspect of their activity is that it is selective. Visitors choose, sometimes apparently randomly, what to focus on. The things they choose to examine are woven into their own museum experience.”

“other.” Just over half of visitors (55%) said they had been marked by the explanatory materials and talks. They constitute a large part of the permanent exhibition, as each theme of the exhibition is accompanied by evidence (video, audio) of immigrants. 29% of visitors checked “artifacts,” 8% indicated “the overall experience of the museum” and 8% indicated “other.” The 21 visitors who answered “other” had the opportunity to complete their choice: 10 visitors were marked by the “mood of music,” 7 visitors about “Ancient Hampi,”<sup>53</sup> which corresponds to a temporary exhibition about India integrated into the museum route. This exhibition features photographs of the ancient temple of Hampi (see Photo 4) and give the opportunity for visitors to test a mobile platform to discover it, equipped with 3D glasses, photographs of India in full size. 2 visitors wrote: “Discovery Centre” which includes the library and genealogy center of the museum<sup>54</sup>, allowing visitors to do more research, and 2 visitors answered “availability of the museum staff.” The following questions (No. 13 and No. 14) examined the relationship of visitors to objects that are exposed and the

<sup>53</sup> Exhibition: “*Ancient Hampi: The Hindu Kingdom Brought to Life*. Immerse yourself in the ancient world of Hampi. This international exhibition offers visitors the opportunity to immerse themselves in the stunning World Heritage site of Hampi in southern India. Using state of the art digital technologies, this ground breaking experience presents 3D stereographic panoramas of an extraordinary site with all its mythological, archaeological, artistic and historic significance. Ancient Hampi includes animations of Hindu myths and stories, an immersive digital interactive space showing panoramic images of the site and its landscape, as well as captivating photography.” URL: <http://museumvictoria.com.au/immigrationmuseum/whatson/current-exhibitions/ancient-hampi/> (Visited in January 12th, 2010)

<sup>54</sup> Discovery Centre’s presentation text: “Browse our extensive range of resources, including topical websites and infosheets based on Museum Victoria’s collections and research.” URL: <http://museumvictoria.com.au/immigrationmuseum/discoverycentre/> (Visited in February 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2010)

information disseminated at the museum. More than half of visitors found the exhibits in relation to their own history. This constitutes 60% against 40% of visitors. 72% of visitors found “information” that are related to their own history. Visitors are more sensitive to the historical information that is disseminated by the museum and in which they manage to locate their own history. Question No. 15 deals with the safeguarding of cultural practices in the country of origin. This question also assumes that these practices are still applicable in the daily life of the visitor. 60% of visitors said they had retained cultural practices against 40%. We can establish a link between the varieties of country of origin of visitors, established in the first part of the questionnaire, which underlines the cultural diversity of visitors, with the majority percentage of cultural practices.

This part of the questionnaire provides information on the quality of the relation between the visitor and the museum’s content, and emphasizes the reality of interaction with the museum exhibitions, the theme of immigration and the different profiles of visitors.

The last part of the questionnaire aims to interrogate visitors about the concept of immigration. To question No. 16 which is: “Do you believe in a multicultural society where immigrants retain their native culture, traditions and speak the language they want?” 96% of the visitors answered “yes.” The next question is: “If yes, do you think this society is Australia?” 96% of the visitors answered “yes.” These results show that “the current demographic landscape of Australia (...) has nothing to do with the one it showed at the end of the Second World War, now showing a large ethno-cultural diversity”<sup>55</sup> combined with a social cohesion, where everyone is free to express his or her own culture. A large percentage shows that the ethno-cultural diversity is constitutive to Australian society. 96% of visitors believe the Australian

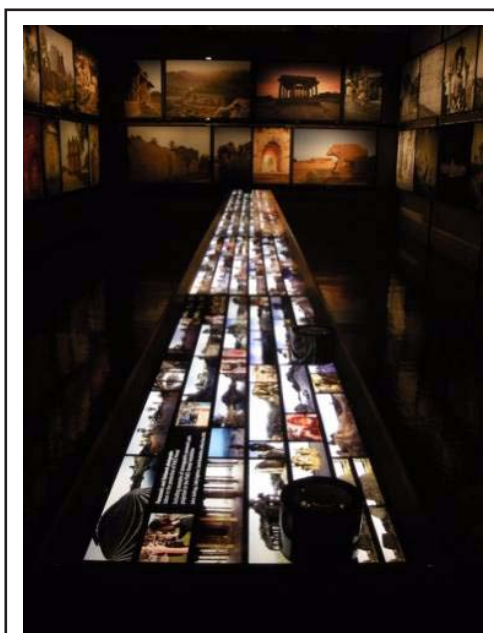


Photo 4: Photographic Exhibition about India\*  
at the Immigration Museum in Melbourne  
(©Ilham Boumankhar 2010)

\* Note: Presentation text in the cartel: "John Gollings, *Colour and Black and white photographs, 1980-2005: A selection from over 15,000 images of Hampi taken in a period of 25 years. John Gollings' work is a major contribution to the study of Vijayanagara.*"  
©Immigration Museum, Melbourne, Victoria.  
(November 2009- February 2010)

community as a "multicultural society" where several cultures, different practices (customs and religions) and where a multitude of different languages are spoken in

<sup>55</sup> LAGAYETTE, P. 2008. *Meeting Australia: crossing perspectives on the identity of a people and a nation*. Paris, Presses de l'Université Paris-Sorbonne, p.12: "The current demographic landscape of Australia (...) has nothing to do with the one she showed at the end of the Second World War, showing now a large ethno-cultural diversity." (Original version in French: LAGAYETTE, P. 2008. *Rencontres australiennes: regards croisés sur l'identité d'un peuple et d'une nation*. Paris, Presses de l'Université Paris-Sorbonne, p.12 : "le paysage démographique actuel de l'Australie n'a (...) plus rien à voir avec celui qu'elle affichait au sortir de la Deuxième guerre mondiale, montrant dorénavant une grande diversité ethno-culturelle").

the same space. The next question concerns the contribution (positive or negative) of the migration paths in the daily lives of visitors involved. 171 visitors (69% of visitors) said that immigration has had a beneficial effect on their lifestyle. 42 visitors answered that it had no effect, while 34 visitors answered that this had a detrimental effect. The results of this question outweigh the positive results that were obtained on the perception of immigration by visitors. This implies that for some visitors, having an immigrant background cannot be well in everyday life, which may refer to certain forms of cultural and racial discrimination, or to a migratory journey difficulties, or a daily disagreement with an immigrant population. The possibilities remain in large numbers. Question No. 19 deals with the visitor's impressions about the treatment of immigration by the museum. When asked: "Do you think that the Museum deals well the immigration question?" 95% of the visitors answered "yes." For those who answered "no" who were 12 visitors, they could give their reason after the last question No. 20: "If not, can you explain?" The explanations were very different: 2 visitors think that "the museum gives a sad version of immigration history." One of the two wrote, "between the nostalgic music, video testimonies of war, the old objects, this makes the museum looks like a sanctuary." 2 other visitors wrote that "China is represented only to say it has long been discriminated by the White Policy, not for its culture, while Japan is presented in relation to some know-how from Japan." One of the two visitors wrote about the lack of representation by referring to South Korea, as opposed to a showcase about Japan. 2 visitors noted that "there is nothing about the Greek community" and two others noted "an imbalance between the first floor and second floor." One of the two wrote that "the first floor is especially nice to visit with the boat<sup>56</sup> (see Photo 5) that enables to understand the

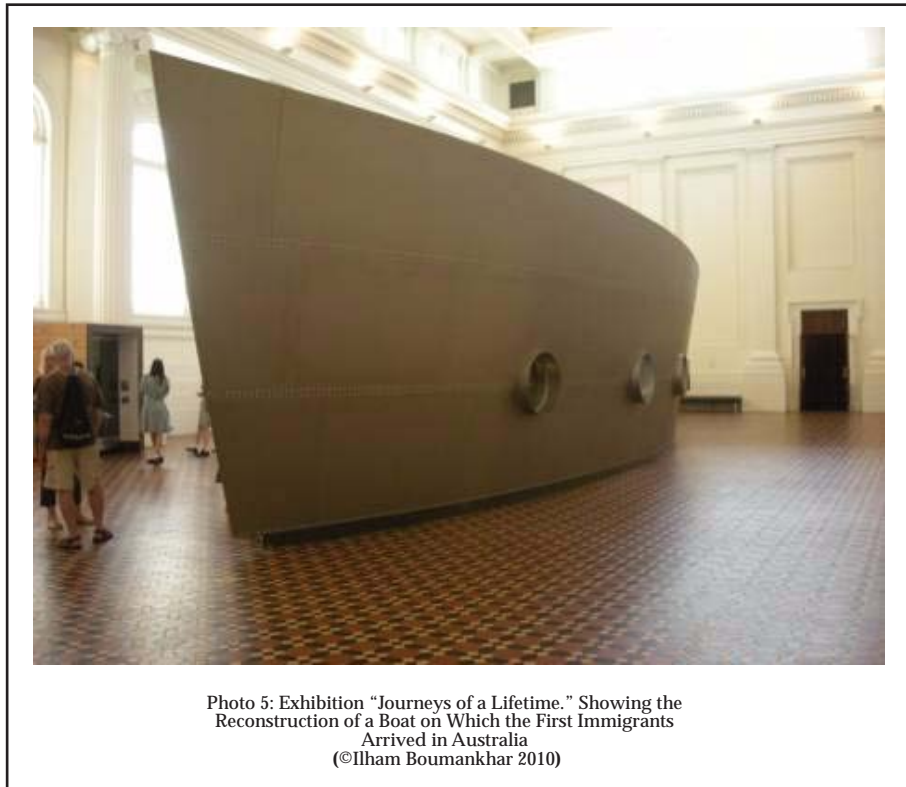


Photo 5: Exhibition "Journeys of a Lifetime." Showing the Reconstruction of a Boat on Which the First Immigrants Arrived in Australia  
(©Ilham Boumankhar 2010)

crossing of the first immigrants, but the second floor, apart from the two models of boats<sup>57</sup>, the rest is not interesting." One visitor wrote "I expected more, I'm bored" and one other visitor highlighted a "big imbalance in the quality of the exhibits between the two floors."

These results demonstrate the various visitors' expectations about the museum and the issue of immigration. It is interest-

<sup>56</sup> Presentation text : "*The journey*. All immigrants, no matter when they arrived in Victoria, are linked by the common experience of a journey. Over the past two centuries changing forms of transport have meant that this voyage has varied in both duration and degree of comfort. The journey remains one of the most memorable aspects of any immigration experience. You are invited to explore these spaces and immerse yourself in the experiences of previous generations of immigrants. Feel free to use any of the furniture and to touch anything you like." © Immigration Museum, Melbourne, Victoria. (November 2009- February 2010)

ing to note that some visitors expect a "good representation" of their affiliated country in the immigration museum, which emphasizes that they "assumed that [the museum] is [a] social, political and cultural actor which is important in our society,"<sup>58</sup> and expect that all countries' immigrants are mentioned. These various remarks about the treatment of the theme

<sup>57</sup> This is the model of the East which was the ship carrying immigrants in the 19th century from Britain to Australia. Text cartel presentation of the model: "Orient—Queen of the seas. The Orient was one of the most famous ships to carry migrants between Britain and Australia in the nineteenth century. Built in 1879 as the flagship for the newly formed Orient Steam Navigation Company, it was the largest steamship launched worldwide since Brunel's colossal Great Eastern of 1858. The Orient was an immediate success carrying 735 passengers to Melbourne on its maiden voyage in record time." © Immigration Museum, Melbourne, Victoria. (November 2009- February 2010)



of immigration in the museum also highlight that “the exhibition of objects already contains a certain vision, but do not tell everything [about] how visitors will appropriate this vision. The gaze of visitors, in fact reflects the ambivalence of the principles of exposure, but in an unbalanced manner”<sup>59</sup> through “the gap between different logics of representation.”<sup>60</sup>

Analysis of the results of the questionnaire provides an interesting perspective on the profile of visitors and how they define themselves through the museum, and with the concept of immigration and Australian society. We maintain, however, that to be defined as an “immigrant”<sup>61</sup> in Australia is relative, both in the spoken language, or the family lineage or affiliation to a country; this makes the museum management a more complex exercise.

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<sup>58</sup> DUBE, P. LAPOINTE, A. 1997. *The museum as a symbolic territory of the nation*. In TURGEON, L., LETOURNEAU, J., FALL, K. 1999. *Spaces of identity*. Quebec, Les Presses de l'Université de Laval, p.149: “assume that [the museum] is an agent for social, political and cultural that is important in our society.” (Original version in French: DUBE, P. LAPOINTE, A. 1997. *Le musée en tant que territoire symbolique de la nation*. In TURGEON, L., LETOURNEAU, J., FALL, K. 1999. *Les espaces de l'identité*. Québec, Les Presses de l'Université de Laval, p.149: “acquis que [le musée] est un agent social, politique et culturel d'importance dans notre société”).

<sup>59</sup> CHRISTIAN, M. 1999. *The visitor's gaze in le Louvre*. In LARDELLIER, P. 1999. *The visitor's gaze in the museum*. In Public Museum and No. 16, Presses Universitaires de Lyon, July-December 1999, p.28: “The exhibition contains objects that have a certain way of look, but does not tell how visitors will appropriate it. The gaze of visitors reflects the ambivalence indeed of exhibition principles, but in an unbalanced way.” (Original version in French: CHRISTIAN, M. 1999. *Le regard au Louvre*. In LARDELLIER, P. 1999. *Le regard du musée*. Publics et Musée n°16, éditions Presses Universitaires de Lyon, Juillet-décembre 1999).

<sup>60</sup> BLANCHET, A., GOTMAN, A. 1992. *The investigation and its methods: the interview*. Paris, Nathan, p.52. (Original version in French: BLANCHET, A., GOTMAN, A. 1992. *L'enquête et ses méthodes: l'entretien*. Paris, Nathan)

### *B. Meeting with Padmini Sebastian, Manager of the Immigration Museum in Melbourne*

The interview I conducted with Padmini Sebastian, Manager of the Immigration Museum in Melbourne, was held in her office, in February 9<sup>th</sup>, 2010<sup>62</sup>. This interview aimed to present my research<sup>63</sup> findings to discuss and ask some general questions about the museum.

#### *Relations with the Victorian Government*

The Museum of Victoria was founded by the State Government of Victoria. In this

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<sup>61</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics. Queensland Office. 1994. *The social Characteristics of immigrants in Australia*. Canberra, Australian Government Publishing Service, p.3: “The first term which needs to be clearly defined is the word 'immigrant'. This is not as straightforward as it might seem. There is a tendency to refer to a person as an immigrant for only a short period of time after his or her arrival. Once resident in the new country for sufficient time, the word immigrant no longer seems appropriate as a description. Term such as “of Italian origin,” “Turkish descent” or “Spanish-speaking” may be more appropriate (DILGEA 1988, p.5). For example, not many people would refer to an 80-year-old man who was born in England and has resided in Australia since arriving at the age of twenty as an immigrant. There are a number of other ways the word immigrant is interpreted by government departments, the media and the general public. Often it is used to refer only to people of non-English-speaking background, whether borne in Australia or not. The word is also often linked with the concept of disadvantage and only applied to those of low economic status emigrating under assistance schemes or of refugee status. The debate can be further confused by including those Australia-born people with foreign ancestral or cultural affiliation as immigrants.”

<sup>62</sup> Interview with Ms Padmini Sebastian at the Immigration Museum offices, at level 4, 22 William St, Melbourne (on the corner of William St and Flinders Lane) Melbourne, February 9<sup>th</sup>, 2010.

<sup>63</sup> Investigations conducted at the museum that consists of questionnaires to visitors, and focus groups conducted with visitors, and were conducted as part of a PhD in Cultural Studies at the University of Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne.



Photo 6: Padmini Sebastian, Manager of the Immigration Museum in Melbourne  
(©Ilham Boumankhar 2010)

sense, the museum has a civic role which aims to represent and reflect the state of Victoria under the light of immigration. The museum is open for a little over 10 years and no interference from the government so far has been noted, unlike the Australian National Museum<sup>64</sup> which was the subject of government intervention in relation to the establishment of a gallery devoted to Aboriginal art<sup>65</sup>. The Immigration museum, however, must comply with the policies and procedures of the government in its management of financial resources, while respecting the code of ethics for museums. In terms of content, the museum is free to act as it sees the issues related to immigration. The content is oriented to the theme of the museum and visitor experience that the museum wants to show. Sometimes the content is distrib-

<sup>64</sup> Presentation text: "Opened in March 2001, the National Museum is the first museum dedicated to the history of Australia and Australians, exploring issues, events and key figures who have shaped and influenced the nation. Exhibition design and technology presents the stories of Australia an exciting and inventive manner, including use of multimedia, live performances and hands-on activities to appeal to a wide audience." URL: [http://www.nma.gov.au/visit/overseas\\_visitors/french/](http://www.nma.gov.au/visit/overseas_visitors/french/) (Visited in February 11<sup>th</sup>, 2010)

uted in correspondence with government issues and may be subject to litigation, but the aim of the museum remains to pacify the issues of migration and provide an area of exchange of the issues. The fact that the Australian Government, through its immigration policy, will always be able to conduct the line of how to identify, differentiate, or to shape an identity linked to the Australian nation is unavoidable. But, the museum's role is not to judge this conductive line but to provide a space for dialogue.

<sup>65</sup> WINDSCHUTTLE, K. 2001. *How not to run a museum? People's history at the postmodern museum*. In *The Sydney Line*, September 2001. URL: <http://www.sydneyline.com/National%20Museum.htm> (Visited in February 11<sup>th</sup>, 2010). In this article, the author explains the various discussions that took place in different areas on the National Museum of Australia. He explains how some authors report including all Australian government interference in the management of museum exhibits: "The content of the museum's displays has attracted less public discussion but has been the source of considerable acrimony within its governing council." The author refers in particular to several statements by government officials, academics and historians, including Graeme Davison, Professor of History at Monash University, which is the largest university in Australia. He states that: "David (Barnette—journaliste) gives the impression—which I am sure he does not really hold -- that the museum should follow the historical views of the government of the day. I am sure that this is not your view, or that of the council. The objective must be to ensure that whatever historical interpretations are expressed by the museum can survive changes of government and councils." Il cite aussi l'article publié dans le *National Museum*, intitulé *National Museums: Negotiating Histories* (2001) de Darryl McIntyre et Kirsten Wehner, qui écrivent: "Histories of colonialism and imperialism led to the formation of many national museum collections and the discourses of racial and social hierarchy and exclusion through which these were displayed. An increasing awareness of these discourses has meant that many museums often find their own collections something of a problem... Many museums are now concerned with the reinterpretation of colonial pasts, seeking to educate visitors about the complex and often unjust social relations which are part of their national history."

*The Management of the Museum about the Diversity of Countries that Make up the History of Australian Immigration*

All socio-ethno-cultural stories that are part of the history of Australian immigration cannot be represented at the same time in the museum. This is an exercise in representation that is realized over time. To manage this, Sebastian Padmini had created "a framework for establish emerging communities." It is a specific database created by the museum, which is useful to identify and list the emerging communities. It exists through the consultative relationship that the museum has with these communities during the preparation of exhibitions that deal with migration reports of these communities. The construction of an exhibition is realized in cooperation with immigrant communities, who share their experiences of their everyday life, between culture of origin and culture of the host society. This experience ranges from the journey and the installation to the hope of building a new life, but sometimes the experience of migration is also a disenchantment with a former life that the migrant will never see again, because of war or ecological disaster. Through the collection, the online programs, cultural festivals, the community exhibition, and a long term galleries, the challenge is "to represent as many people as possible." The permanent exhibition has not so far been completed. Partnership work done with these communities is not intended to collect only those representative objects and witnesses of community cultures but to share and delegate their story so that the museum can transmit them. It is very difficult to represent all communities to provide a perspective that is fair and equitable; it requires considerable work and commitment within the communities but also and especially from the museum.

Each year six community projects are set up in the form of exhibition or festival.

There are 80 different communities with which the museum is working. The collections are completed and are posted on the museum site<sup>66</sup>. The museum's manager understands that the immigration museum visitors will always expect a representation of their cultural origin within the museum. But she says that this representation is not always present because the diversity of communities in Australia is too important. The objective of the Immigration Museum is tender, however, towards a comprehensive representation of Australian immigration.

*Collaboration with the Museum's Diverse Communities*

The community displays and the festival program require a full commitment from the museum in relation to the different communities. Two museum curators have the charge, in full time, to maintain a contact with these communities. It is not for the museum to just express some interest for these communities but to forge a real bond of cooperation in the preparation of these events with these communities.

For this, the museum has a matrix or a database that enables it to consider the community exhibitions to come, over the next thirty years. The ambition of the museum is to create a place for the emergence and visibility of new communities in the State of Victoria. Once the identification of communities is integrated into a real museum project, the involvement of curators and researchers is integral, since the process of finding representations of communities and objects that bring this representation is not regarded as fixed but as an interactional dynamics between the

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<sup>66</sup> Each object in the collection of the Museum of Victoria is listed and featured on the official site of the museum. Available in URL: <http://museumvictoria.com.au/collections-research/our-collections/> (consulté le 11 février 2011)

museum, the society and communities. This is a collaborative work, which lasts more than twelve months and which allows communities to express themselves and bring the necessary materials to museum work. A real exchange takes place between the museum and communities to work not only on a given time for a specific event but for future exhibitions. The contact is also maintained over time to maintain a relationship of trust between community groups and immigration museum. Building a relationship of partnership is one of the missions of the museum that also allows him to set new goals. Indeed, each community exhibition gives rise to heated discussion between community representatives and members of the museum, allowing the seizure of representations of different perspectives and issues of a community exhibition. The interest of these discussions is to converge the knowledge of the various parties involved in assembling the museum project.

#### *Issues Relating to the Permanent Exhibition*

The permanent exhibition covers the period of the history of Australian immigration since 1830 until 2000. The reason the immigration museum has not updated its permanent exhibition is linked to the financial prospects allocated by the Australian government and the lack of staff that can be engaged in this type of project. Moreover, the past ten years have seen the configuration of ethno-cultural Australian immigration to diversify and the immigration policy to change. The technical means to establish an exhibition can also affect a varied range of museum representation of this diversity. The challenge for the museum focuses on ease of understanding for these new migration patterns that are coupled with new technical implementation exposure. In addition, the museum is currently working on a project that will be

accessible to the public in March 2011, which is oriented around the concepts of identity, race, culture, etc. This kind of project, in conjunction with the daily activities of the museum maintained, requires careful planning and organization that is played in time. The purpose is to propose a real-time interaction between the visitor and the museum in order to raise issues about the representation of immigration.

#### *Paralleling the Point of View of Visitors with the Permanent Exhibition*

We pointed out in this part of the interview with Padmini Sebastian, the influence of multimedia (background music and documentaries) on some visitors who have given their opinion. The answer is that the aim of the museum in this area is to reflect as much experience as possible about immigration. The documentary's images refer to images of destruction, war, famine but also construction, installation and love. It is paradoxical that many images are juxtaposed. But immigration is a multifaceted experience of contradictions. The museum's goal is to give to visitors an overview of immersive experience. The documentaries are composed of short sequences dealing with various immigration issues. Music, on the other hand, was treated so as to remain close to neutral. It is interesting that some visitors find it sad or nostalgic. This is part of the diversity of visitor experiences that is aspired to by the museum, which seeks to reflect the visitors, and at the same time, make them project the migration patterns of immigrants. Immigration status is not a phenomenon of the 20th or the 21st centuries only. Some are refugees fleeing famine, environmental disasters, and war. Immigration may also reflect dramatic stories, and it is a fact that the museum has to show.



### *Future projects of the museum*

The exhibition, which will take place in March 2011 on the theme of contemporary identity, is an important exhibition as it will allow visitors to reflect on what immigration means in all aspects of travel and mobility that implies. It will examine also how it continues to shape the identity of immigrants, generations and societies. We live in a globalized world where movements of people are international. In this sense, the museum is also interested in Australians who have left their country to settle elsewhere, and return to Australia with their rich cultural experience. Immigration also concern Australians who have left their country to settle elsewhere, and return to Australia with their rich cultural experience. Change on the national level is fast, and the museum explores the technological possibilities for the treatment of these concepts. The goal is to find visitors but also residents to regard the museum not as a cultural institution but also as a social division of immigration issues. This exhibition will benefit both to present a new interactive and immersive experience for visitors, but also have an online program where visitors can get involved, complete and share in an abiding respect for each difference.

### *C. Meeting with Maria Tence, Manager of the Community Exhibitions Gallery in the Immigration Museum in Melbourne*

The interview with Maria Tence, head of the Gallery of Exhibition Community, the Immigration Museum in Melbourne, was held in the museum's research library, February 17<sup>th</sup>, 2010<sup>67</sup>. This interview was

<sup>67</sup> Interview with Ms Maria Tence, Manager, Community Exhibitions, at the Library Research of the Immigration Museum, 400 Flinders Street, Melbourne, February 17th, 2010



Photo 7: Maria Tence, Manager of the Community Exhibitions Gallery in the Immigration Museum in Melbourne (©Ilham Boumankhar 2010)

intended both to present my results of investigations but also to gather information about the management of the Community Exhibitions organized by the museum and also the museum's interactions with communities in the process of collecting objects.

### *Presentation of the Community Gallery<sup>68</sup>*

Maria Tence began working with communities as part of a museum exhibition project more than 12 years ago, along with Padmini Sebastian and Moya McFadzean<sup>69</sup> even though the project of an Immigration Museum in Melbourne was just starting. Since then, her work has evolved considerably. While initially it was to establish a communication link with the various communities and explain the opportunity for a partnership with a civic museum, then it was more to negotiate the different modes of representation and dissemination of individual and collective histories with the communities in question. Immigration to Australia has an interesting diversity of communities. These are more or less ancient, and if today the collection of objects is simpler, it was not the same at the opening of the museum. In fact, immigrants who came to Australia after the Second World War had never come into

contact with a cultural institution since most came from rural areas of Europe. For these early immigrants, the museum was more a place where the antiquities were stored. It is therefore an educational understanding of the role of museums in representing the communities that initiated the communication between museums and communities. A gallery of communities has been developed for the purpose of exclusive collaborative work with communities. Indeed, for the museum to acquire validity in the eyes of communities, it was both to integrate them into the social history and contemporary Australian immigration, and

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<sup>68</sup> Presentation text: *Community Exhibitions*: "Tell your community's experiences and stories of migration and diversity... The Immigration Museum's *Community Gallery* hosts three exhibitions annually. Each exhibition is presented for a period of between 14 and 16 weeks. The program is flexible so as to accommodate the cultural needs of as many groups as possible. Community exhibitions are created by communities themselves with support from the Museum. The museum provides financial, marketing and promotional support so that communities can create quality exhibitions. Communities must be able to demonstrate community support and endorsement for exhibitions so that they are inclusive and representative of the community. Where possible community exhibitions are scheduled to coincide with important milestones or celebrations in the participating community's calendar? What are the aims of the Community Gallery? To provide a forum for community groups, organizations and special interest groups to tell stories and investigate themes relating to immigration, cultural diversity and identity. To encourage community collaboration, participation and ownership. To document and promote the diverse community stories and experiences that are an important part of Australian history. To contribute to the history collections of Museum Victoria and the State of Victoria. There is an application and selection process if you wish to present your Community's exhibition at the Immigration Museum." URL: <http://museumvictoria.com.au/immigrationmuseum/about-us/community-engagement/community-exhibitions/>

<sup>69</sup> Moya McFadzean is the chief curator of the Immigration Museum in Melbourne. The next section is devoted to the interview we conducted with her in February 23rd, 2010 at the Swan House Immigration Museum.

to reserve a specific space for them. Initially this gallery was called "nexus gallery." The word "nexus" means "the link between members of a group"<sup>70</sup> in relation to sharing the same language. Indeed, sharing the same language within a community, it was seen by the museum as a cultural partnership rather than a factor of social integration it facilitated. The name was changed in 2004 at the request of several artists who wanted to make this space an entry, access, and artistic discovery. However, the immigration museum wanted an exhibition space reserved for collective voice and social history. In this sense, it became the "Community Exhibition Gallery."

The working methods for organizing these exhibitions are very different from the methods usually practiced in museums. Indeed, the museum allows communities to propose an exhibition by completing an application form. From this starting point, a specific group is formed to offer, from the observation of past exhibitions, suggestions based on a scoring system. The highest score is retained in the final decision. The project started being built via an interaction between a group of 5 individuals from a specific community and the team in charge of the museum project, under the direction of Maria Tence. The value of group work helps prevent the individualization of the project. Indeed, in the early days some community representatives took the project too much to heart, offering screenings of representation too personal. However, the project's objective is to provide a collective view from individual stories. There are different perspectives that are offered, and various negotiations that take place during the process of realization of the exhibition project community. The role of Maria Tence evolved, moving

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<sup>70</sup> *Nexus* ...n. pl. nexus. Definition: 1. A means of connection between members of a group or things in a series; link; bond 2. A connected group or series. Source URL: <http://www.thefreedictionary.com/nexus>

from “someone who negotiates” to one who “works as a custodian” of the immigration museum. The aim is both to strengthen dialogue with communities to reassure them about the mission of the museum and the fair representation through the transmission of their material witnesses. It is a constant and permanent work which requires a management of current issues that also existed 10 years ago. Indeed, there are communities that have not yet been exhibited in the museum, and those who struggle to communicate their collective history or who have not yet reached a consensus about their own history because they are recent communities. As Maria Tence says: “my role is to let them understand how we are here to preserve their story and that they are also part of their communities’ culture and history.”

The role of Maria Tence is to make clear what is the benefit for communities to work with the Immigration Museum. The goal is to keep a record of their arrival in Australia as immigrants but also to convey their origins, history and cultural traditions. It is urging them to tell their stories, that every individual belonging to a community participates in the collective history of the community. These stories are not about their social success as a newcomer in Australian society, but the choices that led them to come to Australia, their cultural background and their contribution to the Australian society. Australian society has changed with their arrival; it changed its legislative framework. So there is an interesting balance that the community gallery exhibition attempts to address and reflect. The aim is to provide an overview of the history of these communities both old and new.

#### *Management of community diversity*

The working methods of the museum vary depending on whether it is a project

for a permanent exhibition or a temporary exhibition.

The permanent exhibition is to reflect the complexity and diversity of individual stories while recontextualizing in a global trajectory of immigration to Australia. These compose micro-themes that fit and explain a macro-theme. For this, the museum has a matrix methodology that consists of different parts, which themselves constitute a tree that make up the history of immigration in terms of geographical origins. The operation of this matrix is both rational and objective. To better manage the contents of the permanent exhibition, the museum must ensure that each part is checked and then processed. Not everything can be treated, but the museum must ensure that the broad themes that make up the history of immigration are present. The objective is to enrich gradually and proportionately, the permanent exhibition through the temporary exhibition gallery that represents the community exhibitions.

Temporary exhibitions are preparing for several years because it is a process that requires going out to meet the communities who want to work with the museum and put on an exhibition project. But the starting point of these exhibitions is initiated by communities. The museum policy is very clear: to let the communities decide what they want to convey. The community has both the history of a member of this community, the contribution of the person arriving in Australia, the type of contribution (economic or social) and the relationship to the collective history of the community. The profile of the stories must meet two criteria: the singularity and the collectivity. The stories must be original, unique, and fit into the overall history of the community by contributing to its enrichment and visual explanations. The museum's role is to avoid stereotypes to get closer to the truth of the stories. That's why there are several projects taking place

simultaneously. Sometimes projects are reinterpreted in two or three years later because some interesting stories have emerged, or new objects have been collected. The exhibition is therefore more flexible than the permanent exhibition, but requires a significant investment in terms of verification, processing and updating sources and objects.

### *The Issue of Intercultural Communities*

Communication is carried around the ability for communities to be exposed in the Immigration Museum, to tell their arrival in Australian society. The fact that individuals belonging to this community feel 100% immigrant or even 1% immigrant is not important; the key is to tell their migration routes. The existence of the gallery of Community Exhibition tends to value those communities; whether they arrived in Australia in 1830 or 2010, they are all immigrants. So they all have their place in the museum.

The influence of Australian society in these communities is inevitable. Australian society has an egalitarian approach to immigrants, due to the fact that Irish immigrants arriving in Australia have struggled at the outset to establish Catholic schools, and establish a Catholic Church. Parliament has legislated that each individual has the right to practice religion he wants, and live as he wishes. Australian society was thus built on this cultural pluralism, and has a philosophy of respect for differences. Certainly there was a time it had to go beyond racial politics between the white and the arrival of early immigrants and ethnic culture. But once this step crossed, it allowed Australian society to impose its model of multiculturalism and equality. And because Australia suffered "the tyranny of distance," because it is a Commonwealth country isolated in Oceania, it practices an immigration policy that allows new immigrants to preserve

and maintain their cultural heritage and religious.

The impact on Australian communities comes from that distance. Because some foods can be imported, there are the culinary traditions that have been rehabilitated. For example, the curry a few years ago was not found in Australia, cannot be produced by Australia and cannot be imported for reasons of border security; for this reason the basics of curry dishes cooked in some communities have changed. The immigration process is an inevitable process of change. Individuals who decide to immigrate to a country which is different from their country of origin must accept this change and adjust their lifestyle. However, they also try to maintain links with their countries of origin, a link to both memorial and comfort. In this sense, they form communities. The growing diversity of communities encourages the museum to represent with the target to create a cross-community interaction in a historic approach that is intra- and inter-societal. Because many immigrants came to Australia to escape situations of political and cultural tension, environmental catastrophe but also of war in their own countries, they are looking for peace and harmony. That is why they try to preserve this state at all costs, avoiding attacks and intercultural violence. According to Maria Tence, "Even if, in many ways, we are recognized as a 'lucky country' because we have a lot of land, a lot of sunshine, and a lot of beach, now we can use the same words 'lucky country' in a way that means we have a social harmony and an egalitarian society compared to other countries in the world."

### *The Intercommunity Recognition Process*

For Maria Tence, what differentiates the intercommunity recognition process between France and Australia is how each community is addressed at a macro level



(society and community) and at a micro level (individual) and at a meso level (social organization). Indeed, in France every community forms enclaves. A specific community will find themselves located in the same urban areas, working in the same streets and gathering in the same places. In Australia, it's different because communities are dispersed or mixed. For example, Lygon Street in Melbourne is considered the Italian neighborhood because there are many businesses that are run by Italians, but they live in different places and mingle more in Australian society. This mixture allows children to mix with other children belonging to other communities and become familiar with these communities. Intercommunity dialogue begins early and often this affects the parents. In addition, the curriculum includes multicultural learning of the Australian history, and each student can learn in school his history and language of origin to preserve his cultural heritage. Distribution patterns and location of communities differ between France and Australia.

#### *The Next Community Exhibitions*

The community Gallery exhibitions presented an exhibition devoted to the Kurdish<sup>71</sup> community in Australia, and

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<sup>71</sup> Presentation text: "Survival of a Culture: Kurds in Australia. 16 Mar—25 Sep 2010. Explore the culture of Australia's Kurdish community. This exhibition explores how the Kurdish culture has survived through adversity, invasion, and division of the Kurds' traditional lands. Survival of a Culture: Kurds in Australia examines the traditions at the core of the Kurdish culture that have enabled it to survive, and which Kurds proudly maintain in Australia today. A variety of objects will be on display, including traditional costumes, instruments, hand-made carpets, hand-woven crafts and pewter ware." URL: <http://museumvictoria.com.au/immigrationmuseum/whatson/upcoming-exhibitions/survival-of-a-culture-kurds-in-australia/> (Visited on February 20<sup>th</sup>, 2010)

later, in October 2010, the Timorese<sup>72</sup> community. The year 2009-2010 was devoted to the communities in which developments in their country remains tense, sometimes hopeless as Palestinian communities, Kurdish and Timorese. Sometimes these tensions are reflected in the discussions between museums and communities. Sharing one of her discussions with the community, Maria Tence said: "The Kurdish community I worked with, told me: "you know, be prepared, 'cause Kurdish community might force you to close the exhibition, if it is not suitable." And I said: "In Australia, no community can force the closure of an exhibition." So, it is a permanent work of dialogue with communities to ensure that the beneficial intentions of the museum are maintained. The museum must also establish and promote intercommunity interactions and sometimes pacify them. The gallery exhibits community is an area of community representation but also a forum for discussion between the different actors involved in the project design museum and an intercommunal meeting place. The existence of the gallery is to overcome the various sub-themes that are not covered by the permanent exhibition but also to provide a voice for communities, a chance to speak, to tell their story and leave a trace.

#### *D. Meeting with Moya McFadzean, Senior Curator of the Immigration Museum in Melbourne*

The interview with Ms. Moya McFadzean, senior curator of the Immigra-

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<sup>72</sup> The Timorese community hails from the island of Timor, which is an island in the Indonesian archipelago. This island has two types of settlement, an eastern half which is the Republic of East Timor (to which the exhibition is dedicated) and the western half is part of the Indonesian province of East Nusa Tenggara. The population of East Timor suffered abuses by anti-independence militias and flee the island to seek refuge in Australia.

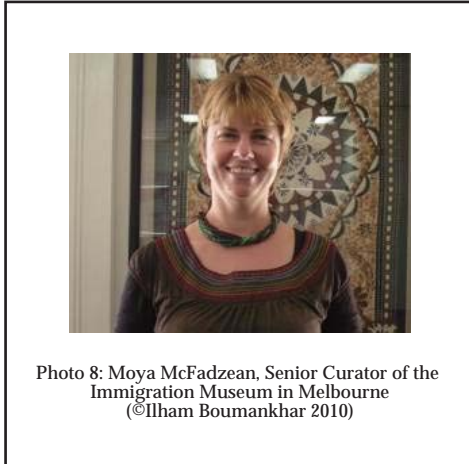


Photo 8: Moya McFadzean, Senior Curator of the Immigration Museum in Melbourne  
(©Ilham Boumankhar 2010)

tion Museum in Melbourne, was held at the Swann House which is the building where her office is located, in February 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2010<sup>73</sup>. This interview was intended to discuss my survey results and gather information on her work as a senior curator, responsible for both the museum's collections but also as one in charge of the exhibition process objects.

*Presentation of the Work of Chief Curator of the Immigration Museum*

As a senior curator of the Immigration Museum in Melbourne, Moya McFadzean first worked for the National Museum of Victoria in 1995 as a curator for the Australian Society and Technology Department. Because she has specialized in studying the history of Australian immigration and immigration history of the State of Victoria in particular, she has been appointed senior curator of the Immigration museum collections. If the collection of the Museum of Victoria was established since 1854, that of the Museum of Immigration is a contemporary collection.<sup>74</sup> This collection started by the Department of Social History Museum in Victoria since 1990 and has served as a

<sup>73</sup> *Interview with Ms Moya McFadzean*, at the Swann House of the Immigration Museum, 22 William Street, Melbourne, February 23rd, 2010

launching base for the proposed immigration museum opened in 1998. As a curator appointed to a museum collection recently, her work has been to initiate first communication links with community networks to develop a collection plan for the museum of immigration. Subsequently, it was targeted to produce collections for exhibitions and to determine the audience profile of the museum in terms of migration-related cultural activities<sup>75</sup>.

She defines her work on the collection of objects as a proactive work, since the museum is responsible to create and complete his own collection in partnership with communities in the State of Victoria. The objective of this collection of objects was to cover a wide range of cultures and historical periods to reflect the history of migration in Victoria. Emphasis was placed on documentation of individual stories and family migration through personal items and stories. These are the many individual and family histories that make up the overall history of the Victorian and Australian immigration. From objects collected from communities, the curator's job begins. Domestic objects, objects in relation to immigrant labor, photographs and lots of luggage. The bags are a symbol of immigrant mobility. As a conservative, it is not simply to dispose of these objects but also to inform, to tell their stories. During the collection process, it often receives immigrants who decide to share their stories and

<sup>74</sup> Complementary document prepared by Moya McFadzean. Collection plan at the Immigration Museum: "The Migration Collection documents the migration experiences of Victorians since the 1830s and, consequently, the long history of the cultural diversity of the Victorian population. The collection officially commenced in 1990, with collecting and programming activity increasing dramatically after the establishment of the Immigration Museum in 1998, one of Museum Victoria's three campuses."

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid*: "This has resulted in the broadening of community networks, focused collecting for exhibitions and the raising of the museum's public profile in terms of migration-related cultural activities."

donate or loan their objects, to ask them specific questions about objects. The collection process therefore involves a collaborative effort between the owner of the object and the curator who collects the history of objects. This support is necessary because often the banality of the objects, or the fact that they blend into the everyday life of the owner, has the consequence that they are not explicit on the details of stories they carry or their past practice. The museum curator is present to complete the story with maximum detail, to create conditions for exhibitions that aim to engender a sense of empathy in the viewer. To do this, Moya McFadzean considers ways and basic techniques that can help to effectively tell the personal stories attached to objects while integrating them into the general history of immigration.

Objects collected are those accumulated by immigrants during their migratory journey, but also they include objects made or acquired after their settlement in Australia. They must be integrated with personal stories and family and with the broader themes of political and immigration process, method of settlement of immigrants, of different generations of immigrants, of the relationship between marriage and migration, of health and migration, and of nation and identity. These sensitive issues have arisen following the exhibition "The Human Body"<sup>76</sup> on which Moya McFadzean worked, as a curator of the museum's Australia Gallery of Victoria in Melbourne in 2002. The exhibition raised the question of morphological differences, racial, cultural, social contact among individuals.

In addition, since Australia had previously based its policy of immigration on a racist basis favoring White immigration, it was especially important to recognize that past but also to update the questions of immigration identity and multicultural policy in Australia. What are the resonances of these policies on individuals, and

how people were affected by the policy? The growing collection of documents relating to Australian immigration policy and the process, by which people are selected, redirected or returned, providing a vital bridge between the personal stories and narratives of nations, either Australia or other countries to which immigrants originate. The local community activities about migration are also represented, including cultural organizations who maintain cultural traditions. Government policies to support communities who wish to preserve and practice their cultural heritage are discussed. Administrative groups created to facilitate community dialogue such as the "Council of good neighbors"<sup>77</sup> are processed by the museum but also are

<sup>76</sup> Reference to the exhibition "The Human Body" as part of wider exposure on "Body Odyssey," which took place from August 3rd, 2002 to January 27th, 2003 at the Museum Victoria in Melbourne. Text of the presentation is: "*Individual identity: really you*: The questions: How am I structurally the same as other humans? How am I unique? Recur in many of the themes throughout The Human Body exhibition. The techniques used to uncover the macro and micro structure of the human body have revealed our relationship with other living things. We share the same basic body structure with all vertebrates, the same cellular structure with all animals, and the same genetic coding material as all living things. What then makes each of us unique? The obvious external characteristics are the most notable. Are you male or female? What color is your skin, hair, eyes? There are many other less obvious structural features. Are your ear lobes fixed or free? What is your blood type? What is the sequence of your DNA? You may argue that what makes you 'you' is not only your structure but your unique set of memories and experiences. However, you may want to then ask the question, Can individual consciousness and memory also be explained or mapped to brain biochemistry and physiology? Or how much of me is nature and how much is nurture?" URL: <http://museumvictoria.com.au/body-odyssey> Text available in .pdf format on URL: <http://museumvictoria.com.au/search/?q=Individual%20identity:%20really%20you> (Visited on February 24<sup>th</sup>, 2010)

<sup>77</sup> Document complémentaire rédigé par Moya McFadzean. Plan de collecte des objets de l'*Immigration Museum*: "the Good Neighbour Council."

protest groups and political movements, for and against immigration, multiculturalism and diversity. The physical collection consists of so many objects as documents that mark the stages of the migration process of individuals as objects of material culture in relation to social events related to the history of immigration<sup>78</sup>—such as historical events and protests which are illustrated in an exhibition by the posters or badges used then.

The issue of immigration is strongly linked to personal identities. The task of collecting objects, documentation and exhibition implementation is even more important that it can be positioned in a contemporary context. How from household objects, tools of work, family heirlooms and community artifacts, do we get to deal with social issues, culture, race, and identity that are all concepts that are closely related to the immigration questions? Moya McFadzean admits that it is a difficult work of constant questioning, but also a job that is rewarding with a systematic collaboration with the owners of objects in order to help them interpret and represent their personal history. If the work of Maria Tence, manager of community exhibition, begins with communities, the work of Moya McFadzean, senior curator, starts from the objects. Her mission is to operate within this framework, a collection of reactive objects, sometimes from contexts and personal histories controversial, but with

the constant objective of clarifying the issues of immigration and innovating the exhibition process objects.

### *The Adjustments in the Practice of Museum Curator*

Before the Immigration Museum in Melbourne was created by the State Government of Victoria, there was a museum of migration in Adelaide since 1986. The Migration Museum of South Australia is a museum that deals with migration issues in the State of South Australia with the main purpose of fighting against racism and discrimination in this state.<sup>79</sup> The objective of this museum is to give voice to diversity and therefore community to claim their rightful place in the state. Because the majority of Australians were English, Scottish, or originating in Wales, there was a strong dominance of British communities which left only little room for other communities growing. So, this Migration Museum was intended to hear other voices. Contrary to the State of South Australia, Victoria State showed instead a significant diversity and the role of immigration museum was to know the history of immigration but also to establish an intercommunity dialogue, with the assumption that everyone in Australia is an immigrant. In this sense, as a museum curator, Moya McFadzean needed early in the project, to adjust her way of working

<sup>78</sup> Ibid: "The Migration Collection is a relatively recent one, and has had three curators since the collection was formed in 1990. Items relevant to the collection had also been collected via the earlier Technology and Social History collections (for example, shipping material, Australian Natives Association certificates, and medals). However, as migration was not the primary motivation for collection, such items tend to be poorly provenance in terms of their migration histories. Much of the collection documents (to varying degrees) the material culture relating to the migration experiences of individuals and families; consequently, objects tend to be personal, domestic and work-related in nature."

<sup>79</sup> Presentation text in the official website of the *South Australia Migration Museum*: "Preservation, interpretation and celebration of our heritage and culture underpin the work of the Migration Museum. Among the core values of the Museum are social inclusion, countering racism, and lifelong learning. Here history can be explored in ways that connect with contemporary issues. Since opening in 1986 the Museum staffs have collaborated with representatives from over 100 different cultural and community groups to develop exhibitions and special programs that tell the story of multicultural life in South Australia." URL: <http://www.history.sa.gov.au/migration/migration.htm> (Visited on February 24<sup>th</sup>, 2010)



because of the topic of immigration. It was no longer only to display objects and personal and collective histories, but also to promote all communities living in Australia and give them a fair vote. Put the story of an Irishman, a Scottish or English at the same level as that of an Iraqi, an Afghan or Turkish<sup>80</sup> or from a country in Africa.<sup>81</sup> Dealing with immigration properly also involves democratic use of museum resources.

But this is not always obvious, because immigration is a subject that varies depending on its degree of impact on a daily basis for individuals. Those whose great great grandparents were immigrants, no longer consider themselves immigrants, while for others, the comparison of different model of society and culture is everywhere. For the work of a museum curator, it is a complex factor to be taken into account while relativizing the objectives of exposure that are to make understandable the multicultural nature of Australian society, the history of various migrations, impacts of this immigration in today's society, all in relation to the contributions of immigrants to society but also to cultural and social changes of these immigrants into society. These are all moving parameters that the curator must keep in mind when working with a museum of immigration, a work that must constantly update and cope with modern and contemporary issues.

### *The Process of Exhibition Objects*

At the museum, there is always a

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<sup>80</sup> Document complémentaire rédigé par Moya McFadzean. Plan de collecte des objets de l'*Immigration Museum*. "Key items and stories include: Stories represented by one or two 'iconic' objects which powerfully capture the experience and/or which symbolize 'large' migration moments. Stories from Asia, Africa and Latin and South America, post 1970 stories and 19th-century stories."

<sup>81</sup> *Interview with Ms Moya McFadzean*, at the Swann House of the Immigration Museum, 22 William Street, Melbourne, February 23rd, 2010

senior curator who is a kind of coordinator of the development team for an exhibition which is the function of Moya McFadzean. The curators' work is done in close collaboration with the designer who tries to articulate the message to be broadcast and representation through objects, texts and sometimes videos. The dialogue is not always easy between conservative and designer. It is established in a productive negotiation, which can both give rise to new ideas to put on display, but also remain on status quo of conventional exposure setting.

The gallery "Leaving Home" presents several objects that are not objects intended to tell a personal story, but symbolic objects of different reasons that led to immigration. There are also controversial items like a rifle, symbolizing the war, and for that purpose, the designer had the idea of positioning the profile such that it does not face the visitor giving the impression that they are facing the barrel of a gun, thereby awakening, for some, bad memories. The aim was to put on a display, both neutral and symbolic, while following the main theme. It is important to work with the designers of the exhibition, because sometimes they do not measure the extent that an exposure setting can have on certain objects. The last discussion Moya McFadzean had with a designer concerned the exposure setting of the Koran, the sacred book of Islam, in the gallery "Spirituality and Identity" in the upcoming exhibition, where the designer wanted to expose it suspended in a showcase. But as a religious text, it is important to put on a pedestal, to show the respect that is brought to the object from the museum. The designer does not seem to perceive the nuances in the understanding, or how the meaning of each item is perceived as a whole by the public. Those are many issues related to the understanding and interpretation of objects, which also depend on how the objects are exhibited.

*Issues Related to the Next Exhibition Linking 'Identity' and 'Race'*

The following exhibition, held in March 2010, connected the concepts of 'identity' and 'race'<sup>82</sup>. This exhibition was developed and led by Moya McFadzean. The aim was to focus on what makes up the identity of an individual in a contemporary perspective, and according to different themes related to immigration, to define the issue of race. This was to establish connections between the components of identity: ethnicity, religion, spirituality, citizenship, and contemporary social history, while implicitly including issues relating to class age, gender, social status etc. Starting with the visible identity, which is on the surface, this is to ask the following questions: how do we identify ourselves? How do we identify the others? Then it is to introduce topics related to race: how do we build the images we have of others? How do we make assumptions about others? How do we make our prejudices or our stereotypes? How do we discriminate? How do we perceive it and how do we live with it? Developing the relationship between identity and race is to ask questions based on the perception that an individual has of himself and how he composes his identity from his social status, personal interests, his spiritual beliefs, cultural heritage, but also how society perceives it, or how other people perceive it, based on ethno-racial characteristics, clothing practices that fall into a ethno-religious or ethnic-cultural category, etc. On the other hand, it is also to understand how an individual constructs his identity when the family inheritance or cultural transmission

<sup>82</sup> "Identity and Race in Contemporary Australia at the Immigration Museum, an exhibition that will engage visitors in thinking about the complex issue of what it means to be an Australian in the 21st century." URL: <http://museumvictoria.com.au/immigrationmuseum/search/?q=race%20identity> (Visited on February 24<sup>th</sup>, 2010)

is absent, as this may be the case for a Holocaust survivor, a refugee, or an orphan. The exhibition is developed around an immersion process, to make the visitor experience issues of racism, discrimination, even when they are more insidious. The different forms of ownership are consulted, depending on the language, community, spirituality. It may also be transmitted by routine activities such as sport. Indeed, whether you are an athlete or a spectator, it is an important part of social and cultural life in Australia. The different types of popular culture practices or cultural affiliation are consulted, which is everything involved in building the identity of an individual beyond the racial characteristics that usually come first. It is also about creating an intergenerational dialogue related to these issues which are not lived in the same way at different times.

The purpose is to understand how identity is created from a personal point of view, and how it is affected by the collective (whether it is social, spiritual, cultural, etc.) to finally explore differences and what forms social diversity. All this was integrated within a broader context of Australian immigration policy, theories of difference, theories of race<sup>83</sup> as well as eugenics<sup>84</sup>, Darwin and historical context with the issue of Australian aborigines and its "stolen generation"<sup>85</sup>. Through the exploration of material and popular culture, this exhibition explores the representations of identity and race in the contemporary context in order to promote the right to difference and diversity in Australia, which are also current international issues.

<sup>83</sup> BANTON, M. 1998. *Racial theories*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, p.7: "Racial theories have been superseded by more powerful explanations which do not need any concept of race. Where the typologists regarded racial characteristics as the properties of species, population genetics in the 1930s demonstrated that the unit of selection was not the species but the gene."

#### IV. CONCLUSION

My investigations at the Immigration Museum in Melbourne, whether involving questionnaires or interviews conducted with managers of various sections of the museum, highlight issues of representation and the question of immigration in the Australian context. While it is the place of diversity and multiculturalism, the social and political history of Australia has both paradoxes but also exceptions that demonstrate how the phenomenon of migration can both inspire the change, power relations, new economic patterns and social structures. The effects relate to the self-understanding of the country and result in social cohesion that is consolidated with contradictions.

If the Immigration Museum in Melbourne has the mission to “save and interpret the experience of people who immigrated to the State of Victoria and Australia, as well as promote and celebrate cultural diversity and Australian identity that result,”<sup>86</sup> it requires an ongoing collaboration with communities and social actor that are involved in maintaining social cohesion in Australia, while moderating

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<sup>84</sup> RUELLAND, J. G. 2004. *The empire of genes, history of sociobiology*. Lyon, ENS éditions, p.210: « The theory of eugenics, Francis Galton, which is, historically has experienced limited success. The close relationship between eugenics and sociobiology are made at two levels: first sociobiology takes on its own the main theses of eugenics Galton, then it takes any action taken by the theory of eugenics in his attempts to institutionalization. Eugenics may claim to Darwin, who remarked that man is not for himself, what he does for horses, dogs and cattle, and relies on random mating, and secondly that the abstinence of artificial selection is coupled with a decrease of natural selection through the development of technological civilization and humanitarian ideas». (Translated from the original version in French: RUELLAND, J. G. 2004. *L'empire des gènes, histoire de la sociobiologie*. Lyon, ENS éditions)

<sup>85</sup> *Interview with Ms Moya McFadzean*, at the Swann House of the Immigration Museum, 22 William Street, Melbourne, February 23rd, 2010

political events. Even if immigration is constitutive of Australian history, it remains a social dynamic in constant motion, seeking from the museum to be engaged in a work of adjustment and continuous communication to foster intercultural exchange. My study has shown that immigration produces a multiplicity schema of the identity of individuals, and diversity of social realities. The migration routes are equally diverse between immigrants who fled wars, genocide, famine, and those attracted by the economic reality of Australia and seeking a new life.<sup>87</sup> They reflect experiences of immigration through the generations, ethnic differences (in a nation that was governed by a white policy for over a century) and cultural practices which are transmitted through the languages, religions, community belonging, etc., in a nation whose founding principle of multiculturalism policy is the preservation of the origins and cultural practices. “What we are talking about in terms of immigration and ethnicity is actually a set of processes related to globalization of economic activity, cultural activity, of identity formation. Immigration and ethnicity are constituted as otherness.”<sup>88</sup> Even if the social landscape of Australia makes the migratory common, the political

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<sup>86</sup> HORN, B. 2006. Obstacles et éléments moteurs : pour la constitution d'un public au musée de l'Immigration à Melbourne en Australie. In MUSEUM International N°231. Septembre 2006, p.87. (Translation: HORN, B. 2006. Obstacles and driving elements: building an audience at the Immigration Museum in Melbourne, Australia. In MUSEUM International N°231, September 2006)

<sup>87</sup> RICHARDS, E. 2008. *Destination Australia*. Opus cité, p.xi: “Behind the transitions, Australia has remained one the greatest immigrant nations. Its immigrants have been conduits for changing currents from the rest of the world including war, genocide, famine and population displacement; their individual stories brought vibrations of these distant worlds directly into an otherwise insulated Australia. What Australia made of them and their alien baggage is a central issue in the story, as also is the fate of the immigrants themselves.”

and social history of Australia requires the museum to deal with immigration issues very carefully, in order “to facilitate transmission between generations as well as encounters between migrants and host populations, through telling their story.”<sup>89</sup>

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