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Between the familial and the museum,
remembering the French Revolution bicentenary

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Unpacking the sonic memory – Between the familial and the museum, remembering the French Revolution bicentenary

Elsa Guily

Abstract

With regards to the exhibition 'Paris-London: Music Migrations, 1962-1989', I investigate the repercussions of representations within the memorialization of the Republican citizenship embedded in the myth of French Revolution (1789), at the National Museum of Immigration History (MNHI) in Paris. One part of the exhibition showcases a dedication to the Bicentenary parade in Paris. The commemoration marks the 200th anniversary of the French Revolution, which was choreographed by the artist Jean Paul Goude and orchestrated by the musician composer Wally Badarou. My research aims at knitting narratives in doing a visual research collage that overcome the delusional idea of the Wes’ embedded in Nationhood as well as in colonialism, together with issues of citizenship representations entangled within the very definition of the National Museum, towards more visibility of postcolonial democratic voices fighting for social justice.
Unpacking interconnections between the public and the personal, the article scrutinizes questions around affect of collective memory by looking at personal photographs and photographic narratives, listening to music and wandering through the exhibition 'Paris-London: Music Migrations, 1962-1989' at the Museum of Immigration History in Paris (MNHI). Thus, it focuses on the entanglement of ‘sonic memory’ within the visual images, such as photographs. How is memory negotiated with reality? What role do personal and national memories play in the politics of the present? To answer, this experience explores the intersections of photography with history and autobiography, questioning how to understand a family photograph as a starting point to critically set up a visual research collage as a strategy to articulate interconnected sensory experiences of memory motifs such as the ‘French Revolution’ carried by objects on the museum’s display. Hence, this essay focuses on ‘memory work’ (Kuhn, 2010), considering both the sonic and visual knowledge modalities entangled in the making of representations. ‘Sonic Memory’ as a conceptual strategy defines a self-critical introspection in conducting research. It consists of listening to the memories embodied within material objects on the Museum’s display together with the echo of other ‘memory work’ bodies (such as family photographs, songs, artworks and private archives). As an empirical impulse, ‘Sonic Memory’ scrutinizes the extent to which objects carry social interconnected sensory experiences. To experience with ‘Sonic Memory’ consists of implementing imagination and intervention as a way to read between the visible lines, to hear the unsaid and to visualize the silenced gaps and thus, acknowledge the agency of objects. This multimodal approach underscores the need to search in the unknown and follow intuitions as well as taking into account the role of speculative fiction while doing research.
Drawn as an expérience (de) mémoire¹ this essay emphasizes how to work from and with memory objects as a means of negotiating with representation apparatus (such as the museum). Hence, I stress the notion of memory motif, a research experience to work with data collection organized in a visual collage, which finds its inspiration in artistic practices at the crossroads of visual research as well as in secondary sources on the role of the ‘work of images’ (Rancière, 2019). This experience aims at deploying a strategy of collage, association and annotation among other visual practices displacing the data collection research as part of the academic writing process. Hence, the memory motif underscores the relation in representations between personal memories and collective imaginary. It asks, how representations celebrating the nation, such as the French Revolution bicentenary, upholds an ‘image dispositive’ (Rancière, 2019) of whiteness citizenship-belonging embedded in colonialism.

The Bicentenary as a memory motif embodied in the family picture

1 In English to translate as a memory experience.
Back home, not long ago my brother and I were having lunch at my father’s place. The latter had put on the side few analogue photographs of our childhood. This series caught my attention as what was represented on the photographs resonates to my Ph.D. research – on representations and discourses of citizenship at the National Museum in France. Those ‘tricolour’ photographs depict my brother and I wearing handmade costumes in blue, white and red to celebrate the French Revolution bicentenary. In the foreground of my research collage (see above figure 1), I have deliberately laid out one of the family albums pictures. I have extracted my brother and me and cut out the background representing a domestic interior. The picture series was taken in the apartment where we grew up in Nanterre – the Parisian suburb. Following Rancière’s notion of ‘the work of images’, I chose to share this photograph to situate myself within a wider body of cultural memory I investigate on the museum’s display. Indeed, ‘we are not in front of the images’ such as the museum would only let us experience but ‘in the middle of it as they are in the middle of us’, as the way images circulating in domestic home and the private life would testify (Rancière, 2019, p. 13). We are inhabited by the images (via media consumptions, for the sake of personal archive, by doing the family album, collecting posters, pictures at home, taking snapshot and sharing them instantly via social media…).²

Photography functions as technology of memory in modern (post-)industrial society. As objects of social meaning, the personal photographs play henceforth, a key role in performing individual’s memories and in negotiating visibilities of citizen’s agency within the national collective memory. Studying cultural memory allows to bridge pre-existing relations between personal memories remaining solely within the family frame and the historical discourses as a form of hegemonic narrative shared among individuals. In other words, cultural memory embodies the relation between the public and the private in performing memory within a specific cultural context. This view has been supported by Marita Sturken, who argues ‘photographs play a primary role in the traffic between personal memory and cultural memory and history (…) the public image, often marked as historical, can change and produce personal memories as well (1999, pp. 178-179). Now, my turn to ask – how to deal with a circulation of a personal photograph into the public, when it depicts my own memory of the past, being a ‘little white child’ dressed up as a ‘French Revolutionary’ wearing the tricolour national flag. The French Revolution bicentenary as a realm of cultural memory is thus, not only embedded in the public institution of the Museum but primary within the intimacy of domestic household. From the private to the public, the imaginary of France’s nationhood is being performed through commemoration of the French Revolution circulating between the public space and the household. By taking this photograph, my father gazes at the embodiment of his nuclear family. Indeed, this photograph embeds my family narrative within the entanglement of the collective imaginary – a fictional experience of the French Revolution as the birth of the Nation. Looking at the Bicentenary as a ‘memory motif’ elaborates discussion on the role played by photographs in regimes of (self-)representation and thus, regarding a wider analysis of museum’s exhibitions based on

² « Nous ne sommes pas devant les images ; nous sommes au milieu d’elles, comme elles sont au milieu de nous. La question est de savoir comment on circule parmi elles, comment on les faits circuler », my own translation in English (Rancière, 2019, p. 13).
personal lived experiences and living memory (such as the case at the MNHI). In his book ‘Camera Lucida’ (1980), Roland Barthes sees the gaze in the photographs as a mutual dynamic between the viewer, the subject and the photographer. Therefore, looking at photographs implements a relational gaze and prompts us to ask ourselves as a researchers – how to gaze at our visual materials. Taking pictures of his children dressed up for the Bicentenary, my father framed his family’s narrative within a public commemoration of the French revolution performing the nation. Looking back at this photograph, I have the opportunity to ask myself, what my relation to this memory and the meaning of such commemoration is.

Reading Marianne Hirsch’s works on family photography as an instrument of cultural dialogue (1991), my interest in memory studies has led my own quest to understand – how family narratives are one of the main social webs perpetuating memories and conserving ancestral histories that can help us to better decipher wider imaginaries of collective memory. As Hirsch asserts familial looking functions as a screen. Her book ‘The Familial Gaze’ studies the multiple looks that circulate within the family, positioning family members in relation to one another and to the gaze of the family (1999, p. xi). Once we have observed inequality in regime of representation, questioned (in)visibility, one interrogation remains – how to perceive resistance and restore agency of the subjects depicted by photography. Thereupon, Hirsch specifies, this is what a dialogue on cultural memory aims at doing:

“resistance becomes a question of the very line between the visibility and invisibility…multilayers reading practice that consistently confronts personal with cultural, political, and economic meaning will locate the resistant elements of a photographic image and will itself be able to produce resistance to the ideologies supported by the medium”


Situating my own personal family narrative in this paper, I engage my research work within a feminist commitment, making a claim about my own life as being political (Harding, 2004; Haraway, 1991). In that sense, sharing the private stories, the familial gaze captured in photography I can address larger historical legacies (Hirsch, 1999); such as the representation of national ideology embedded in the performance of the French Revolution commemoration and the semiotic of the tricolour as national identity, both at home and at the museum. Therefore, as a researcher, it makes sense to use our visual data beyond its status of document, but more like a tool to perform memory and address issues of identification in remembrance. The first part of this experience – making a visual research collage out of my data collections, helps looking at the relation of gazes that are gendered and racialized in representations and intervene through a practice of images upon it.

Looking today at this family picture, I might admit that I don’t remember anything about the Fourteenth of July 1989 and what we did exactly with those costumes that day. But I do remember playing with them a lot during my childhood afterwards. As they remained in our dress up suitcase. Soon I became too tall to fit in this little dress. So, I
would rather have worn the costume trousers of my brother and dressed up in multipleimaginary characters. I cannot remember us ever again playing the little revolutionary
Gavroche. As if the French revolution legacy left us after the commemoration day. Yet,seeing those pictures today, I notice how my ‘familial gaze’ narrative embodied in thatpicture, which re-inscribed within a broader collective imaginary beyond us, a sense
of national belonging to the French citizen body of the Republique. Staged as the lit-tle Gavroche of the revolution on the photographs, the familial gaze would frame mypersonal memory as belonging to the national myth of the French Revolution. In his-toiriography July 14th, 1789 has become France’s national day. When the Bastille wasstormed by revolutionary rioters, is, in the history of the French Revolution, considered
as the first major intervention of the Parisian people in the course of the events and inFrench political life. Dressed in a tricolour drape like the Afro-American opera singerJessy Norman during her Marseillaise interpretation at the Bicentenary parade on the
square of the Arc de Triomphe in Paris, we, the little children of the eighties were em-barked to pay tribute to the Nation. In the household as well as at the parade, wearing
the tricolour flag to remember the French Revolution attempts to perform values of theuniversalist republican citizenship belonging to France’s national body – the embod-iment of democratic Freedom and the birth of Human Rights within the first modernwestern-European Nation.

Despite the burden of the national myth, the photographic narrative may well tell usother things about the remembrance of the bicentenary. As I mentioned, I don’t have
any memory of playing the Gavroche. Yet, I do remember playing a lot with the cos-
tume in a way that subverted the original use and meaning surrounding the tricolorrepresentation of France’s nationhood. in this sense, my brother and I were notquite reproducing the national myth, but just playing with it. In the same way that myfather was less taking pictures to remember the Fête National than the essence of anephemeral playfull alive experience with his children. As a representation of memory,photography does work as a tool of remembrance only if we perform with the object.
As Barthes mentioned, if there is a certain regime of representation orchestrated by thephotographer’s gaze in framing a context for the photography (Studium), our relation as viewer to those representations remain influenced by a personal sensory relation
to it (Punctum), with the gaze of the subject photographed as well as with culturalelements of the photographs working as signs and symbols, which appeal differently from one subject position to the other (Bartes, 1980). Such hijacking of representa-
tional meanings in our personal relation to memory, when it comes to play costumes andperformance of children, could indeed become a useful metaphor for a researchstrategy to address knowledge of ‘the work of images’ with visual data collection. As the child subverts the most serious of situations, I, as a researcher, can play with myimaginary to question multilayers social meanings embedded in the representations ofthe Bicentenary memory motif.

The Bicentenary motif as a ‘work of images’ recontextualizes meaning and interpre-
tation of my data collection within a research collage. In doing so, I merge my ownmemory of the photograph with my encounter of the representation on display to bring
a haptic dimension to my interpretation of memory representation (Campt, 2017, p. 98). Such sensory experience of memory collage questions the very notion of memory
in material culture. How to interact with memory representation and perform them? Working with images allows me to embody the haptic memory experience to look back to the past and to critically situate my own standpoint as researcher looking at the photographs. If yesterday, I was only reading the kindness of family memory on the photographs, today I feel troubled by the brightness of the national tricolours representation and all the binary national identity discourses that they foster as well as all the obliteration they provoke. Our lives are indeed, political, as our bodies are involved in representation policies, not only in the public space but and especially thus, perform in our intimate private space of life and crystalized by amateur photography practice. This experience exemplifies the practices with images as research, in order to rethink ways of working with the materiality of objects between personal archives and museum collections. Such process fosters encountering your data collection, not to prove but rather to discuss your research questions. From that point of experience as scholars, we can work with the images to reveal the pre-existing ‘work of images’ and thereby, acknowledge artistic practice as research itself (Sullivan, 2010; Rancière, 2019, Pink, 2008).

Thus, the practice of visual research allows to re-read image from different set of vantage points (Hirsch, 1999, p. xix).

Using my own family picture to counter the public history narrative with the personal, I link the photographs of my family album within a larger historical and political context, namely the museum as dispositive of collective representation. I make a collage out of my visual data (printed and copied) – creating displacement and recontextualization, in order to underline their agencies. I acknowledge my gaze, as researcher to the visual material, the gaze of the subject of photographs and of the photographer. Analysing the gazes leads to demonstrate how the Nation is performed and interpreted within the making of representation – at home in taking photographs as commemorative act and at the museum creating a display of representation on the event of commemoration, visualizing historical narratives in using documents of archives. My personal photographs of the Bicentenary show how the familial memory is performed within the frame of nationhood representations. Playing with experience of the French revolution revives issues around historiography of the Nation and its ‘realm of memory’.

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3 This visual research approach follows the path of empirical abductive research – puzzling with the unknow to lose yourself within the observation and questions until you realize how the frame is produced by the process of leaving the comfort zone of knowing (Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2012)
The Bicentenary as ‘realm of memory’

Figure 3: zoom in the visual research collage

Figure 3 bis: Jean Paul Goude Exhibition catalogue MNHI

Back at the museum’s display, the close up of my research collage shows studio photographs of costumes designed for the Bicentenary parade. I found those images in the exhibition’s catalogue. The figures on the photographs reveal characters of a nostalgic past, namely on the right, a white male in military uniform hanging an umbrella upon a black woman, air-breast wearing trousers in wax print and wearing an odd hat – inspirations picked up here and there as fashion does, appropriating cultures. Such images illustrate the very idea of ‘multiculturalism integration’ à la française. The white male in a paternalistic and powerful pose next to the ‘sexualized desired’ body of a black woman. July 14, the national day celebrates the completion of republican historiography and the French nation as indivisible (Citron, 2008/2017). However, the Bicentenary parade seemed here to ambiguously reviving representations of a ‘colonial desire’ emphasizing cultural differences through a desire of the otherness while erasing the genealogy of race ideologies (19th century) to which such power constructions of marking otherness belong (Young, 1995).

The Museum curator Stephane Malfettes states about the motif of the Bicentenary in the exhibition – the artistic project for the parade was that the entire world pays tribute to France (as a nation) to have able the very idea of the revolution (Malfettes, 2019). Putting this event in the foreground of a history of music migrations, the curatorial discourse emphasizes Paris as multicultural urban society. Yet, Vincent Martigny (2019) asserts the commemoration of the French Revolution Bicentenary was entangled between controversial political goals. On the one hand, it celebrated the idea of a global transnational culture embedded in the arts. While on the other hand, it underlined the eulogy of a so-called ‘French universal culture’ embodied in the very foundation of the French democratic Republic, embracing diversity under the conditions ‘to be painted tricolour’. According to Martigny, the show celebrated less France’s cultural diversity than the virtues of the Republic as a homogeneous national body (2019, p. 166). 1981, the presidential elections brought the socialist Francois Mitterrand to power, celebrating the very idea of a multiculturalist society. If the socialist government encourages cultural diversity, it does not fail to place a well-thought-out republican discourse highlighting the idea of the French Nation as a ‘welcoming land’, not far from a colonial past that pronounces the merits of a French-style civilizing mission rocked by universalist imperialism. Soon after in 1983, the far-right wing party Front National sees its electorates growing. In the same year after repeated police murdering on the descendants of ‘postcolonial migrations’5 in France, the March of Equality crosses over the country and gains in public visibility for anti-racist claims. Ending up in Paris, the March committee is welcomed by Mitterrand, whose government advocates a multicultural egalitarian French society and promotes the legacy of so-called ‘immigration cultures’ under the discourse of diversity.

5 I have preferred to use the term ‘migration’ than ‘immigration’ to refer more widely to those who are descended from parents of the former French colonial territories that moved to France (former metropole) for economic and socio-political reasons during the colonisation and after the decolonisation. This term encompasses social realities lived by communities particularly affected by institutional discriminations and urban violence in modern France, surrounded by questions of (in)visibility of ethnic diversity of minority groups within the Republican model of French nationhood embedded in whiteness. On the history of immigration with regards to postcolonial theories in France, read further: Boubeker 2013; Hajjat 2005; Hargreaves, McKinney1997 ; Kleppinger, Reeck 2018).
The eighties marked the advent of a multicultural society. A birth in the form of conflicts, revolts, advances and setbacks in the recognition of cultural diversity, of which Paris is one of the urban capitals. This view has been supported by Angéline Esscarfé Dublet, co-curator of the exhibition, who suggests that the MNHI is the cultural outcome of the new immigration policies emerging in the eighties (Escafré-Dublet, 2014). Celebrating multicultural heritage as the very union of all cultures under the French nation, it is this whole paradigm of French multicultural conceptions from the unresolved tensions of colonialism and imperialism agendas that resurfaces. Thus, the Bicentenary motif at the exhibition sustains a representation of post-colonial cultures within the discourse republican model of ‘integration’ at the core of the historiography of the national myth. Therefore, the Museum aims at drawing a homogeneous representation of the so-called ‘immigration culture’ as a ‘renewed’ social category of the national identity in postcolonial France (Escafré-Dublet, 2014, p. 17). Arguing that the permanent exhibition ‘Repère’ already raised the question of the representation of the migratory experience within the logic of intégration, Escafré Dublet suggests, the MNHI seeks to demonstrate how the immigration experience contributes to French culture. In this respect the Bicentenary motif would underline the emergence of inclusive approaches to French cultural diversity as a bulwark against the rise of the Front nationalist and racist identity discourses (Escafré-Dublet, 2014, p. 24). However, the choices of multiculturalist representations are in line with a republican conception of the integration of immigrants into the nation, regardless of their origin, race or religion. Such a universalist gaze on diversity leads to invisibility of cultural differences. Embedded in the genealogy of the French Revolution, the national Museum’s mission, suggests Nora Sternfeld, is to provide a discourse on the shared cultural values, sense of belonging and to represent modes of affect to citizenship belonging (2018, p. 40/41). By displaying the Bicentenary narrative in order to acknowledge the presence of music migrations underlines the idea of France as the very nation of civilization and of human rights, where every ‘foreigner’ would be supposedly welcomed as long as they follow the right path of assimilation to the national body though.

The Bicentenary as being the ‘Republique’s realm of memory’ per excellence, stands for the representation and legacy of democratic citizenship, ‘the miracle of the freedom’ (Citron, 2008/2017). Yet, one could ask, to whom was this concept of the revolutionary museum thought? And to which extend the Bicentenary parade has been partly a commemoration of a colonial desire representing the Republique while racializing the Others. The event represents how the entire world could pay tribute to France to have enabled the Revolution and thereby, the birth of modern democratic nation. Thus, the Bicentenary would seemingly commemorate, how France’s colonial history had abled the nation project to be born and a revolution to take place. According to the historian Jules Michelet, the National holiday of July 14 implements the French republican historiography and the completion of the French nation (Citron, 2008/2017). If the vision of the French republican model is based on forgetting the colonial past, it forgets also, to question the origins of the republican concept based on the ideology of colonialism. In reaction to principle of obliterating in the historiography, Citron suggests that such a historical tradition, is inherited in fact from the Great narrative of colonial Republicanism, which subordinates the reading of the past to the celebration of power must be definitively broken in all levels of education. So, that the memories of the oppressed,
the defeated, the rebels, the colonized, who are the ancestors of many French people, find in history, a historical grounding. To conclude, the French Revolution is the founding event of the republican history in France. Its Bicentenary is thereby, more a realm of memory (a myth) of the Republic, based in the indivisible unity through the abolition of every cultural differences. The national slogan – the republic is one and indivisible, literally expresses it. Indivisible means in other words to not notice diversity among folks of the national body. Placing the French revolution bicentenary in the middle of the exhibition, the MNHI frames the history of music migrations in the lens of political discourses on the integration of so-called “immigration cultures” within the republican historiography.

When memories struggle

Figure 4: Vinyl cover of Carte de Séjour’s album Rorohomanie (1984, on display at the Museum) and (below) a zoom in my visual research collage.
Wandering in the exhibition a sonic memory resonates in my head – ‘Douce France’\(^6\) cover interpreted by the band “Carte de Séjour” and their legendary singer Rachid Taha:

\[
\begin{align*}
&« \text{Il revient à ma mémoire} \\
&\text{Des souvenirs familiers} \\
&(…) \\
&\text{Douce France} \\
&\text{Cher pays de mon enfance} \\
&\text{Bercé de tendre insouciance} \\
&\text{Je t’ai gardé dans mon cœur} »
\end{align*}
\]

Despite the absence of the song in the exhibition’s soundtracks (listenable via a series of digital “Walkman stations” with headphones), a vinyl of the band Carte de Séjour hangs on a wall (see Figure 4). Carte de Séjour combines different music genre, such as Raï, Chaâbi, Techno, Rock’n roll. With their music and voices, the band raises possibility of insurrection to express social realities of structural racism (unemployment, police violence, facial discrimination, poverty). Growing in the context of the anti-establishment punk movement, Carte de Séjour’s melodies left their mark on the eighties youth with lyrics describing the daily lives of migrants from France’s former colonies now residing in the working-class neighbourhoods of major cities such as Lyon, Paris and Marseille. Samia Messaoudi, a former journalist at Radio Beur recalls Rachid Taha (Carte de Séjour’s singer) came to a radio show to sing ‘Douce France’ (Martigny, 2019, p. 129).

If the March for equality became a turning point in the expression of (post-)migration struggles, radiophonic practices plaid also, a major role in sustaining forms of political self-expression such as music that emerged in and around the March. Autonomous local radio became not only a principle medium for self-expression but also a main communication channel between minorities and the mainstream medias. Carte de Séjour’s cover ‘Douce France’ features the rise to fame for the band and open a new era in regime of visibility in mainstream media for minorities in France. Singing Charles Trenet’s famous hit of the forties, Rachid Taha as a young Algerian who migrated to France in 1968 and began to work in the factory where he met the other musician of Carte de Séjour, draws into complexities how music legacies relating to transnational representations of migratory life experiences challenges and revisits the national historiography. Singing ‘Douce France’, Carte de Séjour delivers on the one side a representation of the well-integrated Algerian worker immigrant, who has learned to fit the French republican values. Listening to the lyrics the song could fit to cultural assimilation agenda to the French Republic (references to the power institutions such as the school, the catholic church, etc). Like my family photograph of the Bicentenary, at the first sight, ‘Douce France’ seems to frame the migratory experiences in the narrative of integration discourses, obliviating differences. As we all, beyond consciousness bear

6 Version available here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z8wrvbs9B8Q&feature=youtu.be
7 Extract of the lyrics ‘Douce France’ – a song written by Charles Trenet in 1943, composed with Léo Chauliac and recorded in 1947 and interpreted by Carte de Séjour in 1986.
and reproduce with unequal consequences willing to wear the scarf of national identity belonging. However, by no mean, we could reduce Rachid Taha’s musical oeuvre to this single representation. The cover is thereby, complex and somehow controversial. Yet, it is on the controversy that lies all its interest playing with semiotic ambiguities in and around the myth of French national culture. If the song has been a national hit, the question remains: who is allowed to embody and cover its melody, to remember the sweet country of their childhood and what when your childhood belong to more than one national space and culture...? Naïve and sarcastic at the same time the tone of Taha’s interpretation addresses issues of belonging to the republican imaginary by mean of re-appropriation of the song. Not without issues the cover became a mainstream hit at the end of the eighties.

After the “March for Equality”, “Carte de séjour” re-appropriation embodies the rise of visibility for self-empowerment in pop culture for the youth of postcolonial migration background. The exhibition’s viewer can find some traces of the multi-voices of the migratory life experiences and struggles on display. Yet, clear connexions between the different generations of music voicing out struggles for more equalities and citizenship rights are missing on the display. It calls to question: what if there is an important repertoire of pop music plays in and around the decolonization struggles that would trace back more intricate memories of migratory life experiences? I argue that deepening to the practice of music allows to highlight sonic memories to listen to the living conditions of those who have migrated. Not only immigration policies restricted the rights of migrants by introducing new legislations since the 1970s, but also gradually reinforced stigmatization through a cultural apparatus promoting racist symbols and strengthening stereotypes. Those realities are indeed, heavily discussed and denounced in the lyrics of popular music produced by people of postcolonial migratory life experiences.

The Studio Session’ is a series of concert and talks accompanying the exhibition ‘Paris-London: Music migrations’. The program elaborates further, on topics raised in the exhibition and brings a sonic dimension to the visual display. Where it seems, the Museum had obliviated some important narrative of music migrations history, the event stages back the missing voices. Indeed, it was a great discover to see Rocé being invited to present his recently released compilation ‘Par les damnés de la terre 1968-1988’ referring to Frantz Fanon’s oeuvre and compiling rare almost forgotten protest songs of decolonial struggles in the francophone music repertoire.

Following the path of sonic memory that the vinyl cover of Carte de Séjour evoked me, I would like to further, turn the analysis beyond the museum’s display towards a wider sonic collective memory embedded in Rachid Taha’s greatest-most-famous hit cover performed in 1993 on his second self-titled album. The cover song pays tribute to the well-known original song of Dahman El-Harrachi (1973). One of the major references in the Algerian cultural memory, the musician Dahmance El-Harrachi, was a songwriter and singer of chaabi music. His song ‘Ya Rayah’ (the one who is leaving in Arabic) stresses the topic of the difficult living conditions of the emigrant living in exile. It became a great success soon after its release in the early seventies and still remains a hit up to my generation thanks for Rachid Taha’s cover.
The compilation is accompanied by a booklet including unpublished texts by historians Naïma Yahi and Amzat Boukari-Yabara. This project responds to the need to give (back) voice to music legacies almost forgotten to the new generations. It offers another history of Francophone music beyond the scope of the so-called genre ‘chanson française’, somewhat contributing to feature a national idea of what French culture should sound like and thus, mainly highlighting success of white singers to embody ‘frenchness’. Whereas the sound of those obliviated voices crystallize an era when struggles generated transnational and anti-colonial solidarities. As Rocé states: “this project was a way of looking for our elders. I appreciate these artists who are not part of French music and yet they make music in French” (2019). With this compilation, Rocé makes listenable a continuity in the poetic of struggles plaid by musician. As the artist states, the compilation renegotiates ‘French music’ history including less mainstream artists but of primary importance. Their songs are testimonies of migratory life narratives at the intersection of exile, anti-colonial struggles, working class and subaltern conditions which legacies of experiences are dedicated to the offspring of diasporas and of the workers. Rocé asserts the need of sharing memory to recover from the past.
in the present (Rocé, 2019). As part of the youth that saw the birth of French RAP, a radical emancipatory tool for resistance against social inequalities and ordinary racism, in doing this compilation Rocé is conducting a ‘memory work’, performing and re-enacting memories of the past both in and with the media and thereby, bridges past tradition of music struggles with the one of his generation and the futurities (Kuhn, 2010). In an interview Rocé claims having design the compilation to provide a tool of transmission, for the new generations as well as for the teachers, politicians, among public institutions of power in order to critically address issues of representation around the myth of a French national culture and history told in the classroom, which still remains based on a former colonial republican imaginary and imperial historicity (Bocandé, 2018).

To complete the loop about negotiating national myth in cultural memory, Rocé’s song ‘Je chante la France’ asks, why for some of the citizens it remains hard to happily sing France? To fully enjoy a sense of collective belonging? Such question responds to Carte de Séjour’s re-appropriation of ‘Douce France’ and especially to the collective remembering practice of singing the national hymn, ‘la Marseillaise’. The decolonial sound emerging of Rocé’s song renegotiates notions of cultural belonging, remembering a continuity of dissidence in Rap music that also finds its textual and thematic origins in former references of the elders who lived exiles, of the diasporas, the former colonized, who have been writing texts in French to sing the fight for independence and expressed living conditions of the oppressed (Bocandé, 2018).

Listening to discourses which were only heard as a noise

Renewing strategy to display visual research within the academic writing, I demonstrate through a visual research collage practice how the Museum represents collective memory in using objects of memory and artist practices to perform and even re-enact memory. I began to remember a singular intimate indoor playful moment of childhood while

11 Title is inspired by Jacques Rancière’s statement (in French) : “voir ce qui n’avait jamais lieu d’être vu, faire entendre comme discours ce qui n’était entendu que comme un bruit », quoted in (Rocé, 2019, p. 3)
looking at my own family photograph. Putting in the foreground, my sensory relation to my family photograph representing the Bicentenary helped me to situate myself as researcher to the cultural history discourses, I address in this article. Investigating my own relation to this memory motif in regards to the institutional discourse provided by the museum, I have created analogies with sonic memories not necessarily visible or listenable on display. Hence, working with images of memory and enhancing imagination, I have stressed how this commemoration marks a turning point re-negotiating the representation of the universalist nation project embedded in France’s colonial history. Scrutinizing the impact of a memory motif such as the Bicentenary from the personal to the collective memory, I have shown how the MNHI promotes the representation of integration within the republican historiography and the myth of a French national culture. Listening to sonic memories on display together with the personal memory, tackles to an experience of practicing research with images. It aims at rethinking visual research at the museum and strategies of visibility within an exploration of migratory life experiences – and which can, in turn, creates or underlines narratives of disobedience as ways to unfold and unpack the concept of museum in France embedded in nation-building and carrying colonial legacies.

References


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