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The Duality of Multiculturalism in 1500's and Contemporary Germany: Between Political and Curated Cultural Capital

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Abstract

My research analyzes the hegemonic power of museums through the use of Jean Baudrillard's concept of simulacra and Pierre Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital. I analyze museum objects and museum signage in Berlin's temporary exhibit in the Humboldt Box and the permanent Ottoman collection on display in the Pergamon's Museum of Islamic Art juxtaposed with anti-Turkish rhetoric as seen as early as the 16th century in Edward Schoen's woodblock prints as well as political speeches that have taken place within the last five years in Germany.

Résumé

Cet article analyse le pouvoir hégémonique des musées, grâce au concept de simulacre (Jean Baudrillard) et à celui de capital culturel (Pierre Bourdieu). J'y étudie les objets et la signalétique de l'exposition temporaire au Humboldt Box, à Berlin, et de la collection permanente ottomane au Pergamon's Museum of Islamic Art, juxtaposée à la rhétorique anti-turque rencontrée dès le XVI^e siècle dans les gravures sur bois d'Edward Schoen et à des discours politiques qui sont tenus ces cinq dernières années en Allemagne.

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Multiculturalism, or the arena in which multi identities are performed, has “failed” according to much of contemporary German political rhetoric but it lives on in the signage of German museum exhibitions. Multiculturalism according to cultural studies, is a discursive space where the identity struggle of national minorities can be rendered visible.¹¹⁴ This paper analyzes how the contemporary Turkish diaspora, the largest minority population in Germany, is represented and silenced in political rhetoric as well as museum exhibitions. My research explores the differences between visual representations of multiculturalism and nation-state political rhetoric in contemporary Germany. These conflicting messages have differing economic statuses, target audiences as well as different goals. One is meant to appear to the global citizen that frequents Berlin museums which showcase Germany as sensitive to world culture and accepting of other traditions and embracing the mandates of multiculturalism. On the other hand, the domestic, political message is constructed in a monocultural narrative surrounding the question of who belongs in the German imagined community and who does not.

Overarching Questions

To what end is multiculturalism simply “on display” in Germany? How does this positivist display mimic or oppose a lived view of multiculturalism in Germany? What role does the museum have in constructing an international, transnational ideology? How does the media undermine or stabilize curatorial viewpoints? Art historians and museum scholars often analyze the museum of the modern nation-state. Yet what must be incorporated into this discussion is the museum’s ability to include or silence minority voices.

¹¹⁴ Chicago Cultural Studies Group. “Critical Multiculturalism.” *Critical Inquiry* 18.3 (Spring 1992): 541.

Curating Cultural Capital

The hegemonic power of the museum is exhibited in how it curates a sense of the past, describes the present or projects into the future. As Pierre Bourdieu expands our ideas of capital he outlines the concept of cultural capital as something which is an “embodied capital, external wealth converted into an integral part of the person, into a habitus, that cannot be transmitted instantaneously.”¹¹⁵ Social value is also key in determining if something is considered to possess cultural capital. Cultural capital is held within the walls of the museum. A sense of power is displayed when a curator chooses what to display or what to keep hidden. This sense of cultural capital actually starts well before the curator chooses from the museum’s inventory: it starts with the museum’s acquisitions. Even before acquisitions one must evaluate the social norms for what is considered “museum worthy” in a given society. What is upheld and preserved in a society speaks to the cultural capital of that particular space and place.

German Curated Visions of Multiculturalism

While in Berlin in December 2011, I analyzed the site of the soon to be rebuilt Berliner Schloss (Berlin Palace). Currently on the construction site sits the “Humboldt Box” a temporary exhibition space which boasts itself to be a “global site of art and culture.” We see curators playing to the global tourist and using the idea and ideals of multiculturalism to promote the cultural capital of the Museum Island in Berlin. Its temporary exhibits strive to display “a kaleidoscope of impressive examples out of science, art, culture and the new global society” (signage within the Humboldt Box). Yet in practice German public discourse exhibits a stark opposition to the living multicultural entities that populate present day

¹¹⁵ Pierre Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power*, trans. Gino Raymond and Matthew Adamson (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991), 48.

Germany. As Angela Merkel notoriously commented on October 16, 2010, "Multiculturalism has utterly failed" while speaking at the Deutschland Tag der Jungen Union (Germany Day of the Young Union).¹¹⁶ She was referring here not to the elite, international museum goer that visits Berlin to see the sights, explore the history and frequent the monuments and museums of the city. Instead she is referring to the Turkish guestworker that relocated to Germany at the beginnings of the program in the late 1960s which started in order to help rebuild Germany after World War II. Turkish guestworkers that permanently settled in Germany and their subsequent families comprise the largest minority group in Germany.

In 2009 the German Bundestag set up the Berlin Palace-Humboldt Forum Foundation to oversee the construction of the project to reconstruct the Prussian palace. The current exhibition in the Humboldt box is in both German and English. The box states that "the Berlin Palace reinstates the original arrangement of central Berlin...[the] 1700s palace was developed by Andreas Schlüter into the king's residence, it became the most important secular Baroque building in Germany" (Humboldt Box signage). Here we see the Berlin museum world going back in time to reconstruct a destroyed piece of architecture instead of moving forward with the contemporary voice of the city. All the while the organization, Kölnischer Kunstverein, in Cologne, Germany has been striving to gather material for a museum on the recent history of the Turkish guestworker in Germany but it has not found funding to acquire space to exhibit the already collected objects. As an alternative to a museum the organization has gathered the materials and essays and created the book *Projekt Migration*. Yet the book does not act as an equal substitution for a museum, which stands as a public display of this historic time and a voice to this minority's experience and place in Germany. Here we see the silencing of a collective

memory. What does it say about multiculturalism in Germany if such a project cannot find financial backing? Does this speak to the silencing of a subaltern collective memory, a group of inhabitants that are restricted from marking the physical and intellectual terrain of the museum landscape with their history, or perhaps better described as their collective memory?

Anti-Turkish Sentiments before the German Nation-State

Before Germany became a unified nation-state in 1990s it was split between West Germany and East Germany. Before the Cold War era divide and the rise of the nation-state, the country was marked by a plethora of principalities. This time period was illustrated and documented by notable woodblock artists like Erhard Schoen, Albrecht Altdorfer and Albrecht Dürer. The woodblock print was the main medium of communication in Germany in the 15th century. Specifically, Erhard Schoen's work depicts the angst and anti-Turkic sentiments those in German principalities felt with the fear of the Ottoman Empire taking over Western Europe. Schoen was born and lived in Nuremberg from 1491-1542. His active work in single-leaf woodcuts took place from 1525-1550 in Nuremberg.¹¹⁷ His woodblock titled *Siege of Münster* from 1535 shows the invasion of space and place by the Ottomans.¹¹⁸ The Ottoman tents mark the landscape as intruders upon the Germanic soil. We see the village in the far right, the windmills burning and soldiers being carried off on stretchers. The scene paints a picture of the invasion of the "other."¹¹⁹ Another woodblock titled *Ravages of the Turks* shows the Germanic people being captured by the Ottoman soldiers while in the background the German villages are engulfed in flames. An Ottoman elite is depicted as parading through the landscape with the crescent

¹¹⁶ "Merkel Erklärt Multikulti für Gescheitert." *Der Spiegel Online*. October 16, 2010, accessed April 15, 2012, <http://www.spiegel.de/politik/deutschland/integration-merkel-erklaert-multikulti-fuer-gescheitert-a-723532.html>.

¹¹⁷ Erhard Schoen, *The German Single-leaf Woodcut 1500-1550* (vol.4), ed. Walter Strauss (New York, NY: Hacker Art Books, 1974), xii.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 1256-1257.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*

moon and star on his canopy headed by horsemen carrying swords, trumpets and sticks topped with German soldier's heads.¹²⁰ The *Siege of Vienna* advertises the furthest battle site of the Ottoman Empire.¹²¹ Again the Ottoman tents are carved throughout the print surrounding the city of Vienna. In 1541 Schoen produced a woodblock print *Siege of Budapest* that also marks the invasion of the Ottoman Empire on Budapest; again the motif of the surrounding Ottoman tents demarcates the "other's" visible mark and stands as a threat to Western Europe.¹²² To mark the sentiments of how Germans felt about the Turk, one only need to look at Schoen's *Heathen* blockprint of 1530 which shows an Ottoman soldier atop a horse.¹²³ The woodblock is inscribed with the inscription that reads:

I am born in Persia
 Goldinus is my name
 I hope all the time
 To Constantinople city
 In which he has got ready
 To destroy the complete German lands
 To make his kingdom stronger/bigger
 (Schoen 1239).¹²⁴

tourists that fit the cosmopolitan rhetoric of the Kantian vein. Yet the domestic populace is surrounded by anti-immigrant political rhetoric. How can these two veins exist in one space? They can co-exist because they market different socio-economic spheres creating a disjuncture in curated expressions of multiculturalism and lived expressions of multiculturalism in the contemporary German nation-state, hence the duality of multiculturalism seen in Germany today.

Conclusion: The Turkish Guestworker in Germany

Today the sentiments of Turks taking over Germany seem to mimic the anti-Turkic message of Schoen's woodblock prints from the 16th century. Yet today we are in a time of the nation-state and the Turkish immigrant population was invited into the space to help modernize Germany. This is all positioned within the cosmopolitan lines of the German museum world that markets a type of global perspective to its target audience, the international tourist. Here we see the historical vestiges of anti-Turkish sentiments alongside the rhetoric of the museum curators that market to an elite class of jet-setting

¹²⁰ Ibid., 1251-1253.

¹²¹ Ibid., 1246-1247.

¹²² Ibid., 1269-1273.

¹²³ Ibid., 1239.

¹²⁴ Translated by Miriam Mayer