



Critical Heritages of Europe

ISLAM AND HERITAGE IN EUROPE

PASTS, PRESENTS AND FUTURE POSSIBILITIES

Edited by
Katarzyna Puzon, Sharon Macdonald
and Mirjam Shatanawi



Islam and Heritage in Europe

Islam and Heritage in Europe provides a critical investigation of the role of Islam in Europe's heritage. Focusing on Islam, heritage and Europe, it seeks to productively trouble all of these terms and throw new light on the relationships between them in various urban, national and transnational contexts.

Bringing together international scholars from a range of disciplines, this collection examines heritage-making and Islam in the context of current events in Europe, as well as analysing past developments and future possibilities. Presenting work based on ethnographic, historical and archival research, chapters are concerned with questions of diversity, mobility, decolonisation, translocality, restitution and belonging. By looking at diverse trajectories of people and things, this volume encompasses multiple perspectives on the relationship between Islam and heritage in Europe, including the ways in which it has played out and transformed against the backdrop of the 'refugee crisis' and other recent developments, such as debates on decolonising museums or the resurgence of nationalist sentiments.

Islam and Heritage in Europe discusses specific articulations of belonging and non-belonging, and the ways in which they create new avenues for re-thinking Islam and heritage in Europe. This ensures that the book will be of interest to academics, researchers and postgraduate students engaged in the study of heritage, museums, Islam, Europe, anthropology, archaeology and art history.

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Critical Heritages of Europe

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Heritage, Islam, Europe

Entanglements and directions. An introduction

*Mirjam Shatanawi, Sharon Macdonald and
Katarzyna Puzon*

In looking at heritage, Islam and Europe, this volume seeks to productively trouble all of these terms and throw new light on the relationships between them. In this way, it contributes fresh insights to existing debates in heritage and museum studies, and to the discussion of Islam in Europe.

The position and role of Islam in Europe is contested – especially as it intersects with ideas of heritage. On the one hand, Islam is frequently depicted as not properly European, or as at odds with what are claimed to be European values or European heritage. On the other, however, are arguments that Islam has long been part of Europe and should, therefore, be seen as part of European heritage; or that the many and diverse heritages of those who currently live in Europe – whenever and from wherever they arrived – should today all be regarded as part of the continent's and its various national heritages.

The notion of Islam itself is also contested. Is it a religion, a tradition, or a culture? Or a civilisation, a premise that undergirds most museum representations? Is Islam characterised by internal 'difference, diversity and disagreement' – or the opposite? Can, and should, a distinction be made between 'Islam' (the religion, as an unchanging universal core) and 'Muslim culture' (its fallible human interpretations) – positions that some see as diametrically opposed (e.g. Ahmed, 2016; Jouili, 2019)? Some European Muslims have argued that such a distinction is especially important to make in the face of the current negative public representations of Islam. And what are the pre-suppositions and effects of 'Islamic heritage' (see also Rico, 2017)?

In this volume, we examine such debates, highlighting how particular ideas of Islam, heritage and Europe are variously mobilised at different times and in different places, and looking at how they play out in specific instances. To do so is to take all of the terms of our title not as designating fixed entities but, rather, as subject to diverse interpretations, and as changeable and changing. At the same time, however, we are interested in when and how these may be stabilised (as well as opened up), by whom and in what ways. In particular, we are concerned with how they are materialised through infrastructures, practices and processes, such as those of museum taxonomies, buildings and sites, exhibitions, rituals, and creative reworking of traditional forms. Thus, our contributors variously look both at official sites of heritage, such as museums and designated heritage buildings, including not only some mosques, but also those, for example, sacred landscapes and cemeteries, that

are not so designated but are nevertheless regarded by their participants as of current value and having significant continuities with the past. Moreover, we expand our scope still further to also encompass practices bound up with senses of self that invoke the past, such as particular deployments of music, sound or scent. By opening up heritage in this way, *Islam and Heritage in Europe* also suggests ways in which heritage itself might be rethought.

As well as looking at a broad array of forms of heritage, contributors to the volume also discuss cases in many different European countries, including Bosnia and Herzegovina, France, Germany, Montenegro, the Netherlands, Russia, Spain, Turkey and the United Kingdom. The geographical scope is, however, broader still, for the people, heritages and Islams involved interconnect in various ways with other parts of the world, inside and outside Europe. Temporally, our emphasis is on the present, but this takes us back into the various pasts that are mobilised as heritage, as well as to those that exert continuing influence in the present. This includes colonial histories, which are implicated in the bringing of certain objects to museum collections, as well as many Muslims to Europe, not least in recent so-called refugee crises.

As the subtitle of our book – *Pasts, Presents and Future Possibilities* – indicates, our concern is also to look at what has been and is underway in order to consider what might be potentials for both research and practice in the future. Below, we initiate this by providing broader context for the chapters that follow, as well as introducing the chapters themselves.

The heritage of Islam in Europe

Heritage from the Muslim world has been entering European collections since the time of the Crusades, accumulating over centuries in vast collections in museums, libraries and private homes across the continent. Muslims have had a long historical presence in al-Andalus and in medieval Sicily, as well as in Southeast Europe and Russia, where they remain significant minorities within the population. More recently, postcolonial and workforce migration, together with the seeking of refuge and asylum, have brought them to many more European countries, leading not only to a larger but also to a more varied Muslim presence in the continent. To give an indication of numbers: in 2016, 4.9% of Europe's population was estimated to be Muslim, with figures ranging from 0.2% or less in Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia and the Baltic states, to 11.1% in Bulgaria, 8.8% in France and 8.1% in Sweden.¹ The recent migrant experience has also led to a tendency, especially in Western and Northern Europe, to consider Muslims in Europe primarily through the lens of migration, contributing to a widespread tendency to equate Muslims with migrants (e.g. Brown, 2000; Shryock, 2019), overlooking the fact that Islam has played a part in Europe's history and culture for centuries.

The longstanding presence of Islam in Southern and Eastern Europe gives an alternative potential for heritagisation than does the more recent presence in Western Europe (see, for instance, McMurray's chapter in this volume). This does not necessarily mean that Islam will become part of the mainstream national heritage in those countries where it had a longer presence. For most of the formerly

socialist countries of Southern and Eastern Europe, the rebuilding of national identities since the 1990s has usually excluded giving much attention to Islamic heritage. Indeed, as Jesko Schmoller (this volume) describes for the case of Russia, emphasis on the Christian Orthodox Church – or, rather, on a specific church that becomes the national one, tends to leave Muslims as marginalised as they were during socialist times, or even more so.² Interestingly, even an ideology of Eurasianism, in which Russia explicitly positions itself between Europe and Asia, which might in theory have allowed Islam to also be cast as part of Russian identity, does not overcome this. Nevertheless, they continue their practices, though, as Schmoller argues, this should not be seen as some kind of identity politics – that is, as some kind of publicly active resistance.

Islamic heritage has also played a part in building distinctive identities in the post-socialist and post-Balkan-War period. For those countries that formerly belonged to the Ottoman Empire, and today have substantial Muslim populations (most notably Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria and the Republic of North Macedonia), this includes Ottoman heritage (Adie, 2019; Bryce & Čaušević, 2019; Merdjanova, 2013; Velioglu, 2013). Muslim holy places are also important heritage sites for South European Muslims, such as the Ajvatovica, a place of annual pilgrimage and Europe's largest Muslim gathering near Prusac in Bosnia and Herzegovina (Henig, 2012; Rujanac, 2013). Even within and between these countries, however, there remains considerable ambivalence over Islamic heritage (see especially Velioglu, 2013) – with which 'Ottoman' is, not unproblematically, often regarded as synonymous.³ In Skopje, capital of what since 2019 is officially called the Republic of North Macedonia, for example, some proposed restoration of Islamic architectural heritage has met with local resistance owing to a strong association of Islam with the neighbouring enemy, Albania (Dimova, 2019). Likewise, in 2020, the Louvre cancelled a forthcoming exhibition about Bulgaria's Ottoman past, following concern from Bulgarian lenders over the curatorial framework, which focused on stylistic dialogues between Christian and Islamic art (Greenberger, 2020). Such disputes are not necessarily new, however. Michael Herzfeld's classic study, *A Place in History: Social and Monumental Time in a Cretan Town* (1991), shows local people objecting to what they see as official attempts to preserve 'Turkish' architectural features. In Turkey itself, Ottoman heritage – as architecture and art – has a chequered history (see Karaca, this volume; Shaw, 2010). In recent years, however, the Ottoman past has become increasingly – if still unevenly – celebrated, revived especially by conservative Islamist politics, often playing into a political rejection of European identity, though sometimes into its selective embracing (Bozoğlu, 2019; Bozoğlu & Whitehead, 2018; Girard, 2015; Göle, 2015).

Within Southern Europe, Spain has most enthusiastically and prominently – although nevertheless ambivalently – embraced an Islamic heritage (Arigita, 2013; Astor, 2017; Mediano, 2013). The Iberian Peninsula, and the period of al-Andalus (711–1492), has attracted much attention of scholars interested in translocality of heritage, including questions of 'shared heritage' (Civantos, 2017), Spain's colonial project (Calderwood, 2018) and dealing with its various legacies (Arigita, 2013; Hirschkind, 2014; Puerta Vilchez, 2010). As Avi Astor shows in his chapter in this

volume, the vaunted revival of al-Andalus has not led to a widespread embracing of contemporary Islam and Muslims, or of Islamic heritage elsewhere in the country. While it would probably be too strong to argue that the very fact that Andalusia is considered to have such a rich Islamic heritage feeds into other parts of Spain ignoring it, the case clearly shows how limits are set on how far even a much admired Islamic heritage comes to be seen as part of wider national or European heritage. Elsewhere too, a flagging up and even celebration of Muslim presence and Islamic heritage in some parts of a country – perhaps even certain cities, such as Bradford in the United Kingdom being colloquially referred to as ‘Bradistan’ on account of its population connected with Pakistan (see McLoughlin, 2014) – risks being double-edged, leading to ghettoisation rather than inclusion.

It should also be recognised that heritage has played an important role in the discourses and practices that Muslims and Muslim ‘communities’ mobilise to negotiate Islam’s place in Western Europe. Mosques, through their visibility and audibility, mediate between the public and the private, the secular and the religious. They can also be agents of transformations – and what might be seen as ‘new’ heritage-making – in an urban context, as Petra Kuppinger (2015, 2019) shows in her examination of the Salam Mosque complex in the German city of Stuttgart.

Transcending Europe’s borders

Islam in Europe is connected beyond the imagined geographical borders of Europe through multiple kinds of entanglements. These include those of transborder movements of people through migration – recent or longer ago – as well as continuing connections, such as through relatives or wider faith-based communities, as well as through ideas and imaginaries. The very notion of the *ummah* – to designate a world community of Muslims – is thoroughly translocal, transcending nations as well as regions (e.g. van der Veer, 2002). How it is understood and lived in practice may well vary between groups and localities, of course, but even as an idea, it clearly evokes belonging beyond more limited territorialisation (Merdjanova, 2013; Puzon, this volume). So too does a Muslim cartography that not only gives special significance to certain locations, especially Mecca, but also requires that ‘people of Muslim heritage’ – to use an increasingly frequently used formulation – visit these. Hajj – pilgrimage to Mecca – is, as such, part of a thoroughly translocal and indeed global heritage practice in which Muslims in Europe, as elsewhere, may participate. In addition, heritage tourism to Islamic sites is a global phenomenon, supported by a wide range of organisations. These include the Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (IESCO), established in 1979, modelled on and offering a significant alternative to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).⁴ Like its counterpart, IESCO gives attention to cultural heritage, having proclaimed the ‘Islamic Declaration on the Protection of Cultural Heritage in the Islamic World’ in 2017 and established an Islamic World Heritage List. While its list of 132 sites does not include any within Europe, there are other organisations dedicated to preserving Islamic heritage, which are also based outside Europe but that have provided funding for the restoration of heritage within it. The Turkish

Cooperation and Coordination Agency, TIKa, established in 1992, has been especially influential – its Islamic Heritage programme funding the restoration of mosques in Balkan countries (Kersel & Luke, 2015).⁵ Companies specialising in Islamic heritage tourism visits to Europe from other parts of the world have also developed, with Spain being the most popular destination but *halal* tours are also offered in Portugal, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Russia, Greece and Italy (Adie, 2019).

In several European countries, cultural institutions have been established to strategically advance cultural relations with the Arab states. These institutions frequently use the medium of the exhibition, with a special focus on contemporary art and photography, as tools for cultural diplomacy. In 2006, a consortium of Spanish governmental bodies founded the Casa Árabe, with branches in Madrid and Cordoba, whereas the private A.M. Qattan foundation runs the Mosaic Rooms in London. Casa Árabe presents itself as a meeting point where different stakeholders can ‘dialogue, interact, establish lines of cooperation and undertake joint projects’ (<http://en.casaarabe.es>, for more examples of cultural diplomacy in Spain, see Astor, this volume). The Institut du Monde Arabe (Arab World Institute, IMA) in Paris was founded in 1980 by 18 Arab countries together with France (see Guidi, this volume). In addition, the Institut des Cultures d’Islam (Cultures of Islam Institute, ICI), also based in Paris, but city-financed, wants to be ‘a place for dialogue and learning’ about the diversity of the cultures of Islam in the world (<https://www.institut-cultures-islam.org/>). Like the IMA, the ICI largely focuses on Islamic cultures abroad rather than on French Muslims, in line with the French official state policy of perceiving all citizens as French without making a distinction based on ethnic origin or religious affiliation.

The idea of Europe

That Islam has played a significant and even key – if often unrecognised or ignored – role in imagining the very idea of Europe has been argued by many scholars. Edward Said’s *Orientalism* (1978) established what became an influential and widespread analytical approach in which representations of ‘the Orient’ were understood as being fundamentally about European self-definitions. Not least because Said’s ‘Orient’ principally drew examples from the Middle East, Islam was thoroughly part of the oriental ‘Other’ against which Europe defined itself. Within the broad and often ambiguous span of emotions evoked by this Other, Said argues that fear and a sense of threat have long been to the forefront. ‘For Europe’, he writes, ‘Islam was a lasting trauma’ (1978/2003, p. 59) – a lurking danger that could imperil ‘the whole of Christian civilisation’ (ibid.).

Building on this, Talal Asad poses the question ‘Muslims and European Identity: Can Europe represent Islam?’ (2002). As he puts it: ‘The problem of understanding Islam in Europe is primarily... a matter of understanding how “Europe” is conceptualized by Europeans’ (2002, p. 209). Through a selection of contemporary historical narratives, he shows how these variously position Muslims as ‘in Europe but ... not of it’ (2002, p. 213). In some cases, this is by historical accounts that equate

Europe with Christendom, or, later, Judeo-Christianity,⁶ deploying tropes such as ‘civilisation’ to evoke a continuing ‘essence of Europe’, with Islam thus cast as the fundamental other. Also exclusionary are historical narratives of Europe that focus on conflict within the continent – as applies especially to many World War I and II narratives – and ignore entanglements beyond it. What these produce is a teleological account in which contemporary Europe emerges autochthonously, in triumph over its own internal conflicts. This runs alongside the positioning of Islam as ‘Other’, simultaneously bolstering an image of Europe as autonomous and pristine, with other presences and histories – especially those of the colonial – side-lined or ignored.

There is no doubt that such historical narratives are crucial to how Europe is imagined and to who can thus be defined as, or can be allowed to feel, ‘European’. As Asad notes and other scholars have also elaborated, such narratives have been deployed in the establishment of, and debates over, the expansion of the European Union (Berger, 2009; Macdonald, 2013). In relation to the possible accession of Turkey, the issue of its ‘Europeanness’ has been especially questioned, with Islam a major reason given or implicit (Delanty, 2013; Göle, 2012, 2015; MacMillan, 2013). An important part of Asad’s argument, however, is that at issue is not just the question of which narratives are told but also the key concepts and formations of ideas that inform them. He regards a particular discourse of ‘identity’ – one bound up with Lockean notions of property and inheritance – as promoting the idea of ‘real Europeans [who] acquire their individual identities from the character of their civilization’ while at the same time as implying that ‘not all inhabitants of the European continent are “really” or “fully” European’ (2002, p. 217). He acknowledges, however, that the word ‘civilisation’ – which plays a key role in this articulation – does not have wide public traction, though, as we see below, it is frequently deployed in museums. The idea and practice of heritage, however, which he never mentions, can provide a means for such narratives to permeate society more widely. Moreover, it shifts the parameters of debate still further.

Heritage and ‘the idea of Europe’

Putting ‘heritage’ into Asad’s argument shows how the ideas of Europe with which he is concerned can be disseminated and naturalised. Heritage as a term and a format – in which certain histories are given contemporary value – has become, especially over the past two decades, internationally widespread, and, importantly, not only in relation to ‘high culture’ but also at local, popular and vernacular levels. What it entails is not simply historical narrative – though this is typically part of it – but a close linking with identity. Heritage is always attached to some group – some social collective: there is always a ‘whose’ of heritage (Eriksen, 2014; Macdonald, 2013, 2018).

Unlike ‘civilisation’, heritage operates at multiple scales. It can be deployed not only with reference to large-scale entities, as is civilisation, but also at more micro ones, not only national but sub-national, even of small localities or special interest groups. Thus, categories such as ‘European heritage’ or ‘Islamic heritage’ are used

as well as, say, ‘Syrian migrant heritage’ or ‘Bosnian Muslim heritage’. Moreover, these various kinds of heritage can be overlapping or subsumed within each other: they can be non-exclusive. This contributes to a widespread democratisation of heritage, in which it is increasingly not only used in reference to – or left in the hands of – elites but is also taken up by many various groups and to multiple different, and sometimes contradictory, ends. Scholarship – especially what has come to be called critical heritage studies – has both reflected and supported this, casting its net all the more widely to incorporate more and more forms under the label of ‘heritage’ – as, indeed, we do in this book.

This development has a number of implications. On the one hand, it means that there is now potentially an even more effective route for consolidating particular ideas of Europe – including ideas in which Islam is positioned as ‘Other’. ‘European heritage’ turns Europe not just into an idea but also into a landscape filled with material and immaterial ‘evidence’ of an identity-relevant past. On the other hand, however, it allows for a recognition and flourishing of multiple other heritages, potentially subsisting together, at different scales – rather than just in the model of clashing or serially superseding civilisations. While this does not eliminate the persistence of majority conceptions of Europe, it allows for the manifestation of others, including alternatives or even those that run counter to the majority ones. That is, it also opens up to widespread acceptance of the idea of a multitude of diverse, minority identities and heritages. This goes some way towards establishing a model in which Asad’s call for a ‘Europe in which *everyone* lives as a minority among minorities’ (2002, p. 226) is at least more thinkable. Equally, however, it remains clear – as contributions to this volume abundantly evidence – that majority heritage and accompanying practices of exclusion continue across the continent.

Nevertheless, what these reflections and the contributions to this volume also imply is that attending only to majority ideas of Europe would be to miss important parts of the picture. While there is no doubt that ‘fortress Europe’ – a conception in which the continent is seen as needing to maintain forceful guard of its boundaries against incursion, especially Muslim – has considerable continuing, and indeed even increasing, currency, it is not the only imaginary in operation, even within Europe’s political and cultural centres of power. Not only have there been alternative conceptions – including some that are more accommodating of Islam as part of Europe (Delanty, 2013; Fadil, 2019) – in the past, but there are also significant variations across the continent, as already noted. Furthermore, over the last decade in particular, even promoted by the relatively European mainstream – such as the European institutions and governments of Western Europe – there have been multiple political statements and the creation of narratives in which Islam is included as part of Europe (Bock & Macdonald, 2019; Puzon, this volume). Especially relevant for the present volume is that many of these do so by positioning Islam as part of Europe’s heritage. As heritage is an especially powerful mode of inclusion – a format with widely acknowledged legitimacy and value – this allows for Islam to be historically situated within Europe rather than simply accepted as being present in the here and now. As heritage, in other words, Islam becomes a valued cultural form, and as part of European heritage, it gains the potential to

become *of* rather than just *in* Europe. It becomes part of ‘where we have come from’ and not simply ‘what we are now’.

Therein, however, lies heritage’s ‘rub’. That very past-orientation of heritage also allows for making a distinction between the past and today in which ‘where we have come from’ might also potentially be ‘what we no longer are’ or even ‘what we have left behind’. Thus, considered as part of heritage, Islam may be seen as having contributed to shaping Europe but that does not necessarily mean that Muslims living in European countries today will feel included. Indeed, as various chapters in this volume show, such heritage can even be used to the contrary, to act as a ‘better’ form of Islam, in relation to which contemporary Muslims and their practices are held as lacking. A heritage of ‘good Islam’, that is, can make today’s Islam seem all the more, instead of less, alien (see, e.g. Guidi, and Shatanawi, this volume).

Europe, then, we argue, needs to be seen as globally entangled and multiply imagined and reimagined – processes in which heritage and Islam are thoroughly and mutually enmeshed. As such, *Islam and Heritage in Europe* contributes to a wider project of ‘provincialising’ (Chakrabaty, 2000) or ‘decentering’ Europe (e.g. Adam et al., 2019; Dabashi, 2019; Göle, 2012).

Coloniality and heritage

The movement of decentering Europe, in relation to Islam, is essentially a movement to overcome the legacy of European colonialism. In *Europe and its Shadows: Coloniality after Empire* (2019), Hamid Dabashi deals with Europe as a metaphor and traces how the condition of coloniality persists even after the collapse of empires – museum taxonomies are but one example. Dabashi argues that this condition ‘with the European “West” on one side and the colonized “Rest” on the other—has now metastasized’, and the world has entered a new phase in which the coloniser and the colonised are no longer divided along any national, regional, or continental divide (Dabashi, 2019, pp. 193–194). What results, he says, is the decentering and de-authorising of Europe globally, in a ‘new montage’, and the opening up of Europe to the world at large. Various contributions to this volume discuss the implications of this development at a local level, whereas other chapters outline the legacy of colonial-period constellations and suggest directions for their transformation.

At the peak of European imperialism, the British, Dutch, French and Russian Empires each governed more Muslims than any Muslim-ruled state, including the Ottoman Empire. The most obvious consequence of this was the large-scale movement of works of art, objects and even entire architectural structures from the colonised Muslim lands to the European metropolises. The Islamic art collections in France, Britain and Russia were largely formed in colonial contexts, but museums in countries without colonies in Muslim regions, such as Germany, also benefited from the steady stream of objects coming out of the colonies (Gierlichs & Hagedorn, 2004; Giese, Volait & Varela Braga, 2019; Vernoit, 2000). In recent decades, the restitution and repatriation of colonial collections has become an area of increasing debate. Remarkably, Islamic art has thus far remained relatively in the shadows. There are several reasons for this, such as the greater weight many countries in the

Muslim world place on the cultural heritage of pre-Islamic civilisations (Feener, 2017) and the relatively more urgent situation regarding Sub-Saharan African heritage.⁷ Nonetheless, a few claims on Islamic objects have been put forward, mostly by Turkey, against museums such as the Louvre (Güsten, 2011).

Colonial paradigms continue to have profound influence on how these collections are being displayed in museums in Europe. The nineteenth-century arrangement of collections broke up Middle Eastern history and heritage into three time periods (pre-Islamic, Islamic, and modern). Each of these time periods was studied in a different disciplinary tradition (archaeology, art history, and ethnology, respectively) and the corresponding collections became part of dedicated museums (Shatanawi, this volume). The taxonomies and conceptions of Islamic collections (including definitions of the ‘Islamic’) have remained largely unchallenged since the early twentieth century (Karaca, this volume). Likewise, artefacts from the ancient Near East remain not only geographically, but also epistemically dislocated and detached from the region where they were once excavated (Brusius, this volume). Moreover, the different time periods were, and still are, appreciated and appropriated differently; generally, Near Eastern archaeology and Islamic art were valued more, and seen as closer to Europe, than the heritage of modern and contemporary Muslims. In addition, colonial concepts did not lead to the appreciation of Islamic art everywhere in Europe. The largest colony of the Netherlands, Indonesia, had a predominantly Muslim population. Yet Indonesia came to be seen in Dutch museums, academia and popular culture, as part of a single Asian civilisation with Hindu–Buddhist and spiritual characteristics (Bloembergen & Eickhoff, 2020; Formichi, 2016).

Colonialism has also resulted in the creation of Islamic heritage in Europe as a result of Muslim migration. For instance, the Great Mosque of Paris, inaugurated in 1926, was built to serve the needs of Muslims originating from the French colonies (Bayoumi, 2000). Furthermore, post-independence migration has led to new forms of heritage, for example, pious art forms and the reshaping of cultural expressions (Peter, Dornhof, & Arigita, 2013). Chapters in this volume, especially those by Katarzyna Puzon, Peter McMurray and Jesko Schmoller all provide instances of this, highlighting the broad range of forms that these might take, and, in the process, showing how heritage itself is expanded and diversified through such processes.

National approaches to diversity

In addition to differing colonial legacies, also varying between European countries are laws and policies that seek to regulate approaches to cultural and religious difference. While there have been useful attempts by scholars to identify ‘national models’ of how difference is approached (see Choquet, 2017) – ranging from its attempted erasure through assimilation to its toleration or even celebration, it is important to emphasise that there may be considerable change over time and variety within legal and policy landscapes, even to the extent that inconsistencies arise. Questions of Islam and heritage are not necessarily (and are indeed unlikely to be) covered by a single law or policy but instead fall under laws and policies variously devised to address citizenship in general or more specific areas, including religion and culture

(within which heritage legislation and policy are more specific still). In addition, different levels of law and policy may be in operation simultaneously, emanating not only from national governments but also from supranational organisations such as the EU and UNESCO, as well as from more local, regional or city governance. How far these shape what actually happens on the ground is itself also notoriously varied, as chapters here, especially that of Schmoller, also underline.

With these caveats in mind, it can nevertheless be usefully pointed out that some countries primarily favour integration, that is, emphasising collective values and downplaying difference (even outlawing certain manifestations of it), whereas others accept and may even support religious and cultural diversity through forms of multiculturalism. Usually, France is taken as the prime example of the former, though even there, this does not entail extensive restrictions on religious and cultural expression outside the public sphere. Moreover, as Diletta Guidi's chapter here shows, the French approach certainly does not rule out displaying Islamic heritage. On the contrary, doing so, especially in national institutions, can contribute to the centralising agenda by promoting a 'frenchified' form of Islamic heritage that conforms to national values. Multicultural models ostensibly not only tolerate the manifestation of cultural and religious difference but even give state support for some expressions of it – with heritage especially likely to be so recognised. Here, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom are the usual exemplars of nations adopting multicultural policies, with both usually being said to have done so in part to respond to Muslim populations (Bertossi, 2011; Modood, 2013). Again, however, this has gone alongside more integrationist tendencies rather than supplanting these. Moreover, both countries, alongside various others in Europe, have seen a 'backlash' against multicultural approaches since the early 2000s (Modood, 2013; van Reekum et al., 2012; Vertovec & Wessendorf, 2009). Indeed, both countries' governments in the early 2000s proposed new national history museums to help instil more national values in the face of what was claimed to be the 'failure' of multiculturalism (Macdonald, 2016). Elsewhere in Europe too, there are often complex and changing mixtures of approaches. Greater religious freedom in most post-socialist contexts has sometimes allowed for the flourishing of Islam (Račius, 2018), alongside other religions, though not necessarily (Schmoller, this volume), and perhaps accompanied by increased state control (Račius, 2020). As we also see in this volume, however, while national governments may seek to instrumentalise heritage to fit with prevailing policy approaches – of which the chapters by Astor and Guidi provide the strongest examples, though even here this is not unequivocal – this is far from all-pervasive, not least because heritage is also shaped by the very presence of collections (including with specific colonial histories and entanglements), sites and people that may push in other directions.

Contestations of Islam in Europe

What we see clearly in this volume, then, is that there is no single 'European' position on Islam and Islamic heritage. Whether Europe is even imagined as having a single heritage or multiple heritages is not a constant across time or space. These

are important caveats to arguments about Islam playing the role of the Other in constituting Europe as a predominantly Christian space. As we have noted and will see in various chapters that follow, these arguments are certainly not without substance: there are many contexts in which Muslims find themselves positioned as very much as neither *of* nor belonging *in* Europe, not least those of the populist nationalisms discussed below. But these ways of positioning Islam also need to be considered alongside others, which manifest a good deal of variety not only across different European countries but also within them. Degrees of rejection and acceptance are not equally distributed across populations and they change over time, as well as being variously inflected in different cultural spheres and in relation to different kinds of imagined Islam. Such differences matter not only to help gain a fuller picture but also because they too shape the lived experience of and with Islam in European societies.

That having been said, there was a widespread increase in anti-Muslim sentiments across Europe, and indeed worldwide, after the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001. Following those and subsequent tragic events, such as the terror attacks in Madrid in 2004, the London bombings of 2005, and the Berlin Christmas market attack of 2016, Islam was most prominently featured in public debate in relation to terrorism. Elsewhere, as in the case of Chechnya, Islamophobic campaigns have been launched against secessionist movements. More recently, especially during the ‘refugee crisis’ of 2015 and 2016, increased Islamophobia has been witnessed in many countries (e.g. Kaya, 2020), including those with very small Muslim populations (Bobako, 2017).

Heritage – perhaps figured as ‘tradition’ or ‘culture’ – is often central to contested aspects of Islam in Europe. Veiling (Moors, 2012; Abu-Lughod, 2013), minarets (Göle, 2011), the *azan* (call to prayer) and attitudes towards figurative images (Tamimi Arab, 2017, and forthcoming) have all, variously, been depicted in the media as rooted in ‘traditional culture’, and used as exemplars in discussions over whether Islam can – or should – find a place in Europe. In 2019, as part of the campaign for the European elections, the German nationalist AfD party (Alternative for Germany) placed posters across the country that were a ‘reinterpretation’ of Jean-Léon Gérôme’s 1866 painting ‘The Slave Market’. The posters showed a naked white woman surrounded by men wearing Arab headdress, and featured the slogan ‘Europeans, vote for AfD! So that Europe does not become a “Eurabia”’. Pointing to the imaginary ‘Orient’, they evoked representations rooted in Orientalist discourses supported by the ‘us’ versus ‘them’ rhetoric. At the same time, however, heritage has been mobilised to challenge anti-migrant attitudes and anti-Muslim prejudice. For example, in Amsterdam, designers collective Mediamatic developed a line of Arab products in the style of the ‘typically Dutch’ department store Hema, including a redesign of the logo which was rebranded EL HEMA. The HIPSTER/MUSLIM project (2014–2019) involved a series of portrait photographs of hipsters and Muslims, with the identical beard as starting point. The photographs were exhibited outdoors in the urban settings of Brussels, Antwerp, Rotterdam and Amsterdam to start a conversation on identity and stereotyping. In addition, museums have sought to challenge problematic representations of Muslims in many and various ways as we see below and elsewhere in this volume.

Museums and Islam in Europe

Since the events of 11 September 2001 and the rise of anti-Muslim sentiment, there has been an increased interest of museums in the West in presenting Islamic art and material culture. Across Europe, museums have invested in new galleries, or their existing collection displays have undergone a major overhaul (for a partial list see Shaw, 2019a). In major metropolitan institutions, notably the Louvre in Paris and the British Museum and Victoria & Albert Museum in London, these remakes were made possible by sponsorship coming from the Muslim world, in particular the Gulf countries and Southeast Asia. Yet, despite the renewed interest in exhibitions, research on how Islam is transmitted, displayed and framed through museum representations remains relatively scarce (Grinnell, Berg & Larsson, 2019). This is remarkable considering the interest of critical museology in issues of social justice, and the focus on museums as spaces to counter prejudice and to confront racial discrimination (e.g. Gonzales, 2020; Janes & Sandell, 2019; Labadi, 2018; Sandell & Nightingale, 2012).

In Europe, Islam is mostly presented in museums through Islamic art, a category of art that was created by European art historians around the turn of the twentieth century, grouping together objects from Central and West Asia and North Africa on the basis of stylistic similarities. Islamic art is often defined as ‘the visual culture of any society where Muslims were or are dominant’, and the category also includes the art made by or for Muslim groups in societies where they constituted minorities (Watenpaugh, 2017). Major Islamic art collections can be found in museums across the continent (for an overview see Ådahl & Ahlund, 2000), for instance, in Austria (Vienna), Belgium (Brussels), Denmark (Copenhagen), Ireland (Dublin), Germany (Berlin, Hamburg), Greece (Athens), France (Paris), Portugal (Lisbon), Russia (Moscow, St Petersburg), Spain (Granada, Madrid), Switzerland (Geneva, Zurich), Turkey (Istanbul) and the United Kingdom (Cambridge, Edinburgh, London, Oxford).

The idea that there is something like ‘Islamic art’ is deeply embedded in modernist, European discourse rather than in Islamic concepts. As Wendy Shaw (2019b, p. 11) explains: ‘Islamic art history has often designated a history of objects produced under Islamic hegemony and considered through lenses crafted to define the “Western” legacy: art, aesthetics, and dynasties. This is a history of objects recognized as art and understood in analytical terms from a vantage point dependent on European intellectual history’. Modernist European principles, privileging aesthetics over function and secularising the concept of art, can be found in most definitions of Islamic art that museums commonly provide. Therefore, an ‘Islamic’ work could be designated purely on stylistic criteria, regardless whether it has a relationship to the Islamic religion or not.

Initially the term Islamic art was used for a limited range of objects. In the twentieth century, the canon of Islamic art gradually expanded to include a wider geographical and temporal reach. Today the category of Islamic art comprises, as the Calouste Gulbenkian Museum in Lisbon clarifies, ‘objects made from Spain to India, from the time of the Prophet Muhammad to the eighteenth century’. The starting

point is Islam as a cultural and civilisational zone. Islam is here explained in the sense of ‘Islamicate cultures’ (Hodgson, 1974), to refer to the cultural layers of the regions ruled by Muslims, which are influenced by Islam but not necessarily religious in themselves. According to this canon, Islamic art is said to end in the nineteenth century, coinciding with the beginning of European colonisation of the Muslim world and the birth of its disciplinary study (Flood, 2007; Watenpaugh, 2017). Following from this art historical format, the central message of Islamic art galleries focuses on stylistic and material features (e.g. metalwork, ceramics, textiles, calligraphy, miniature painting) and their development over time (the dynasties under whose guidance the items were produced). Exhibition texts usually only briefly touch on religious and social aspects of the Muslim world (Grinell, 2020, p.36).

A second mode of museum presentation also defines Islam as a culture and civilisation, but focuses instead on its social aspects. This type of exhibition can be found in ethnographic museums and other categories of cultural history museums, where objects are usually presented under geographical headings, such as the ‘Middle East’ or ‘North Africa’. These modes of presentation are also present in Europe’s Muslim majority countries and regions, for example, in Bosnia and Herzegovina, where they are current in museums showcasing national or regional cultures. Thematically, this type of exhibition addresses topics like religious rituals, social classes, gender roles and the differences between city and countryside.

Museums where Islam is primarily exhibited as a religion, rather than an art historical category or a civilisation, are few. Notable exceptions are the gallery dedicated to Islam at Glasgow’s St Mungo Museum of Religious Life and Art, which was inaugurated in 1993 (Kamel, 2013; Naguib, 2015), as well as the Religionskundliche Sammlung in Marburg and the State Museum of the History of Religions in St Petersburg (Orzech, 2020). The colonial past could also be one of the prisms through which collections are presented, as it is intimately tied up with the histories of collections, especially in Western Europe, which are often the result of colonial encounters, but this background is largely ignored in museum presentations of Islamic collections (Kamel, 2019).

The study of museum representations of Islam

Following the pioneering volume *Discovering Islamic Art: Scholars, Collectors and Collections, 1850–1950* (Vernoit, 2000), there has been a steady rise of research on the histories of collecting Islamic art and material culture in Europe. These publications often focus on one collector or museum, or they take a national approach. Together they cover a wide geographical range, including countries such as Poland, Russia, Romania and Hungary (e.g. Dolezalek & Guidetti, forthcoming; Gierlichs & Hagedorn, 2004; Giese et al., 2019; Kadoi & Szántó, 2013). However, when it comes to questions of how museums present Islam and Muslims today, and how historical collecting practices impact contemporary representational politics and identity formation, research is concentrated on Western Europe. Moreover, within this part of Europe, only a limited range of countries is covered: the United Kingdom and Germany (see, e.g. Heath, 2007; Kamel, 2013; Kamel & Gerbich, 2014),

the Netherlands (Shatanawi, 2012a, 2012b, 2014), and France (Bernasek, 2007, 2010; Guidi, 2019). Within this body of literature, the main focus is on Islamic art in national and encyclopaedic museums, while less attention has been paid to the presentation of Islam and Muslims in other types of museums, for example, those with holdings of ethnographic material or contemporary art and in city and neighbourhood museums.

The focus on Western Europe has a number of implications, as it means that the place of Islam in museums is studied through the lens of postcolonial and labour migration and as a minority culture, rather than with an eye on the Muslim communities that have been living in Europe for centuries. Another research theme that follows from this focus, concerns the colonial roots of collections of Islamic art and material culture in Western Europe. Past research has focused on colonial encounters through objects, the durability of colonial epistemologies through canon formation and the construction of taxonomies, as well as on the impact of these historical processes on museum representation today (see the various contributions in *Journal of Art Historiography*, June 2012; Junod, Khalil, Weber, & Wolf, 2012; Vernoit, 2000). Specifically, critical debate has focused on the untimely 'death' of Islamic art around 1900 which, by consequence, locates Islam's greatest achievements in the past and ignores its contributions in the modern period (Flood, 2007; Graves, 2012). More recently, the growing research interest in ways in which museums address religion has resulted in a number of studies about the religious aspects of museum representations of Islam, in particular Muslim spiritual experiences, in museums in Western Europe (Berns, 2015, 2016; Reeve, 2017, 2018). Besides Western Europe, Turkey has a prominent place in research that is critically engaging with museum representations of Islam, with a focus on the question of how changing political attitudes towards the secularisation policies of the Turkish Republic govern museum practices (see, e.g. Harmanşah et al., 2014; Posocco, 2019; Shaw, 2010). Literature on Southern or Eastern European countries, on the other hand, but remarkably enough also on Scandinavia, is scarce or even absent.

Exhibitionary emphases of Islam

The portrayals of Muslims in cultural institutions in Europe 'tell us much about how Europe is understood, maintained and imagined' (Larsson & Spielhaus, 2013, p. 106). As Diletta Guidi outlines in her contribution on France in this volume, museums in Europe employ different 'exhibitionary regimes' in their portrayal of Islam and of Muslims, which can be seen as two distinct (if overlapping) emphases that run in parallel and compete with each other. To a large extent, these emphases are framed by the type of collections museums possess as well as the specific missions and roles they seek to fulfil. Almost all exhibitions discuss Islam and Muslims through the 'management of difference' (Whitehead & Bozoğlu, 2015), that is, they construct 'Europe' and 'Islam' as distinct and separate cultures, and subsequently they set out to emphasise difference between the two entities, to either marginalise Islam or to assimilate it.

In national and encyclopaedic museums, Islam is typically staged through masterpieces of Islamic art, presenting Islam as a civilisation that is distant from Europe in time and place. The historical nature of the Islamic art collections comes with a number of drawbacks. The make-up of the Islamic art collections, with the majority of objects originating in Central Asia, the Middle East and North Africa rather than in the Muslim regions of Europe, and their temporal frame, predating the modern and colonial era, precludes a narrative which presents Islam as integral to European heritage. Policy makers, and also the public, expect these exhibitions to address issues relevant to present-day Europe, such as the twentieth-century migration from Muslim countries, the rise of political Islam and the position of Muslim women (Demerdash-Fatemi, 2020). Yet, the historicity of the objects and the art historical prism through which they are interpreted makes museums ill-suited to reflect these recent interests and, as a result, they hardly accommodate the public's growing demand for better insight into Muslim history and societies (Heath, 2007). Instead, Islamic art exhibitions present objects in a frame of tolerance, that is, the displays intend to teach visitors to respect, admire, and become intrigued by the beauty and wisdom produced in the Islamic world, which is situated far away and in the past (Larsson, 2019). Nonetheless, in a number of national museums, one can find a narrative which shows Islamic culture as historically intertwined with and contributing to the cultural past of Europe and to specific national histories, as is the case of the Museum of Islamic Art in Berlin (Spielhaus, 2013) and the Louvre in Paris (Guidi, this volume).

Another type of exhibitionary emphasis focuses on contemporary Islam and Muslims and their relation to European culture. In Western European museums, this regularly involves the celebration of multiculturalist and cosmopolitan cultures and an intercultural treatment of Muslim otherness, based on the accentuation of similarities and differences to promote common living. Whitehead and Bozoğlu (2015, p. 254) give the example of exhibition displays about the presence of Turkish communities in the urban centres of Germany and the Netherlands, and observe: 'we see Turkish people and cultures utilized to construct a kind of ideal cosmopolitanism associated with a hybridisation of cultural identities and forms (e.g. cuisine) that characterize a beneficial Western-European multiculturalism'. Similarly, exhibition displays of this kind draw parallels between Christianity, Judaism and Islam, pointing out the shared origin of the three religions, in order to promote tolerance and co-existence (Guidi, this volume). The Ottoman past is sometimes employed in a similar scheme of positive re-interpretation of history to promote common living. For example, it is remarkable that in many of the new Islamic art galleries, Armenian works of art are displayed with reference to the multireligious and multicultural make-up of the Ottoman population. Yet as Banu Karaca (this volume) explains, the same galleries remain silent on the state violence, dispossession and the displacement of Armenians and their material culture in the late Ottoman period.

A third type of exhibitionary emphasis presents Islam and Muslims as integral to Europe's history and Muslims as a natural component of Europe's population. This type of narrative is, however, more rarely encountered. Of particular interest in this respect are the museums located in the Muslim-majority countries and regions of

Europe, such as Bosnia and Herzegovina where museums offer competing narratives of the position of Muslim culture vis-à-vis other religious and cultural communities in the region (von Puttkamer, 2016). In Western Europe, museums led by Muslims have only recently been created, for example, in Spain and Switzerland.⁸ In these Muslim-led museological settings, Islam is no longer presented as foreign, but as ‘diasporic’, because objects are used for self-representation oriented towards contexts that are at once national and supra-national, for example, the *ummah* or the Middle East as well as Africa (Rey, 2019).

Research in the United Kingdom and Germany shows that exhibitions representing the lives and perspectives of Muslims living in Western Europe today tend to happen outside the large metropolitan museums: in city museums, local libraries and neighbourhood and community museums (Kamel & Gerbich, 2014; Reeve, 2017). Small locally based museums have a number of advantages. They are less bound by the conventions of academic disciplines such as art history or archaeology, which makes it easier to collect new material relevant to the lives of Europe’s Muslim citizens and to address current questions, including those related to migrant experiences and a specifically European Muslim religiosity. Furthermore, they are more likely to engage new audiences through outreach work or by becoming a meeting place and discussion forum for local citizens (Puzon, 2019). Nevertheless, as we discuss in the final chapter of this volume, such developments are also, increasingly, evident in larger and even national museums.

Bridging cultures in museums

As noted above, negative images of Islam and Muslims prevail in the news media, political discourse and public perceptions throughout much of Europe. In contrast, museum representations of Islam and the Muslim world typically focus on positive aspects. As Göran Larsson (2019, p. 11) observes, ‘museums in Europe are governed by the notion that they should combat what they see as negative and stereotypical images in society’. In addition, museums have expressed that they want to ‘promote dialogue’, ‘create understanding’, or ‘build bridges’ between Europe and the world of Islam. Museums, thus, take on the position of broker, which emanates from some of the roles they assume for themselves: to make society a better place and to spread beauty to the world. The more direct response of museums to current affairs also has to do with the fact that governments and funding bodies increasingly ask museums to prove their relevance for today’s societies.

In a much-cited essay, Jessica Winegar (2008) analyses Islam-related arts events in the United States after 11 September 2001. Her main argument holds that cultural institutions promote an understanding of Islamic history and cultures that converges with political discourses departing from a clash of civilisations between the West and the Islamic world. Museums and other cultural institutions aim to build ‘bridges of understanding’, but in doing so, they hold on to their own norms as to what kind of art, and what kind of underlying political idea, makes an acceptable bridge, and by extension they hinder constructive dialogue from being fully realised. Much of Winegar’s argument also holds for museums in Europe. Deniz Ünsal (2019) observes

that the politics of recognition of migrant and refugee cultures translates more often into a conception of cultural difference akin to celebratory spectacle, for instance, through ‘opening up museum spaces for the participation of diverse communities with their music, performance, food and art’, and to the espousal of cultural integration rather than to deep engagement with some of the difficult questions arising from living together in difference. Cultural institutions tend to shy away from critically addressing the destruction the West has wrought in the Middle East, in the past or present, or the problems of Muslims living in the West in the face of anti-Muslim racism and Islamophobia. Few museums in Europe have staged exhibitions addressing the rise of Islamophobia heads on, as the exhibition *Re:Orient – The invention of the Muslim Other* (2019) did. The exhibition, curated by Anna Sabel und Özcan Karadeniz for the GRASSI Museum of Ethnology in Leipzig, examined the image of the Muslim in Germany from the days of nineteenth-century orientalism up to the anti-Islam Pegida movement and recent violent attacks on German citizens of Middle Eastern descent. Equally important, the highlighting of ‘good’ (beautiful, peaceful and humanising) aspects of Islam inevitably evokes its counterpart of ‘bad’ (destructive, aggressive and fanatical) Islam. As Winegar (2008, p. 677) asks: ‘Can the emphasis on art as evidence of humanity really erase stereotypes of Middle Eastern Muslims as un-human destructive terrorists, or does this framing depend on these stereotypes for its own definition and execution?’ The reality of representation leaves museums in a catch-22 situation: the idea of dialogue and bridge-building evolves out of the idea of two irreconcilable cultures and ‘museums looking for alternatives in an attempt not to assert, but rather subvert the thesis of the clash of civilisations have very few options’ (Shatanawi, 2012a, p. 192).

More than 10 years after publication, Winegar’s assertions still seem to hold relevance in the European situation, as is evidenced by the multiple references to her essay throughout this volume. But are there options for museums to get out of this representational crisis suggested by Winegar and others? One way is to present Islam in a networked model, showing the links between religions, cultures and countries, as Sharon Macdonald (2014) has suggested. Macdonald cites the Museum with No Frontiers (<http://www.museumwnf.org>, MWNF), an online museum in which cultural institutions from 36 countries in Europe as well as the Middle East and North Africa (MENA region) collaborate, among other examples of presentations which avoid the two-civilisation mode. Mirjam Brusius’ contribution to this volume argues for a much more intense involvement of Europe’s Muslim communities with museum work. This will lead to an engagement with Islam as a lived and living tradition, and will also bring the networked experience centre stage. Here, other possible understandings of heritage that Islamic ideas and practices suggest – as articulated by Wendy Shaw in her chapter below, and exemplified in different ways by the chapters of Puzon, McMurray and Schmoller – might also be drawn on to inform novel museological approaches.

Another model is to present Islam within other topics, rather than as a stand-alone civilisation in a dedicated exhibition or section (Macdonald et al., this volume). Such a model is followed by the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam, where Islamic objects are scattered across different displays, such as the ceramics and armoury sections, and the

galleries dedicated to the Netherlandish Middle Ages and Renaissance and the eighteenth century (Shatanawi, 2021). The choice to spread the Islamic objects positions the Muslim world firmly within the narrative of (art) history and positively emphasises its connections to Europe. In fact, various museums in Europe with only a few Islamic items in their collections opt for this approach, but mainstreaming Islam could be also worthwhile for museums with large collections of Islamic art and material culture. Temporary exhibitions also create excellent opportunities for this approach and several museums in Europe make Islam feature in themed-based displays. For instance, the Jewish Museum in Berlin regularly includes Islamic topics in temporary exhibitions with themes such as food or fashion.

The chapters in this volume

To further explore the entanglements and directions outlined above, this book brings together the disciplinary perspectives and vantage points of scholars from anthropology, art history, media studies and musicology, political science and sociology. Covering a wide range of cases, they collectively highlight various problematics. Furthermore, in their diversity and depth, they show the value of exploring heritage and Islam in Europe.

We have split the book into three sections, each of which is organised around one main theme that we recognise as vital to a critical investigation and better understanding of past and ongoing developments and future possibilities with which this volume is concerned. Part I deals with embodied heritage and senses of belonging manifested through sonic, fragrant and performative ways of engaging with aspects of Islam. Part II takes up the subject of nation-state and identity formations. The chapters discuss how the workings of the state – including state violence – play out in museum and heritage developments in different national contexts. Focusing primarily on museums, the contributions in Part III explore in various ways how older taxonomies and established, as well as newer, practices come together with contemporary social and political challenges. In doing so, they also point towards possibilities for new museum and heritage practice.

We begin with a chapter by Wendy Shaw who provokes us to draw on Islamic thought to rethink the very idea of heritage, as well as notions of the museum and objects with which it is entangled. Rather than operate in terms of ‘the heritage of the Islamic world’, she argues, we might try to imagine a concept of heritage that is Islamic. Reflecting on Platonic, Islamic and modern European discourses of perpetuating Truth through embodied form (as speech rather than as writing), her chapter identifies various modes of what she calls ‘heritage messaging’ and argues that the that dominant model of objective heritage preservation could be shifted towards models of embodied heritage perpetuation. This would in effect constitute a decolonising of the category of Islamic heritage, redefining it instead as perpetually re-emerging through the reconstruction of the past with an eye to the future. The museum would thus need to be re-envisioned to emphasise perpetuation over preservation, and to devise non-linear strategies

of exhibition that stage multimedia and information in a complex matrix of forms of display.

The following three chapters all take up the theme, identified by Shaw as important within Islam, of embodied heritage. Peter McMurray's contribution explores how the social life of Islamic cemeteries is made manifest through sonic practices embedded in what he calls 'cemetery poetics', that is, norms and practices that govern interactions in those places. These include recitations, ritual prayers, and processional routes. Bringing together examples from Turkey, Germany, Montenegro and Bosnia and Herzegovina, McMurray reflects on different histories with regard to European Islam and ways in which Islamic cemeteries act as a rich medium for articulating those histories. He examines how sound shapes those places and how the past and the present intersect there. McMurray argues that this contributes to a better understanding of Muslim life in contemporary Europe, and shows how ethnographic listening can be incorporated more effectively into heritage studies as a critical interpretive lens as well as a research practice.

In her chapter, Katarzyna Puzon examines ways in which young Muslims of the i,Slam collective negotiate their belonging through the medium of poetry slam in the current German context, in which Islam is often contentious. Combining oral traditions of 'Islamic heritage' with a contemporary format of poetry performance, they engage in practices which entail seeking to make a difference, in the sense of causing change, and represent an embodied form of heritage-making that moves beyond the binary of 'here' and 'there'. Puzon shows how their slam poetry, along with other activities in which it is embedded, challenges a limited understanding of what it means to be German. Her contribution draws attention to questions that arise when Islam is put on stage in Germany – literally in the case of i,Slam's events but also more broadly – and what comes into play in these developments.

The lines of visibility and invisibility also play a role in the lives of the Uralic Muslim communities in Russia. Drawing on ethnographic research, Jesko Schmoller discusses the ways in which members of these communities create a space for themselves in a context in which national identity is officially defined by only one religion and one culture, that is, Orthodox Christianity and Slavic culture. In so doing, they mobilise the sense of smell and use fragrance (*misk*) in order to make 'visible' a neglected and seemingly forgotten Muslim culture. Schmoller discusses how this connects to the Islamic notion of 'the other world' (*al-ghayb*), exploring the role that fragrance plays for Muslims in Russia not only in facilitating the coming of a new world but also in addressing and dealing with their current situation within the nation.

The national political context is also central in Avi Astor's discussion of how Spain's rich Islamic heritage has been the object of national redefinition. He shows how, following Spain's democratic transition during the late 1970s, Islamic heritage was strategically deployed by political elites, urban planners, and business entrepreneurs. In a context of a small numeric presence of Muslim minorities, this continued through to the 1990s, resulting in large mosque projects and other initiatives aiming to render Spain's historical connection to Islam visible. As there were few significant political and social concerns regarding Spain's modest Muslim

population, the 'Muslim question' was treated as a purely symbolic matter, divorced from the problems of integration that were beginning to take shape in other European countries. This changed, however, in the late 1990s and early 2000s due to rising levels of North African migration, as well as the terror attacks of 9/11 in New York and of 11-M in Madrid.

Diletta Guidi describes another context that is strongly defined by national policies: that of the national museums in Paris. According to Guidi, both the Louvre and the Institute du Monde Arabe (IMA) are involved with the production of images of the 'good' Muslim. The Louvre's Islamic art department exemplifies a first model as it filters out religious elements and 'frenchifies' Islam to present a picture of a secularised Islamic art that conforms to European art historical norms. Institutions like the IMA present another model, as they play what Winegar has named the 'humanity game'. The IMA projects a humanist image of the Muslim as part of its mission to create a bridge between the Arab world and the West. Its exhibitions leave out anything that could be seen as negative or dangerous, in order to produce the image of an Islam that is free, emancipated and modern, as well as successful and open-minded. To this end, the IMA uses examples of practices perceived as familiar and positive by the non-Muslim visitor to present Islam as a 'cool' religion and Muslims as a 'cool' community. However, the polished image of Islam, Guidi argues, is just as stereotypical as that of the fanatical terrorist.

Continuing a focus on museums, the following chapters engage with the heritage constellations of the past and the need to transform them towards future – more inclusive – practices. Mirjam Shatanawi's contribution looks at the taxonomies of Islamic and Middle Eastern collections that developed in European museums in the nineteenth century and continue to inform museum praxis today. She describes the historical process of the division of objects over different museum disciplines – archaeology, art history and ethnology – in the Netherlands. Yet, as she explains, the Dutch situation is not unique: it has its pendants in museums all over Western Europe. The museum narrative of Islam and the Middle East thus developed implies a movement of inclusion and exclusion from Europe, in which the ancient pre-Islamic past is taken as Europe's own, pre-modern (or actually, pre-colonial) Islam is reluctantly and conditionally accepted and modern Islam perceived as a full outsider. Using structural injustice theory, Shatanawi argues that this narrative, and particularly how it positions contemporary Muslims, reproduces colonial inequalities and hinders the self-realisation of Muslims as European citizens.

Drawing on recent work of critical engagement with the category of Islamic art, Banu Karaca's contribution addresses state violence against non-Muslims in the late Ottoman Empire and the early Turkish Republic in the course of which works of art were expropriated, looted and displaced. Karaca argues that the formation of Islamic art, which happened concurrently, led to the de-emphasising of the contribution of non-Muslims to the art histories of Turkey's Ottoman and post-Ottoman periods, in favour of a homogenous national frame. The continuous disregard of museums of the violence and dispossession that is part of the biographies of some of the Islamic objects in their collections, stands in contrast with the 'bridges of understanding' the same objects are supposed to make.

Focusing on instances of dispossessed art that are not captured by provisions against crimes against humanity, war crimes, and the conventions on the illicit trafficking of cultural property that have been elaborated by UNESCO and the EU, the chapter asks what historical justice might come to mean beyond the restitution of individual objects.

Mirjam Brusius also points out that many museum collections relating to 'Islamic heritage' are products of imperial expansion. As such, they play crucial roles in producing concepts of historical narratives, ethnicity, racial identity and difference. Current displays of Mesopotamian artefacts, for example, suggest a period of decline from the birth of Islam onwards, while European narratives link their historical present to mythical beginnings in the Middle East. Many European museums thus show the Middle East's past as part of European history, in relation to narratives of the 'cradle of civilisation' that first had to be 'discovered' by European archaeologists in the nineteenth century. Meanwhile, the excavations that were foundational for many collections are still rendered as triumphalist and heroic stories. As a result, ancient artefacts are historically disconnected from other histories, including Europe's imperial endeavours, and the resulting conflicts in the Middle East today. In light of this, the chapter asks what would be entailed in a decolonisation of archaeological artefacts from this region; and what might be done. Like Shaw, she argues that this requires a rethinking of how 'heritage' is currently conceptualised. This is needed, she points out, not least to respond to the demands of those who ask for new narratives that also reflect other senses of belonging and inclusion.

Our final chapter turns to a major turn in heritage practice that is directed towards providing such new narratives and senses of belonging. This is a turn to using participatory approaches to involve a broader range of participants – and especially involving those who might be less likely to visit museums otherwise. In the chapter, we discuss various such new initiatives – mainly in major state museums in Berlin – that in some way or other have involved Muslim participants and that held the potential to disrupt or counter some prevailing negative stereotypes. As the chapter shows, such initiatives face certain challenges – the acknowledgement of which can help in the development of future practice. At the same time, however, they are an important impetus for bringing new voices into the debate and thus contributing to re-framing Islam in museums and heritage in Europe.

By bringing these cases together, we hope not only to add more studies to the existing repertoire of research that is variously concerned with heritage, Islam and Europe but also to show the importance of considering these areas in concert to highlight their entanglements. By doing so, we also seek to illuminate new directions and possibilities for scholarship. Furthermore, as heritage is a field of practical activity – that reaches deep into lives and experiences, as well as into institutional structures and the making of selves and others – we hope that this book shows how this has been shaped in different parts of Europe, as well as how it might be reshaped in future.

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Notes

- 1 See the Pew report: <https://www.pewforum.org/essay/the-growth-of-germanys-muslim-population/>. As this explains, figures are not available for Balkan countries (accessed 23.5.2020).
- 2 Occasionally, in other parts of the Russian Federation following the break-up of the Soviet Union, the idea of a shared Islamic heritage has emerged as part of unifying imaginaries, as in Daghستان, where it remains significant (Kemper, 2014; see also Yemelianova, 2016).
- 3 The wording of the UNESCO World Heritage entry for Albania's Historic Centres of Berat and Gjirokastra is indicatively sensitive and diplomatic. It describes them as being of the 'Ottoman period' characterised by 'coexistence of various religions and cultural communities down the centuries', and 'a way of life which has been influenced over a long period by the traditions of Islam during the Ottoman period', <http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/569> (accessed 11.4.2020). An emphasis on the multi-religious and multiethnic nature of the Ottoman Empire has also been emphasised in Turkish secularity (e.g. Göle, 2015).
- 4 IESCO's website: <https://www.icesco.org/en/>. Its cultural heritage resource: <https://www.icesco.org/en/sustainable-protection-of-cultural-heritage-in-the-islamic-world/> (accessed 11.4.2020).
- 5 See also TİKA's website: <https://www.tika.gov.tr/en> (accessed 11.4.2020).
- 6 As Wendy Shaw explains, "Judeo-Christian" [is] a nineteenth-century term justifying racialized Protestant supremacy in Europe recycled in anti-fascist discourse of late 1930s North America to assimilate Jews into "Western" societies' (2019b, p. 9). As she notes of 'the "Western" artistic tradition', however, 'the Jewish is as absent as the Islamic' (ibid.).
- 7 The Sarr and Savoy report (2018) did not involve North Africa, because of the region's different histories of collecting and appreciation.
- 8 For instance, the Musée des Civilisations de l'Islam (MUCIVI) in La Chaux-de-Fonds, close to Neuchâtel, Switzerland, which opened in 2016, and the Museo vivo de Al-Andalus in Cordoba, Spain, a creation by the controversial French philosopher Roger Garaudy (1913–2012), a convert to Islam.

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Part I

Embodied heritage and belonging



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From postcoloniality to decoloniality, from heritage to perpetuation

The Islamic at the museum

Wendy Miriam Kural Shaw

The Sassanian Emperor Anoushirvan once went hunting with his vizier. They rode their fine steeds through lush woods and sunny vales. Eventually they came to a clearing no less full of birdsong than the woods, full of beautiful buildings lying tragically in ruin. Two owls sat on a broken vault. The emperor turned to his trusted advisor and, knowing that he understood the language of the birds, asked him what they were saying.

‘Forgive me, my king, for I will only convey what I hear with no balm for your ears’, said the vizier. Curiosity overtook pride as the emperor agreed to lay anger aside.

The younger owl has asked the hand of the daughter of the older owl. This father-in-law is shrewd: requesting a dowry, he asks no more than one ruined town, a perfect kingdom for owls. Yet his son-in-law is shrewder. He says: ‘if the king maintains his careless rule, I will give you a thousand towns such as this!’

Anoushirvan wept as they departed. In the following years, the justice of his rule won him glory. And to think, it came all from the wisdom of owls, sitting where hens should have roosted (Würsch, 2005, p. 281).

What do we learn? Representation remedies absence. It invents the very malady that it aims to cure.

The notion of representing ‘the Islamic’ presumes an externally definable and thereby absent entity called ‘Islam’; that this ‘Islam’ might achieve presence through some action, such as the presentation of objects, performances or lectures; and that this presence would accrue added value beyond that of ‘Islam’ itself. This desire to re-present Islam structures the nature of its representation. If we conceive of Islam solely as an engagement with or a making present of the divine, then individual prayer would suffice. Perhaps we would need a place for the bowing to the divine, *s-j-d*¹, essential to the embodied ritual of Islamic prayer; perhaps we would need a place for the congregation of such bowing, the *m-s-j-d*.

Yet this is not the type of making present to which we refer when speaking of museums or heritage. This making present relies on a disembodiment, a bringing together of products surrounding the *s-j-d*, to which they may or may not be related. What is made present at the museum is not the greeting, *s-l-m* implicit in Islam itself – the greeting of the divine, which also constitutes peace – so much as the greeting of its by-products, a hall of mirrors in which the verbal noun of

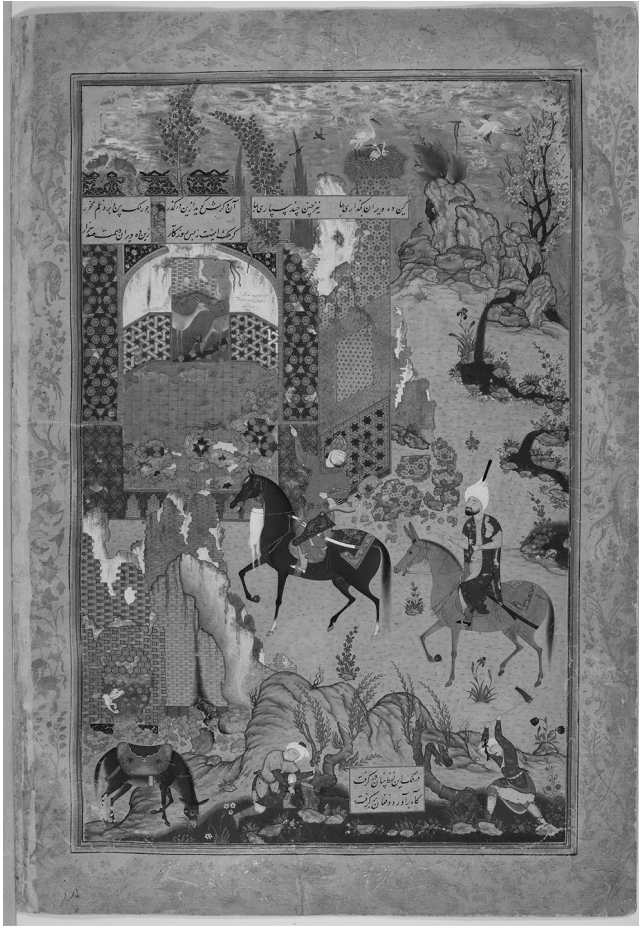


Figure 1.1 Mirak the painter, 'Anoushirvan and the Owls', Khamsa-i Nizami, British Library OR 2265, f. 15v. (1539–1540).

greeting the divine is not there.² This slippage, from the embodied act of greeting the divine towards representing the act in its by-products, centralises the worldliness (the secularity) of the museum. The making-present structurally repeats and underscores absence, rendering the 'unfortunate marionette that the history of the unheeded subaltern must unfold', by separating the misapprehension of *darstellung* as *vertreten* (Spivak, 1999, p. 259).

What does it mean to represent Islamic heritage in the museum? The very question undermines its possibility. Islamic thought refuses the distinction at the core of the museum: the premise that Islam is elsewhere. Islam cannot be reconstituted from its by-products in a passive construction, where the by-products are made to fit into a pre-existing matrix of making meaning. Rather, if Islam is to genuinely

inhabit the museum, it can only emerge if these by-products actively bring forth their intrinsic expressions of Islam. This paper will argue that despite the best of intentions, the drive towards heritage preserves the coloniality of collection within the post-coloniality of heritage. It reproduces the marginalisation of Islam that it attempts to cure. Instead, this essay proposes a model of perpetuation that draws on Islamic concepts of embodied knowledge, resonating with those articulated by Plato, to enable tangible and intangible entities of Islamic culture to articulate Islam by constructing their own matrices of meaning.

With the best of intentions: from coloniality to post-coloniality

What do we do with the mess that the nineteenth century bequeathed to us? Capitalism, industrialisation, racism, resource depletion, globalised inequity... and folded in all that, the legacy of rapacious materialism enshrined in the museum. Do we just give everything back? That has been the call for some time now: to return the booty of colonialism lingering in museums to its rightful owners... After all, the logic of public display in glorified warehouses no longer functions as well in an era of virtual access, social distancing, and an absence of leisure time. But what will they do when the objects are returned? It is not like the people over 'there' have the time and space that we lack. It is not as though they haven't been creating living cultures in the meantime. We may be able to give things back across space, but not across time. If you stole something from my great grandmother and return it to me, I may want it. I may also very well have no use for it. Once a thief, always a thief. Once we wrest objects out of the processes of life, they acquire new life in new processes.³ There is no redemption.

The museum houses an afterlife, as Theodor Adorno famously pointed out in his 1955 essay, 'The Valéry Proust Museum':

The German word, 'museal' ['museumlike'], has unpleasant overtones. It describes objects to which the observer no longer has a vital relationship and which are in the process of dying... Museums are like the family sepulchers of works of art. They testify to the neutralization of culture... Once tradition is no longer animated by a comprehensive, substantial force but has to be conjured up by means of citations because 'It's important to have tradition', then whatever happens to be left of it is dissolved into a means to an end... That the world is out of joint is shown everywhere in the fact that however a problem is solved, the solution is false.

(Adorno, 1967, p. 175)

This world is out of joint in that it continually murders objects to manufacture meaning out of them, transforming mourning into pleasure (Crimp, 1987). Adorno's rendering of the near homonymy between museum and mausoleum depends on a negativity surrounding death, which Adorno identifies as particularly German, one that refrains from enacting life in the present tense in favour of embalming it in the

fixed form of tradition. Nonetheless, this all is as it should be: as long as death remains inevitable, museums allow for resurrection.

The museums will not be shut, nor would it even be desirable to shut them. The natural-history collections of the spirit have actually transformed works of art into the hieroglyphics of history and brought them a new content while the old one shriveled up... The only relation to art that can be sanctioned in a reality that stands under the constant threat of catastrophe is one that treats works of art with the same deadly seriousness that characterizes the world today.

(Adorno, 1967, p. 185)

The museum that Adorno monumentalises functions as a family sepulchre where death is the condition enabling recognition and where culture becomes suspended in the everlasting life(lessness) of knowledge. Objects lie securely in crypts or in hermetically sealed cases, each a Snow White awaiting a prince destined to never arrive. In this suspension, she becomes less herself than a metonym of the family – be it nation or other genus of category – with which she lies. Here or there, interment remains constant; once dead, repatriating the body fails to revive the dead. In this model, those of us who work with museums all serve as undertakers. We freshen up corpses, comfort the bereaved, and write eulogies for the public. But what to do if we are not German, and the museal mausoleum lacks the same ring? Will we play the emperor for whom all is already in ruins, or will we play the canny vizier who teaches us that a living city is worth more than a sublime ruin?

Ironically (or perhaps typically) for a place tasked with keeping things, the roots of the modern museum lie in a gaping absence. The Museum of Alexandria was destroyed in the fourth century CE. By the time the word was revived in sixteenth to eighteenth century Europe:

The Musaeum was a vanished object (nothing to see) yet still a voluptuous memory (much to know); it was not a collection of things but a body of scientific and literary knowledge.

(Lee, 1997, p. 186)

It was as imaginary as it was anachronistic. ‘Until the final decade of the eighteenth century’, Paula Young Lee points out, “‘museum’ was a means of knowing rather than a place for showing; it was a transitive process of thought rather than a given collection of things’ (Lee, 1997, p. 186). It was a cabinet of scholars, not things; a place of direct discourse rather than an indirect discourse established between objects metonymic relationships with absences like artists, histories, cultures or nations.

Yet objects, previously inhabiting esoterically organised private studios and cabinets, were quick to creep into museums where the concept of art neutralised the ideologies that objects had originally inhabited. Established in 1796, the Musée des antiquités et monuments français collected the fragments of royal tombs and church architecture in order to exhibit them through a historical and chronological

framework (Greene, 1981). As a partisan of classicism in the perennial debate between the ancients and the moderns, Antoine Chrisostome Quatremère de Quincy, future *secrétaire perpétuel* ('director in perpetuity' as of 1816) of the Académie des Beaux Arts was a vociferous opponent to this transformation of the concept of the museum into a warehouse for art. Referring to the Napoleonic plunder of palaces and cities for objects of European art, he explained:

In vain do we convince ourselves that the antiquities taken from [Rome] today can preserve their virtue. Everywhere else they are sterile, since everywhere else they lack the power deriving from their place; everywhere else they are disenchanted. They become images for which there is no mirror.

(Ruprecht, 2014, p. 413)

While bemoaning this spatial and spiritual incarnation of the object, Quatremère articulated the metonymic attribution at the heart of every valuation of an object beyond its materials or its commodified status: its capacity to serve as an image of that perceived as absent. In his very complaint that displacement severed the object's tie with meaning, he underscored the object's apparent capacity to convey meaning transparently across time. *In situ*, an object carried with it the values of a place; it was a history, a place of remembrance. Yet even as Quatremère naturalised the capacity of the object to transport meaning across time, he bemoaned its incapacity to convey meaning across space. The museum was not so much a graveyard as a collection of gravestones. Even as many of the objects collected under the Napoleonic expeditions in Europe were returned, many from his farther-flung forays – particularly Egypt – remained. Already images across the vector of time, objects also became images across the vector of territory. Each object mapped onto a system of knowledge constituting a world unto itself, an encyclopaedia safely detached from the physical realities it purported to represent.

The emerging institution of the museum depended on normalising the destruction of the organic situation of the object through a new emplacement depending on the subterfuge of preservation in a matrix of disembodied knowledge conceived as universal. This ideology of abstracted aestheticism governed by a temporo-spatial matrix consciously neutralised preceding hegemonic ideologies of royalty and religion. Museums became a purgatory for objects, suspended between their living relationship with the vagaries of the human and their death and degradation into oblivion. There, objects released from their initiating situation (and any accompanying signification) were at liberty to be resituated in a new matrix of signification. Like the word 'museum' itself, plucked from antiquity as a space of scholarly gathering and plopped into modernity as a space of gathering things, the institution of the museum granted objects liberty from their origins only on the condition of enslavement to a new regulatory matrix.

The persistent coloniality intrinsic to the post-colonial museum, whether located in imperial centres or post-colonial nation-states, emerges not simply the ownership of the objects or the location of the exhibitions, but in the procedures that give objects order. It begins with the distinctions of meaning that structure

institutions, keeping some objects and destroying others, differentiating between types of collections, designating some as museums, some as rich people's bunkers, and others as zoos. It continues with the distinctions of value that place some objects on view and others in storage (Brusius & Singh, 2017). It continues with the matrices of knowledge that give meaning to the objects. Finally, it gains narrative through the spatial organisation that favours one vector of meaning over others in the matrix as visitors move through a collection.

This matrix of knowledge is embodied, of course, in the types of information we foreground on the label.

- (a) Name of maker
- (b) Name of object
- (c) Date
- (d) Location of production
- (e) Material
- (f) Dimensions
- (g) Provenance
- (h) Location in collection (accession number)
- (i) Narrative information (description of object and commentary)

Each of these information types constitutes a vector. Curators construct exhibitions through the complex task of foregrounding one or two of these vectors over the other. In the nineteenth century, Islamic art was shuttled into museums of craft and rich men's bunkers, but not into zoos or museums of art. Organised by material (e), carpets and tureens alike metonymically articulated a distinct realm visually identifiable as 'Islamic', but with no expectation that the exotic should articulate culture. In the early twentieth century, some works gained value through tropes such as art, science, or material culture, shifting the vector of meaning from that of materiality (e) to that of maker or patronage (a), objects became metonyms for a vector of historicity (c). Comparisons of similar instances of the same object or illustration have enabled narratives based on the name of the object (b), often with a synoptic narration of the work itself (i). In the post-colonial framework following World War II, interest in material legacies of modern nation-states foregrounded geography (d). With the rise of critical postcolonialism, increasing concerns about the role of the museum in making meaning have enabled trends in acknowledging modern collectors and institutions as signifying actors in constructing Islamic arts, leading to the possibility of turning the endeavour of a pure history of the Islamic world through objects on its head, resulting instead in the possibility of exhibitions foregrounding the history of collection and acquisition (g/h). These enable fascinating histories of collection and effectively underscore the problematic nature of the museum itself. A fanciful exhibit might invite aesthetic appreciation of particular colours, introducing another vector (j); yet another might look to historical representations of topics (k), like gender, astrology, or science. Yet each imposes a categorical episteme external to the objects on display.

Conceived through structural linguistics, each object functions as a signifier in a chain of signifiers. Each relates to its neighbours associatively, producing meaning through lateral connections enabled through these vectors of meaning. Each object is not only unique but also syntagmatically replaceable – another object exists, somewhere, that could approximate similar information; collections become enriched as each of the objects necessary to tell an associative narrative are filled in. For example, the Bernisches Historisches Museum owns a small collection of ‘Oriental’ works, largely donated by the wife of Henri Moser (1844–1923), who had collected objects while travelling with the Russian army during its conquest of Central Asia.



Figure 1.2 Henri Moser Collection, Bernisches Historisches Museum.

While many of these works cohabit an eclectic room recreating his itinerant exhibitions, others populate a small auditorium next door. At my visit in 2012, objects were arranged in cases around a square room, with one case devoted to keys hanging in mid-air, and another to scimitars. Leading the visitors clockwise around the room, a museum volunteer illustrated the nineteenth-century Qur’ans on display with the story of the seventh-century emergence of Islam. Although the objects, the most famous of which include lacquered pen cases and barbers’ instruments typical of the Qajar era, illustrate layered histories of colonialism in Central Asia, her narrative conformed to a predetermined history. The artifice of the story of ‘Islamic art’ perhaps needs no more evidence than the consistency of the narrative that can be applied to almost any collection, anywhere in the world, regardless of the diverse contexts of creation and amalgamation of the collections. Islam, however diverse from within, becomes reduced to one story when narrated from outside.

This would be true of any vector informing the narrative between objects. Each episteme imposes our modern questions. Although other types of information persist, they fall by the wayside through the process of narrative implicit in the curatorial structure of exhibition. In bringing the object to life, they restrict as much as enabling its speech. I ask my vizier, what are the birds saying?

The ruins are too beautiful.
We fall into the trap of ruination.

Platonic perpetuation

The logic of the museum, rooted in the notion of heritage, prefers the permanence of objects as inscription to the ephemerality of action as speech. What if the condition of keeping is not that of death, but of perpetuity, of circulation? What if we replace the noun of the object with the verb of its movement through the world?

The Platonic opposition between speech and writing concerns perpetuity, not of the object but of the ineffable that passes through it. It encourages us to pay attention less to the object than to its passage. Although generally not labelled specifically as Platonic, this notion of perpetuation pervades Islamic discourses of maintaining the past within the present. Islamic heritage would emerge through this notion of perpetuity rather than preservation, which depends on death in order to embalm the form as a palimpsest of potentially fluid content. Is it possible to imagine the museal through the model of perpetuity rather than that of preservation? What might this museality look like? What objects would it hold? How would it function?

Platonism exemplifies the epistemic tension between preservation and perpetuation. All too often Plato is hailed as the father of Western philosophy. Yet as a good Athenian, he would have held every non-Greek as a barbarian. There was no West. The man known as Jesus would not be said to be born for another 500 years, and the religion claiming inspiration from his supposed teachings would not gain power for 500 more. At that moment, when Christianity became the law of the land in the Roman Empire, centred no longer in Rome but in Constantinople (because at that time Rome, more concept than place, could be displaced to a new territory, and the old territory could be left behind like so many stones, nothing more than a snake's skin), 1,000-year-old Platonism was exiled: in 529 CE, the Emperor Justinian outlawed all Platonic Schools. Philosophers from throughout the empire found a new home in the Sassanian Empire, which was conquered by Muslim forces in the following century.

This Near Orient (as situated against the region that would later call itself the Occident) was replete with Christians and Jews as well as Muslims. Plato and Socrates settled into the cushions of new *symposia*, called *majlis*, where thinkers would sit and debate, and even drink wine (Ahmed, 2015, pp. 57–71). Under Islamic sovereignty in Baghdad, the practice of state-sponsored translation initiated under the Sassanian Empire persisted, leading to the development of libraries not only maintaining antique manuscripts, but also perpetuating them in translation, through commentary, and in new discourses structured by philosophy. Although in

the ninth century, philosophy was officially banned in Islamic theology, it already pervaded the dialogical systems underpinning Islamic law and continued to circulate through the writings of Muslim intellectuals. The proverbial cat was already out of the bag.

The West distinguished itself from the East through Plato's exile. His thought did not return to the Occident for over five centuries. Antique philosophy came to Europe through the Islamic world, particularly through access to libraries through the conquest of southern Italy and Spain from Islamic rule in the twelfth to thirteenth centuries. Monks read Plato through Christian eyes, which cleansed it of its paganism, its pederasty, its playfulness, its passions. The Islamic world that had preserved the thought of Plato through his exile from Western Christendom was treated strangely like the Virgin Mary, as though it were a vessel through which thought had passed, itself untouched, pure and eternally Other. Yet that Islamic world was more of a mother than a midwife to Platonism, nurturing its passage into a new world.

And Platonism may have been more of a mother than a midwife to the Islamic world as well. Socrates' qualified critique of rhetoric, the Qur'an both condemns *j-d-l* (the undefined term parallel to sophistry) in general and accepts it when it leads to truth or good conduct. Likewise, argumentation (*h-w-r*, indicating the exchange of words, and *h-j-j*, indicating argumentation) can be understood as 'a quest of legitimacy of theological dialectics' in early theological disputes (Belhaj, 2012, pp. 265–266). While the translation of surviving Platonic texts occurred later, it is possible that Platonism circulated in the cosmopolitan, multifaith discursive environment of the seventh-century Arabian peninsula where the Qur'an emerged. Regardless of the extent to which Platonism informed aspects of the Qur'an, its presence in the formative years of Islamic law rooted in transregional, trans-temporal practices of disputation. Not only is the Qur'an dialogical in its address towards the believer, a first-person divine voice speaking to a second-person prophet, Muhammad, and through him the believer; but the worldly structure of Islam in the law is also dialogical. The stillness of the written (*maktub*) exists in perpetuity – past, present, future – not on the plane of creation, but on that of the Divine, in the heavenly tablet that is the original Qur'an.⁴ Like Platonic truth, the Divine is unreachable; every attempt to reach it blinds us, and reaching transcendence is equivalent to death. Life perpetuates that which is written, the reading of which constitutes experience.

Thus Platonism precedes both Christianity and Islam by centuries and diffused into the thought of each differently, although at times interconnectedly. This Plato is not a Western forefather, but a pagan Athenian who toyed with monotheism as much as with the mythologies of other gods. His thought persisted. Where it had died, it was resurrected at various times and places, and in different ways, in several discursive traditions that themselves interacted, quoted, blended, rejected and reflected each other. Platonic thought is like a gas that, although hard to trace, works its ways into the most subtle of corners.

Plato's mouthpiece, Socrates – yes his teacher, but also his puppet, articulating truth with whatever words Plato wrote into his mouth in any given dialogue – disputed the existence of the gods, yet articulated his arguments allegorically,

drawing on myth willy-nilly. He did not even seem to require the pre-existence of myths to transform them into parables, nor did he restrict himself to myths of his own culture, which his listeners might know and therefore believe. The purpose of myths was not the truth of the myth itself, but the message they imparted. In fact, the truth of the message half the time was not even the message itself, but the passage of that message through the litany of questions that challenged it: the very process of the dialogue. The structure of knowledge in Plato's dialogues – the reason they are written as dialogues rather than as treatises or as songs – is that knowledge is not static, but passes through language, back and forth between interlocutors with the elegance of a tennis ball volleyed between rackets. The very opposite of the museum object, held still and safe behind glass, Truth for Plato must repeatedly hold its own with every challenge. Truth is not in the static endpoint of an argument or the form of an object, but in the passage of meaning through ideas as well as through things.

We might compare the relationship between the object and the meanings that pass through it to the relationship Socrates suggests between writing and speech. Contrary to popular simplified misinterpretations, Socrates was not against writing. He knew perfectly well that students like Plato and Xenophon were writing down his words; he even may have edited some of the texts. He was not against it so much as he recognised its danger. Considering a myth from ancient Egypt (which he may not have invented, but for which we moderns have no other evidence), he says that the multitalented god Thoth, inventor of arithmetic, logic, geometry, astronomy and games like checkers and dice put forward the great new idea of writing. Writing is the cousin of logical mathematics, divinatory astronomy and the seedy world of games of chance. Thoth presents his new idea to King Amon as a memory supplement, but the king calls out his trick. He says that writing only promotes forgetfulness, replacing memory with the image of speech. Unlike a teacher, writing cannot talk back. In its failure to defend itself, it transforms wisdom into opinion. Written words can be taken from one place to another, displaced just as I have displaced Plato's text here. Written words are no different from the objects that a museum re-places with other works through processes that obscure their deracination, decapitation, and displacement. You never know with keeping things: writing is a gamble. But what do we have instead? In his know-it-all way, Socrates offers an answer:

...when one makes use of the science of dialectic and, taking a fitting soul, plants and sows in it words accompanied by knowledge, which are sufficient to help themselves and the one who planted them, and are not without fruit but contain a seed from which others grow in other soils, capable of rendering that seed forever immortal, and making the one who has it as happy as it is possible for a man to be.

(Plato and Rowe, 2005, p. 65)

The problem, then, is not with the physicality of words, their manifestation as text on paper, but with their passage. Words live on not through quotation, but in

giving rise to new words: they live in their replanting, in their regeneration, in their capacity for movement. This could indict the text, if only it did not come to us in a text. Socrates does not tell us to burn our books, but to endow them with the living conversation of our minds. Likewise, we are not to destroy our museums, but endow the objects within them with living meaning beyond the categories of the family created in its sepulchre.

These articulations of the Platonic dialectic differ intrinsically from the Hegelian dialectic, upon which much of modern thought – including the structure of historical periodisation and the progress implicit to it – is based. Like Plato, Hegel's understanding of the dialectic rests on the notion of passage. However, for him, the movement in this passage transpires through confrontation and resistance. Each entity emerges through resistance to its precedent, which both moulds the new entity and enables its difference, resulting in a process of improvement conceived as progress. In the Hegelian legacy of the museum, objects produce meaning as representatives of their place in a legacy of coming into being; their own meanings lie dead, because they have been surpassed. Conversely, the perpetuation of the regrown seed (in the parlance of Socrates) or the reinterpreted utterance (*hadith*, in the parlance of Islamic law) does not endow change with a direction or a necessary will. Change happens, like mutation, but even if driven by will, its results lack direction. It is a model rooted in living regeneration rather than in discarded pasts.

Perpetuation through rearticulation in Islam

The concern over writing was central in the formative years of Islam, where the sacred voice of God embodied in the Qur'an trembled in the tension between text and sound, written and oral, book and recitation. The Qur'an can be defined through two descriptive practices: the self-description in its own text; and the narration of its delivery to humankind. The Qur'an describes itself as the manifestation of the sacred tablet of creation located on the plane of the Divine, a translation into a linguistic form recognisable to humanity. In this act of translation, the recitation gains both temporality and physicality. That is, whereas the tablet contains its language synchronously – all parts of the Qur'an-as-divine-tablet exist equally in all time and all place. In contrast, language unfolds diachronously, such that the Qur'an-as-text unfolds as we read or recite it. As the manifestation of the Divine will to make itself known, the Qur'an is self-same with all of creation. It is the infinite encyclopaedia, as is creation itself, all of which manifests signs of the Divine to those who know. According to the dominant Sunni interpretive tradition, as a non-created manifestation of the unique Divine, the Qur'an is distinct from but contemporary with the Divine. All of this complexity emerged through centuries of debate entrenched in the discursive tradition of Islamic law, which regenerates itself through rearticulation in the tradition of legal scholarship. Interpretation is not preserved in fixed texts; it is perpetuated through the rearticulation of text in recitation and interpretation.

This emerges most clearly in the praxis of learning the Qur'an, which focuses on memorisation. A fully memorised text distinguishes itself from a written one in

that the mind presents all aspects of the text as simultaneously available. Only in the process of recall do some aspects of the text progress to articulation. As on the sacred tablet, the Qur'an exists in the mind of the memoriser as continually equipotent. Thus in a tradition that may stretch back to early Islamic traditions, people in the Senegambia region of Africa who have successfully memorised the text are known as 'walking Qur'ans', producing an unbroken chain through the prophet, the angel Gabriel (believed to have delivered the sacred word to the prophet), and ultimately to the divine. Knowledge becomes embodied not only through memorisation but also through the drinking of ink washed from written verses of the text or licking off the revelation from such tablets (Ware, 2014).

The idea of text as a site of perpetuation rather than preservation emerges in the thought of the bibliophile al-Jahiz (776–869), a proponent of philosophical disputation (*qalam*) during the ninth-century heyday of philosophy in Islamic thought. Just as our era contends with the vast expansion of knowledge enabled by the internet, he enjoyed the florescence of books enabled by the technological revolution of rag paper, far cheaper to produce than preceding substrates for writing, parchment and leather. Yet as in our era, the growth of knowledge production brought new practices of conflict and censorship (Montgomery, 2013, p. 4). Defending the importance of discussion and of books in an era thwarting disputation (the inquisition known as the *mihna*), he argued:

The composing of books is more effective than building in recording the accomplishments of the passing ages and centuries. For there is no doubt that construction eventually perishes, and its traces disappear, while books handed from one generation to another, and from nation to nation, remain forever renewed.

(Necipoglu, 1995, p. 38)

What for modern subjects might amount to an argument in favour of keeping books, as in a library, al-Jahiz expresses as an imperative to write them. The notion of books for him is less of a physicality than of a passage for the perpetuation of ideas perennially renewed through composition. The opposition here is not between the monument-as-object and the book-as-text, but between the physicality of an object and the passage of meaning through it. His most famous work, *The Book of Living*, a seven-volume survey of everything created by God, was composed as a totalising exposition of creation designed to internalise debate in the souls of his readers, thus propagating dialogical practice not simply within books but in the social practice of engaging with them⁵ (Montgomery, 2013, p. 56). Whether intentionally or not, his purpose may have been similar to that of Plato, who probably wrote dialogues attributed to his teacher Socrates in order to preserve the rhetorical tools of democratic speech for an era of mass rule (Allen, 2012).

As in many imperial contexts, rulers in Islamic lands often commissioned encyclopaedic texts, particularly histories, as a means of situating knowledge as part of the centralisation of power and naturalisation of sovereignty (Muhanna, 2018, pp. 87–88). In the Islamic world, the early fourteenth-century *Compendium of Chronicles* written by Rashid al-Din under the Mongol dynasty, the turn of the

fifteenth-century *Book of Lessons, Record of Beginnings and Events in the History of the Arabs and the Berbers and Their Powerful Contemporaries* by Ibn Khaldun written under the Mamluk rule, and the *The Gardens of purity in the biography of the prophets and kings and caliphs*, by the Persian-language historian Mirkhwand (1433–1498) working under the Timurid dynasty, each renewed this role. Like generations of historians who came after them, each tried to establish a true rendition of events, yet discovered a wormhole of new questions. Tree and seed, followed by tree and seed again and again: each generation creates the entirety of the world anew.

The totalising ambitions of such works invite comparison with the temporally and geographically distinct mid-eighteenth-century *Encyclopedia* by Denis Diderot and Jean-Baptiste le Rond d'Alembert. Like the *Book of Living*, the *Encyclopaedia* aimed to teach everything. 'The goal of an encyclopaedia is to assemble the knowledge scattered far and wide on the surface of the earth, to expose its general system to our fellow men with whom we live and to transmit it to those who will follow us...' (Creech, 1982, p. 183). Its objectives were firmly grounded in the mortal over the immortal, in knowledge as tangible rather than as indicator of the ineffable. If the totalising goals of the *Book of Living* placed al-Jahiz in the uncomfortable, potentially blasphemous, position of emulating God's exposition of all creation in the Qur'an in the attempt to praise it, the totalising goals of the *Encyclopaedia* granted potential omniscience to every reader. Although Diderot was well aware that the *Encyclopaedia* was not complete in its present form, its ultimate ideal was that of a potentially comprehensive compendium. In contrast to al-Jahiz's ambition to impress dialogical practice upon his readership, the *Encyclopaedia* aimed to give power to its readers through a thorough listing of what and how human knowledge enables the processes of the world. Whereas for al-Jahiz, creation served as a transient medium for the contemplation of the divine; for the *Encyclopaedia*, materiality itself was the end product of knowledge. This was distinct from the tradition in the Islamic world, where like al-Jahiz, centuries later, Mirkhavand put more faith in history writing than in buildings, subject to ruin.

Buildings may be seen
 Ruined by sun and rain.
 Erect history's strong foundation
 To escape from wind, rain, and desolation.

(Necipoglu, 1995, p. 38)

Many more examples (and possible counter-examples) would be necessary to argue for either a wholesale enactment of Platonism in Islamic thought, or for a pervasive preference for the perpetuation of the word over the permanence of matter throughout the vast corpus of Islamic texts. Rather, what the above examples suggest is a mode of distinguishing between modern notions of preservation, invested in maintaining the object, and notions of perpetuating thought frequently found in both Platonic and Islamic discourses. The modern Islamic scholar Mohammad Arkoun articulates a similar distinction between the anthropological definition of tradition as 'the sum of customs, laws, institutions, beliefs, rituals, and

cultural values which constitute the identity of each ethno-linguistic group', which he likens to the use of *'urf* in Islamic law, as legitimised by the *usuli* methodology of jurists, which perennially rearticulates the *sunna*, the tradition of the prophet as articulated in word (*hadith*) and deed (Arkoun, 2003, p. 22). Tradition is not simply the sum total of what exists in Islam, but that which circulates through the law. Naturally, this process of rethinking is itself subject to debate, as truth lies not in the conclusion but in the capacity to speak back to challenges.

From preservation towards perpetuation

If we are to imagine an Islamic heritage that derives from Islamic thought – not a heritage of the Islamic world, but a concept of heritage that is Islamic – then how can we envision a site that emphasises perpetuation over preservation? If we have come to imagine a museum as a materialisation of a totalising book like the *Encyclopaedia*, then how might we conceive of a museum rooted in the totalising knowledge of the Qur'an, or al-Jahid's *Book of Living* that honours it? What kind of muses would dance in it, inspiring what kinds of relationships with knowledge, with the human, or with Truth? Can the museum as mausoleum come to house not as a crypt of dead objects but a celebration of perpetuation?

Each of these forms of *heritage messaging* coincides with a particular set of premises and objectives. The former, which I provisionally call *objective heritage preservation*, presumes that there is a distinct and identifiable set of elements that constitutes Islam that can be identified and set within a matrix that corresponds to the sets that establish the norms and boundaries of other parallel sets, whether constituted by similar religious categories or other types, such as geographical or temporal categories often also indicated through the overarching category of 'Islam', particularly in art history. The latter, which I call *embodied heritage perpetuation*, engages in a decolonisation of the category of Islam by recognising it as perpetually productive of its identity through a continual reconstruction of the past with an eye to the future. As Shahab Ahmed articulates: 'something is Islamic to the extent that it is made meaningful in terms of hermeneutical engagement with Revelation to Muhammad as one or more of Pre-text, Text, and Con-text' (Ahmed, 2015, p. 405). If, contrary to the modern premise of the museum, all knowledge is understood as indivisibly related to revelation – even when not directly about cosmology, agency, prayer or other matters understood to directly impinge on the Divine, an Islamic premise asserts that all we can know is always already part of Truth. This proves an awkward reality for a universalist desire for an unmarked, unmediated and undenominational truth. Yet to deny it also imposes an episteme which occludes that which it seeks to understand.

Embodied heritage production articulates identity multivalently, resisting the pragmatic stability enabled by objective heritage preservation. Whereas the former emphasises transcultural communication at the potential cost of reductive summary, the latter emphasises cultural expression at the cost of transcultural communication. Each mode of heritage messaging has its own pragmatic and theoretical limits, and each enactment of heritage presentation – such as that which might take place within a ritual, at a musical performance or in a museum – must negotiate

between the poles of objective heritage preservation and embodied heritage perpetuation, recognising the real world constraints of social expectations, need, and range of address. In other words, all heritage messaging needs a bit of the mausoleal to give it a semblance of stability, but the cemetery of culture need not be a place of death. Rather, it can recognise the uncanny livingness of the space of remembrance that embodies us simultaneously in past and future.

Between the poles of heritage preservation and perpetuation, Islam as a living entity encounters several hurdles of modernity: its *scripturalisation* into a discourse pitting authentic roots against inauthentically multivalent practices through nineteenth-century Orientalist philology and religious studies; its *segregation* as historicised tradition from a progressive, secular world through premises reliant on protestant modes of religious privatisation under colonialism and during the twentieth-century establishment of postcolonial nation-states (Tageldin, 2011); and its subsequent *illiberalisation* through governmental efforts at decolonisation in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, resulting in a strong coincidence between restrictive, authoritarian governance and Islamism. In response to all of these framings of Islam, heritage messaging floats as though folded in a bottle from elsewhere: an object example (whether intangible or tangible heritage) of cultural practices that precede and/or persist through these phases framing the production of a recognisable set of practices called 'Islam', both confirming and contravening its limits. One way or the other, the exposition of heritage provides a window to another world. Yet this window requires a frame with a critical approach to the epistemology of modernity, including its framings of Islam. As Muhammad Arkoun points out:

'Islamicizing knowledge' must be preceded by a radical epistemological critique of knowledge at the deepest level of its construction as an operative system used by a group in a given social- historical space. We need to differentiate *ideological* discourses produced by groups for assessing their own identity, power and protection, from *ideational* discourses, which are controlled along the socio-historical process of their elaboration in terms of the new critical epistemology.

(Arkoun, 2003, p. 23)

Aiming to represent Islamic heritage in institutions like museums, objective heritage preservation runs the risk of reifying oppositions between 'us' and 'them', identifying Islam with modern communities even as it locates Islam as a non-actor in a mythic past. It preserves forms – material and immaterial – at all costs, including the cost of the potential plurality of meanings that have transited through the object over time and place. The preserved object becomes a vessel not of ideational but of ideological discourses. This may objectively preserve the object, but effectively destroys the modes of knowledge that it embodies. Only through the perpetuation of meaning can the object have a substrate through which to survive. It turns out that the opposite of destruction is not preservation; rather, they are all too often synonyms in which preservation uses the object as a mimetic shroud for that

which has been destroyed. The opposite of destruction is perpetuation; and if the object survives alongside thought in that perpetuity, all the better.

To this end, we can produce a mode of engagement with the forms of culture in which, rather than organisation into precedent categories, objects articulate knowledge. Samer Akkach describes a longstanding Islamic paradigm in which aesthetic practices function not as outlets of emotion, but as modes of knowing alongside those of philosophy, mathematics, and natural sciences, all of which share a shared goal of apprehending the truth of the Divine (Akkach, 2019, pp. xx–xxi). To the extent one might speak of an ‘eye of the beholder’, this is not an individual subjectivity governed by desire, but a subjectivity informed by a broad range of embodied aesthetic and intellectual practice.

The key to the shift from preservation towards perpetuation lies in enabling objects to instruct on their own terms and situating them so that their teachings inform each other. Rather than knowledge functioning as a descriptive practice that imposes order on objects, it becomes a productive practice in which objects articulate themselves. The objective becomes less to tell a predetermined story rooted in one of the vectors of meaning described above, but one that enables objects to articulate narratives imparting knowledge on multiple vectors. The recipient of the narratives encounters them less as learning *about* than as learning *from* the Other, expanding their own set of expressive tools.

The purpose of the exhibition shifts from placing the object in a pre-existing order, representing an external episteme (system of knowledge), into a revelation of its intrinsic epistemes. The meaning of the painting above shifts from an exemplary status as ‘Persian’ painting and the rarity of the signature (located on the vault, like graffiti) – art historical concerns – towards engagement with the poetic nexus referenced by the image, touching on multiple narratives implicit but not articulated in the text. This is readily apparent in the inclusion of a second story with a woodcutter at the bottom of the frame, which would have enhanced the meaning of the image and the poetic text associated with it within a broader cultural landscape. The image also invites comparison with architectural forms from the region, and with other texts with the same characters, such as the *Fables of Kalila and Dimna*. The image is not simply an illustration of an epic poem, but a focal point in a broader literary discourse.

If objects are to represent a culture, we need to engage with them with a broad knowledge of that culture on multiple levels. We need to let the objects articulate their elements as they would to a viewer in that culture, whose concerns would probably be less about cultural influence or authorship, less about the date or geography, and more about how justice functions in the righteous world, and how to live their own lives as elites viewing these manuscripts. We can and should situate these works in their temporogeographic matrix, but we cannot substitute that act of taxonomic placement for knowledge of the culture. We can, of course, look to the histories of collection of these objects, which often wrest the painting from the book, underscoring the process of cut-and-paste which renders the works of one culture as reflections of the rapacious entitlement of another. But to do so is not to speak of Islamic culture as such, but rather as a metonym of its appropriation and

reconceptualisation as knowledge of the other embodied both in Orientalism and in the museum.

Islamic heritage emerges through this process of appropriation, but if we are to engage with a heritage that is Islamic, it must enable objects to articulate their worldview in the plenitude of their intellectual and lived cultural traditions. We need to be able to learn from them, just as a subject in the sixteenth century would have.

This learning from initiates an alternative set of practices. Rather than just describing works, what if our own artistic creation comes to embody and reflect them? What if the idea of heritage becomes dislocated from identities and origins? What if what has happened with the hegemony of European art as a global contemporary expressive practice were to be taken out of the ghetto of regional heritage or 'world music' and also become a globalised expressive praxis? This embodiment of knowledge might become the greatest function of the museum: a mediator of that which is brought to life through the crumbled ruin or the mausoleum.

Making collections Islamic: matrices of decoloniality

On the level of the exhibition, this involves a breakdown of the categories through which we conceive of objects and offer them meaning through exhibition. It can only begin in a theoretical form, in the way that we write narratives about objects in the liberty of text, where we are not bound by entrenched physical boundaries such as ownership, insurance companies, and curatorial departments. But reality often begins in theory, so here goes: what might a collection that articulates its intrinsic knowledge rather than representing external vectors of knowledge look like?

My recent work articulates a decolonial model for art history, in which the subject position of the individual changes depending on the episteme from which they perceive. As though staring at an isometric, polyhedral, intertwining and laterally infinite Islamic pattern, the placement of the viewing subject remains mobile between a modern episteme of geohistoricity and an Islamic episteme of awareness of Truth via divine order (Shaw, 2019, pp. 326–335). What kind of exhibition structure induces or reflects this mode of apprehension?

The question of exhibition organisation is essentially mathematical. How do we organise sets into series, and deploy them across space temporalised through our movement? The dominant model functions through a logic of linear similitude along a single vector. Ideally, each object or object group follows the next through a pattern of difference along a single vector. For example, a retrospective of a single artist (rare in Islamic art) follows the category *a* (name of artist), generally through the vector *c* (time). Many exhibitions of Islamic art follow a dual vector of time in the form of dynasty (*c*) and geography (*d*), articulating the category of Islam as a historically hegemonic practice of sovereignty. How can we envision an alternative?

Let us return to the Henri Moser room at the Bernisches Historical Museum, where objects exist in visual association, but have complete syntagmatic freedom in terms of time or date. This is a free association of objects, shocking against an

ordering system predisposed to art history. Yet most of us live amid such cacophony, inhabiting environments in which objects beside each other do not ‘match’, but coexist. Such a room reproduces an idealised ‘image’ of the Orient, a fantasy still explicitly tied to the Thousand and One Nights on the museum’s website.⁶ Could this unique, eclectic collection function to inform an exhibition of ‘Islamic art’ as a site of knowledge production, perhaps just as well as the linear exposition of totalising collections in large museums? If so, how could it manage this task?

Assuming that each object functions against other objects syntagmatically, then there is no reason to assume that the association between objects must always follow a single vector. Consider the children’s game of *Dobble*. It consists of 55 cards, each with 8 of 57 symbols. Seemingly magically, the math works out such that every pair of cards has one and only one match of symbols.⁷ In the game, the player who calls out the match first wins the pair. The one with the most pairs wins (my daughter never lets me win). Winning aside, what if each of these symbols were one of our vectors, so some objects match in terms of (a), and others in terms of (b), then others in terms of (c). As in any exhibition, a given object tells a story in relation to its companion, but the vector of the relationship is both arbitrary and variable. Knowledge emerges less through linear narration than through the circular building of repeated elements. Curiosity leads from one vector to another, such that the fifth time the visitor encounters a vector, she comes to recognise it, calls it out, wins. Rather than being pushed into a pre-existing order, the objects thus become deployed to speak specific aspects of their stories against a shifting parade of neighbours. The condition of the exhibition would not be the consistency of a single vector (the overarching narrative of the exhibition), but the ability of objects to articulate aspects of their presence associatively through syntagmatic placement. Just as a decolonial art history requires decentering of the subject potentially modelled on Islamic pattern, this embedding of the object in a matrix of shifting vectors enables an awareness of the object’s multiple, simultaneous, shifting, and decentered subjectivities. An expanded array of mathematical premises informing exhibition strategies suggests ordering systems no less objective, and perhaps more dynamically informative, than the tried and true convention of linearity along a single unchanging vector.

Such a strategy of multiple contextualisations necessitates multimedia formats. It recreates the fascination of the nineteenth-century Oriental room but imbues it with the same type of associative meaning we might experience in the variety of our own complex material lives. Thus, for example, the Qajar-era Qur’an mentioned above functions in a context of Central Asia, Russian colonialism, trade with Iran, and the legacy of the Qur’an itself. It might indicate vectors of paper paint production, thus legacies of fabrication and trade. These might link to the rise of photography, or the industrialisation of carpets. A single work could syntagmatically rub elbows with entities representing each and all of these relationships – objects as well as literary quotations, music, films, reproductions and artworks reflecting on these legacies. We are no longer limited by the material legacies of collections and the media and quality classifications that have structured them. The only limit is the stories we want to tell.

In perpetuity: living

The crumbling building at the centre of the painting of Anoushirvan and his minister teems with life. As they fall away, the stability of the isometric patterns covering the vault enables productive flourishing. The owl, after all, is getting married. The storks are feeding a young family. Snakes, mice, deer and birds frolic in pairs. Delicately, even botanically, rendered flowers flourish. Much as we experience in the Corona times that I write this essay, nature flourishes in the absence of humans.

Likewise, the cemetery teems with life. Trees grow tall, vines flourish, mice, birds and foxes forage. Mosquitos eat me alive. People tend their small plots in remembrance. Recitations float across the air. We mourn the dead, but uncannily we live on. They live on in us. If museums can manage to live as vitally as mausoleums, this may not be such a bad thing.

The perpetuity of inheritance is simple, and it works like this. My daughter's lips are the same as my lips, which are the same as my father's lips, which are the same as his father's lips, with a far larger lower than upper lip, both of which are full and not very wide. At an age when she was young enough that nonexistence was both not far and absolutely incomprehensible, she asked me repeatedly where her grandpa, who died a year and a half before her birth, was now. 'Far away', I said. 'Too far even to Skype?' she said. Every day she asked again. One day I said: 'He is in our lips, and every time we kiss each other, we kiss him'. She was satisfied.

Notes

- 1 Arabic words are formed from groups of (usually three) consonants, indicating a concept around which a variety of nouns, verbs and adjectives evolve. The vowels imposed through speech change in various dialects and languages. I indicate the radicals rather than the words to emphasize the conceptual aspect of language and to avoid the pitfalls of transliteration that artificially emphasizes one vocalization as normative.
- 2 'Islam' of course is generally translated as 'submission', which is not incorrect as much as incomplete. In English, the notion of submission suggests force against the will of the subject. This is, rather, the kind of willing submission involved in recognition of the good will of the other, a laying down of arms and defenses implicit in the act of greeting. I like to think less of human greetings than of how a dog lays down and shows her belly, which can function as submission to a greater power (as with another dog), but also as a willingness to recognise the love of the other and enjoy a nice belly rub.
- 3 This essay considers the material object, but can also be considered regarding objects with tangential relationships with materiality (related to but not equivalent with intangible heritage), such as food, music, or dance, deployed as conveyors of identity.
- 4 Although Islam understands the unique Divine as identical with that of other Abrahamic traditions and the word *Allah* is used by Christians, Jews and Muslims alike, the word *God* in English implies a more anthropomorphic concept. In Islam, the Divine is likened to a veiled, self-perpetuating light, located closer than the believer's own jugular vein, and is endowed with some anthropomorphic descriptors (a face, hands and feet), but no necessary embodiment.
- 5 Montgomery convincingly argues that the title, normally translated as the *Book of Animals* and partly informed by Aristotle's *Naturae Animalia*, refers instead to the condition of living occurring in the afterlife as mentioned in the Qur'an, and pertaining to animals, humans and to the supernatural creations, angels and djinn.

- 6 <https://www.bhm.ch/en/exhibitions/permanent-exhibitions/oriental-collection-henri-moser/> Accessed 16.04.2020.
- 7 This is, of course, not magic. It follows the logic of a finite projective plane of order 57. *Dobble* relies on a condition that is not true in its prospective exhibitionary application: in the game, for any two symbols, there is one and only one card containing those symbols. This is not true with objects, for which many symbols – region, artist, date and material – may well overlap. It may be that these are ‘mute’ signifiers in our imaginary game, much like color in the card game – signifiers that may coincide, but offer little meaning for the connections we are interested in making.

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Chapter 2

Cemetery poetics

The sonic life of cemeteries in Muslim Europe

Peter McMurray

In many respects, my life as an ethnographer of music and sound began in a cemetery. In June 2004, I travelled to Bijelo Polje, Montenegro, to meet members of the Međedović family. I was interested in the poetic career of Avdo Međedović (d. 1955), the so-called Yugoslav Homer whose epic songs rivalled the *Odyssey* in length (Lord, 1960). One of our first activities was to attend the funerary procession and burial (Bosnian: *dženaza*; Arabic: *janaza*) of a neighbour. Then after a morning of filming Avdo's son, Zaim, singing at the old family home in the village of Obrov, we made a quick stop at a single gravemarker, isolated from the municipal cemetery, on the village road. Zaim invited me to get out of the car and approach the grave with him. Without explanation, he then lifted his hands, palms towards his face, and began reciting from the Qur'an in near silence: his lips moved rapidly with slight hints of audible breath and sibilants. Only later, as we continued with our drive down from the foothills into town did Zaim explain that he had been reciting from Sura al-Fatiha and al-Ikhlās from the Qur'an and a prayer of supplication (Bosnian: *dova*, Arabic: *du'ā'*) as part of traditional Muslim practices of visiting the dead.

In the years since, my research has come to focus more specifically on sonic practices within Islam; cemeteries have continued to figure quite centrally in my work, precisely for their liminal auditory states. Cemeteries in Western contexts are often understood to be sites of solemn quiet and repose. Yet on further reflection, many cemeteries, especially Islamic cemeteries and burial sites both in Europe and elsewhere, are replete with sound, recitation and listening. In this chapter, I make three interconnected arguments about Islamic cemeteries, focusing on those in Europe in particular, though many if not all these claims may also apply to Islamic cemeteries elsewhere. First, these cemeteries have a distinctly social life, full of visits by the living to the dead (and for some, vice versa). Second, this social life is made strikingly manifest through (sometimes loosely) codified sonic practices that foster certain interactions while proscribing others – I call these practices and the norms that govern them *cemetery poetics*. And third, these cemetery poetics play an important role in forging a sense of shared heritage and cultural identity, and, as such, they give rise to potential contestation where sound – especially prayers and protests – yet again plays an important role in shaping what these cemeteries are and how they articulate the intertwining of past/present.



Figure 2.1 Zaim Međedović prays at the grave of his father outside Bijelo Polje, Montenegro, June 2004. Photograph by Peter McMurray.

Again, such cemetery poetics may well hold for Islamic cemeteries beyond Europe and for cemeteries that are not Islamic as well; but European Islam offers intriguing opportunities for thinking about how heritage and cultural memory emerge across geographies with very different histories relative to Islam. My ethnographic research here ranges from places like Turkey (Istanbul and Kars) and southeastern Europe (Bosnia and Herzegovina and Montenegro), where Islam has long been part of the social fabric, to Berlin, where migration in the mid-twentieth century brought Muslims in much larger numbers than had previously inhabited the city. Crucially, across most if not all of these locations, Islam's status has been a point of frequent contestation – and sometimes violence, as I explore below – in the past century, adding another layer of complexity to the question of heritage, memory and death, whether through sound or otherwise.

More broadly, these examples suggest a broader point about heritage sites and heritage studies: sound plays a crucial role in forming, transmitting and contesting cultural memory. Furthermore, the interplay between sonic practices and physical sites suggests a blurring between the frequent distinction of intangible/tangible heritage: less-tangible sound practices (speech, recitation, praying, listening and protest) arise in response to the emphatically tangible realm of cemeteries, with the two joining together and (sometimes rather literally) engaging in dialogue to co-constitute the very idea of an Islamic cemetery.

Sonic heritage in Muslim Europe: an itinerary

In tracing out an idea of cemetery poetics in this chapter, I chart an itinerary that is both geographical and conceptual. Beginning in Istanbul, I consider a longstanding debate among Muslims about whether the dead hear, and if so, what kind of hearing that may be and what kinds of sonic practices emerge there. In short, I argue that a cemetery functions as a kind of sonic medium or interface between the living and dead. Next, at Berlin's Şehitlik Mosque and cemetery, I explore concrete ways in which Muslims engage sonically with the dead in cemeteries, including through special recitations at the end of Ramadan. The notion of *şehitlik* means a 'martyrs' cemetery', and gestures towards a historical memory that predates the larger waves of migrants from Turkey in the mid/late-twentieth century. That memory has also become a point of contestation and protest, often through sound. More broadly, the idea of being a martyr (a *shahīd*, the Arabic root of the word *şehitlik*) relates closely to witnessing (being a *shāhid*), a thread that runs through many of these practices, intertwining sound, memory and death – including genocide and state-sanctioned violence.

The next two cemeteries and their particular poetics raise questions about the diversity of practices within Islam beyond Sunnism. First, I discuss how Shi'a Muslims in Kars, Turkey, commemorate the death of the early Muslim martyr Husayn ibn 'Ali at Ashura by visiting cemeteries – including the Garnizon Şehitlik cemetery in Kars – as part of a processional route through the city. The procession is extraordinarily loud, as well, suggesting ways in which sonic power and affect figure into the poetics of encounter between living and dead. I then return to Berlin to an Alevi cemetery that opened in October 2016 in a ceremony featuring music performed on the *bağlama* lute and ritual prayers that differ markedly from Sunni practice. Alevi practices are often viewed as 'heterodox' or adjacent to Islam, yet Alevis play a crucial role in German public discourse in defining what it means to be a migrant from Turkey (or to be part of a second- or third-generation of earlier migrations) and by extension what Islam means – even if some Alevis would insist that they are not Muslim. Furthermore, a history of massacres of Alevis in the Ottoman Empire and Turkey has also engendered a complex sense of memory, death, and commemoration through sound and other practices.

My concluding example is the Srebrenica-Potočari Memorial and Cemetery in Bosnia and Herzegovina, a site where literal and figurative silence hangs heavy in the face of the Srebrenica genocide. That trauma destabilises any simple notion of cultural heritage or collective memory in Europe, and by extension, raises the question of whether any kind of utterance – let alone a full-fledged, cemetery poetics – is possible in its wake. Srebrenica also calls attention to the ruptures in conceiving of a European Islam (or perhaps even of Europe itself).

I situate my work here within an emerging scholarly discussion about *sonic heritage*. This term has been used to describe a variety of practices and objects/locations, but I see three major strands emerging in its usage, all of which have some relevance here. The first and oldest strand relates to sound archives as key sites for constructing a notion of sonic heritage, as argued by Johannes Müske (2010), or

reconstructing, deconstructing, re-performing and critically scrutinising forms of sonic heritage that have accumulated in archives already (Birdsall, 2016; Loble, 2018). We might consider a more precise term here, *audio heritage*, since the form of sound is bound up with audio recording in particular.¹ A second strand can be seen in Pinar Yelmi's Istanbul-based work on 'contemporary cultural soundscapes as intangible cultural heritage' (2016), which suggests that sounds produced in a city space more generally – that is, on a daily basis or in ostensibly mundane moments – might constitute cultural heritage, though Yelmi (like Müske) still seems to presume that such sound must be recorded to 'count' as sonic heritage. A third possible trajectory is exemplified by Paul Tourle (2017), who uses sound and practices of sonic heritage-making (albeit, again, mostly tied to audio recording) to theorise broader questions of heritage and cultural memory more generally.² My approach here hews most closely to Yelmi's work on Istanbul soundscapes in its focus on sound (as opposed to audio) and space; but like Tourle, in drawing on sound, and more precisely here a notion of 'poetics', I aim to conceptualise more clearly still how heritage is constructed in Muslim life in contemporary Europe.³ Such an approach suggests ways in which critical heritage studies might cultivate ethnographic listening – distinct from audio recording per se – as a research practice and a critical interpretive lens.

Listening to a cemetery: polyphonic deadness at Eyüp Sultan, Istanbul

On a warm summer morning in 2014, I met two friends at Eyüp Sultan Mosque in Istanbul to hear a theology lecture on *hadith* traditions (sayings about the life/deeds of the Prophet Muhammad) in the mosque later that day. I had arrived quite early and sat around, watching life at the mosque complex: shops opened, cleaning staff swept out the courtyards, and the families of young boys preparing for circumcision gathered to take photos in front of the mosque's fountain. When my friends arrived, we decided first to walk up to Pierre Loti, a café and city overlook, following a path that leads through a hillside cemetery. As we walked, our conversation turned to the condition of the deceased between death and resurrection, sometimes called *ölüm hayatı* (literally 'the life of death') or *berzah hayatı* ('the life of *barzakh*'); *barzakh* is the formal theological name for this interim period; see Hacıoğlu, 1996). Among other things, we discussed the rules of visiting the graves of the dead, including prohibitions on wailing that the Prophet Muhammad had instituted. During the course of our conversation, the sound of special recitations known as *sela* (or *salâ*) began emanating from the mosque down the hill, prompting me to ask directly – and for the first time in my research – whether the dead could hear. Both friends promptly agreed: the answer was 'yes'. They referenced *hadith* traditions and passages in the Qur'an, as well as some more recent, supernatural experiences they had heard from local religious leaders and friends.

We attended the lecture, after which I waited outside while they performed congregational prayers. From there, I observed dozens of visitors press up against the mausoleum of the mosque's namesake, Eyüp Sultan (or Abū Ayyūb al-Anṣārī).

There they adopted the same prayerful posture as Zaim Međedović had at the grave of his father: standing upright with hands raised about as high as their shoulders, palms facing the face. The courtyard was nearly full of people, many of whom were about to begin congregational prayers, making it possible only to see people's lips moving gently as they stood in front of the small window looking into the mausoleum.

The congregational prayers spilled into the courtyard, creating an even more porous divide between the sensory space of the mosque interior and exterior, with loudspeakers conveying the imam's liturgical expressions during prayers. After the prayers, many in the congregation gathered in a space just outside the courtyard for the *cenaze* (funerary) prayers for several people. Once again, an elaborate set of sonic and kinetic rituals brought together the living and dead – or rather, were performed by the living on behalf of the dead, who were, at least to some degree, able to hear and understand such sacred rites.

My interest here is less to demonstrate just how widely Muslims believe that the dead can (and do) hear, and more to suggest a kind of polyphonic space of sonic and spatial interaction between the living and dead. In recent years, the Islamic *adhan*, or call to prayer, has become a key paradigm for scholars of Muslim sonic practices (e.g. Eisenberg, 2013; Tamimi Arab, 2017). But little distinction is generally made between the variety of recitations that might be broadcast from mosque minarets (e.g. *adhan* vs. *sela/salâ*) as well as those that might be broadcast just into the mosque courtyard itself (e.g. theological lectures, the imam's liturgical expressions during congregational prayers).⁴ Furthermore, the cluster of other rituals with carefully calibrated sonic registers (e.g. recitations that are near silent, partially aloud, or entirely aloud; as well as sounds like weeping or wailing that are generally discouraged) relate mosques specifically to the dead, whether recently deceased and awaiting burial or buried over 1,300 years ago. In collapsing the space between the living and the dead through sound, these rituals also collapse – at least partially – distinctions between the past and present, present and absent, and material and immaterial.

Cemetery poetics at Berlin Şehitlik Cemetery: contestations

Ramadan at Berlin Şehitlik Mosque is a time of important interactions between the living and the dead. While the month is better known for its month-long fast, it also entails other rituals, including the recitation of the entire Qur'an and certain special congregational prayers, that can cultivate an intermundane intimacy unique from other times of the year. For instance, congregational prayers on Laylat al-Qadr (the Night of Power, usually held on the 27th night of the month) and on the morning of Eid al-Fitr (marking the end of the month) draw such large crowds that the mosque fills to capacity and then beyond. Congregants then spread mats on the mosque balcony and around the courtyard to create more space for prostrations. Their ability to spread out is hindered by the presence of the dead: two small plots of land holding dozens of graves take up half the courtyard, with only a small

walkway running between the two plots across much of the length of the courtyard. This design is a feature, not a flaw: the cemetery precedes the mosque, and indeed, the name ‘Berlin Şehitlik’ indicates a cemetery of martyrs, or those who died in wars. In this case, the cemetery dates back indirectly to the late nineteenth century – in other words, predating both Germany and Turkey as political entities. As a consequence of the unusual spatial configuration and the large congregation size, the small walkway between the two cemetery plots is used for praying, meaning that many congregants are only inches away from graves.



Figure 2.2 View of Şehitlik Cemetery from main entrance of Şehitlik Mosque, Berlin, 2019. Photograph by Peter McMurray.

Another point of close contact comes on the final day of the month and relates to the traditional Ottoman/Turkish practice of *mukabele*, or reciting the Qur’an in pairs, with one person reciting while the other follows along to ensure accuracy. Members of the congregation sit and listen and (if inclined/able) follow along. The practice allows the congregation to perform a complete recitation/reading of the Qur’an. At Şehitlik (and at some mosques in Turkey), this complete recitation of the Qur’an, or *hatim* (*khatm*), culminates in a special set of prayers that are consecrated to the benefit of the dead. In both 2015 and 2019 when I participated in these concluding rituals, the congregation processed out of the mosque and mosque courtyard, continuing to the municipal cemetery behind the mosque that has served as the mosque’s primary burial site for decades since the plots inside the mosque courtyard filled up. They found a suitable place in the Islamic section of the cemetery where they then recited Sura YāSīn. This practice of reciting the Qur’an in the cemetery simultaneously addresses God and the souls of the deceased, following the injunction found on so many gravestones, ‘*Ruhuna fatiha*’ (also ‘*Ruhuna el-fatīha*’): recite Sura al-Fatiha to the deceased’s soul (see Figure 2.3).



Figure 2.3 Headstone in Şehitlik Cemetery, Berlin: ‘Ayşe Aykoç, daughter of Hamdi Aykoç of Kayseri. Fatiha to her soul. B[orn] 5.8.1969, d[ied] 7.4.1970’. Photograph by Peter McMurray.

But just as cemeteries have poetics, they also have politics, and Berlin Şehitlik is no exception. Or as one acquaintance put it to me during my research: ‘The problem with cemeteries is that the people buried there were once alive’ – and so did all kinds of things during their lives which might be commemorated on tombstones or other memorials. For instance, a large commemorative pillar stands in memory of Gıridî ‘Alî ‘Azîz Efendi, an Ottoman diplomat and writer whose death prompted Prussia to give a parcel of land to the Ottomans (Uysal, 2006). Less grandiose but no less compelling, many of the individual gravestones tell microbiographies, including several individuals in the mosque courtyard sites who died at very young ages, ranging from one day to a couple of years old. Most of these gravestones date back to the 1970s, giving some indication of the pains suffered by the community of ‘guestworkers’ (*Gastarbeiter*) who had arrived only a

few years earlier and now were grieving the loss of babies and young children who were born and died in Berlin.

The most politically contentious graves are those of Cemal Azmi and Bahâddin Şakir, two of the organisers of the Armenian Genocide who were killed in exile in Berlin in the 1920s. A third, Talaat Pasha, was also buried there but his remains were moved to Turkey during World War II (Kieser, 2018). The contestations over their graves have manifested most clearly in protests. These began after the two graves, now both including the phrase ‘Ruhuna el-fatiha’ and describing their deaths as *Şehadet*, or martyrdom (a variant of the cemetery’s name, Şehitlik) at the hands of ‘Armenian terrorists’, were renewed by the mosque community in 2011. German-Armenians held small-scale protests across the street from the mosque (Kalarickal and Bax, 2012). The protests escalated again in 2015 when the German government formally declared the massacre of Armenians to be genocide (‘Merkel nennt Massaker an Armeniern nun doch Völkermord’, 2015), to which German-Turkish groups responded with a large demonstration in May 2016, marching from Potsdamer Platz to Brandenburg Gate (Coşkun, 2016). While not deafening, this protest was loud, featuring group chants and amplified speeches from a sound truck (and later a temporary stage), as well as a kind of impromptu drum circle in front of Brandenburg Gate, featuring folk music and *halay* dancing. The event culminated in a musical concert on the temporary stage featuring artists such as Uğur Işlak, a German-born singer-turned-politician (‘Almanya’daki Türkler sokağa döküldü’, 2016).

To return full circle, these tensions then spilled into Ramadan, which began just a few days later, as Şehitlik Mosque cancelled an evening fast-breaking (*iftar*) with Norbert Lammert, then President of the Bundestag (German parliament) (Kather, 2016). These sonic interactions between living and dead, with special focus around the time of Ramadan, highlight the ways in which a cemetery functions as a medium, entangling the past with the present in emotionally charged ways. These sonic contestations about the deceased may seem unrelated to the *khatm* prayers, yet in both cases, the state of the dead becomes an urgent concern for the living, whether for political/historical reasons or more personal ones, like remembering relatives who have passed away.

Cemetery poetics at Kars Şehitlik Cemetery: (loud) commemoration

If Islamic cemeteries generally give rise to a particular poetics, perhaps it is not unreasonable to think of *Şehitlik* or martyrs’ cemeteries as cultivating their own distinctive poetic genres, often tied to heritage-making that explicitly invokes national military histories. Much as the congregation at Berlin’s Şehitlik processed through the cemetery to mark sacred moments in the liturgical calendar, so too at the *Garnizon Şehitliği* (Military Martyrs) Cemetery in Kars, Turkey, on the day of Ashura. Kars, located in the northeastern corner of the country, is home to a sizeable community of Caferi, or Twelver Shi‘a, Muslims, and on Ashura, the 10th day of the Islamic month of Muharram, the congregations in the city join together for

a procession through the city to commemorate the Battle of Karbala (680 CE) and the martyrdom of Husayn, the son of ‘Ali ibn ‘Abi Talib and the third Imam according to Shi‘i belief.⁵ The procession, in which participants beat their chests or whip their backs with chains, is accompanied by sung poetry; in 2017, when I attended the procession, poetry was broadcast – primarily played back from recordings – at extremely loud levels from a construction truck piled high with loudspeakers. I do not think I have ever heard anything as loud as this soundtrack in the 10 years of research I have been conducting on Islamic sonic practices in Germany and Turkey. The procession stretched out over several city blocks at any given time and the sonic intensity allowed thousands of people to coordinate their actions. After wending throughout the city, the procession stopped at the Kars Şehitlik Cemetery for a short programme, then continued a few more blocks to the entrance of the Asri Cemetery, where it concluded with an extended gathering. These two cemetery stops and their respective sonic performances – the cemetery poetics that emerged at each – suggest a common repertoire of commemorative practices as well as certain particularities unique to martyrs’ cemeteries.

As a preliminary note, the Kars Şehitlik Cemetery belongs to what we might think of as the same generation of military or martyrs’ cemetery as Berlin Şehitlik. Although Berlin has some graves predating World War I, the first cluster of Ottoman ‘martyrs’ are those from World War I who died while in Prussia, often for medical treatment. It is worth noting that the neighbouring Columbiadamm Cemetery, where the *khatm* prayers were recited at the end of Ramadan, also has close connections to fallen Prussian/German soldiers in World War I, as evidenced by its monuments. The Kars Şehitlik Cemetery was founded in 1920, creating a designated burial site for nearly 100 soldiers who died in the 1877–78 Russo-Turkish War and the War of Independence (1919–1923) (Durmuş, 2019). The coincidence of the founding of the cemetery and the struggle for independence is suggestive of the ways in which remembering the dead connects to national identity.

The 20-minute program at Kars Şehitlik on the day of Ashura in 2017 strung together a series of performative sonic genres, with the whole congregation pressed closely together at the cemetery’s entrance. Some key moments included:

- military (bugle) taps, played back over the loudspeakers
- the Turkish national anthem, ‘İstiklal Marşı’, played back over loudspeakers, with most of the procession joining in singing
- recitation of the Qur’an by a local reciter
- a series of speeches by local religious and civic leaders, culminating in *dua* prayers

While the non-spoken portions were, in many respects, more sonically engaging, the speeches – also amplified over the truck’s loudspeakers – articulated a more explicit connection between the commemorations of the martyrs of Karbala and the martyrs of more recent armed conflict. The main speech was given by Seyit Ahmet Erdem, the head of Işıklı Mosque, one of the major Shi‘i mosques in Kars. His speech mostly recounted for the audience *about* the martyrs of Karbala, but he

concluded with the following comments, addressed to Imam Husayn, the central martyr of the Battle of Karbala:

We came to support you against this falsehood. We came to say *labbayk* [i.e., we stand ready]. We are at your side and have given our hearts to your cause. [...] Here with our dear people, with our respected governor, and with our representatives who have travelled from afar, we stand with you with our minds, our souls, and our hearts and we will continue on your path. You who are the lord of all martyrs [*bütün şehitlerin efendisi*] who undergo martyrdom, o Husayn, in the presence of our martyrs, we make known to you and the martyrs of Karbala, those who were thirsty at Karbala, and those who suffered at Karbala, our love, our reverence and our commitment. I offer my reverence and respect to these dear devotees of the prophet's household. Peace be upon you, as well as God's mercy and blessings.

(30 September 2017)

As Seyit Ahmet finished his remarks, the congregation gathered there called out '*Labbayk, o Husayn!*' three times, signalling that they too stood ready to assist Imam Husayn. His commentary explicitly ties Husayn and his companions to the martyrs buried there at the Kars cemetery. The conversation becomes multidirectional. At this culminating moment, Seyit Ahmet is primarily addressing Husayn (and those who were with him at Karbala), already a striking exchange between living and dead. Yet his remarks are clearly meant to be heard by the congregation gathered there and to be heard clearly, as evidenced by the microphone/loudspeaker as well as his use of the first-person plural ('we came...' or 'we stand...'). The congregation reciprocates by echoing his comments with the cry '*Labbayk, o Husayn!*', simultaneously responding to Seyit Ahmet and yet addressing Husayn explicitly; and again, the martyrs buried in Kars are then invoked (if not necessarily addressed) as de facto witnesses – again, already implicit in the word *şehit*. The particular poetics of this moment are poignant and multidirectional, entangling the living and the dead in a call and response.

This kind of interaction contrasts in striking ways with the final destination of the whole procession, Asri Cemetery. At Asri, the entire procession again came to a halt, but in this case, the participants did not stop or grow quiet, but rather intensified their self-flagellations (or *sinezen*). An open field and a large intersection provided an open area to stage the climax of the procession rituals. At the same time, smaller groups from individual congregations headed into the cemetery itself to visit graves and pay respects to family and friends. Many of the groups went to visit the grave of Axund Gökmen Kankılıç, the former head of the Kamer Kesemenli Mosque, another of the Shi'i mosques in the city. Kankılıç had died almost exactly 40 days earlier, an important interval for mourning and visitation to graves. Some groups recited prayers on his behalf or even recited poetry he had written, and several participated in *sinezen* mourning. He, not unlike the deceased soldiers at the Kars Şehitlik Cemetery, took on a role that bore certain similarities to Imam Husayn as an object of lamentation and as a kind of posthumous poetic

interlocutor. Yet the process at Asri Cemetery was much less formal and made few (if any) gestures towards a broader national identity or history. The cemetery was still a site of heritage-making, but the poetics were much more intimate and personalised, rather than the kind of macro-level narratives being asserted by and in response to the Şehitlik Cemetery.

Beyond Şehitlik: Alevi cemetery poetics in Berlin

The October 2016 opening of an Alevi cemetery in Berlin offers yet another illustration of the complex poetics that emerge from cemeteries, again including forms of contestation through sound. The cemetery suggests both how heritage-making is currently taking place as migrant communities – now well into their third generation – put down increasingly deep roots in Berlin and Germany and how the very notion of an ‘Islamic cemetery’ (or even ‘Islam’ for that matter) is already an unstable concept.

Describing the precise poetics of Islamic cemeteries in Europe requires, as mentioned above, defining Islam. Alevi, a minority group in Turkey with a strong presence among diasporic communities in Germany and Western Europe, have a complex relationship with Islam, with many ritual practices invoking God (Allah), Muhammad and ‘Ali in ways that bear close resemblances to Sufism and Shi‘i Islam, yet with key differences as well. Just as cemeteries created points of contestation through sound between Muslims and non-Muslims in the case of Berlin Şehitlik Mosque, they can also reveal tensions within groups that are often lumped together as ‘migrant’, ‘Turkish’ or ‘Muslim’ communities. Many Alevi I interact with regularly would disagree with all three of those labels: their families have often lived in Germany for multiple generations already, they identify ethnically as Kurdish or Zaza rather than Turkish, and their devotional practices (for those who see Alevism as a form of religious or spiritual practice) unsettle clear boundaries of Islam.⁶ Other Alevi I have spoken with reject any connection to Islam at all, or even any connection to religion, embracing instead an identity of ‘Alevism without ‘Ali’ that focuses on longstanding connections to Alevi culture that predate Islam (Bulut, 1997). In other words, the way Alevism cuts across these multiple, seemingly stable categories of identity – religion, ethnicity, language – highlights just how inadequate, if not downright artificial, such theoretical classifications are in practice.

The first two Alevi cemeteries in Germany – and in Europe more generally – were opened in 2016, with one opening in Hamburg in April and another in Berlin in October. Indeed, these cemeteries could be seen as the first purpose-built Alevi cemeteries anywhere (Gürler, 2016). I attended the opening of the Berlin cemetery on 1 October 2016, a chilly, grey Saturday afternoon. The cemetery consists of 3,000 square meters within the St. Thomas Cemetery in the district of Neukölln, and can accommodate 400 burial sites. The opening ceremony was held in a small chapel near the entrance of the cemetery. It opened with two distinctively Alevi sonic practices: a *deyiş*, or sacred poem, sung by Erdal Kaya, who accompanied himself on the *bağlama* (or *saz*), a long-necked lute; and a ritual invocation known as *gülbank* pronounced by Ercan Yıldız, one of the *dede* elders that lead the

Religious Council (*toplum*) of the Berlin Alevi Community. The *deyiş* which Kaya sang features the common Alevi refrain ‘*Hû hú hú*, help us, o ‘Ali!’ That orientation towards ‘Ali rather than (or as a means to) God (Allah) offers some insight into Alevi thought and practice, both in cemeteries and beyond. While often described as a form of ‘heterodoxy’ relative to state-sanctioned forms of Sunni Islam in Turkey, these kinds of poetic utterances in Alevism suggest theologies that have commonalities with longstanding traditions in Shi’a Islam (e.g. the focus on and veneration of ‘Ali) and Sufism (e.g. the recitation of the word *hú*, meaning ‘he’ as a shortened form of *Allahu*, as discussed in Gill, 2017). At the same time, Alevi’s articulation of these ideas, through the pairing of *saz* (instrumental music) and *söz* (sung poetry), points to a performance register that expands considerably on the cemetery poetics I have been discussing here, at least in this moment of celebrating the opening of the cemetery.

Ercan Dede began his portion of the programme with a similar theological invocation: *Bismişah Allah Allah*: ‘in the name of the Shah [‘Ali], Allah Allah’, rather than the ubiquitous Islamic phrase, *bismillah*, ‘in the name of Allah’. He then lit candles, with an accompanying invocation that they may burn and give light, before beginning the *gülbak* itself. He opened with the same invocation again (*bismişah Allah Allah*) and then proceeded with a series of supplications about and on behalf of the congregation as well as a variety of intercessory figures (God, Muhammad, ‘Ali, Fatima, and so on). While the programme continued with a series of speeches, these two opening gestures set the tone – both literally and figuratively – for making these burial plots a kind of sacred ground.

In one of the subsequent speeches, the District Mayor of Neukölln, Franziska Giffey, quoted a popular aphorism: ‘People come into our lives and accompany us for a while. Some remain forever because they leave behind traces of themselves’.⁷ She then continued: ‘People leave behind traces of themselves when there is a place where their loved ones can grieve for them’. Kadir Şahin, the General Secretary of the Berlin Alevi Community at the time, underscored similar concerns: ‘With this cemetery plot we’ve signalled: Alevi have arrived in Germany. They’ll be staying here for good. They want their descendants to be able to mourn here’ (Gürler, 2016).

For many migrants from Turkey, whether Sunni, Alevi, or otherwise, the act of ‘staying here [in Germany] for good’ and creating physical sites to commemorate the dead marks an important cultural shift; but it also offers Alevi further possibilities for distinguishing themselves from Sunni Muslims. For instance, the cemetery plot will have its own Alevi symbols (e.g. a gate and four pillars symbolising the divine path Alevi seek to follow). It will also use different spatial arrangements for burials, as Şahin explains:

For us Alevi, we don’t orient ourselves toward the Ka’aba [in Mecca] during prayers, but rather people sit in a circle and prostrate toward one another.... So to begin – and unfortunately we can only do this at the front of the cemetery plot or we would lose too much space – the graves will be arranged in a circle, the same way we pray.

(Hür, 2016)

Burial practices can offer Alevis other, more explicit (that is, verbal) ways of differentiating themselves from Sunni Muslims. Ercan Dede explained: 'It was only about ten years ago that Islamic terms were being used for our burial ceremonies. Now of course we use the proper Alevi terms. When you look at history, remember that all rulers have tried to assimilate Alevis to be Muslims. We're working here to ensure that we return to our own rites and practices and revitalise them' (Hür, 2016). That question of assimilation points towards a longer history of political violence against Alevis, including a long list of massacres in Dersim/Tunceli, Sivas, Maraş, Çorum, Sivas again and so on. In short, cemetery poetics allow for expressions of identity and cultural difference through sound, ritual, and physical space, but they also fuse death in the present with the commemoration of longer histories of dying and being killed. In other words, cemetery poetics are never divorced from the political.

Speechless at Srebrenica: the limits of cemetery poetics

These experiences and cemeteries represent only a part of the Islamic cemeteries and related sonic rituals that have figured in my research. I have barely touched on funerary prayers, visitation practices at the graves of major 'saints', or more esoteric teachings I have heard discussed about how the dead not only hear but also speak back or even join with the living in forms of recitation.⁸ But by way of conclusion, I want to point to the limits of my argument here: yes, there is a rich variety of sonic poetics that emerges in and around Islamic cemeteries and funerary practices. But there are limits to what those poetics can express. One cemetery stands out in particular as eliciting a kind of anti-poetics, a shutting-down of some of these sonic activities: the Srebrenica-Potočari Memorial and Cemetery (or Memorial Complex) in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The website *Remembering Srebrenica* describes the complex as follows: 'The Srebrenica-Potočari Memorial Complex was founded in May 2001 as a non-profit organisation that aims to build and maintain the complex in memory of the victims of the Srebrenica genocide'. It then continues: 'The Srebrenica genocide saw the systematic murder of 8,372 Bosnian Muslim men and boys by Bosnian Serb forces'.⁹ Sarah Wagner (2010) has suggested that the memorial complex has a two-fold function of 'tabulating loss' and 'entombing memory', that is, imposing a framework on the horrific violence of Srebrenica to allow survivors, families and visitors to start to make some sense of it. Her focus lies primarily with the formal organisation of the complex. My interest lies more so with the practices of individual visitors as they come to the cemetery and the ways they then respond to its traumas and calls for remembering.

I visited the site in 2015 with a small group of Bosnian Muslim men, organised by a close friend of mine. At the time, my friend and I were considering making an audiovisual project about the complex. But even more so, it became clear as we drove that my fellow travellers were going primarily to pay their respects. So it was no surprise when, upon our arrival at the cemetery portion of the complex, they got out and all held their hands up in front of them, palms facing towards

them – much like Zaim Međedović had when we visited his father's grave together a decade earlier – and silently recited passages from the Qur'an and other prayers. The morning was generally very still, the only sound in the cemetery being the regular rhythm of two men digging a new grave off to one side. The process of finding and identifying remains is still not complete.

For the better part of an hour, however, we simply stood there quietly, each of us reading to ourselves the names of the deceased – the *šehid* martyrs/victims of Srebrenica. There was nothing to say. There was nothing that *could* be said.

Eventually, without hardly saying a word to each other, we headed to the car. It was time to go. We drove into the town of Srebrenica for lunch, but mostly just ate in silence. On the drive back, it took us probably an hour to start talking again, despite having enjoyed a lively, fluid conversation on the drive down earlier that morning. On some level, this is (and was) hardly a surprise. Yet I remember distinctly how heavy that quiet was. Later, one of my travel companions brought up this issue of silence with me indirectly, shaking his head and asking: 'What is there to say? There's nothing'.

Conclusion

It's tempting to simply stop this chapter there – to let this call to silence be the last word. But in closing, I want to make two broader points related to Srebrenica. First, a more general observation on Islamic heritage in Europe: this heritage is not simply a question of locating certain sites or practices within the territory of Europe; it is also a question of recognising that when genocide takes place in Europe, that trauma is inseparable from some abstract notion of Europe or its recent history. There is no Europe without Bosnian Muslims, nor can there be a Europe today without some acknowledgement of this brutal violence. And indeed, several of the cemeteries I discuss here – not to mention the Holocaust and its memorials – are bound up in histories of genocide and massacre, raising the question as to whether these intense forms of state violence are the exception or the norm in European modernity.

Secondly, Srebrenica raises the question of the limits of the very possibility of cemetery poetics. The problem here is not necessarily the absence of sound; indeed, any notion of poetics (or poetry or music) seems predicated on the possibility of silence as a way to punctuate other audible utterances. Neither trauma nor political violence is an insurmountable challenge per se, as evidenced by the way Shi'a Muslims have responded and continue to respond sonically, poetically and ritually to the Battle of Karbala. Rather, the question is one of a poetics of the future: can an anti-poetics of speechlessness coexist with the need to speak out, as it were, in order to ensure that these acts of violence are not forgotten? Strikingly, almost all of the examples I have dealt with here touch on histories of traumatic political violence, at least obliquely: Berlin Şehitlik and the Armenian Genocide; Kars Şehitlik and Karbala; and the Alevi Cemetery in Berlin and the long history of violence against Alevis that lies in the background of their relationship with the Turkish state. Many of those groups have long since established rituals to grapple

with mass killings and trauma, often using sound as a central aspect of their rituals. Only time will tell precisely what kind of cemetery poetics might emerge from Srebrenica.

In turn, the same might be said of any and all of these cemeteries: while sound plays a crucial role in defining their existence at present, and they in turn play important roles in defining contemporary understandings of the past, that poetics can and does shift quickly. While some of the sites discussed here have existed for centuries, others have been constructed in the past 5 years. The power and limitation of ethnography, whether sonic or otherwise, lie in its particularity; these cemeteries and their sonic poetics, taken altogether, suggest a broader phenomenon, but one with ongoing granularity and change. The establishment and ongoing expansion of Sunni Muslim and Alevi cemeteries in recent years in Berlin foreshadow a deepening of these sonic practices across Europe. And while the future remains uncertain, these varieties of cemetery poetics are shaping collective and individual memories of the dead and of a broader cultural history spanning from Karbala to Srebrenica, from the death of a poet to the deaths of soldiers, and so on. Yet at the same time, the ongoing 'refugee crisis' (among other recent political and cultural developments) and the shifting demographics of cities like Istanbul and Berlin (especially with the increase of Syrians) suggest that existing sonic and sensory processes will also continue to shift and evolve.

I am reminded of Jacques Derrida's comments about the archive and its futures, which seem applicable to heritage sites like cemeteries and their poetics as well. With regards to the cemetery (in lieu of 'the archive'): 'if we want to know what this will have meant, we will only know in the times to come. Perhaps. Not tomorrow but in the times to come, later on or perhaps never' (Derrida, 1995, p. 27).

For the time being, as my Bosnian colleague might ask: what (more) is there to say? There's nothing.

Notes

- 1 Tim Brooks uses this term in an article on sound recordings and US copyright law (Brooks, 2009), but does not draw any clear distinction between 'audio heritage' and any other form of sonic heritage.
- 2 Although not framed expressly as a discussion of heritage, the essays in Michael Frishkopf and Federico Spinetti's recent volume, *Music, Sound, and Architecture in Islam* (2018), suggest the possibilities of a broader, interdisciplinary conversation about sound and Islamic heritage sites more generally.
- 3 In delineating Europe, I include here by design both areas that have had Muslim majorities for centuries, as in regions of southeastern Europe, and areas like Berlin that have seen a notable rise in the numbers of Muslims living there in the past century due to various forms of migration. I also include Turkey as a whole, including both Istanbul – an important part of Europe in a literal, geographical sense and in the European imaginary dating back to Constantinople – and also Kars, a city in eastern Turkey that has shifted between Turkish and Russian holding over the past two centuries. Even without that Russian connection, it has a long history as part of a larger Black Sea region that is closely intertwined with European history.
- 4 Although not solely about the distinctions between *adhan* and *sela*, Erol Koymen (2017) does explore the meaning of *sela* during the 2016 failed coup in Turkey.

- 5 For a general overview of Caferis in Turkey, see Güngör (2017). For a discussion of Caferi poetry during Muharram, see Williamson Fa (2018).
- 6 For discussions on how to define Alevism, see Yaman (1998) and Doğan (2013), among many others.
- 7 In the original German: 'Menschen treten in unser Leben und begleiten uns eine Weile. Einige bleiben für immer, denn sie hinterlassen ihre Spuren'.
- 8 I address many of these issues in my forthcoming book, *Pathways to God: The Islamic Acoustics of Turkish Berlin* (forthcoming, 2022).
- 9 <https://www.srebrenica.org.uk/lessons-from-srebrenica/srebrenica-potocari-memorial/>

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Germans without footnotes

Islam, belonging and poetry slam

Katarzyna Puzon

‘Islam belongs to Germany’. With these words, a young woman concluded forcefully her performance on the stage as part of the i,Slam Finale, an event held to celebrate the seventh anniversary of i,Slam, a collective of young Muslims, most of whom are slam poets. The jubilee took place in the Bärensaal (Bear Hall) of Berlin’s Old City Hall in December 2018. Placed on a high plinth, the bronze sculpture of the bear, the symbol of Berlin, overlooked the hall in which the audience gathered to listen to slam poets’ recitations. i,Slam often chooses prominent locations for their large public events to amplify their visibility and presence in the city. This was the case with their fifth jubilee too, during which the i,Slam Kunstpreis (i,Slam Art Prize) was awarded in 2016.¹ The ceremony attended by around 500 people took place in a convention centre in Berlin’s Pariser Platz, just at the foot of the Brandenburg Gate. Belonging was also one of the themes addressed in the artists’ works presented that evening, as evidenced by the video titled ‘Heimkehr’ (‘Homecoming’), the prize winner. It shows a young Muslim woman hastening through a forest, against a soundtrack of recordings from rallies of the anti-Islam Pegida movement (Patriotic Europeans against the Islamisation of the Occident; in German: *Patriotische Europäer gegen die Islamisierung des Abendlandes*). At some point, she asks into the camera: ‘How can it be that this country, the country of my father, my family, my friends, the country that is my home, that this country is betraying me? And with whom?’²

This chapter discusses how young Muslim slam poets negotiate their belonging through explicit and implicit references to Islam. Situating their practices in the current German context, it examines how they can contribute towards a notion of heritage that disrupts the binary of ‘here’ and ‘there’ – and, to some degree, of ‘now’ and ‘then’ – and that highlights perpetuation over preservation (Shaw, 2019 and this volume). I reflect on how i,Slam poets grapple with the dilemma of wanting to be seen as German, on the one hand, and holding on to their ‘Muslimness’, on the other hand. To this end, I probe into their activity as constitutive of the young Muslim poets’ understandings of belonging in Germany and analyse how this is articulated in their slam poetry and the practices in which it is embedded and embodied. In addition, I draw attention to the ways in which Islam is put on stage – literally in the case of i,Slam’s events but also more broadly – and what comes into play when this happens. The idea of onstage is especially salient here

because poetry slam involves a contest in which young spoken word artists perform self-written lyrics in public.³ As I show below, i'Slam poets deploy certain characteristics of 'Islamic heritage', which can be defined as intangible, and combine them with a contemporary format of poetry performance. This practice exemplifies an embodied form of heritage-making that results in doing a new heritage as a new belonging. Before elaborating on this doing, I first delve into recent political debates on Islam in Germany in order to contextualise i'Slam's activities.

Belonging and recognition

The phrase 'Islam belongs to Germany' has a contested public history. It has been voiced on various occasions, especially by politicians. President Christian Wulff (2010–2012), for instance, famously pronounced that 'now Islam also belongs to Germany' in his 2010 speech delivered during the celebrations of '20 Years of German Unity' (Hildebrandt, 2015). In 2015, Chancellor Angela Merkel asserted that Islam belonged to Germany at a press conference after the meeting with Turkey's Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoglu (2014–2016) in Berlin. Wulff's successor Joachim Gauck (2012–2017) broadly agreed, though with some reservations. He spoke about Islam followers, and not Islam, while declaring in a 2012 interview for the weekly newspaper *Die Zeit* that 'Muslims who live here belong to Germany' (Hildebrandt & di Lorenzo, 2012). Gauck explained his claim by stating that anyone 'who came here and does not only pay taxes but also likes being here, also because here he has rights and freedoms which he does not have there where he comes from, is one of us as long as he obeys the fundamental principles'. He added: 'I can also understand those who ask: Where did Islam shape this Europe, did it experience the Enlightenment, even a Reformation? I understand this as long as it does not have a racist undertone' (ibid.). His references to the European Enlightenment and Reformation confirm the common presumption, at least in Germany, that without these experiences Islam cannot 'fully' belong to the modern secular world⁴ and, therefore, cannot constitute a part of its heritage.

Public debates on Islam reached another level, so to speak, during the 'refugee crisis' of 2015 and 2016, when Islam became an even more contentious subject. In 2018, Horst Seehofer, the newly appointed Minister of the Interior and a stark opponent of Angela Merkel's open-door refugee policy, sparked controversy when he stated: 'Islam does not belong to Germany'. He further clarified a couple of months later at the German Islam Conference (*Deutsche Islam Konferenz*) – a forum for dialogue between the German State and Muslims living in Germany⁵ – when he said that Muslims residing in Germany belonged in that country. In these ongoing deliberations on belonging, the distinction is made between 'Islam' and 'Muslims'. Namely, discussions revolve around whether the former is or only the latter are part of German society, as well as around disputes over the incommensurability of Islam with a German *Leitkultur* (guiding or dominant culture). This is especially reflected in public statements of the nationalist Alternative for Germany (AfD) party, as in the claim of the party's deputy leader, Beatrix von Storch, that

'Islam is a political ideology incompatible with the German Basic Law' ('Von Storch: "Islam nicht mit Grundgesetz vereinbar"', 2016).

A doing–undoing dynamic is a crucial aspect of these and other debates on belonging, as well as of the politics of recognition or the politics of difference. As Judith Butler notes: 'if the schemes of recognition that are available to us are those that "undo" the person by conferring recognition, or "undo" the person by withholding recognition, then recognition becomes a site of power by which the human is differentially produced' (2004, p. 2). Drawing on Patchen Markell, Schirin Amir-Moazami's (2018) analysis of recognition and Islam in a liberal secular context illuminates how the marking of some groups and individuals is embedded in these schemes. She discusses the problematic dichotomy reproduced of an 'unmarked We' – the majority – and the marked minority and demonstrates how it has operated in Germany in relation to Muslims. This has played out along, though not exclusively, religious lines, casting Muslims as the religious Other, with either a Turk or an Arab standing as the predominant representation of the Muslim. Otherness, and the Other for that matter, is not merely perceived in terms of difference – and potentially as part of a valued diversity—but also positioned as culturally inferior (cf. Argyrou, 2000) or as a kind of deviation from the norm (e.g. Fernando, 2019). Amir-Moazami posits that a politics of recognition is predicated upon the marked–unmarked dyad as well as the inclusion exclusion dynamic (see also Asad, 2003). To make the point, she refers to Joachim Gauck's talk at the newly established Centre for Islamic Theology at Münster University in 2013, in which he stated:

And now Islam is also becoming one of the academic disciplines at our universities. Behind this is a reciprocal act of recognition: our society is changing, because it includes an increasing number of Muslims – just as Islam for its part is developing in contact with our society. This entails demands being imposed on both sides – that is all part of it. Admittedly, some people who are resistant to change try to make mileage out of it. But the majority knows that we can only live in fruitful coexistence if we treat each other with respect and come together in a spirit of openness. The foundations for this is *our* basic rights and freedoms, *our* history and language [emphasis added by S. A.-M.].

(2018, p. 434)

Gauck's speech⁶ raises at least two interesting – yet quite problematic – issues that merit attention. Firstly, by not mentioning the established position of *Islamwissenschaft* (Islamic studies) in Germany, especially given that his talk was held in the context of the recent foundation of institutes of Islamic theology, Gauck ignores over a century-long presence of this academic discipline in Germany (see, e.g. Gräf, Krawietz & Moazami, 2018). Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, despite his assertion that recognition comes from 'both sides', the majority and the minority, the quote, and especially the last sentence, clearly signals that the rights and history of the majority – the unmarked '*our*' – determine the nature of the recognition of the minority by the majority.

Elaborating on the politics of minorities making a claim for religious freedom in a liberal secular context, Saba Mahmood (2016) attends to the tension implicated in the concept of minority. She propounds that ‘on the one hand, a minority is supposed to be an equal partner with the majority in the building of the nation; on the other hand, its difference (religious, racial, ethnic) poses an incipient threat to the identity of the nation that is grounded in the religious, linguistic, and cultural norms of the majority’ (ibid., p. 32). As a result, the majority versus minority distinction fixes the role of ‘both sides’, that is, the non-Muslim majority and the Muslim minority, as well as who recognises whom. In addition, it reinforces the ‘us’ and ‘them’ dichotomy by picturing ‘the majority’ and ‘the minority’ in somewhat oppositional terms and grouping both separately as part of a collective sameness (Handler, 1988). In what follows, I discuss how i,Slam poets challenge this binary logic in a German context by means of embodied heritage-making.

Muslim heritage on stage in Berlin

In 2011, i,Slam started its activity as an explicit response to the controversial book *‘Deutschland schafft sich ab: Wie wir unser Land aufs Spiel setzen’* (translated into the English as ‘Germany Abolishes Itself: How We Are Putting Our Country at Risk’). Authored by Thilo Sarrazin, former senator of finance for the State of Berlin, the monograph was published in 2010 and was widely criticised as racist and Islamophobic, though it was also positively received by some.⁷ After it had come out, many public debates about Muslim youth were held, but ‘nobody talked to them’, Youssef, i,Slam’s co-founder, said disapprovingly. This prompted him to think about poetry slam, with which he had already experimented, as a space where young Muslims could speak for themselves.

The birth of poetry slam dates back to the mid-1980s when Marc Smith, a writer based in Chicago, initiated a more vibrant and engaging alternative to the format of open mic and other then current modes of poetry performance in the local Green Mill bar. Fairly quickly, this new form of cultural expression appealed to many, especially to minorities and marginalised groups and individuals.

i,Slam poets, mostly aged between 20 and 30 years, are from various ethnic backgrounds. The majority can be denoted as belonging to the Arab or Turkish diaspora, that is, to one or other of the two largest Muslim communities in Germany. i,Slam was the first group self-identifying openly as a Muslim collective on the German slam poetry scene. When I asked Youssef what characterised their activity as Islamic, rather than referring to Islam as a religion, he talked about different forms of discrimination towards minorities. Poems performed by i,Slam are not solely – or even primarily – concerned with Islam or multiple ways of being Muslim.⁸ In their texts, the slam poets not only deal with discrimination against Muslims but also are critical of social injustice and ‘global racism’ more broadly.

Creating a ‘stage’ on which to present different ideas and views, i,Slam established a public platform through which to speak for themselves. Their Five Pillars of i,Slam, inspired by the concept of the five pillars of Islam (*arkan al-Islam*), reflect the general tenets of poetry slam. These pillars are: respect the poet (every poet gets

his or her recognition regardless of their performance); own construction (every poet must ensure that the poems are their own texts – no intellectual theft); no aids (the poet is not allowed to use props such as costumes or musical instruments); time limit (the poet must not exceed the time limit of six minutes, otherwise they lose points); no verbalism (verbal attacks of any kind are prohibited – the Islamic framework must be respected here). Some of these rules resonate with what Jeanette Jouili (2012) terms ‘*halal arts*’ (permissible arts), which, as she explains, ‘includes, for instance, the avoidance of vulgarity and insulting speech, and respect for Islamic modesty requirements (the interpretation of these forms may, of course, vary). Often, however, the contents involve topics that reflect a political consciousness and a commitment to social justice’ (ibid., p. 402).



Figure 3.1 Youssef performing on the stage © i,Slam.

Delineating i,Slam’s beginnings, Youssef highlighted that the group established a ‘symbiosis between their heritage [*Heritage* – he used an English word], legacy (*Vermächtnis*), ancestors (*Vorfahren*) and a modern form of poetry’. This symbiosis plays out in manifold ways. Their catchy name ‘i,Slam’ not only references Islam but also has the double entendre of ‘I slam’, which works in German (*Ich slamme*) too. Derived from the verb *qara’ a*, which translates as ‘read’ or ‘recite’, the Arabic word *iqra’* (recite!) is believed to have been revealed to the Prophet Muhammad, marking the beginnings of Islam. Youssef links this revelation to the way in which i,Slam was conceived when he had a Eureka moment and came up with the name *Ich slamme*, subsequently transformed into the neatly anglicised i,Slam. Therefore, the collective’s official statement *Alles began mit einem Wort* (It all began with a word), which also features on their T-shirts, refers to both *Ich slamme* and *iqra’*.

i,Slam crafted their self-image by drawing on the prominence of oral traditions in Islam. Their idea of slam poetry evokes public recitations, including *qira'at* (Qur'anic recitations), pointing to a well-established practice in Islam. It is cultivated by i,Slam too, as some of their events open with a recitation of the Qur'an. Favouring speech over writing, the format foregrounds the salience of auditory experience and listening in Islam⁹ (see, e.g. Hirschkind, 2006; Kapchan, 2016; McMurray, this volume). Moreover, it alludes to storytelling considered an art form in, albeit not only, Middle Eastern cultures. For a *hakawati* (storyteller in Arabic), a story is important, yet a particular emphasis is placed on its delivery.

In her seminal ethnography, *Veiled Sentiments. Honour and Poetry in a Bedouin Society*, Lila Abu-Lughod (1986) mentions 'the social context of *performed* poetry' as vital for oral tradition. In the case of i,Slam, this concerns, among other things, audience participation, which is integral to a live performance. Lauren Osborne's (2016) description of Qur'anic recitations as an 'emergent phenomenon', when the performer and the audience enter into a sort of interaction, also resonates with poetry slam that, as Susan Somers-Willett (2009, p. 8) notes, is 'best understood by what it means to achieve or effect: a more intimate and authentic connection to its audience'.

Despite appearing improvised, slams are meticulously prepared shows. Drawing on performance art and rooted in oral traditions, they combine several elements: writing, performance, competition and audience participation. The last characteristic is crucial for the format of poetry slam because the audience actively participates by giving each poem a score, and is thus engaged in developments on the stage and reacts to them, which entails applauding or booing those who perform. The principles on which i,Slam relies specify that anyone can act as a judge (Somers-Willett, 2009). During one of their events, for example, a stand-up performer left the stage after some audience members had interrupted his guest show because they had disapproved of his remarks about the headscarf. Although the format is known for its open-door policy which stipulates that everyone is welcome to participate or perform, i,Slam's events are mostly attended by members of Muslim communities.

Founded in Berlin, the collective has now grown into a network of about 300 performers in Germany, Austria and Switzerland (its German-speaking part).¹⁰ In Germany, their activity is not limited to Berlin, as local groups operate in several cities, for instance, in Cologne, Mainz, Hamburg, Munich and Stuttgart. In Europe, and more globally due to i,Slam's connections with groups in Tunisia, Egypt, Malaysia and Singapore, the collective became part of what Annelies Moors and Jeanette Jouili have named 'Islamically inspired artistic scene' (2014; see also, e.g. Herding, 2013; Jouili, 2019). Other genres are represented too, such as rap and hip-hop which influenced the popularity of spoken word and slam poetry in those circles.

Through the genre of slam poetry, intentionally unsettling of stereotypes, i,Slam engages in 'undoing' Islamophobic myths, as well as striving to challenge those about gender, race, nationality, ethnicity and religion. By means of parody, they disrupt simplistic depictions of Islam in Germany and play on fears of Muslims and other Others (on parody in slam poetry, see, e.g. Hoffman, 2001).

Somers-Willett (2009, p. 8) describes poetry slams as 'laboratories for identity expression and performance'. In this respect, i,Slam's activity emerges as a practice

which transpires in the immediate context of performing poems and represents an embodied form of heritage-making that favours perpetuation over preservation (Shaw, 2019 and this volume). Wendy Shaw distinguishes between ‘objective heritage preservation’ and ‘embodied heritage perpetuation’. The former, which applies to any religion or culture, suggests that Islam can be identified by means of certain categories, norms and sets of elements, whereas the latter deals with Islam as perpetually producing its identity by reconstructing the past and looking towards the future. The past–future connection is well encapsulated in Youssef’s ensuing declaration about i,Slam: ‘we do it for what comes after us and what came before us’. In order to understand better the role of belonging in this, I reflect below further how i,Slam’s practices challenge not only the us-versus-them logic but also the binary of ‘here’ and ‘there’.

‘It is always good to see *Heimat*’

‘It is always good to see *Heimat*’, Youssef said to me after casting a glance at the display of the legacy of the Umayyad Caliphate at the Museum of Islamic Art. The Umayyads, the Muslim dynasty (661–749) established in Damascus, made him think of *Heimat*, by which he meant Syria where he was born. He was heading towards the room where the panel discussion ‘Art as an escape from a faulty system?’ was held. The event was organised by i,Slam as part of the Muslim Cultural Days in order to converse about the meaning of art in practices of marginalised groups in the current political climate.¹¹



Figure 3.2 Panel discussion during the 2019 Muslim Cultural Days at the Museum of Islamic Art. Photograph by Katarzyna Puzon. Courtesy of Staatliche Museen Berlin and i,Slam.

The German word *Heimat* has no equivalent in English and roughly means home, homeland or a sense of belonging. Youssef considers the city of Aleppo his first home (*Heimat*), his place of origin and a foundational part of his identity. In 2002, he moved with his family to Germany, and 2 years later, when he turned 12, he started writing poems to ‘have better access to the German language’. Berlin became his second home but, as he emphasised, not his *Heimat*. He told me: ‘I have Arabic culture and there is lot of German culture in me’. ‘Too much of it’, he added laughingly. ‘But when’, he carried on, ‘this Germany tells me that I am not German, I do not feel German’. He experiences this not only when he hears public pronouncements, such as those of certain politicians, but also when he, for example, receives threatening letters, as well as in everyday situations. For this reason, he associates *Heimat* first with Syria, and then partly with Germany, because ‘such feelings depend on one’s surroundings’.

The term *Heimat* is negatively tainted due to its connotations with Germany’s Nazi era and is regarded as an exclusionary construct (Bausinger, 1986). As a way of reclaiming it, some propose the use of *Heimaten*, the plural of *Heimat*, and others study *Heimat* as a process or *Beheimatung* (homing), a ‘feeling at home’ embracing belonging and being at home not limited to the place of origin (Binder, 2010; Göb, 2019; Greverus, 1979; Römhild, 2018). Nevertheless, to Youssef, *Heimat* is not a problematic word because as he remarked: ‘I have nothing to do with the Nazis’.

His place of origin plays a crucial role in his self-identification, including in his interpretation of heritage, which to him denotes much more than just his *Herkunft* (origins). Youssef refers to it as *Vermächtnis* (legacy) that he inherited from past generations and views as empowering. He therefore makes a distinction between heritage as a place, which he identifies more in terms of *Herkunft*, that is, his place of origin, and heritage that builds on his ancestors’ legacy and constitutes a kind of resource, which underpins his current activity.

Understanding heritage as composed of multiple parts, he looks at this legacy as something that he embodies and that is ‘the result’ of various components and of: ‘socialising which I have enjoyed and which my father enjoyed’. Youssef’s conception of heritage is a positive one, that sees it not as a constraining ‘cultural *baggage*’ (Jouili, 2019) but as having liberating potential to express oneself. By mixing up different heritages, he crafts his own one that affords him creativity. This partly resonates with what Sharon Macdonald calls ‘transcultural heritage’ wherein ‘transcultural’, approached as assemblage, entails ‘bringing together elements from different cultures and fusing these in what becomes a new form, though it may retain identifiable elements of previous assemblages’ (2013, p. 163; see also Macdonald, 2014). The mixing and fusion of cultures – or differences – may take multifarious forms and generate different constellations, as i,Slam’s practices aptly illustrate, and is also perceptible in other art forms which they promote. Calligraffiti, with which i,Slam’s office in Berlin’s Wedding district is embellished, constitutes one example. It merges modern graffiti styles with classical Arabic calligraphy, which is used to convey ideas and as decoration and is in fact associated with a number of faiths in the MENA region. Calligraffiti references Islamic heritage due to the fundamental role of Arabic calligraphy in Islam – and Islamic art for that matter.

Building upon the notion of transcultural processes of heritage-making, the next section is concerned with forms of belonging – and non-belonging – addressed in i,Slam’s poetry and with some of the themes it invokes.

Being German and being Muslim

Leila, an i,Slam poet born in Germany, does not primarily attend to Islam or her religiosity as a Muslim woman in her work, but centres on what it means to be German, or a Muslim German in particular. In one of her poems, she says: ‘She calls me a foreigner, she calls me a migrant, she calls me a person with migration background, and now I am a New German’. The term ‘migration background’ (*Migrationshintergrund*), which she mentions, is officially used to identify those who were not born as German citizens or who have at least one parent who was not born a German citizen. ‘New German’, or ‘New Berliner’ for that matter, is a name applied by some to those who arrived seeking refuge in Germany during the ‘refugee crisis’ of 2015 and 2016 (see also Bock & Macdonald, 2019). Leila’s poems bring to focus the distinction made between those who are seen as German and those who are considered conditionally German. She is concerned not just with the fixed categorisation of Muslims but also with the constant relabelling of those deemed not ‘fully’ belonging in Germany.

In his study on citizenship and exclusion, anthropologist Damani Partridge notes that ‘the process of “foreign” incorporation is not one of normalisation, but one of differentiation’ (2012, p. 18). This mechanism plays out along the lines of what he calls ‘a politics of exclusionary incorporation’, which suggests that despite being formally (German) citizens, some cannot exercise their citizenship fully. Practices of naming and renaming fall within these ‘technologies of exclusion’ (*ibid.*, p. 19) and serve as conventional ways of managing the difference of Islam – or Muslimness. They are tantamount to practices of integration that represent a perpetual process of ‘becoming’ German, a sort of never-ending gestation period, or what Abdelmalek Sayad has termed an ‘indefinite temporariness’ (1999; see also Fadil, 2019). The tedious process of ‘becoming’ German is well captured in the following excerpt from Leila’s poem:

But when I tell you that I would just like to be German, I mean that I would like to be unconditionally German, without a footnote, without an exception, without scandal and without patriotism. But with the same rights, standards and brands.

The excerpt raises a number of questions pertinent to what it means to be identified repeatedly as a non-German or not fully German. It draws attention to various ways of marking those who do not belong and shows how this operates through ‘extra’ descriptors, such as a ‘footnote’ or an ‘exception’, which classify someone as ‘different’. Although especially the excerpt’s last sentence partly invokes the notion of ‘the right to have rights’ (Arendt, 1973), the text implies a ‘call for equality’, which, I suggest, corresponds with Hegel’s *Gleichgültigkeit*, translated as indifference

or equivalence. Its literal meaning conveys the idea of equal validity or equality. It is this equal validity, I contend, that Leila addresses in her poem.

This resonates with the issues voiced by anthropologist Mayanthi Fernando's French interlocutors. She points out that 'Muslim French argue that they are not "different", but French. Moreover, they argue that the demands they make are claims to equal citizenship and justice rather than to difference, claims made by citizens with as equal a right to France as any other citizen' (Fernando, 2019, p. 266). A similar 'call for equality' is discernible in i,Slam poets' practices and is conveyed in their reflections on Heimat and belonging, as mentioned above in the 'Heimkehr' video, for example. Their 'call for equality' epitomises a call for being a German citizen 'without a footnote', as Leila notes in her poem, and thus someone who does not need to earn belonging more than others. Like Fernando's French interlocutors, i,Slam poets challenge the image of Muslims as non-German and consider their Muslimness as already German.

Making connections

Slam poetry remains the chief form of i,Slam's cultural expression. They also support and collaborate with those who are involved in other kinds of creative work and artistic production through which various cultural, political and social issues are addressed (see, e.g. Puzon, 2016). For example, in the case of the i,Slam Kunstpreis, a contest for socially engaged art, artists were awarded in seven categories: singing/hip-hop, music, photography, literature, poetry, design and film. In addition, i,Slam experimented with various formats, for instance when they held a series of flash mobs called i,Slam for Justice in four German cities in 2013.

The 2012 i,Slam – we,Slam event provides an example of broader collaborative endeavours and making connections, in that case among young poets representing three Abrahamic religions: Islam, Judaism and Christianity. The rationale behind this was to create a stage on which they could speak together openly about their beliefs. A key idea of i,Slam is that 'being on the stage' will encourage young people to raise questions that are vital to them and will, therefore, empower them. The stage 'is for those who have something to say', as Youssef put it. His statement did not just point to self-expression but also to the group's credo 'we don't want any superstars in i,Slam'.

Organised under the slogan '*Ver-Bindungen schaffen*' (Making Bonds and Connections), the 2019 Muslim Cultural Days constituted their attempt to collaborate with others. The event covered different parts of Berlin, and meetings and performances took place across the city over 4 days. The aim was to showcase the diversity of Muslim communities and reach out to those who might not be familiar with Islam, as well as reflecting on past developments and future possibilities of forming alliances. Flagging up 'connections' as a leading theme of the Muslim Culture Days, the focus was on Berlin's Muslims, with the intent to 'invite all non-Muslim citizens to learn about the Muslim life and cultural diversity'.¹²

The launch event was dedicated to possible cooperation between organisations representing marginalised groups in Germany. The following ones were invited as speakers: the Initiative Black People in Germany, the Academy of the Jewish Museum Berlin (JMB), the Archiv RomaniPhen, a feminist association of Sinti and Roma women, and GLADT – an organisation of black and PoC lesbians, gays, bisexuals, trans*¹³, inter* and queer people. The subject of alliances was the focal point of the meeting. One speaker called for the need to adopt a multilayered approach, along with an intersectional one, and highlighted that marginalised groups do not embody one community. A former representative of the JMB brought attention to the problem of *Hierarchisierung* (creating hierarchies) that often hampers collaborative efforts because some groups are given more consideration, especially those deemed more important historically and thus more relevant in the German context. She meant the Jewish community, and drew on her experience as a leader of the Migration and Diversity Programme and the Jewish-Islamic Forum at the JMB's Academy.

In their endeavour of making connections, i,Slam deals with the Othering of Muslims and strives to bring about a change. This necessitates altering the focus – orientation – by drawing attention to what is not instantly visible¹⁴ and fostering diverse connections, as well as looking at Muslim heritage as not just belonging elsewhere but also as part of the past, present and future in Germany.

Conclusion

In her analysis of belonging, Joanna Pfaff-Czarnecka (2011) touches on the distinction between two German words: *Zugehörigkeit* (belonging to) and *Zusammengehörigkeit* (belonging with in the sense of togetherness). This distinction resembles the divergence between differences brought together to embody a fixed category and differences that are constantly negotiated. In the former case, rather than maintaining heterogeneity, differences are often turned into a sameness. The category of 'the Muslim' epitomises this, as the debates on Islam belonging or not belonging addressed here illustrate. The process of granting equal validity to Muslims or those with a 'migration background' resembles 'conditional belonging' with respect to becoming a German citizen; in this case, a German Muslim who never seems to belong enough. By situating the question of belonging in the current German context, the primary purpose of this chapter was that of examining i,Slam's practices and the ways in which young Muslims negotiate differences by claiming their place in Berlin – and in Germany more generally. i,Slam poets' identification as Muslims is no different than their self-positioning as Germans. This is manifest in their call for recognition as Muslims, as well as recognition as Turkish or Arabic, for example, all as part of being German citizens without footnotes.

As I have shown, i,Slam poets do not necessarily conform to a certain 'bridge of understanding' (Winegar, 2008) with which the 'majority' could feel comfortable. In so doing, they do not eschew their religion to make themselves more relatable or to fit the image of the 'good Muslim' – one that is westernised and secular

(Mamdani, 2005). Rather, their practices, representing an embodied form of heritage-making, offer a lens through which one can rethink the relationship between Islam and heritage in Germany. By virtue of this, i,Slam poets question what it means to be German – and a Muslim German in particular. Combining oral traditions of ‘Islamic heritage’ with a contemporary format of poetry performance, this model of heritage heightens translocal elements (Puzon, 2019) and accentuates connections. i,Slam’s practices thus reveal doing a new heritage as a new belonging which attends to the diversity of articulations of Islam not only in Germany but also across Europe and beyond.

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Notes

- 1 The prize was funded by the German Federal Ministry for Family, Seniors, Women, and Youth as part of the Living Democracy programme.
- 2 Unless otherwise indicated, all translations are my own.
- 3 Despite sharing many qualities, the two forms of poetry, slam and spoken word, differ mainly in this way that unlike the latter, the former is staged as a competition which involves audience participation.
- 4 The ‘framework of the “West” is’, as Wendy Shaw (2020) shrewdly argues, ‘less the recognition of a secular cultural geography than a legacy of the universalisation of Protestant values through the occlusion of religion as a visible agent. Such ghosts may be the most difficult of all agents to battle, as they can always claim that they were never there’.
- 5 <http://www.deutsche-islam-konferenz.de>. For a critical account of the Conference, see Bayat (2016).
- 6 For a full text of Gauck’s speech, see http://www.bundespraesident.de/SharedDocs/Downloads/DE/Reden/2013/11/131128-Themenbesuch-Islam.pdf;jsessionid=FD02305F80AD576C432C050A167AFA8C.1_cid362?__blob=publicationFile
- 7 It even became a bestseller in the category of non-fiction literature (*Sachbuch*) and enjoyed this status from mid-September 2010 to early February 2011 (see Stein, 2012).
- 8 For more on different ways of being Muslim, see Osella & Soares (2010); Fadil & Fernando (2015); Özyürek (2015).
- 9 For example, Kristina Nelson points out that ‘the Qur’an is not the Qur’an unless it is heard’ (2001, p. xiv), which positions oral and auditory qualities of the Qur’an as being of primary importance.
- 10 The Berlin-based group runs a Youtube channel called *Erklaeriker*. See their website <https://www.i-slam.de/erklaeriker/>
- 11 Apart from organising slams, workshops and other public events, i,Slam poets have performed in museums. In Berlin, this was, for instance, the case with the Neukölln Museum’s *Festival für Demokratie und Vielfalt* (Festival for Democracy and Diversity) that accompanied their 2017 exhibition *Die Sache mit der Religion* (*The Case of Religion*). The collective has also been involved in the project *TAMAM – Das Bildungsprojekt von Moscheegemeinden mit dem Museum für Islamische Kunst* (*TAMAM – The Mosque Communities’ Education Project with the Museum of Islamic Art*) run by the Museum of Islamic Art in cooperation with the Institute of Islamic Theology in Osnabrück (see Macdonald, Gerbich, Gram, Puzon & Shatanawi, this volume).

- 12 <https://muslimische-kulturtag.de/programm-2019/>
- 13 An asterisk after ‘trans’ or ‘inter’ indicates that it is an umbrella word encompassing a wide range of gender variations. See also, for example, Stryker (2008).
- 14 The 2019–20 exhibition *Re:Orient – The Invention of the Muslim Other* at the GRASSI Museum of Ethnology in Leipzig addressed this subject. Its aim was to ‘reorient visitors towards what is all too often left unseen when they look at “the others”’. See <https://grassi-voelkerkunde.skd.museum/en/exhibitions/reorient/>

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The here and now and the hereafter

Engaging with fragrant realities in Muslim-minority Russia

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The *murids* (apprentices) of the Naqshbandi-Mujaddidi brotherhood in Ufa, the capital of the Republic of Bashkortostan, assemble twice a week in the mosque that also serves as their place of meeting and dialogue. They are one of the several Muslim communities whose quotidian religious routines I closely observed during fieldwork over a period of 5 years. In the anteroom to the prayer hall, we would sit in a circle facing the teacher, who is addressed by everyone with the honorary title *hazrat*. Over hours and hours, while the shadow of the trees outside the windows moves through the room, we discuss Muslim metaphysics and questions of everyday behaviour. At times, some of the *murids* suddenly leave to attend to their personal affairs or they disappear into the prayer hall to read messages on their mobile phones. They may even close their eyes to take a brief rest from the discussion. The *suhbat* (conversation) ceremony, which is the preferred contemplative technique of the brotherhood, can be exhausting. To help sustain their energy, food or drinks are shared. And almost always, a small flask is handed around, from which the *murids* apply fragrance to their temples or rub it into their facial hair.

Upon returning from my first *suhbat* ceremony in the summer of the year 2017, I had the impression that both I and my environment were radically transformed. That night, the rented flat in Ufa felt only conceptually the same place it had been 12 hours previously. For me, this sense of dissociation, where it seemed impossible to reconcile my newly gained outlook with the reality I had become accustomed to, was bound up with a lingering of the fragrance that had been distributed among the *murids*. And while I did not want to make the scent responsible for how I had begun to perceive the world around me, I felt that it played a vital part in altering my sense of perception.

This chapter is concerned with the role of *misk* or *attar* (fragrance) in Muslim communities in the Russian Federation and particularly in the Russian Urals. At religious festivities and exhibitions, one can almost always discover at least one booth selling *misk* and one sometimes sees groups of young men, who swap the small flasks and discuss the merits and differences of their fragrant content. For those unused to them, the scents may initially seem overpowering. My empirical material was collected and insights formed during and after anthropological fieldwork in Uralic Muslim communities since summer 2015. I initially conducted fieldwork in Tatar and Bashkir villages in the south of Perm Krai, followed by

studying Sufi Islam and sacred sites in Bashkortostan and Chelyabinsk Oblast since early 2017. My focus is thus on the middle and southern Urals, where Islam is likely to have more in common with the Muslim traditions of Siberian Tatars than the religious landscape in Kazan or Moscow, meaning that it considers a vernacular rather than a purely scriptural interpretation of the religion.

In this contribution, my focus is on the effects of *misk* on the user. I intend to shed light on how in Muslim religious contexts, fragrance is related to the Islamic 'other world' (*al-ghayb*). I argue that by reflecting about the afterlife, people belonging to the Muslim minority in Russia do not only engage in theological speculation, but they also make a statement about the present and their own situation. The scholar of Islam Christian Lange (2016, pp. 12–13), who has recently turned to the study of the senses in Islam, points out that eschatology does not primarily pertain to that which is beyond and far away but to those things that are almost here and matter right now. By taking a closer look at popular perceptions of the coming world, he suggests, we can learn much about the most immediate fears, hopes and desires of Muslim believers. Events from the history of Muslim populations in Russia lend credibility to this proposition. Beginning in the early nineteenth century, village communities whose ancestors had been forcibly converted from Islam to Orthodox Christianity or who saw an advantage in converting were much distressed by what they considered to be indications of the impending end: a cholera epidemic, bad harvests, but also the building of new churches and the adoption of Russian language for instruction in Quranic schools (Kefeli, 2014a, pp. 26–27). Soon, they figured, the redeemer of Islam, the Mahdi, would restore the true faith and liberate them from Christian repression. This expectation encouraged great numbers of them to renounce officially their affiliation with Orthodox Christianity and return to Islam. In the twenty-first century, I want to emphasise, Muslims in Russia do not need to conceal their religious convictions, as long as they do not belong to radical Islamic groups. But some might be concerned about a new Russian national culture disregarding Muslim minority culture and accelerating a process by which the memory of a Muslim presence in Russia fades into oblivion. Although the conditions are far from ideal, the scent of *misk* promises another reality that has not yet arrived but whose arrival is already underway and cannot be inhibited by human force. The Muslim religious outlook holds the capacity to defy secular explanatory frames and it thus seems just as appropriate to speak about a collision of worlds, rather than only about a submerged clash of cultures. Drawing upon my empirical material, I am going to illustrate how in certain moments, fragrance can open a door to the other world or allow the other world to manifest in people's surroundings.

Negotiating belonging

It needs to be clarified that many of the religious ideas discussed below are rather characteristic for the kind of vernacular Islam that informs the peripheral regions of the Muslim world, which, however, is not to say that they have to be considered marginal (Ahmed, 2016). This is true not only for the notion of the beyond located

in close proximity to our sphere of existence, but also for that of some people and matter traversing the boundary between the two worlds. Other than reformist interpretations of the Muslim faith, the vernacular variant is difficult to reconcile with modern secular perceptions of human life and social organisation. For the moment, I can only suspect that it is precisely this incompatibility which enables the emergence of an alternative reality. As noted above, I myself experienced a sense of dissociation when one mode of being was contested by another one. In a post-Soviet Russia that undergoes a process of desecularisation, we can observe a Muslim re-enchantment of the environment. And quite possibly, this re-enchantment must also be understood as a reaction to efforts by nationalist-minded groups to claim the land for the majority Slavic and Russian Orthodox population.

But who has the right to claim Russia for themselves? Who can define what it means to be Russian? Which populations are 'at home' in Russia and which have guest-status and are regarded as not truly constituting one segment of the Russian nation? We thus arrive at the question of belonging (Puzon, this volume). Although there has been an influx of working migrants from Central Asia and Azerbaijan into Russia since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, Islam has been part of Russian culture for considerably longer. Official declarations are frequently made stating that Muslim culture is part of Russia's shared heritage. Despite this, however, a policy of adaptation – in which Muslims and other minorities are supposed to give up their cultural and religious distinctiveness and become part of the majority culture – prevails. In my perception, the Russian government's course of action has much in common with Soviet nationality politics, where a 'folklorisation' of ethnic minority culture took place. At celebrations, members of ethnic minority groups were encouraged to perform their music and dances in traditional costumes, but rarely was this seen as anything more than decorative. While superficially promoting some aspects of ethnic minority culture – but never religion and other aspects that did not conform to Soviet socialist ideology – the ultimate aim remained to turn 'backward' people into Soviet citizens. In present-day Russia, references to a shared culture similarly appear to be mostly diplomatic in nature. The unspoken expectation seems to be that in the long run, Muslims will adapt to a hegemonic culture, defined in Russian terms. Conservative fractions furthermore undertake efforts to minimise if not erase a Muslim presence from the country's heritage.¹

At the same time, one can observe attempts by the Muslim minorities to manifest their own reality, as part of their lived Muslim culture. Fragrance is one of the means employed for that purpose. Accordingly, I ask what role fragrance plays for Muslims in Russia in facilitating the coming of a new world? And by looking at specific practices, which conceptions of the other world can be deduced from them? It must be stated that further objects and practices than the ones described below are involved: blessed sweets, recorded sermons and photographs of the *sheikh* (Sufi master) all play a role, for instance, in a local Muslim pilgrimage that turned a peripheral area into a place of central religious significance for the pilgrims.² Those items also appeal to the senses – taste, hearing and sight – of the people who use them. *Misk* seems appropriate both for its close association with the other world and for the evocative power of smell. In circumstances where some members

of the Russian elite would prefer to purge Russia's heritage of its Muslim components, *misk* assists Muslims in bringing about an entirely different state of being of and for themselves.

Although I like to think of Uralic Muslim practices also in terms of a response to official Russian policies, it would be misleading to characterise this as identity politics. Rather than either explicit resistance or overt attempts to reintroduce their culture in public space, the majority of practising Muslims whom I encountered are simply doing their best to reconcile their professional and family lives with the religious duties. Even so, these practices can be seen as a form of politics, especially since they have an effect on people's perception and transform the space they live in.³

Before attending to Muslim religious practice and the theological conceptions they indicate, I will in the following first describe and analyse attempts to render Muslim culture in Russia invisible. Partly in response to this, some Uralic Muslims are engaged in manifesting an alternative reality, evoked through concrete religious practices.⁴ These practices provide us with a better idea of their interpretation of this world and the next. Fragrance is commonly associated with the coming world and it assures Muslim believers in the specific context outlined in this chapter of the inevitable end of the current social order.

Concealing Muslim presence

Large Muslim populations in Russia and Eastern Europe more generally are not recent arrivals, but have long been very much at home in the regions they inhabit. It was the Russian Empire that – beginning in the sixteenth century – gradually expanded into other areas to swallow the Tatar khanates of the Volga, the Urals and Siberia and later the Muslim polities in the North Caucasus (Grant, 2009; Kappeler, 2001; Kivelson & Suny, 2017). Before the arrival of Russian settlers, the Urals – geographically located where the European and the Asian continents meet – were for many centuries only home to various Turkic and Finno-Ugric groups. Nowadays, Muslim Tatars and Bashkirs constitute ethnic and religious minorities to be found predominantly in the southern parts of the Urals, closer to the border with neighbouring Kazakhstan.

Despite claims of liberation and emancipation, one can argue that the Soviet Union continued the colonial enterprise of its predecessor, causing much harm to ethnic minority culture and individuals unwilling to renounce their beliefs (Gradska, 2019; Igmen, 2012; Kamp, 2006; Luehrmann, 2011; Northrop, 2003; Stronski, 2010). Since the end of the Soviet Union with its atheist ideology, we can observe a return of religion to Russia. Unfortunately, this does not necessarily mean that Muslims are able to practice their faith free of mistrust and rejection. For about two decades, a new Russian national identity is taking shape that stresses Slavic civilisation, Orthodox Christianity and an imperialist outlook. The spectacular rise in power of the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) is at least partly responsible for a tendency in wider society to erase the presence and heritage of Muslims in Russia from people's perception. After the disintegration of the Soviet Union, the political elites newly positioned Russia both in terms of political

ideology and in terms of geographical space and its relations to the rest of the world. Eurasianism – a school of thought typically promoting the building of a society of ethnic Russians adhering to Orthodox Christian religious principles and considered to be an imperialist ideology – became highly influential in the sphere of politics (Sibgatullina & Kemper, 2019, pp. 97–100).⁵ As the designation Eurasianism already suggests, no simple answers to the question of belonging are provided. Instead, what the designation captures is Russia's position between East and West, between Asia and Europe (Kaminskij & Friess, 2019, pp. 9–10). Unlike most other conservative groups in Europe, proponents of Eurasianism do not embrace a European identity to distance themselves from cultures considered to be Asian or Muslim. The Russian ultraconservative thinker and political analyst Aleksandr Dugin, who successfully turned Eurasianism into a movement, even referred to a heritage shared by Europe and Asia (Sibgatullina & Kemper, 2019, pp. 102–105). Although in the popular imagination, the Mongol rule of the late medieval period in Russia is responsible for the settlement of Muslim tribes and thus the enduring presence of Islam in the country, Dugin believes that it had a formative influence on the Russian state as a bulwark against Western encroachment. With the inheritance of this divine mission, Islam, for Dugin, seems to have exhausted its historical function and may now be dissolved to enable the rise of a united Orthodox Christian nation. Of course, Dugin's Eurasianist ideas are not the only valid ones and different Muslim leaders seek to accommodate to the ideological demands of the political system. They also do so, as they are aware of the Muslim population's minority status in Russia.

In spite of the indigenous provenance of many Muslim groups in Russia, the willingness to grant Muslims a proportionate degree of representation – both in historical accounts and in the built environment – is diminished by the problematic image of Islam in wider society. The ongoing conflict in the North Caucasus has been partly responsible for conventional associations of Islam with threat, destruction and chaos. So far, the efforts of the state and influential institutions to remake Russia into a glorious empire upholding the three-barred cross of the Russian Orthodox Church while reducing the Muslim presence have met with little resistance.

Two examples must suffice to indicate how Muslim and other ethnic minorities are made to disappear from the Russian perception of past and present. A new large-scale educational project called *Rossiya – Moya Istoriya* (Russia: My History) displays, in the format of an exhibition, an Orthodox Christian reading of Russian history.⁶ Developed by a team of people from within or close to the ROC and financially supported by the Russian state, the original exhibition in Moscow has been exported to twenty further cities across the country. The curators portray Russia as an empire, and visitors learn at the entrance to each room about the country's boundaries and size of population under each tsar. But nowhere do they mention the prior existence of non-Russian polities and societies or the colonial nature of the empire's expansion. Instead, visitors are presented with a picture of a Russian state existing in a cultural vacuum and surrounded by empty territories only waiting to be incorporated. Visitors unacquainted with Russia's colonial

history might gain the impression that any ethnic or religious minorities are not worth being considered and thus naturally inferior to Slavic and Russian Orthodox culture.

The second example concerns the confinement of Muslim presence in contemporary urban space. On the major Islamic holidays, *uraza bayram* (Eid al-Fitr) and *kurban bayram* (Eid al-Adha), millions of Muslims gather in the streets of Moscow to conduct the obligatory prayer, regularly causing a collapse of traffic in the Russian capital. As only four official mosques exist, many Muslims are forced to pray under the open sky even in conditions of rain or snow. The overall population of Moscow is estimated to be approximately 12.5 million, of which at least two million are Muslim (Lozinskaya, 2019). We must assume that the authorities are concerned by this ratio and try to prevent a more concrete architectural presence of Islam, thus denying Muslims the right to be seen, except on those main holidays.⁷ At the same time, the ROC is actively involved in the construction of new churches in the capital and all over the country. While there were about 50 churches and chapels in Moscow shortly before the end of the Soviet Union, this number had increased to 1,154 by 2017 (Gorevoy, 2019). Because the majority of churches can be found in the city centre, the administration implemented a programme for the construction of churches in 2010, which helps to expand the reach of the ROC to the suburbs. One church is to be built for each 20,000 inhabitants and no one should have to walk more than one kilometre to attend the service. In Moscow and beyond, Russia is being materially transformed in an Orthodox Christian image. Although the ROC depends upon donations to finance its construction campaigns, the state most likely assists the church by encouraging state corporations to donate money for this purpose (gazeta.ru, 2019).

Manifesting a lived Muslim culture

An excellent place to think about the once rich history of Muslim life in Russia would be the town of Troitsk. Located right next to the border with Kazakhstan, Troitsk used to be a significant centre of trade and a node on the famous Silk Road, whose multiple routes stretched from China to Turkey. With several Quranic schools, it also contributed to the Muslim mobility in the region, eventually disrupted by the Russian Revolution of 1917. The town's former glory is still tangible in the form of what used to be a fashion warehouse but now lies in ruins. Trade with Central Asia continues but is mainly reduced to the import of fruits and nuts from the south of Kazakhstan and the less visible flow of narcotics from Afghanistan. When walking on its empty streets, where the wind carries dust from the nearby Kazakh steppe, it feels like having arrived at the end of the world.

Nowadays, Muslim culture is once more flourishing in Troitsk. In the summer of the year 2019, I curiously examined the goods sold in a small store for religious products, which is attached to one of the main mosques of the town. To replenish their supply of *misk*, the store-owner regularly visits neighbouring Tatarstan. In the capital Kazan, he explains, one can choose from more than 1,500 different kinds of fragrance produced for Muslims, which demonstrates that *misk* constitutes one

segment of a massive market for Muslim consumer products in Russia. Some of the packaging displays Arabic writing, oriental ornaments and religious images, but other scents use variations of the name or logo of famous brands, such as Chanel, Paco Rabanne or Hugo Boss. Most of the small flasks contain three millilitres of fragrance and are sold by the storeowner for 120 roubles or less than two Euros. In Kazan, he was told that the *misk* he buys is almost exclusively made in the United Arab Emirates or in Turkey. Interestingly, one product line directly indicates the other world, confirming the association of fragrance with the invisible realm. Named ‘Al-Rayan’, it refers to one of the eight doors of Paradise.



Figure 4.1 Sample from a store for religious products in Troitsk, Russia, June 2019. Photograph by Jesko Schmoller.

Misk assists the manifestation of that which we cannot easily discern with our eyes. The other world is removed in space and time, but simultaneously it exists ‘everywhen’ (Lange, 2016, p. 11). By holding on to a rational outlook, firmly established in the Western hemisphere, we would be unable to grasp its ambiguous

relationship with the here and now. *Misk* reminds the believer of the confined space of life on this planet, the volatility of civilisation and the finitude of humanity. Secular powers provide a vision of a universe, where man is in control. This vision begins to dissolve when confronted with God's eternal domain. Similarly, people belonging to another faith community may be involved in erasing the traces of a Muslim past and heritage in this corner of the world, an attempt to which *misk* would be something of an antidote. *Misk* speaks of an alternative truth and a lifestyle that goes along with it. It newly makes visible a lived Muslim culture that had been neglected and seemingly forgotten. But all the while, this lived culture simply lay dormant. Once again, religious principles informed by the concept of a divide between this and the next world guide practising Muslims through space in search for knowledge and redemption. They arrive in Troitsk from all over Russia and even Kazakhstan to attend the newly opened Quranic school or pay their respects at the grave of a famous Sufi *sheikh*, where Islamic moral codes regulate personal interaction.

Fragrance is a distinctive kind of material object. When kept in liquid form in a container, it is both tangible and visible, but when applied to a surface fragrance evaporates and tends to become invisible to the eye. Is it because of this ambivalent quality that *misk* can grant us a glimpse of the otherwise invisible? By drawing upon insights from the academic tradition of material religion, I wish to better explain how fragrance may indicate the presence of the divine (Orsi, 2016, pp. 37–45); a presence, which in turn helps people to realise their exposure to an enchanted universe. Writing about charismatic Pentecostalism in West Africa, Birgit Meyer (2010) points out that mass-produced Jesus pictures may under certain circumstances accommodate demonic forces and then cease to be ordinary depictions of only symbolic value and instead become idols with the capacity to gain power over unsuspecting Christian believers. Marleen de Witte (2012) similarly writes about the real effects of the holy power in the lives of members of one Pentecostal community, who are rewarded for the adoption of a new lifestyle with material wealth, physical well-being and social status. Younes Saramifar (2018) describes the careful interaction of an Iranian Sufi master with his prayer beads, which he regards as being alive. A divine presence can also be detected in the empirical material from the Russian Urals presented in this chapter. Periodically, the other world interferes so forcefully with people's shared reality that it impacts them in their physical environment. This interference is frequently facilitated by *misk*.

***Misk* in Muslim history**

Before engaging with the empirical material from Russia, let us first see what people in the more central regions of the Muslim world historically associated with *misk* and how they put it to use. In the medieval Middle East, fragrance served a function not only in the social but also in the religious sphere (King, 2017, p. 325). Long before the arrival of Islam in the region, aromatics had already assumed the symbolic meaning of purity and holiness. And no aromatic was comparably influential in the history of Muslim civilisations as the animal product musk. Within Islam,

musk clearly acquired such a central role because of the Prophet's appreciation for it.⁸ According to one *hadith* (Prophetic tradition), Muhammad himself declared that he cared for nothing in this world except women and perfume (King, 2017, p. 343). The *hadith* literature contains a number of passages where Muhammad makes use of musk. It even becomes a component of Muslim ritual practice, as in the case of applying perfume when undergoing the full ablution. Musk was further employed for purposes of purification, including the reintegration of women into society after menstruation (King, 2017, pp. 350–351).

Interesting for the argument at hand is the association of fragrance with the other world, where Muslims enjoy conditions of complete purity and harmony, whereas one faces constant contamination and potential misery in the incomplete and impure conditions of this world. In the original Garden of Eden, the first man and woman, Adam and Eve, did not have to be concerned about purification, as they knew nothing other than purity and cleanliness (Wheeler, 2006, pp. 57–58). But when they taste the fruit of the tree, they begin to produce bodily waste, which in turn induces a state of contamination requiring the performance of ablution. The consumption of crops and meat lies at the foundation of life on this planet and enabled the rise of civilisations, but from a Muslim perspective, they are also a cause of pollution. At the same time, the immaterial and ethereal state of being in the other world appears to be a premise for the prevailing conditions of purity there.⁹ After the fall of man and having lost Paradise, perfume evokes memories of the perfection only to be found in the other world. As we saw above, the product line 'Al-Rayan' indicates that similar associations are being perpetuated even today. According to various sources, Adam, having been separated from the Garden of Eden, felt deeply sad, as he missed its sights and smells (Wheeler, 2006, pp. 63–64, 85–86). To ease his suffering, God commanded Adam to go on a pilgrimage to Mecca and establish a sanctuary there, which might serve as a substitute for the Garden of Eden. The later prohibition by the four schools of Sunni Islamic law against the use of perfume in the sanctuary can be explained with the argument that it derives from the plants growing in the Garden of Eden and would thus not be necessary. Instead, it is the proximity to the Garden of Eden, the reasoning goes, that will lend a sweet smell to the pilgrims. Initially, Muslims were supposed to apply perfume, if they had any, after the full ablution, which had to be performed every seven days (King, 2017, pp. 343–346). Several *ahadith* (Prophetic traditions) attributed to Aisha relate how she scented her husband with perfume, oil or specifically musk before he entered the state of ritual purity (*ihram*) and set out to circumambulate the Kaaba. Aisha is also said to have scented herself with both musk and ambergris when in *ihram*. In spite of the eventual condemnation of the use of aromatics while in *ihram*, Muslims continued to be allowed to apply fragrance to places of worship, such as the Kaaba and the Dome of the Rock. Even before the expansion of Islam, the art historian Nina Ergin (2014, p. 71) observes, fragrance signalled the presence of the divine.

According to the medieval scholar al-Tabari, the existence of perfume in this world can be traced to Adam bringing a rod from one of the trees in the Garden of Eden (Wheeler, 2006, p. 83). In one of the reports, Adam is wearing a wreath

from the trees of the Garden, which, after his fall to earth, dried up and the various types of perfume grew from its scattered leaves. In another report, Adam brings with him not a wreath but branches that he collected from all the trees in the Garden when learning that he would be banished from Paradise. Because the sanctuary was to reproduce the conditions in the Garden of Eden and perfume, deriving from its plants, was nowhere to be found before the fall, the jurists felt obliged to prohibit its use by pilgrims (Wheeler, 2006, p. 65). Apart from places, people – when especially pure – may likewise have a pleasant smell attached to them. Several *hadith* reports state, for instance, that the breath of a fasting person smells like the Garden of Eden (Ergin, 2014, p. 72; Wheeler, 2006, p. 63). And the sweet scent of babies is supposed to derive from Paradise (Lange, 2016, p. 7). The above illustrates a view of the cosmos where this and the other world are opposed to one another insofar as the former is associated with deficiency, volatility and decay, while purity, beauty and eternity are qualities of the latter.

As we are going to see in the following section, one can come across the same outlook among Muslims in the Russian Urals of the present moment.¹⁰ A sweet scent indicates the proximity of the other world. Possibly due to its ability to travel more or less unhindered by physical barriers, fragrance is also considered a vehicle that grants access to a sphere that would otherwise be inaccessible or a kind of adhesive agent that connects the contrary realms.

The other world draws near

Muslims from the Russian Urals recognise the existence of another world next to the one we live in. The other world can be far removed from this world, but it can also open up at unexpected moments or even intrude into this reality to such a degree that its physical laws take precedence over those we are usually subjected to. Central for the argument at hand is the physical reality of the other world, as it emerges to permeate and substitute an environment interpreted only in secular or Orthodox Christian terms. While the above pertains to conceptions, it is often and sometimes only through specific practices that the outside observer becomes aware of them. Muslim believers engage in actions to bring about a transformation. Fragrance is one of the more customary – and evocative – means by which this transformation is marked, and through which the arrival of the other world is announced.

On two different occasions during fieldwork in the Urals, I heard a truly moving account. It is a passage from the *tafsir* (Quranic exegesis) *Ruh al-Bayan*, written by the seventeenth-century Sufi *sheikh* Ismail Haqqi, that the young imam of a mosque in Troitsk shared. In June 2019, we sat with a handful of people on the carpeted floor of the mosque, when the imam related the anecdote to us once again. As Ismail Haqqi wrote, a boy left his home village to fully dedicate himself to Islam. His relatives were worried and sent some religious scholars after him, but upon their return, the latter explained that nothing can be done anymore, as the boy is already enveloped by the smell of Paradise (*zapah dżannata*). In this case, commented the imam, the boy's *taqwa*, his yearning for the other world, was simply

too strong. The account is short, but it conveys a forceful message. No information is given as to where and when the story takes place or if the boy was disappointed by the conditions of life he faced in society. But a Tatar reader might be thinking of Tatar village life and imagine the boy subsisting as a hermit in the Russian forest. We understand that this world held no attraction for him anymore. He devotes his life to God, which would include religious practices such as regular ablution, prayer and remembrance of the Almighty. And then, we learn how his firm belief and efforts are rewarded, as the other world reveals itself while he still dwells among the living. Instead of being out of reach, the other world is in fact close to those who have proven themselves. Emitting a heavenly scent, it becomes manifest around this boy, who does not hesitate to relinquish this world for the sake of another.

Another time, the same imam mentioned how the transition from this to the other world is indicated by a pleasant smell. When an especially good person dies, he explained, the body is wrapped in a burial cloth from heaven and an angel opens the gate to the first heaven, from which emanates a beautiful smell, a hundred times better than anything we know. Yet the angel will not open the gate for a bad person, continued the imam, and a foul smell will begin to exude from the dead body. The real consequences of having achieved proximity to the spiritual world were confirmed by another imam from the same town. Those who succeeded in their search for God, one gains the impression, have attained an ambiguous state between life and death. Even though they are biologically dead, elucidated the imam in late June 2019, their bodies remain in a condition that makes them appear almost alive. He recounted how about 20 years ago, some Salafis in Saudi Arabia opened the grave of Hamza ibn Abd al-Muttalib, a relative and companion of the prophet Muhammad, to bury him elsewhere. As they were not careful when transporting the body, it suffered damage and blood flowed from the wound, as if Hamza had still been alive a few hours earlier. We have to understand, said the imam, that these people lived such exemplary lives that they remain entirely pure. When *awliya* ('friends of God' or saints) pass away, we are similarly unable to detect the development of a foul smell. He added that their bodies do not disintegrate and the ground does not claim them. Their bodies dwell more in the spiritual world than in ours.

The Uralic Muslims I was in conversation with associate fragrance with an exposure and a temporary unsealing of the passage to the other world. When the Sufi practitioners from the first paragraph of this chapter engage in the *suhbat* ceremony, the use of fragrance reminds them that the other world is close by or it even draws the other world into the present. In those hours of companionship and theological exchange, they neither entirely inhabit the here and now nor the hereafter. But how do they conceptualise the other world and its relation to this world? Sometimes, we may deduce their conceptions from specific practices and these practices do not necessarily need to involve fragrance. The empirical material also demonstrates the disruptive effect of such conceptions on the more dominant sense of reality.

The people on whose insights I rely here tend to differentiate between this and the other world by using the terms *dunya* and *rukhaniyat*, respectively, although the

other world is occasionally also called spiritual realm (*duhovnoe carstvo*) or *akhirat*. The perception of the other reality is equivalent to the wider Muslim understanding of the realm of the unseen (*al-ghayb*). The invisible world contains all of those beings – spirits, angels, ghosts, jinni – that most humans cannot discern with the naked eye (el-Aswad, 2019, p. 5).¹¹ In the afterlife, however, the hitherto concealed will cease to be unseen and nothing can remain hidden or invisible. For some people, the veil that hides the invisible world may in rare moments be temporarily removed, so they may behold it and cross the divide between this and the other realm (el-Aswad, 2019, pp. 6–8). Endowed with special gifts, some prophets and saints can move more easily and sometimes freely between those spheres. This would be the case for the prophets Muhammad and Idris (Lange, 2016, pp. 6–7). The dreams that come to us while sleeping – with sleep itself considered a partial or minor death – also allow ordinary people to travel to the invisible world and to interact with angels or the dead (el-Aswad, 2019, pp. 9–10).



Figure 4.2 At the graves of relatives and saints, as here at the grave of the Sufi saint Zaynulla Rasulev in the town of Troitsk, the other world is close by, July 2018. Photograph by Jesko Schmoller.

Several people I encountered during fieldwork expressed the idea that the other world is removed from that of human beings, but the boundary between those worlds can be overcome by individuals who seek to draw closer to God. In Ufa, the practising Sufi Azat explained that the two worlds are not far from one another but they are closely entwined. To make his point, he entwined the fingers of his hands. His claim echoes a *hadith*, according to which the Garden and the Fire (heaven and hell) are ‘closer to you than the strap of your sandal’ (Lange, 2016, p. 3). Just as the strap of the sandal sits between one’s toes, the other world cuts through the shared reality of this life and suggests a degree of immanence of the divine in the material world. A cat, Azat continued, can perceive humans as well as angels and jinns, but among our species, the brain and intellect are too developed to perceive the inhabitants of the spiritual world. Alfiya, a female Sufi from Ufa, argued that in the past, the spiritual and material world used to be one, but civilisation made them drift apart. Humans, she is convinced, were able to see devils and had the capacity to communicate with animals by using the language of the earth. As in the story about the loss of Paradise, we here encounter the idea that humans once belonged to the other world. The term civilisation may even be interpreted as the process of Western secularisation, where people abandoned the notion of living in an enchanted universe and instead claimed authority for themselves. Also in the accounts of Sufi *murids* from the Naqshbandi Mujaddidi brotherhood, we might see the other world open up in various places, but the encounter usually does not last all too long. In the summer of 2019, I travelled with a Sufi *murid* from Ufa in Bashkortostan to Aqtöbe in Kazakhstan, where the Sufi *sheikh* assembled his followers. Towards the evening in the vicinity of Orenburg – not all that far anymore from the border with Kazakhstan – we spotted a police control in the distance but my fellow traveller and driver, Ibrahimjan, asserted that we are not going to be stopped. He turned out to be right and assured me of the direct intervention of the *sheikh* in our affairs, a consequence of which he describes as ‘opening the door to the *rukhaniyat*’, or other world. Nothing bad will happen to us, he said, as we are already part of the spiritual world. When Sufi *murids* swear the oath of allegiance (*bayat*) to their *sheikh* or teacher, the spiritual world is placed inside of them. He added that this does not mean, however, that they will constantly dwell in the other world. As I interpret these words, the *murids* gain access to the other world upon joining the brotherhood. This helps differentiate them from both infidels and common Muslims. Their eyes were opened to the reality beyond this reality. The next day, after we attended the assembly with the *sheikh*, we drove to a horse farm for a spontaneous retreat. On this occasion, we took along an old Kazakh man with a good sense of humour, who declared that after our participation in the *bayat* ceremony we now carry passports and can be considered citizens of the spiritual realm. In our new condition, we are more from the spiritual realm than the material world and we fly with the angels in the air. Once more, a transition from one sphere to the other takes place.

In other situations, the boundary between this and the other world is regarded as thoroughly fluid and permeable. Individuals from the current generation of Uralic Muslims and their ancestors, both the living and the dead, engage in an

ongoing dialogue and exchange (Kefeli, 2014b, pp. 604–606). In a discussion in mid-June 2019 with a mullah, a mosque leader without an official religious education, from the village of Kubovo in Bashkortostan, he explained that we came from the other world and eventually we will return to it. Therefore, nothing can be more important than commemorating the dead (McMurray, this volume). As we visited a spot where in the past a major battle took place, he pointed out that the dead are standing all around, watching us and listening to our conversation. With the *azan*, they assemble and after the prayer for their benefit (*dua*) they thank us. When speaking about the gratitude of the dead, he took a formal bow. It is through our intervention, he added, that they can ascend to the seven heavens.

As these vignettes illustrate, contact with the other world can be brief, but it is nevertheless sufficient to rupture a widely established sense of space and time; concepts that are apparently impossible to reconcile with the conditions of existence in the elsewhere. We saw how a person might switch from one realm to the other when driving a car. As I attended the meeting with the *sheikh* of the above-mentioned Naqshbandi Mujaddidi branch in Aqtöbe in summer 2019, I was confronted with a further perception of time. Since we drove all night with practically no rest, I felt quite exhausted after the arrival at our destination. I was permitted to rest for a while in the prayer room of an unofficial mosque. Eventually, I got up again and joined a group of Sufi *murids* that includes my driver, who, to my surprise, looks young and fresh, even though the tour of the previous night must have exhausted him much more than me. Making this observation, a Kazakh *murid* responded that space and time do not exist in the other world and whereas one might need 8 hours of sleep in the material world this is not the case in the spiritual one. Here, one must keep in mind that Muslim believers who think of the other world as close by will be less surprised than other Muslims or non-believers by those changes occurring in their environment. While it might be not entirely accurate to argue that they simultaneously inhabit two worlds and thus two temporalities, they are certainly used to miracles (*karamat*) interfering with their routines; in this case, switching from one mode of being to the other. Russian Muslims may find that in their everyday surroundings, little consideration is shown for their faith, their culture or history. But then, they also experience those moments where the seemingly all-pervading force of secular conviction or Russian Orthodox entitlement reaches a limit, reassuring them of their own presence and the eternal truth of their beliefs. Instead of being confined to a life in a universe whose rules are made by others, they can partake in the experience of living in an enchanted universe.

The sudden dissolution of the concepts of space and time as they apply to life in this world, I want to suggest, have to be interpreted from a decolonial perspective. As an interpretive frame, decolonial studies may be of use when arguing for the physical substance of the transformations taking place but they can also assist us to recognise this process as a kind of world-making. Criticising the involuntary reproduction of dominant assumptions and perspectives, the sociologist Martin Savransky (2017, 2012) points out that the epistemological approach to the phenomena of the world around us usually goes unquestioned. Motivated by the work of the anthropologist Eduardo Viveiros de Castro and others, he challenges the dominance of

Western science over our perception and instead suggests to turn to ontology, which in this context means to seriously engage with the conceptions and cosmologies of non-Western cultures by not only accepting them as other interpretations of one and the same reality but also by recognising them as other realities. Taking up this proposition, I see no reason to question the existence of a Muslim elsewhere and the possibility of its manifestation in different moments and places. On the way to Kazakhstan, we pass the police control because the *sheikh* looked out for us and allowed the car to momentarily slip into the invisible realm. At our destination in Aqtöbe, the driver Ibrahimjan does not feel tired, as the spiritual world has taken shape around us and supplies him with energy. Another state of being takes over and affects both physical bodies and material matter.

Conclusion

In the Russian Urals, the conceptualisations from the previous section are usually associated with those Muslims whose beliefs and religious practices can be considered indicative of local or vernacular Islam (Schmoller, 2020). Muslim believers act with the coming world in mind. They live in a society that cares little for their convictions and way of life. Secular-minded Russians may regard their religious conceptions and practices as irrational and obsolete. Some Orthodox Christians, in turn, think of Islam as foreign and threatening. And in the ongoing search for a new Russian national identity, Islam does not seem to be considered.

In comparison with most other European countries, who did not have to overcome the traumatic breakdown of the Soviet state, Russia constitutes an exception. Both the experience of state collapse and its geographical position at the edges of Europe would indicate quite different political currents and constellations. Indeed, one cannot easily apply analytical categories that prove useful in political contexts elsewhere to the circumstances in Russia. Even so, one may discern striking similarities with other European nationalist projects, first and foremost the obsession with a past that never existed (Kaya & De Cesari, 2020, pp. 3–5). Across the continent, ‘present pasts’ are now becoming urgent social and political concerns. And while memory and cultural heritage provide some with a stable identity, the exhibition *Rossiya – Moya Istoriya* briefly portrayed above is just one example for how they can also be the reason for the exclusion of others. The effort of separating Islam from Russia – may it be an explicit aim or only a side effect – must strike those who are aware of the centuries of cultural contact and co-existence as nothing less than an attempt to rewrite history. In some European countries, the more recent preoccupation with the past can further be accompanied with a re-evaluation of the state’s involvement with colonialism (Kaya & De Cesari, 2020, p. 9). Russia never had an easy relationship to its own colonial history and the term continues to be avoided, but it seems as if a certain positive attitude towards it can again be detected (Morrison, 2016). Irrespective of making references to it in museum exhibitions or history books, the everyday lives of people of Muslim minority background confirm the persistence of the colonial past in the present, or what Ann Laura Stoler calls ‘tenacious durabilities’ (Stoler, 2016). As long as the government

does not come to terms with the mistakes committed by the political predecessors, problematic patterns of thinking are going to be reproduced in the population. The confinement of Muslim presence to be observed in Moscow, while Orthodox Christian devotion flourishes, is only one consequence of such thinking.

But Muslims must not despair, as they realise that a better world is underway. When the time has come, Islam is going to be reinstated and humankind enters a period of serenity. This is followed by the annihilation of all life on earth, the end of history and a new existence in the other world. For now, however, Uralic Muslims carry on with their lives in a flawed environment, while the presence of God and the truth of the Muslim faith are being confirmed by small signs and genuine miracles. Over the previous centuries, Russian Muslims had to endure first the attempt of forcibly converting them to Orthodox Christianity and then the banishment of religion within a Godless state. They were told that they adhere to a false belief and that their God is nothing but a delusion. But it turns out that God never left them and the other world has been close by all along. At least some of them live in an enchanted universe, where *sheikhs* direct their movement, angels fly through the sky above their heads and they engage in a regular exchange with the dead. And this other reality is being revealed and comes into being through their practices: prayer in the cemetery, local Muslim pilgrimage and saint veneration, *sulbat* and *bayat*.

The process of another reality taking shape is not to be understood in a metaphorical sense. When people seek encounters with Muslim saints, those saints are not regarded as only metaphorically alive. The physical reality of the divine becomes similarly apparent in the accounts of especially pious individuals, whose bodies remain perfectly preserved even centuries after they passed away. And the heavenly scent of Paradise enveloping a place or person is more than merely imagination. Occasionally, the other reality is literally inscribed in the landscape, as when a Muslim pilgrim points out that in a drone picture we can recognise the name Allah in the formation of a mountain or in the windings of a river. In those places, the land is marked as God's creation and the ground can be considered sacred. The actions that Muslims take with the other world in mind betray a lived religious culture that counters efforts to make this heritage disappear from people's perception. By recalling and reviving such a heritage, Muslims in Russia are implicated in a politics of reality. Its disruptive effect is probably due to the radical contrast between the hegemonic sense of reality and Muslim vernacular tradition. For the moment, we have to recall, Muslim culture remains a minority culture in Russia. This is not to say that the situation will not change over the coming decades. The demographics are shifting in favour of the Muslim population.¹² In the Urals, mosques are reopened and built in cities, towns and villages; people once more move on the old paths of pilgrimage and discover further sacred sites. Older forms of translocal connection and sociality – for instance between Russia and Kazakhstan – are being remembered, but Muslims also realise themselves as attached to their homeland with its deep forests and holy springs, its graves of revered saints and rich Islamic history. The difficult past has taught them to carve out a place for themselves.

As the land around slowly awakes to another reality, the other world is being exposed to varying degrees. In some instances, it has come close to momentarily replacing this reality, but in other situations it might only be a heavenly light beam that illuminates people's daily routines or the scent of musk wafting over from the Garden of Paradise. Sometimes, nothing but the pleasant smell of fragrance will suggest the proximity of the invisible realm. But we should not underestimate either the evocative power of smell or our ability to draw the right conclusions from it. Most certainly, many of us have become too comfortable in relying on sight since, in the Age of Enlightenment, it assumed the rank of master sense to the detriment of the other senses (Classen, Howes & Synnott, 1994, p. 4; Shaw, 2019).¹³ For certain Uralic Muslims, though, it does not constitute an impossible task to perceive the other world through the sense of smell. Fragrance here does more than evoke a distant place or bygone event. Since it links the two disparate spheres, taking in the scent of *misk* also enables Muslim believers to look ahead and beyond the current conditions. Associating fragrance with a utopian vision of a future Muslim existence in Russia might be going too far, but it does at least hold the promise that another world is possible.

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Notes

- 1 If asked to draw a comparison, I see a certain resemblance with post-socialist developments in the Balkans, where the states that emerged from the fragments of former Yugoslavia also interpreted their traditions, cultures and legacies in an exclusive manner, which sometimes meant dismissing the role of Islam in both history and culture (Elbasani, 2017, pp. 10–14).
- 2 A research paper that attends to this case is currently in development.
- 3 See Pedersen (2011) for religion *as* politics in Mongolia. De Certeau (1988) writes about the silent protest within the patterns of our routine behaviour.
- 4 I am here specifically referring to the people I was in contact with. Without question, not all practising Muslims in the Russian Urals share the same sentiments.
- 5 This is not the place to go into a nuanced analysis of Eurasianism in its manifold interpretations. I am likewise ignoring the difference between Eurasianism and neo-Eurasianism. For more information, see Marlène Laruelle (2008).
- 6 The project website can be accessed here: <https://myhistorypark.ru/>. Marlène Laruelle (2018) describes the exhibition as the ROC's conquest of the history market.

- 7 See Bialasiewicz (2017) for a discussion of Muslim visibility in urban space.
- 8 See also Ergin (2014, p. 72).
- 9 This idea also seems to be informing a religious practice among the Uyghurs of Xinjiang, where the smell of fried pancakes becomes nourishment for the spirits of the dead (Bellér-Hann 2001, p. 20). Indeed, the spirits do not desire the pancakes themselves, but it is the fragrance of the boiling oil that provides them with sustenance.
- 10 The fundamental contrast between the other and this world may be more representative of a specific Sufi cosmology than of dominant religious perspectives, however. Lange (2016, p. 5) confirms that perfection is reserved for the afterlife, but he also points out that the world inhabited by humankind is not a place of corruption.
- 11 For more information on *al-ghayb*, see the special issue by Bubandt, Rytter and Suhr (2019).
- 12 If currently the Muslim minority in Russia amounts with about 15 million people to approximately 11 per cent of the overall population, their share is expected to increase at least three times by 2050 (Laruelle, 2016).
- 13 Bubandt, Rytter and Suhr (2019) write in this context about the ‘empire of the gaze’.

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Part II

The nation-state and identity formations



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Reviving al-Andalus

Commemorating Spain's Islamic heritage in the context of democratic transition*

Avi Astor

Throughout Europe, references to heritage have figured centrally in recent polemics surrounding Islam. Right-wing populists and ideologues across the continent have invoked the urgency of safeguarding European values and preserving national (Christian) heritage when advocating policies that restrict the admission of Muslim migrants and refugees, or that limit the liberty of Muslim minorities to express their religious identities (e.g. via bans on the use of headscarves or face veils). In countering such positions, progressives and others on the Left have commonly pointed to the significant historical presence of Muslim civilisations in certain parts of Europe and to the contributions Muslims have made to European heritage and culture. As highlighted by the contributions included in this volume, these debates have unfolded differently in distinct parts of Europe. Their discursive, performative and spatial dimensions and ramifications must therefore be analysed in light of context-specific entanglements of national identity, religion and politics.

This chapter examines the legal and spatio-material recognition of Islam as part of Spanish cultural heritage in the aftermath of Spain's transition to democracy. As an 'edge' territory located at Europe's southern frontier (Whitehead et al., 2019), Spain's geographic proximity to North Africa and historical engagements with Islam have played a formative role in its development as a nation. Over the course of Spanish history, these engagements have been a source of both pride and stigma. On the one hand, Spain's Islamic patrimony is one of its most distinctive and defining features. Granada's Alhambra and Cordoba's Mosque-Cathedral (*Mezquita-Catedral*) attract millions of visitors each year, and are recognised as core sites of national heritage not only in Andalusia but also across the country. On the other hand, the legacy of *al-Andalus* (711 C.E.–1492 C.E.) and Spain's Moorish heritage have made it susceptible to orientalist discourses that locate it beyond Europe's frontiers (Rogozen-Soltar, 2007; Tofiño-Quesada, 2003). The deep ambivalence and multivocality characteristic of Spain's relationship with its Moorish heritage make it an especially illuminating site for studying how complex and variegated historical entanglements with Islam may influence contemporary dynamics surrounding Muslim incorporation.

* This chapter is an adaptation of a chapter entitled 'Reviving al-Andalus' published in *Rebuilding Islam in Contemporary Spain: The Politics of Mosque Establishment (1976–2013)* (Sussex Academic Press, 2017).

As in other European contexts, debates regarding Islam have become more prominent in the Spanish public sphere over the past several decades due to rising levels of Muslim migration, as well as fears regarding Islamic extremism. Since the late 1990s, a substantial Muslim population has emerged in Spain, primarily due to migration from North Africa and South Asia. There are currently about two million Muslims (roughly 4.3% of the total population) and 1,600 mosques dispersed throughout the country, most of which are small oratories or prayer rooms located in nondescript apartments or warehouses. The regions with the largest Muslim populations in Spain are Catalonia (~564,000), Andalusia (~341,000), Madrid (~299,000) and Valencia (~221,000), though sizeable populations may also be found elsewhere in the country (Observatorio Andalusi, 2020; Observatorio del Pluralismo Religioso en España, 2019).

Islam's renewed presence in Spain has coincided with a series of major political and social transformations, including the transition from dictatorship to democracy, the disestablishment of the Catholic Church and progressive secularisation of the populace, and the shift from a religiously homogeneous to a religiously diverse national community. Grappling with the legacy of *al-Andalus* and its place in Spanish history, and addressing the challenges of social integration and religious accommodation, have significant implications for Spain's development as a modern, democratic and plural society.

The legal and material infrastructure for accommodating the religious needs of Muslim minorities in Spain has been shaped by a series of developments that occurred in the decades following its transition to democracy in the late 1970s. During this period, municipal governments and business entrepreneurs in several Spanish regions supported the construction of large and ornate mosques financed by wealthy Arab donors. In 1992, the Spanish government signed a generous cooperative agreement with the Islamic Commission of Spain (CIE) that entitled Muslims to a series of special rights and privileges. These developments were not the outcome of Muslim minorities' prolonged struggle for acceptance and accommodation. Indeed, it was not until the onset of the 21st century that Muslim immigrants began to have a sizeable numeric presence in Spain.

The erection of several major mosques and the establishment of an official accord with the CIE led to a curious situation in which Islam achieved a relatively high degree of visibility and recognition at a time when the actual presence of Muslims in Spain was still quite limited. In this chapter, I show how the commemoration of Spain's Islamic heritage and the support given to large-scale mosque projects during the 1980s and 1990s were driven by the interplay of: 1) symbolic projects of national redefinition that sought to fashion a new Spain liberated from Franco's National Catholicism and the country's long history of religious intolerance; and 2) economic undertakings promoting foreign investment, tourism, and urban revitalisation. I argue that initiatives seeking to render Spain's Islamic legacy visible during the 1980s and 1990s could be pursued without major social obstacles or political risk as a result of the relative invisibility of the country's modest Muslim population at the time. When Muslims did begin to have a more substantial presence in Spain, the legal and spatio-material recognition granted to

Islam during the post-transition period did little to shield them from the effects of escalating prejudice and discrimination. Since such recognition was primarily the result of top-down initiatives rather than grassroots struggle, it had limited efficacy for promoting generalised reflexivity regarding Spain's approach to dealing with its Islamic past or its increasingly multicultural present.

The political antecedents to Spain's first modern mosques

Prior to Spain's democratic transition, the country was ruled by Francisco Franco's dictatorial regime (1939–1975), which was highly repressive of ethnic and religious diversity. Despite Franco's repressive domestic policies, he placed great effort in developing diplomatic ties with the Arab world in the context of Spain's international isolation and economic stagnation following World War II. Spain's rich Islamic heritage proved a valuable resource for cultivating relations with Middle Eastern elites, which later contributed to Arab interest and investment in Spain.

When the United Nations (UN) was formed in 1945, its leadership voted to exclude Spain and passed a resolution the following year recommending an international boycott of Franco's dictatorship. Shunned by the major Western powers, Franco sought to strengthen ties with the Middle East and Latin America through forging a series of economic and cultural agreements. By cultivating close relations with Middle Eastern and Latin American leaders, Franco hoped to obtain the necessary votes to lift the UN's diplomatic ban. He was also eager to develop new forms of economic cooperation that might give a boost to Spain's distressed economy. Moreover, he perhaps naively believed that an alliance with powerful Arab leaders would help Spain deflect criticisms of its ongoing colonial presence in North Africa (Algora Weber, 1995; Rein, 1998).

In courting Arab elites, Franco and other regime officials strategically referenced romanticised ideas of *convivencia* (coexistence)¹ and cultural interchange between Muslims and Christians during the period of *al-Andalus*. Together with the respect that Franco was able to command due to his charismatic persona, the deep nostalgia for *al-Andalus* in the Middle East contributed to the resonance of such rhetoric among influential Arab leaders (Algora Weber, 1995). In addition to employing symbolic rhetoric, Franco arranged a series of diplomatic encounters during the 1940s and 1950s. Arab leaders were invited to visit Spain's Islamic patrimony, as well as the royal palace in Madrid. Spanish ambassadors embarked on several diplomatic 'missions' to the Middle East. Franco's regime also supported the establishment of educational centres such as the Hispano-Arab Institute of Culture and the Farouk I Institute of Islamic Studies to facilitate exchanges between Spanish and Arab students and scholars. Through these initiatives, Franco enhanced cultural and economic ties with several Arab countries, including Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, Iran, Yemen, Iraq and Saudi Arabia (Huguet Santos, 2005; Rein, 1998).

The substantial effort that Franco put into fortifying relations with the Arab world seemingly contradicted the decidedly anti-Arab and anti-Muslim domestic propaganda that his regime disseminated. 'National Catholicism' was the regime's

ideological lynchpin, and celebrating the Christian defeat of the ‘ruthless’ and ‘barbaric’ *moros* (Moors) was central to the nationalist narratives advanced in political speeches, school textbooks, and Spanish media. Although relatively few religious minorities resided in Spain during Franco’s rule, those that did were highly constrained in their ability to express their religious identities outwardly (Morán, 1995). With regard to foreign diplomacy, however, Franco and his associates were perfectly content to appropriate romanticised representations of Spain’s Islamic heritage developed by liberal historians in order to portray Spain as a bridge between Eastern and Western civilisations. Such representations were mobilised during the 1950s to promote a Mediterranean pact between Spain and the Arab Middle East, though this idea never gained sufficient traction among Arab leaders to come to fruition (Logroño Narbona, 2014).

Franco’s experience as a military officer in North Africa and his familiarity with Moroccan culture contributed to his personal sense of proximity to the Arab world. Between 1912 and 1936, he served roughly 14 years in campaigns to establish and maintain Spain’s colonial presence in parts of present-day Morocco. During the Spanish Civil War, he recruited 70,000 Moroccan mercenaries, the so-called *Regulares*, to assist with the rebellion against the Republican government (Seidman, 2015). A small mosque in Cordoba called the ‘Morabito’, which is still in use today, was originally built to meet the religious needs of these troops. At the conclusion of the war, Franco enlisted several Moroccan soldiers to serve as his personal bodyguards. He would later make a point of having these bodyguards accompany him while engaging in diplomacy with Middle Eastern leaders (Rein, 1998). Such diplomacy was a key antecedent to the construction of Spain’s first modern mosques.

A major mosque in the Spanish capital

After 39 years in power, Franco’s rule finally came to an end with his death in 1975. By that time, roughly 20% of Spanish imports came from the Middle East, and the difficulties resulting from the 1973 energy crisis created new impetus for securing long-term agreements for the importation of oil and gas (Huguet Santos, 2005). As Spain transitioned to democracy, Adolfo Suarez’s centre-right administration (1976–1982) sought to maintain positive relations with the Arab world. State officials also perceived close ties with the Arab world as crucial for improving general relations and commercial engagements with Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia, and for resolving lingering tensions surrounding the North African enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla (Segal, 1991).

Relations with the Arab world in the aftermath of Spain’s democratic transition, however, went beyond the pursuit of strictly diplomatic and commercial objectives. A central aim of Spain’s first democratic administrations was to repair the tarnished image that Spain had acquired during Franco’s rule. With the transition, conservatives and progressives alike partook in the construction of a more modern and cosmopolitan Spain, in part by supporting initiatives that demonstrated a greater openness to religious plurality. Large-scale mosque projects were welcomed as symbols of Spain’s new and more inclusive course of societal development.

Madrid, Spain's capital city and centre of diplomacy, was a logical destination for the country's first modern mosque. In 1976, delegates of 18 Arab countries with diplomatic representation in Madrid came together and developed a proposal to jointly fund the construction of a large Islamic centre with the aim of strengthening relations between Spain and the Arab world. Madrid's municipal government welcomed the proposal, and the following year it donated a 20,000m² parcel of public land to the Muslim World League, which assumed responsibility for managing the project. The practice of ceding public property for the establishment of religious structures had been quite common in the case of Catholic Churches. The city's donation to the Muslim community was thus not viewed as particularly abnormal or controversial. Other cities including Valencia and Fuengirola (Andalusia) would later follow Madrid's example.

When negotiations surrounding the cession of land for the proposed centre were finalised, an extravagant ceremony celebrating the agreement was held at the luxurious Zarzuela Palace. A number of illustrious figures attended, including King Juan Carlos I, Prince Fahd of Saudi Arabia, an array of Arab ambassadors, the heads of several Spanish ministries, and the mayor of Madrid, Enrique Tierno Galván. Aureate discourses harking back to the glory of *al-Andalus* and praising Spain's strong relations with the Arab world abounded, reflecting the project's highly symbolic and diplomatic objectives ('España regala', 1977).

In 1978, representatives of Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Libya took measures to obtain a legal permit for the Islamic centre, paving the way for its construction. In March of the following year, a competition was organised to collect ideas for the centre's design. A total of 453 projects proposed by 840 architects from 45 different countries were presented. Two teams composed of Polish architects won the top two prizes for the competition, and the winning design served as the basis for the eventual mosque. Part of what made the design appealing to judges was that it fused Western and Oriental styles, and incorporated elements typical of the Hispano-Islamic tradition. The interior of the mosque, for instance, included columns and double arches that closely resembled those of Cordoba's Mosque-Cathedral, making it a visual reminder of Islam's historical presence in Spain.

Due to unforeseen difficulties with funding, the mosque was not built until nearly a decade later, when Prince Fahd assumed responsibility for financing its construction. The formal name chosen for the centre was the 'Islamic Cultural Centre and Omar ibn al-Jattâb Mosque of Madrid' (CCIM). Saudi Arabia's leading role in bringing the project to fruition resulted, in part, from the strong relations it had developed with Spain starting in the 1960s. In 1966, Franco had awarded Faisal bin Abdulaziz, the Saudi king and father of Prince Fahd, the prestigious Order of Civil Merit Collar for his diplomatic and commercial collaboration with Spain. In celebration of the occasion, King Faisal was invited to Madrid to receive the honour, and a special event in praise of his presence was held at the iconic Mosque-Cathedral of Cordoba. Spain's importation of oil from Saudi Arabia had also grown significantly since the 1960s, further tightening relations between the two countries (Huguet Santos, 2005).

As the CCIM was being completed, an organisation called the Muslim Association of Spain spearheaded the construction of a second mosque, formally



Figure 5.1 The Islamic Cultural Centre and Omar ibn al-Jattâb Mosque of Madrid
© Luis García.

named the ‘Abu-Bakr Mosque’ in Madrid’s Tetuan neighbourhood. The project was designed and directed by a prestigious architect from Cordoba named Juan Mora Urbano. Although it was not as grand as the CCIM, the Abu-Bakr Mosque gave Islam a visible presence in the Spanish capital. The mosque, which was also dubbed the ‘Central Mosque of Madrid’, was inaugurated in 1989.

The CCIM opened 3 years later in 1992, a year chosen for its historical marking of the 500th anniversary of the conquest of Granada, the last bastion of Muslim rule. The Spanish king and queen, the mayor of Madrid, Prince Salman of Saudi Arabia, and the prince’s son Mohammad were among those who attended the inaugural ceremony. The CCIM later became the headquarters for the Spanish Federation of Islamic Religious Entities (FEERI), an Islamic federation that competes with the Union of Islamic Communities of Spain (UCIDE) for national representation of Spain’s Muslim population. UCIDE evolved from the aforementioned Muslim Association of Spain and has its headquarters at the Abu-Bakr Mosque.

Media coverage of Madrid’s two main mosques was generally positive, framing them as a symbolic bridge between Spain and the Islamic world, and an additional attraction in the city. In an interview with the Spanish daily newspaper *ABC*, Rafael de la Hoz, the CCIM’s principal architect, compared it to two large mosques being erected in Paris and Rome, and stated: ‘Ours is going to be the most important; in the end, we are the occidentals most connected to the Muslim world by the enormity of our common past’ (Borroso, 1988, p. 33). His comments were reflective of how, at the time, having a large and visible mosque that highlighted Spain’s unique connection to the Islamic world provided a means for Madrid to distinguish itself and elevate its prestige vis-à-vis other major European capitals.

The symbolic politics of national redefinition and Islam's official recognition

As part of the commemorative events of 1992,² the Spanish state also signed an historic cooperative agreement with the CIE. The CIE emerged as a consequence of the Spanish state's demand for a single national interlocutor that could represent the country's Muslim population in conversations with state agencies.³ Its executive board included representatives from FEERI, which was initially led by Spanish converts to Islam, and UCIDE, whose leaders were mainly professionals of Middle Eastern origin. Relations between the two federations have always been soured by rivalry, contributing to the CIE's general inability to reach consensus on key issues (e.g. fair and democratic procedures for determining its leadership and representation). The inefficacy of the commission has resulted in a relatively large proportion (approximately 30%) of Muslim associations electing not to affiliate.

The 1992 agreement with the CIE, which has been considered 'one of the most liberal in Europe' (Zapata Barrero, 2006, p. 150) conferred Muslims a series of rights and privileges, including the protection and recognition of mosques as inviolable spaces, the right to religious accommodation in public institutions (e.g. the military and state prisons), the right to Islamic religious education in schools receiving public funding, the legal recognition of marriages performed in accordance with Islamic law, tax exemptions for Islamic associations, the right to take time off from work to celebrate Muslim holidays and the right of Muslim associations to participate in the conservation of Islamic historical sites and artefacts.

Similar agreements were established with Spain's Jewish and Protestant federations. These agreements were made possible by the state's prior recognition of Islam, Judaism, and Protestantism as 'deeply rooted' (*de notorio arraigo*) religions (Fernández-Coronado, 1995). By formalising relations with Islamic, Jewish and Protestant federations, Felipe González's Socialist administration aimed to promote a new image of Spain as a modern, plural society that had transcended its legacy of religious intolerance. The strategy of reviving memories from Spain's distant past, moreover, provided a means for elites to engage in the process of national redefinition without directly confronting the more recent and still divisive memories of fascism and dictatorship. Since the challenges of Muslim integration and religious diversity were not yet an issue of public concern due to the limited presence of religious minorities in the country, the agreements posed little political risk.

Muslim leaders were not passive bystanders to this process, but rather actively took advantage of the favourable structure of opportunities that existed following Spain's democratic transition. The extension of official recognition to Islam was formally requested by the Muslim Association of Spain the same year that it had inaugurated the Abu-Bakr Mosque. In soliciting recognition, the association's president, the Syrian-born doctor Riay Tatory, strategically leveraged Islam's historical legacy in the Iberian Peninsula to demonstrate its 'deep rootedness' in Spanish society.⁴ The following excerpt is taken from the request submitted by Tatory in 1989:

The Islamic religion is of the spiritual beliefs that have configured Spain's historical character. Our culture and tradition are inseparable from the religious principles which have cultivated the deepest essences of the Spanish people and being. The Islamic faith, for its scope and number of believers, has achieved deep rootedness in Spain.

(Tatary, 1995, p. 167)

Although there were just seventeen Muslim associations registered in Spain when the request was submitted, the bid for official recognition received unanimous support from the state's Advisory Commission on Religious Liberty. The 1992 cooperative agreement between the state and the CIE was likewise approved by unanimous vote in both houses of the Spanish Parliament. During parliamentary discussions on the agreements, elites from across the political spectrum praised Spain's diverse religious history, emphasising the importance of correcting for historical injustices and recovering Spain's lost cultural and religious heritage (Astor, Burchardt, & Griera, 2017).

The generous set of rights and privileges established by the 1992 agreement between the state and the CIE thus grew out of the celebratory climate surrounding religious diversity characteristic of the period. Elites from across the political spectrum saw religious diversity, which was still relatively minimal in Spain at the time, as a tool they could leverage to support the construction of a more modern and open society. Their target audience was not just religious minorities, but also the broader Spanish populace, as well as the international community. This was especially apparent in the case of the agreements with the Muslim and Jewish federations, which were accompanied by a series of symbolic acts. For example, a large exhibition celebrating Spain's Muslim and Arab heritage was organised at Granada's Alhambra, and King Juan Carlos gave a speech highlighting the deep connections between Spain and the Arab world at the ruins of the medieval Medina Al-Zahara palace in Cordoba. In a similar fashion, an event was organised at Madrid's central synagogue during which the king spoke of the need for historical reconciliation with the Jewish people. The president of Israel, Haïm Herzog, was among those invited to attend (Astor, Burchardt, & Griera, 2017; Rozenberg, 1996).

Major mosques as instruments for economic development

Two years after the inauguration of the CCIM and the signing of the 1992 cooperative agreement between the state and the CIE, a major mosque was built in Valencia. The decision to erect the 'Great Mosque of Valencia' – formally named the 'Xúquer Mosque' – did not respond to the needs or demands of Valencia's modest Muslim community. It resulted, rather, from a broader strategy of urban and economic development pursued by Valencia's city government at the time.

The first Muslims to arrive in Valencia were Middle Eastern students who took advantage of the educational opportunities offered by the city during the late 1960s and early 1970s. Towards the late 1980s, Valencia's Muslim population

underwent modest growth with the arrival of immigrant workers from Morocco, Algeria and Senegal. A small community of Spanish converts to Islam also emerged during this period. None of these groups, however, were particularly numerous prior to the late 1990s, when North African immigration began to increase sharply (Buades Fuster & Vidal Fernández, 2007).

Although the Xúquer Mosque was over 1,600 m² in size and had sufficient capacity for 500 worshipers, very few Muslims attended the mosque when it was initially opened in 1994. Aside from the fact that Valencia's Muslim population was still relatively small, a number of the Muslims who did reside in the city, especially students or former students of Middle Eastern descent, opposed the mosque project because it was financed with Kuwaiti capital, which they felt might compromise their ideological autonomy.

The impetus for building a major mosque in Valencia grew out of the connections with the Arab world that had been developed by Valencia's then mayor, Ricard Pérez Casado. In 1984, Valencia hosted a meeting in which the Kuwaiti-based Arab Towns Organization (ATO) and the Spanish Federation of Municipalities and Provinces signed an agreement promoting economic, cultural and educational collaboration between Arab and Spanish cities. The meeting resulted in a commitment by several Arab donors to support the restoration of the Almirante Baths, an iconic Arab monument in the city. The donors also pledged to establish an Arab cultural centre in the city and to assume the costs of publishing the writings of Arab poets and scientists from Valencia.

The construction of the Xúquer Mosque was made possible by the city government's cession of a large plot of land for the initiative in 1988. In ceding land for the mosque, Pérez Casado sought to enhance Valencia's image as a global city and to promote tourism from wealthy Gulf countries. The ties he had forged with the ATO proved useful, as it was capital from Kuwait that ultimately financed the mosque's construction. The capital from Kuwait was channelled through an association called the Islamic Community of Spain, as the Kuwaiti organisation financing the mosque lacked juridical status in Spain. As a result, the Islamic Community of Spain was technically the owner of the Xúquer Mosque. However, responsibility for managing the mosque was delegated to a newly formed association called the Islamic Cultural Centre of Valencia (CCIV). The Xúquer Mosque remained the only mosque with visibly Islamic architecture in Valencia until 2014, when a second major mosque was inaugurated in the region's southern city of Alicante.

Municipal officials were not the only domestic actors that facilitated the construction of major mosques during the 1980s and 1990s. Business entrepreneurs helped to create a climate conducive to the erection of major mosques by fostering Arab tourism and investment in southern Spain. Beginning in the mid-1970s, the Saudi Royal Family and other Middle Eastern elites began to purchase properties and initiate large-scale construction projects along Andalusia's southern *Costa del Sol*. Their interest in the region derived, in large part, from their nostalgia for Islamic Spain. Establishing a presence in Andalusia held great symbolic significance, as it represented a tangible way of reconnecting with, and in a sense reclaiming, the splendour that was once *al-Andalus*.

Marbella was one of the first destinations for Saudi tourism and investment in southern Spain. Companies like Panorama, Marbella's longest established real estate agency, played an important role in encouraging wealthy Saudi elites to invest in the now posh resort town. Christopher Clover, an American who is currently Panorama's managing director, provides an account of the emergence of the 'Saudi and Pan-Arabian market'.⁵ He relates how a client of Panorama who had real estate dealings with King Fahd introduced him to the Saudi Royal Family during the late 1970s. These contacts, along with Clover's ties to the Saudi Consul in Málaga, facilitated a close working relationship between Panorama and the Royal Family. The expansion of Saudi investment in Marbella, in turn, inspired other royalty and business moguls from the Middle East to invest in municipalities along the *Costa del Sol*.

In 1981, the Saudi Royal Family funded the construction of a large, ornate mosque in Marbella. The Marbella mosque was officially called the Mosque of King Abdul-Aziz al Saud. It was built on a 10,500m² parcel of land that the family had previously purchased in the town. Like the Abu-Bakr Mosque in Madrid, it was designed by the Cordoban architect, Juan Mora Urbano. The mosque's façade was styled in accordance with Hispano-Islamic and North African architectural traditions. However, the minaret and other core elements of the mosque's exterior were of Ottoman inspiration and gave the mosque a distinctly modern appearance that resembled some of the newer mosques in Saudi Arabia. This fusion of styles was perhaps meant to signal a connection to local Islamic architectural tradition while simultaneously gesturing towards a more modern, cosmopolitan, and Saudi-inspired future (Moreno Fernández 2001). The Saudis also constructed an extravagant royal palace that they tellingly named *al-Nahda* (Revival) in the vicinity of the mosque (Shannon, 2015, pp. 34–35).

A decade later, the Saudis initiated a second major mosque project in the nearby coastal town of Fuengirola. The project was directed by the Suhail Foundation, whose president, Mohammed Bashir Kurdi, was the Saudi Consul in Malaga at the time. The mosque, which was also called the Suhail Islamic Cultural Centre, was built on land ceded by the local city government. Its construction was completed in 1992, and it was officially inaugurated in 1993.

In 1996, the Suhail Foundation launched an additional mosque project in the city of Malaga and once again hired Mora Urbano as chief architect. The municipal government, then headed by the conservative Popular Party (*Partido Popular*, PP), agreed to sell the foundation a plot of land where the mosque would be constructed for 425 million pesetas (about 2.5 million euros). The project encountered a degree of resistance from representatives of the Socialist Party and the United Left – Green Party, who argued that the PP had acted with too much urgency and had not properly consulted residents living in the area designated for the mosque or the local Muslim community before arranging the deal with the Suhail Foundation. In defending the project, the urban planning official and future mayor of Malaga, Francisco de la Torre, argued that the mosque was a 'positive' development which, in addition to bringing in significant revenue, gave the city 'an open and cosmopolitan image' (Souviron, 1996).



Figure 5.2 The Mosque of King Abdul-Aziz al Saud in Marbella. Photograph by Avi Astor.

After four official hearings in which the project was debated, it was finally approved in December of 1996. Prince Abdul Aziz bin Fahd, the son of King Fahd, symbolically laid the first stone a year later. The project ended up costing over 22 million euros, more than double the original budget. The mosque, which was also called the ‘Andalusian Cultural Centre’ (*El Centro Cultural Andalusi*), was not opened for general use until 2007 due to a delay in funding for its construction. The sources of this delay remain somewhat unclear, though they likely stemmed from a combination of internal problems within the Saudi Royal Family and the unexpectedly high cost of the building’s construction.

Hall (1993, p. 279) has argued that general policy ‘paradigms’ specify ‘not only the goals of policy and the kind of instruments that can be used to attain them, but also the very nature of the problems they are meant to be addressing’. The ideas, norms, and values that comprise particular policy paradigms shape the policymaking process by setting the terms of political debate and determining the range of possible disagreements and solutions (Surel, 2000). At the time of the debates that took place over the Suhail Foundation’s mosque project in Malaga, it was essentially taken for granted that attracting Arab investment through the promotion of a major mosque was a positive development for the city. The mayor and other public officials representing the PP never questioned the threat that the mosque might pose to Spain’s Catholic identity or the potential dangers of Islamic fundamentalism – two issues that leaders of the PP would later bring up repeatedly amid debates over matters pertaining to Islam – since these issues had not yet become part of the political agenda. Moreover, the politicians who were initially reluctant to approve the sale of the land to the Suhail Foundation never criticised the mosque

project as such. Their criticisms centred exclusively on the transparency of the process by which city officials had pursued the project. Once all the relevant groups and associations had been adequately consulted, the project was approved without significant difficulty.

Although public officials and local businesses generally welcomed Arab investments in southern Spain, some Spaniards experienced the arrival of ‘petrodollars’ to the *Costa del Sol* with trepidation. Reflecting on the Marbella mosque project and other Saudi investments in the region, Pedro Crespo, a distinguished writer, journalist and lawyer who founded the Association of Editors for Spanish Newspapers, wrote an alarmist editorial in *ABC* entitled ‘Moors at the Coast’ (*Moros en la costa*), a phrase employed during the Middle Ages and early modern period to warn of Moorish raiders landing in Spanish coastal towns:

This invasion, at the moment profitable for the invaded, and welcomed, could be considered a form of historical redemption, or the beginning of a new historical era, now without Florinda la Cava or Don Opas to bungle the landing.⁶ But it would always be an invasion of caliphs. The evil did not arrive with the blond-haired and blue-eyed Arabs, with the saga of the Ummayyads, but rather with their African companions... There truly are Moors at the coast, though not all the Moors nor all the coasts are equal.

(Crespo, 1981, p. 3)

The analogies that Crespo employed in the editorial were illustrative of how negative representations of *al-Andalus* within the Spanish collective imaginary could be mobilised to criticise the growing presence and influence of Arab elites in Spain. He warned that the Marbella mosque was a point of reference that might attract Muslims to Spain from Morocco and other African contexts, which, as in the past, threatened the security and values of Spanish society. Crespo’s words were somewhat prophetic insofar as it was the subsequent arrival of working-class North African migrants to Spain that would later arouse significant public concern. He added that the contingent of ‘special’ visitors from the Gulf should not lose sight of the fact that they were visitors in a land that was not their own.

Cordoba: from meeting point of religions to locus of territorial dispute

Crespo was not alone in voicing concerns about the ventures and dealings of Arab elites in Spain during the 1980s. Discourses warning of Arab intentions to appropriate Spanish lands and re-establish *al-Andalus* surfaced on several occasions in the context of local disputes surrounding the use and ownership of religious buildings in Cordoba. The eruption of such disputes represented a rupture from the highly positive atmosphere surrounding inter-faith relations that existed in Cordoba during the 1970s.

Prior to Spain’s democratic transition, Cordoba had re-emerged as a site of encounter between Muslims and Christians. Beginning in the 1960s, Catholic activists who drew inspiration from the Catholic ideal of ecumenism – an ideal the

Church had begun to prioritise with increasing rigour following the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965) – became increasingly active in reaching out to other religions. Ecumenism, in the original sense of the term, refers to the promotion of unity among Christian faiths. However, its meaning was extended to include the promotion of inter-faith dialogue and understanding with non-Christian faiths as well (Aloisi, 1988).

In Spain, the first inter-faith organisations dedicated to relations between Catholics and Muslims were founded in Madrid.⁷ In 1968, Salvador Gómez Nogales, a professor from a private Catholic University in the city, and Dr. Hussein Munis, an Egyptian writer and scholar, jointly created the Association of Islamo-Christian Friendship (AIC). The following year, the AIC supported Father Emilio Galindo's founding of Darek-Nyumba, an organisation dedicated to promoting dialogue between Catholics and Muslims, and to facilitating the integration of Arab students studying in Madrid. During the 1970s and 1980s, Galindo and the AIC organised a series of meetings aimed at deepening the connections between Christianity and Islam, including two international 'Islam-Christian Conferences' held in Cordoba in 1974 and 1977.

Cordoba's symbolism as a meeting point between different cultures made it a particularly suitable location for the conferences, which brought Church officials together with political and spiritual leaders from several Arab countries, including Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Algeria, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Syria and Tunisia. The sessions comprising each conference covered a range of topics, some theological and others political. As part of the proceedings, Muslims were invited to pray before the *mihrab* (prayer niche) of Cordoba's Mosque-Cathedral, an act that would generate controversy on multiple occasions in subsequent years (Astor, Burchardt, & Griera, 2019; Monteiro, 2011).

The first such controversy took place in 1982, when Julio Anguita, the charismatic mayor of Cordoba and a leading figure within the Spanish Communist Party, arranged for a contingent of Muslims to visit the Mosque-Cathedral during the first 'Hispano-Muslim Friendship Conference', an event similar to the Islamo-Christian conferences that had been organised during the 1970s.⁸ The contingent prayed before the *mihrab* without express permission, arousing the ire of Cordoba's Catholic leadership. The city's bishop called the act an 'outrage against our religious beliefs' that is 'deeply worrying to Catholics because it is a flagrant invasion of our sentiments' ('Nuevos roces', 1982, p. 33). The Mosque-Cathedral's canon and chief archivist lambasted Anguita for instigating the conflict:

So now a non-believing atheist party causes two religions to begin fighting with each other, and to begin -- above all the Muslims -- occupying lands that are not their own. I think it's an absurd position that, if it hurts anyone, it's the Muslim community itself because returning the Muslim religion to Cordoba at the hands of the Communist Party is the worst thing that can be done to the Islamic religion.

(‘El canónigo Nieto Cumplido’, 1982, p. 40)

Nieto Cumplido added that the Muslims had once tried to destroy the Mosque-Cathedral before being driven out of Andalusia. The great structure was still in existence today, he argued, thanks to King Ferdinand III's order to kill any Muslim who dared approach it. Nieto Cumplido's remarks made waves in conservative Catholic media such as *Tendillas* 7, which published an issue in 1982 with a cover photo of a Muslim pushing a wheelbarrow filled with the remains of a destroyed Mosque-Cathedral.

Hence, the very same act of prostration before the *mihrab* that had been celebrated by Catholic leaders just 5 years earlier was perceived, in this instance, as a form of 'spatial transgression' (Collins-Kreiner et al., 2013). A key difference between the two instances was the fact that the Muslims praying before the *mihrab* in 1977 had been expressly authorised to do so by the bishop. There was thus a clear understanding that the Church had the authority to decide which acts were permitted and which acts were not. In 1982, by contrast, the Muslims participating in the act were not doing so on terms laid down by the Mosque-Cathedral's Catholic administrators. Praying before the *mihrab* in this instance was thus interpreted as a performative act intended to challenge the building's status as an exclusively Catholic place of worship. Controversies over Muslims praying in or around the Mosque-Cathedral would later take place on several occasions during the 2000s and 2010s, in some instances leading to violent confrontations (Arigita, 2013; Astor, Burchardt, & Griera, 2019).

The anger expressed by Cordoba's Catholic leadership regarding the incident had been building since the previous year, when Anguita had taken steps to donate the Morabito and a vacant convent to the Muslim community.⁹ The decision to hand over the keys of the convent to a Saudi dignitary named Ali Kettani was particularly controversial, as the convent had originally been built upon the remains of an old mosque, and its cession was interpreted by some as a form of symbolic re-conquest. The temporal proximity of the transfer to the construction of Spain's first two modern mosques – the aforementioned mosque in Marbella and a mosque built in 1981 by the Ahmaddiya community in Pedro Abad, a small town 30 km outside Cordoba – added to the impression that Muslims were seeking to re-appropriate what was once theirs.

It is difficult to know with certainty whether the general public was at all concerned about these events, or whether the dramatic newspaper headlines they elicited were drummed up by journalists looking to sensationalise otherwise unnoticed local controversies. The little information that does exist suggests that the general public was not overly anxious about Islam's growing presence in Cordoba and the rest of Andalusia. The author of an article published in *ABC* in 1981 puzzled over the public's 'curious indifference' regarding Islam's recent overtures in Andalusia and attributed this apathy to the general perception of the polemics as 'more folkloric than anything else' (López, 1981, p. 30). Moreover, there were no media reports of public protests or petition campaigns aimed at preventing Muslim collectives from acquiring property and establishing mosques in Andalusia, or elsewhere in Spain, prior to the 1990s.¹⁰

For the vast majority of Spaniards, contact with Muslims remained minimal, and Islam's presence in Spain – both historical and contemporary – was still too abstract and distant to arouse serious concern. Although visible mosques were certainly

viewed as exotic, few perceived them as harbingers of any foreboding future developments. The specific segments of the populace that viewed mosques with apprehension tended to be less concerned with Islam's presence in Spain per se than with how it might be leveraged by anti-clerical activists, such as Anguita and the Spanish Communist Party, to wage subtle attacks against the Catholic Church's hegemony at a time when Catholic leaders felt especially vulnerable due to the Church's recent disestablishment and the progressive secularisation of Spanish society.

The Catalan exception

By the mid-1990s, several large and visible mosques had been erected in Madrid, Andalusia and Valencia. In Catalonia, however, major mosques remained conspicuously absent, despite that fact that its capital, Barcelona, was Spain's second largest city and had attracted a significant number of Muslim students, business entrepreneurs, and workers (Moreras, 1999). Several factors impeded the establishment of a major mosque in the region. For one, Catalonia did not have the same diplomatic importance as Madrid or symbolic connection to *al-Andalus* as Andalusia, making it less attractive to wealthy Arab donors motivated by political influence or nostalgia. Secondly, unlike Valencia, whose mayor actively sought to foster ties with Middle Eastern elites and organisations in order to attract Arab investment during the 1980s, Barcelona did not have a city official or agency that took a comparable interest in strengthening relations with elites from wealthy Gulf states. Finally, by the time serious proposals to build a major mosque in Barcelona emerged during the late 1990s, there were already nine different Islamic places of worship in the city that catered to different segments of the local Muslim population (Moreras, 1999). This raised a series of dilemmas related to representativeness and influence that proved more problematic in Barcelona than in other Spanish municipalities where major mosques had been constructed.

According to Moreras (1999), efforts to establish a large mosque in Barcelona were initially undertaken in 1988, when a group of Muslims with ties to a local Palestinian association formed the 'Great Mosque Association of Barcelona'. Their activities, however, never materialised into any concrete proposal and the group dissolved within a short period. More significant efforts were made in the 1990s, when Muslim leaders attempted to enlist the city's support for a major mosque by strategically linking their proposals to broader projects aimed at enhancing Barcelona's international profile. In the aftermath of the 1992 Olympic Games, which played an important role in putting Barcelona on the map as a major global city (Kennett & de Moragas, 2006), affiliates of the Islamic Centre of Barcelona requested that the city government follow the example of Madrid and Valencia in donating space for the construction of a mosque. In 1994, Joan Gaspart, an influential businessman and president of a large tourist consortium, lent support to the request of Muslim leaders by declaring that Barcelona needed a large mosque to attract Arab tourism and to maintain its competitiveness with Madrid.

It was not until 1998, however, that more concrete talks regarding the establishment of a major mosque in the city finally materialised. That year, a contingent of

Middle Eastern diplomats visited Barcelona to view an exhibit on Islam in Catalonia at the Catalan History Museum. The diplomats took advantage of the occasion to meet with Jordi Pujol, the president of Catalonia at the time, in order to discuss viable options for building a large mosque in the city (Moreras, 1999). The following year, Barcelona's mayor, Joan Clos, established a special commission to gather and weigh the feasibility of different proposals for the construction of a mosque in the city. Clos' interest in expediting the establishment of a mosque was influenced by UNESCO's endorsement of Barcelona's proposal to organise and host a 'Universal Forum of Cultures' in 2004. Several Muslim leaders had highlighted how having a large and visible mosque would help to demonstrate Barcelona's plural and cosmopolitan character to the diverse array of nations represented at the forum. At this point, there was significant momentum for the establishment of a major mosque in the city, and it seemed all but inevitable that the project would come to fruition.

Somewhat surprisingly, just one proposal was submitted for consideration by the deadline set by the special committee in March of 2000. The proposal was put forth by Radi Mahmud Al-Shuaibi, a Palestinian who had been selected to act as spokesman for Saudi interests in Barcelona. Many expected a competing proposal from Morocco, as Barcelona had become a major destination for Moroccan immigrants, but Spain's North African neighbour proved unwilling to furnish the capital necessary for a mosque project that would be competitive with the Saudi proposal.

Although the city government initially supported Al-Shuaibi's proposal, several obstacles impeded its implementation. For one, finding a suitable place for the proposed mosque proved difficult, given the paucity of large spaces available in the urban core of Barcelona. Nevertheless, this is an obstacle that likely could have been resolved had there been sufficient political will and support from local Muslim communities for the project. From the start, however, questions were raised about the representativeness of the mosque and the type of Islam that would be transmitted should it be funded by Saudi Arabia. Antoni Comas, Catalonia's Director of Social Welfare, had voiced concerns about Saudi influence and the danger of the mosque becoming a centre of Islamic fundamentalism (Guia, 2014). Cardinal Ricard Maria Carles of Barcelona's Catholic Diocese criticised the project on various occasions for catering to a select group of Arab elites, rather than the broader Muslim community, and for being sponsored by a country that was intolerant of religious diversity. Most troubling from the administration's point of view were the criticisms advanced by representatives of several of Barcelona's local Muslim communities regarding Al-Shuaibi's legitimacy and the threat of undue Saudi influence on Muslims in the city, very few of whom were from the Gulf region. Al-Shuaibi defended the project, stating that it was a private endeavour of the Royal Family and need not appeal to all of Barcelona's Muslims. However, this made the project less enticing to city officials, and it was gradually pushed off the public agenda.

In March of 2001, the city government officially pulled the plug on the project, citing its unwillingness to donate public land for the proposed mosque. Specifically, city officials flagged the potential Pandora's box that donating property for a mosque might open, as other confessions might then feel equally entitled to receiving public donations for their respective places of worship. Here again, timing was critical, as

Barcelona's general populace had become much more religiously diverse by the late 1990s and early 2000s. Between 1996 and 2001, the number of foreign nationals residing in the city rose from roughly 26,800 (1.8% of the population) to 72,800 (4.8% of the city's total population). This rise was part of a larger wave of immigration to Spain that began towards the onset of the twenty-first century. From 2000 to 2009, Spain received an average net inflow of 500,000 foreign-born individuals a year, more than any other European country during the period (Arango, 2013). The number of foreign nationals in the country increased from about 542,300 (1.4% of the total population) in 1996 to nearly 1.37 million by 2001 (3.3% of the total population). By 2010, this number had reached 5.75 million (12.2% of the total population).¹¹

Many of the immigrants arriving to Barcelona and elsewhere in Spain were Muslims, Evangelical Protestants and Eastern Orthodox from Africa, South Asia, Latin America and Eastern Europe. Other minorities, such as Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons, Sikhs, and Buddhists, also came to have a more notable presence, especially in large cities. In Barcelona, there are now over 300 non-Catholic places of worship, many of which were established during the late 1990s and early 2000s.¹² As a result of heightened religious diversification, arrangements made with the Muslim community had potential ramifications for the city's dealings with other religious groups that had to be taken into consideration. Since large-scale mosque projects in other municipalities such as Madrid and Valencia had been undertaken earlier, when religious minorities in Spain were still few in number, questions of equity had not yet become a major issue of concern.

Shortly after the Saudi proposal failed to materialise, the attacks of 9/11 took place in New York City, giving rise to widespread and powerful associations between Islam and terrorism. Gaining the political and public support necessary to realise a large-scale mosque project suddenly became immensely more difficult than it had been prior to the attacks. The window of opportunity for establishing a major mosque in Barcelona had closed, at least for the foreseeable future. Although Muslim leaders in Barcelona have continued to hold meetings on the matter and to lobby for a major mosque in the city, concrete steps towards the establishment of such a mosque have yet to be taken. A decentralised model of small and dispersed Islamic places of worship, or what Maussen (2009, p. 179) has called 'vicinity Islam', thus remains the status quo. This is not to say that a major mosque will not be built in the proximate future. If provisions are made to establish a large-scale mosque in the city, however, they will likely elicit a degree of controversy given the present climate surrounding Islam.

Conclusion

The analysis advanced over the course of this chapter illustrates how projects of national redefinition and urban renewal following Spain's democratic transition engendered a structure of opportunity conducive to the recognition and revival of Spain's Islamic heritage during the 1980s and 1990s. The support given by local governments to Muslim elites in their efforts to promote the construction of large and *visible* mosques was facilitated by the relative *invisibility* of actual Muslims due to their limited presence

in Spain at the time. The absence of significant political and social concerns regarding Spain's modest Muslim population enabled the 'Muslim question' to be treated as a purely symbolic matter, divorced from the problems of integration that were beginning to intensify in other European countries, such as France, the United Kingdom and Germany, where the demand for foreign workers had materialised much earlier than in Spain. The large-scale arrival of working-class Muslim immigrants to Spain during the 1990s and 2000s, and the emergence of notable conflicts between North Africans and Spaniards in several municipalities, coupled with the terror attacks of 9/11 in New York City and of 11-M in Madrid, generated a climate of fear that came to eclipse the celebratory atmosphere that had existed during the post-transition period.

The developments commemorating Spain's Islamic heritage following its democratic transition undoubtedly generated tangible benefits for some segments of the country's Muslim population. The major mosques constructed during the 1980s and 1990s provided spacious and comfortable spaces for prayer for certain communities, as well as visible contemporary symbols of Islam in which Muslims could take pride. The 1992 accord with the CIE facilitated subsequent claims for accommodation and opportunities for Muslim federations and associations to acquire limited public funding (e.g. from the Foundation for Pluralism and Coexistence) (Astor, 2017). These developments, however, did not significantly bolster general awareness of Spain's Islamic heritage in a sustained or reflexive manner, as one might argue has been the case with events like Black History Month in the United States. This is due largely to the fact that the developments commemorating Spain's Islamic heritage resulted from top-down initiatives driven mainly by the interests of political elites, business entrepreneurs, urban planners and wealthy foreigners, rather than more grassroots struggles and achievements. To be sure, local Muslim minorities were not passive bystanders to the developments that unfolded during the post-transition period. However, the efficacy of their actions depended on their close alignment with the objectives of the state and powerful economic actors.

Perhaps the emergence of a more robust and vocal cohort of second- and third-generation Muslims in Spain will lead to more bottom-up demands for public initiatives promoting recognition of Spain's Islamic heritage, as well as more reflexive awareness of the suffering and injustices caused by the Inquisition, Spanish colonial ventures in North Africa, and current forms of prejudice directed at Muslim minorities. Such recognition and awareness might be achieved, for instance, by incorporating more material on Spain's Islamic heritage within public educational curricula, by creating a cyclical commemorative event akin to Black History Month that provides regular occasion for national reflection on Islam's contributions to Spanish society or by developing other initiatives that involve a more active and expanded engagement with Spain's past and present relations with Islam.

Notes

- 1 The term *convivencia* was coined by Américo Castro in reference to 'the "coexistence" of Christian, Muslim, and Jewish communities in medieval Spain and by extension the cultural interaction and exchange fostered by such proximity' (Wolf, 2009, p. 72).

- 2 In addition to commemorating the conquest of Granada, the events of 1992 commemorated the 500th anniversary of Columbus' 'discovery' of the Americas and the Spanish Inquisition.
- 3 For a more detailed discussion of Spain's cooperative framework for religious governance and its requirements for representation, see Astor (2015).
- 4 Tatar passed away in 2020 after contracting COVID-19.
- 5 Panorama's Marbella office was opened in 1970s. A blog relating its history may be viewed at <http://www.panorama.es/es/blog/marbella-setenta-primeros-panorama/> (accessed March 4, 2020).
- 6 Florinda de la Cava and Don Opas were folkloric figures said to have been embroiled in the events that led to the Moorish conquest of Spain in the eighth century.
- 7 An association promoting relations between Jews and Christians had previously been founded in 1961 (Rozenberg, 2010).
- 8 Anguita was nicknamed the 'Red Caliph' due to his powerful appeal among Cordoba's electorate (Casas, 1990).
- 9 The convent in question was the Santa Clara Convent.
- 10 In the early 1990s, the donation of land for the mosque eventually erected in Fuengirola aroused a certain degree of controversy, as representatives of an opposition party in the town accused the mayor of fraud and corruption. However, there is no evidence to suggest that ordinary citizens opposed the donation, which was eventually upheld in court.
- 11 Data on the number of foreign nationals in Spain were obtained from the Spanish National Institute of Statistics (<https://ine.es/>). Spain does not collect official data on religious identity.
- 12 Non-Catholic places of worship now outnumber Catholic churches (243) in Barcelona. More detailed information on places of worship in the city and the rest of Catalonia may be obtained from the websites of the *Observatorio del Pluralismo Religioso en España* (Observatory of Religious Pluralism in Spain, <http://www.observatorioreligion.es/>) and the *Mapa Religiós de Catalunya* (Religious Map of Catalonia, <http://www.mapareligios.cat/>).

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Museum *Islamania* in France

Islamic art as a political and social scene

Diletta Guidi

Paris, Cairo, Berlin, London, New York, Tehran, Kuala Lumpur, Melbourne, Washington, Doha, Honolulu, Copenhagen, Toronto: these are only a few of the cities with museums – partly or fully – devoted to Islam. This international boom, which started in Europe at the very end of the nineteenth century, has considerably increased since the 2000s (Junod, Khalil, Weber & Wolf, 2013). In recent years, there has been a sort of museum ‘*islamania*’ (Rieffel, 2011). More and more cultural institutions are investing in Islamic art worldwide (Ådahl & Ahlund, 2000). In France alone, 37 museums hold objects so categorised (Boyer, 2006).

Despite this marked trend, in France no research on Islamic art has been done to date in the fields of political science or religious studies. Looking abroad, the topic remains barely addressed (Flood, 2012; Frank, Dornhof & Arigita, 2013). However, according to the historian Pierre Rosanvallon, culture is used by the French state ‘to give face to [i.e. to picture] the nation’ (Poirrier, 2017; Rosanvallon, 1990, p. 403). Museums, in particular, are exploited as a political tool to build national identities (Anderson, 1983; Levitt, 2015). Furthermore, as Benoît de L’Estoile (2010) explains, the exhibition of otherness is involved in the creation of the national identity because exhibiting otherness is essential to creating a self-image. Therefore, museums are a key tool to study the political and social spheres. By extension, by looking at museums in France that display Islamic collections, we can have a better understanding of the French nation-state and its relationship to Muslim otherness.

Collect and collections

Intrigued by this premise, I conducted fieldwork that covered major French museums hosting Islamic art collections.¹ From 2013 to 2019, I documented, analysed and interpreted the presence (or the absence) of Islam, as well as the meaning given to it (i.e. religious, cultural, political, etc.), in French cultural institutions, exploring them in three ways. First, I looked at the archives (paper and online) to reconstruct the histories of representation. Then, I interviewed the principal actors involved who worked for them. From security to cultural and administrative staff, I did not neglect any institutional role. Finally, I visited the museums several times, alone, in pairs, or in group visits.

Among the many French institutions holding Islamic collections, I selected two main case studies: the Louvre museum and the Institut du Monde Arabe (IMA) (The Arab World Institute). Those institutions, both located in Paris, are in fact simultaneously exceptional and typical. Given their attendance, legal status, artistic content, success, etc., each of these institutions is unique, although their way of showing Islam can be found in other French museums. As my analysis in this chapter shows, the Louvre and the IMA are in fact representative of two major trends of framing Islam in museums and their underlying issues.

The Louvre is currently the most visited museum in the world and the national museum *par excellence*.² It has held Islamic art collections since 1893 and has recently opened a brand-new department of 5,000 m² dedicated to it. Inaugurated in 2012, that new department was initiated by the former President of the Republic, Jacques Chirac, after the 9/11 terrorist attacks. The aim of the French government was to show ‘the bright face of Islam’ (<https://www.louvre.fr/le-nouveau-departement-des-arts-de-l-islam>) to promote dialogue and peace in the post-2001 socio-political context. In the same way, Saudi prince Alwaleed bin Talal, whose foundation spent over 17 million euros on the project (the greatest donation ever made by a private sponsor to the Louvre) wanted to present ‘true Islam to the world’ through the Louvre’s new department (<https://www.bbc.com/news/entertainment-arts-19672951>).³ The Islamic Art department seems, then, to have become a diplomatic and economic asset for these politicians, not just an artistic one. More broadly, French museums’ *islamania* can also be interpreted as a political trend in addition to being an artistic phenomenon. However, this is mostly not how it is seen by cultural professionals, especially at the Louvre. In fact, the project of the new department was put under the supervision of Islamic art expert Sophie Makariou, whose intention from the beginning was to avoid any connections between Islamic art and contemporary Muslims, which she did through public statements and scenography choices but without great success. Right after the inauguration, she declared: ‘We cannot judge a work of the tenth century through the prism of current events. It would be really unfair’ (Iqbal, 2012). Furthermore, she chose the name *Département des Arts de l’Islam*, which in English translates as ‘Arts of Islam Department’ (AID). It is also no accident that the I in Islam is in upper case. In fact, in French, this typography refers to Islam as a political and cultural entity, whereas islam with a lower case means religion. This effort to marginalise religion is not limited to this detail – one can notice it in the AID exhibition, as I will discuss. Indeed, it is also relevant to note that the term ‘arts’ is used in plural to signify that Islamic art is a very complex artistic genre. Despite all these efforts, public expectations and the media coverage at that time maintained the connection between Islamic art and contemporary Muslims (Junod et al., 2013), as in the BBC coverage of the AID inauguration which made link between Louvre collection, 9/11 and French debate on the Muslim veil (Iqbal, 2012).

Like the Louvre, the IMA holds an exceptional place in the cultural landscape of Paris. Created in the 1970s, right after the Middle Eastern crisis (the Six-Day war and the oil crisis provoked by the OAPEC embargo) by the will of the President Valéry Giscard d’Estaing (1974–1981), the IMA is considered an

institution *sui generis*. It is the only cultural organisation co-directed by a partnership between France and the 22 countries of the Arab League. It was built to promote the 'knowledge of the Arab world, to conduct in-depth research on its language, its cultural and spiritual values, as well as to promote exchanges and cooperation, particularly in the fields of science and technology between France and the Arab world, thereby contributing to the development of relations between it and Europe' (IMA, 1981, p. 3). Given its mission, the IMA is governed by a staff of ambassadors and politicians, together with curators and managers.

While on the one hand unique, the Louvre and the IMA can also be seen in some ways as typical organisations. More precisely, we can speak about them as two ideal-types of museological framing of Islam in France. In fact, after looking at a large sample of institutions,⁴ from the mid-nineteenth century World's Fair to contemporary museums exhibits, I maintain that Islam is caught between two logics, two parallel and competing 'exhibitionary regimes' (Flood, 2007),⁵ one or other or both of which can be detected in all French cultural institutions that address Islam. On the one hand, Islam is staged through the masterpieces of Muslim civilisation, understood as a past and distant political and cultural entity but only marginally as a religious reality. The Louvre embodies this first model. On the other hand, in museums like the IMA, a wide range of facets of Islam are shown, especially the religious one. The IMA exhibits both historical and contemporary Islam, objects from the Arabian Peninsula as well as testimonies from the French Muslims. From exhibitions about hip hop in Muslim culture to veiled comedians, Islam is made a 'cool' religion and Muslims a 'cool' community.⁶ This presents an alternative way to showcase otherness that merits a more in-depth analysis.

Islamic Mona Lisa versus pop islam: two ways to showcase otherness

In this section, I describe the main characteristics of the two cases studied, giving details about what a visitor might see while walking through the museums. With more than 3,000 works of art shown in the Islamic department of the Louvre and no less than 1,000 at the IMA, this analysis is limited to three types of objects: 1) large objects, 2) pedagogical tools (i.e. maps, panels, etc.), 3) objects directly related to Islam.⁷ Here, I discuss those objects that, in my opinion, are especially prominently displayed and, thus, most likely to be noticed by museum visitors.

The arts of Islam at the Louvre: a peaceful, bright and beautiful Other that became French

'I'm looking for the *Département des Arts de l'Islam*, can you tell me where I have to go?', I asked the young woman at the information point situated in the Napoleon hall just at the entrance to the Louvre museum. She turned back to a huge lion statue on a billboard behind her and answered: 'Follow the lion'.

Like the other nine departments, the Islamic art collection is represented by one of its flagship art works. In this case, the masterpiece chosen by the Louvre is a

massive bronze statue in the shape of a lion with mouth wide open called the *Lion of Monzòn* founded in Monzòn de Campos, in Palencia, a province in north central Spain, in a palace which was recaptured by Christians in the eleventh century from Islamic forces. It probably served as a waterspout or as a water vessel for both Muslims and Christians.

Enlightened Islam

'It's an object that was chosen for the poster of the department because it has a lot of presence', Sophie Makariou explained to me about this artwork, but it is also well-known among the experts due to its rarity and history. Indeed, this piece is 'one of the few preserved metal works of the entire Islamic West', as stated on the museum's website.⁸ The 'Western Islamic' formula indicates the moments of strong Muslim presence in the West. In this case, it refers to the Muslim occupation in medieval Spain, because the lion dates from the seventh and eighth centuries and was found in the province of Palencia, which the Umayyad dynasty occupied at the time. It was likely used as a fountain mouth in a Muslim palace and later passed into Christian hands to be used in a monastery in the region. A transformation of use that would testify to the peaceful '*convivencia*' (i.e. coexistence) between Islam and the West during the period of Al-Andalus (711–1492). It is in any case, the multiplicity of uses that the museum's team emphasises about the *Lion of Monzòn*. So, despite the efforts made by Sophie Makariou to keep the exhibition apolitical, by emphasising the Europe-Islam relation, she renders it nonetheless political.

Elena Arigita (2013) talks about the 'paradigm of Cordoba' (from the name of the capital of Al-Andalus) to describe the contemporary use of this period of Islamic history. She explains that after the attacks of 11 September, 2001, Al-Andalus is used as a 'counter-narrative' to react to the growing association of Islam with violence in public discourse. Arigita argues that in a context where Islamophobia has grown to international proportions, the approach becomes one of finding a historical precedent that shows the possibility of integrating Muslim populations into Western democracies. This is what the AID with the Lion of Monzòn attempts to do. The problem of this approach, she warns, is that it is also a historical construction. As she points out, the irenic character of Al-Andalus, its ideal of tolerance and dialogue, is an idea that has been stretched by historians. For this reason, she suggests caution in the exploitation of the 'paradigm of Cordoba'. She argues that its use is likely to become 'counterproductive' (Flood, 2007, p. 44) precisely because it refers to the past – to the Middle Ages, which is seen nostalgically as an idealised bygone 'golden age' (Lowney, 2006; Menocal, 2002). By selecting only some of the biographical elements of the Lion of Monzòn, the AID contributes to the idealised construction of a refined and tolerant Islam.

The visitor might confuse this idealised Islam with a more complex and multifaceted reality of contemporary Islam. This could create a disappointing anachronism. Contemporary Islam ends up looking inadequate by comparison with the fictive tolerant one from the past. It acts as a distorted ideal, impossible for today's Muslims to live up to.

The lion poster leads the visitor to the entrance of the AID. The public enters in the AID through a long dark tunnel. The light coming from the floor is barely sufficient to illuminate the quote inscribed on the left black grey wall: 'François Hollande President of the Republic inaugurated the new spaces of the Arts of Islam on September 18th 2012'. Located just at the entrance to the AID, at eye level, in golden bold letters, this reference shows the links between the Louvre and the state, the museum and the government. This strong relationship began, as mentioned above, immediately after 2001, when Chirac, President at the time, asked the Louvre to build the new department. This is unique to the Louvre, which, being a national museum and one of the most visited in the world, has the power to be a voice that the government tries to exploit to drive national discourse. The museum becomes a vehicle to define an idealised Islam and to promote a dialogue between France and Muslims.

As they walk through the tunnel, visitors gradually see more clearly the department whose first-floor bathes in natural light that penetrates the golden fishnet roof designed by the French architect Rudy Ricciotti. Indeed, this brightly lit first level of the AID contrasts with the penumbra of the path that precedes it. When leaving the tunnel, visitors are dazzled, awed by the amount of light.

The museum historian Carol Duncan argues that the construction of the first public museums in the eighteenth century helped to replace religion with the state, and religious ideals with Enlightenment values, and thus to transform the faithful into citizens (Duncan, 1995). To do this, the museums of the time were inspired by places of worship (churches, temples, etc.). According to Duncan, museums took over the architectural codes (e.g. facades, porticoes, entrance halls, tunnels, galleries), aesthetics (lights, artistic elements, etc.) and conduct (the silence, the meditation, the decency) that were characteristic of religious buildings. Consequently, visitors' circulation through the museum is comparable to the circumambulation of a worshipper in a place of worship. The aesthetic experience resembles a religious experience. In both cases, the presence – as well as the absence – of light plays an important role.

Analysing the path leading to the AID from Duncan's perspective, we can argue that the museum's choices of illumination and internal architecture give to the Louvre's Islamic collection an almost sacred character. The same is true, as we will see, for the lighting of certain objects. Art, the aesthetic value of the collection, is sacralised here. In 2012, Henri Loyrette, former president of the museum, emphasised the enlarged size of the new galleries: 'Marginalized for too long, the Arts of Islam, which were presented in a simple section of the Department of Oriental Antiquities, did not have proper rooms to do justice to one of the largest collections of this type in the world' (Monier-Vinard, 2012). The quality and the uniqueness of the Louvre's Islamic collection, publicised by the museum, recognised by the experts and appreciated by the press, relies especially on its vastness. With origins spanning from Spain to China, the artworks date from the seventh to the nineteenth century. There are few museums that can boast such variety in terms of periods, styles and genres.

Chronological boundaries: the acceptable limits to access French heritage

As the first museum panel at the entrance of the AID shows, the date chosen to begin the exhibition is 632, the death of Muhammad, the prophet of Islam. Yet the date is not treated as a religious reference but as a historical landmark. The expedition of Napoleon in Egypt, in 1798, ends the exhibition. The choice to reference a specific event in French history is unique. Other museums of Islamic art stop more vaguely somewhere in the nineteenth century, at the beginning of colonialism. It is for instance the case at the Metropolitan Museum in New York and at the Aga Khan Museum in Toronto. Here, the direct reference to Napoleon seems more related to the history of the Louvre than to Islamic art in general. In this respect, we already noticed that the entrance is named after a French general. The chronological limit ‘frenchifies’ the Islamic collection, making it more familiar to the visiting public, especially those educated in France. Also, by choosing 1798 as *terminus post quem*, the AID does not show any recent Islamic works of art. This ‘contemporary denial’ (Shatanawi, 2012) can be explained by the fact that the Louvre is mainly a history museum, which seldom exhibits contemporary artefacts.

This chosen end date should have allowed the thorny question of colonial looting to be raised. Napoleon’s expedition brought back a vast number of objects now displayed in the museum, including those exhibited in the AID. However, this topic has not yet been faced. With high profile museums in other countries (e.g. the Rijksmuseum in the Netherlands, and in the United States, the Contemporary Art Museum in Los Angeles and Queens museum in New York; see also Shatanawi, this volume), as well as the international organisations UNESCO and ICOM⁹ starting to address the complex issues of legitimate ownership and restitution, the Louvre and French museums in general still seem out of touch and hesitant to get involved in the topic of art decolonisation process. This is despite efforts by organisations such as Decolonize Art (*Décoloniser les Arts*) and the restitution policies recently initiated by President Emmanuel Macron. In 2018, Macron’s government appointed French historian Bénédicte Savoy and Senegalese writer Felwine Sarr to examine the conditions under which African heritage exhibited in France can be repatriated in their countries of origin. The report Sarr/Savoy (<https://bj.ambafrance.org/Telecharger-l-integralite-du-Rapport-Sarr-Savoy-sur-la-restitution-du>) recommends a 5-year restitution plan that the government has not yet initiated, but has already been rejected by some museums, including the Louvre (Price, 2020).

Alexandre Kazerouni, political scientist specialised in the study of the museums of the Gulf, coined the term ‘eclipse effect’ (*effet d’éclipse*) (Kazerouni, 2017, p. 14) to refer to something which is voluntarily ignored or marginalised in museums. In contrast, he adopts the word ‘overthought’ (*surpensé*) to describe something excessively highlighted (2017, p. 65) in them. If religion is the major eclipsed topic, along with colonial history and the present, what are then the ‘overthought’ themes?

Holy beauty

By taking the stairs leading from the first floor, full of artefacts dating from the Islamic Golden Age (8th–13th century), to the underground second level, the visitor discovers a vast set of copies of the Qur'an as well as several objects used as tools for the illumination of these religious manuscripts. In this transitional section, aesthetics is central. Indeed, the religious content of the Qur'anic texts is never mentioned. It is only a question of artistic quality. In fact, the section title 'Art of the book' refers to the work of the illuminators and the calligraphers. The captions placed beneath the exhibited Qur'anic manuscripts emphasise only their decor and style, while the religious meaning of these holy books is not mentioned. The same happens in the carpets section, placed just behind the manuscripts. Ultimately, Islam as religion is never directly addressed, not even in the video devoted to 'Religions in the Islamic civilisation' placed at the end of the circuit, itself a problematic positioning given the very large size of the AID which usually takes more than 2 hours to visit. The visitor is by this stage likely to be too tired to pay attention to the video explanations and identify the rare religious references, which thus end up eclipsed.

In contrast, as the Qur'an and carpets sections show, art is one of the main 'overthought' topics of the AID. Several sections of the collection are devoted to 'masterpieces of Islamic art'. These include, for instance, the Lion of Monzòn, whose artistic value has been described more closely above. The Lion also embodies the commonalities between East and West, which is the other important theme of the collection. More precisely, it is the idea of the 'bridge between civilisations', Islamic and French ones which is underlined in this case.¹⁰ In fact, the Louvre's storyline particularly insists on the influence of the Graeco-Roman art and European late antiquity on Islamic art, which is posterior to them but never showcased as such in the exhibition. Yet, instead of reciprocal links, these connections are represented as unidirectional. More precisely, they end up highlighting Western Art as superior to Islamic art, and by extension Eastern Art, which ends up being considered derivative. Presented as a 'familial relationship', so to speak, the relation between East and West becomes unbalanced in favour of the latter. There is no mention, anywhere in the gallery, of Islamic Art influencing Western artists, even though many examples could be made (Rieffel, 2011).

However, by placing Islamic art in a continuum with Graeco-Roman art and European late antiquity, it finally wins a place in the universal art history, which the Louvre claims to represent and preserve. In this perspective, the AID collection is also presented as part of French heritage. Neutralised of their religious nature and associated with a westernised ethnocentric definition of universal art, the Louvre's Islamic objects are thus integrated into national heritage. Indeed, the curators talk about the 'Mona Lisa of Islam' or 'Turkish Versailles' to describe some of the flagship objects of the Department of Islamic Arts, thus reconfiguring their biographies to award them French nationality. One of the most interesting examples in this respect is a basin called '*Baptistère de Saint-Louis*' (Figure 6.1) that I discuss in the following section.

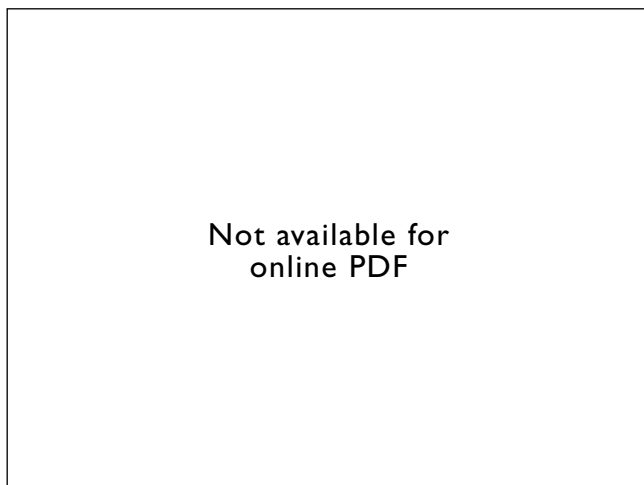


Figure 6.1 'The Baptistry of St. Louis', around 1320–1340, Syria © R. Ricciotti - M. Bellini - R. Pierard / Musée du Louvre. Photograph by Diletta Guidi.

Manipulating creativity to assimilate otherness

Considered one of Mamluk masterpieces of the AID, this Syrian basin dates around 1320–1340. As Sophie Makariou (2011) explains: 'the sponsor of the object remains enigmatic'. What is known is that from the seventeenth century onwards, it was used for baptising children of the French royal family, including Louis XIII, hence the choice to call it 'Baptismal font of St. Louis'. However, this attribution seems to be erroneous because Louis IX, known as Saint-Louis, was born in 1214 and died in 1270, which is long before the creation of the basin. The AID does not mention this mistake. The coat of arms on its interior contains an inscription: 'France, 1821', and it is this 'French identity' that is instead publicised.

Far from being trivial, the naming (Hauser, 2012, p. 210)¹¹ signals then the museum's desire to insist on the basin's use by French Christian monarchy rather than on its Mamluk origins. The Islamic biography disappears in favour of its later redefinition; the work is frenchified in a process of one civilisation gaining supremacy over another.

The framing process (Goffman, 1974) is also worthy of interest. The baptistry is displayed alone, in its own showcase, treated as a masterpiece. Raised by a pedestal, it benefits from a low-angle illumination that gives it more value. The distance between the visitor and the work, as well as the lighting, generates what Avinoam Shalem calls an 'auratic zone' (Shalem, 2013, p. 109), according to the piece an aura, an exceptionality (see also Benjamin, 1991 [1936]). The President of the Republic François Hollande, in his inaugural speech of the AID in 2012, called it an 'exceptional work'. Indeed, the baptistry undergoes one last manipulation, political this time. François Hollande mentioned it as a proof to illustrate the points in common between Islam and France. In fact, he said: 'Revelation! So,

monarchs of divine right bathed in Islamic art works. We did not know that. It reminds us of sometimes-common origins'.¹² The basin is therefore invested with a diplomatic meaning, transcending mere artistic value to become a symbol of the possibility (the term 'sometimes' is remarkable in this respect) of a dialogue between two civilisations.

The treatment of 'The Baptistry of St. Louis' is an example of how the museum storyline can alter the nature of an object and modify how visitors understand it. In this case, the Mamluk basin is no longer seen as an Islamic work of art but instead becomes for the audience a French Catholic royal masterpiece, part of the national heritage preserved in the most important museum of France. To justify the exclusion of Muslim religion, the AID's team speaks about the department's policy as a testimony of the '*laïcité à la française*' (i.e. French secularism) (Guidi, 2019), especially because the Louvre is a public institution. The mention of the Catholic religion nevertheless seems to be acceptable unlike the Muslim one. This challenges the claim about adherence to the idea of *laïcité* and at the same time positions the Muslim faith in France as all the more problematic.

To deal with this problem, the Louvre shows a peaceful, refined, barely religious, and westernised image of Islam. The representation with which the visitor comes out of the museum fits *volens nolens* with the one desired by the state right after 2001. Despite Sophie Makariou's wish to separate art from current events, the storyline that she herself created ended up offering an image of Islam resembling the one desired by the government at the time and since then. But even if the political goal was to counter the social tensions generated by the terrorist attacks and their representation, the final result produces a sense of nostalgia for what Islam used to be (or, better, for what the AID's displays suggests Muslim civilisation used to be in the past) and what Islam no longer seems to be capable of being today. Thus, by assimilating the other through art, the Louvre places them at distance.

The Institut du Monde Arabe: an alive, modern and similar neighbour

The second type of staging of Islam in France is that of the IMA. In direct contrast with the Louvre, the IMA displays a multiplicity of facets of Islam – especially the contemporary and religious ones avoided by the Louvre's AID.

Walking with the others

To access the museum's permanent collection the visitor must cross an audiovisual installation – a contemporary work of the Swiss artist Anna Katharina Scheidegger, created for the reopening of the IMA Museum in 2012. Entitled *The Arab World in Motion*, this installation consists of several screens featuring extracts from daily life filmed in the Maghreb and the Middle East.¹³ Women, men and children talk to each other, buy bread at the market, pray at the mosque, and so on. The screens are in turn placed in a room with walls lined with mirrors. The visitor walks through

the room, juxtaposed with the projected scenes. They see their own reflection mirroring the daily experience of those who are only geographically distant. By this method of *mise en abyme*, the visitor is positioned not just as a spectator but as an active participant who may actually learn from the exhibition and not just admire it. Pedagogy thus seems to take precedence over aesthetics.

This space, like others in the museum, is a multisensory area, where the visitor is 'immersed' in the collection, which they discover 'by eye and ear' (Nerou, 2012). Here, they experience the Arab world and are integrated – symbolically and physically – in its movement. Contrary to the stereotypes that make the Arab world resemble a monolithic block frozen in time and tradition, through this work, that world becomes a living entity, contemporary and dynamic. The distance between the visitor, in the room, and the Arab world, on the screen, is reduced.

Unlike the Louvre, which is organised chronologically, the IMA's museum has six types of 'atmospheres', as museum designer Roberto Ostinelli named them (Foissy, Delpont & Chakour, 2014), each relating to a theme: poetic, spiritual, scientific, urban, intimate and festive. For each of these sequences, the IMA exhibits objects from the past and the present, artefacts from East and West; civilisations, cultures, traditions, religions and spiritualities are all merged within the same showcase. The section dedicated to 'sacred books' is particularly representative of this.

Hosting the sacred

The 'sacred books' section consists of four showcases, placed sequentially. The visitor begins with the first case, containing a copy of the Jewish Torah, then on to the second, where a Catholic Gospel is exhibited. The third displays a copy of the Qur'an, a gift from the famous Khalili family (renowned for its large and precious art collection) to the Presidency of the French Republic, who then offered it to the IMA. This donation shows the importance of the IMA as a place of culture in the eyes of the French State. In recent years, this importance has increased still further. French heads of state and politicians, previously frequent attendees of the Louvre, begin to favour the IMA. The fact that right after the shooting at the Charlie Hebdo magazine, that took place in January 2015, President Hollande chose to make his very first public speech in the name of the government at the IMA's entrance is symptomatic in this respect.¹⁴ In the same way, it is remarkable that the prime minister at the time, Manuel Valls, met with the main French representatives of different religions at the IMA, just in front of the 'sacred books' section.¹⁵ Like the Louvre, the IMA is ultimately used as a policy tool, to address international and domestic issues, reconnecting with the diplomatic role imagined by its designers in the 1970s.

These books, which the three monotheist religions consider sacred, are accompanied by long captions explaining the content to the visitor. Nothing is said about the aesthetic quality of these works, only their historical and theological significance matters. The fourth and last showcase displays a book of watercolour paintings on paper. It is a work entitled *Zikr* ('invocation of God') made by the Lebanese-American poet Etel Adnan in 1978. The caption below it reads: 'This

artist's book is a contemporary invocation of the ancestral sacrality which founds the three religions of the Book'. The work synthesises the common origins of Judaism, Christianity and Islam. It desecrates and then re-sacralises the three monotheist religions together. Again, meaning (i.e. an explicit message about religious and historical connections) takes precedence over aesthetic features.

According to Mirjam Shatanawi, when curators place Muslim objects next to Christian artefacts they create a *continuum*, which builds a link that makes Islam more accessible to the public, thus encouraging visitors towards positive analogies (Shatanawi, 2012, p. 184). This is likely the case here too. The exhibition framework does not just equalise the three religions through identical showcases, it places them in visual continuity suggesting a progression from Judaism to Islam, with Christianity as an intermediate step. Islam is the climax, with an extended set of windows entirely dedicated to it just after these showcases. Indeed, the section that follows exhibits several prayer carpets, with captions detailing their ritualistic use. As with the Qur'an mentioned above or with other objects (e.g. a set of rosaries) and installations (e.g. a set of architectural buildings reproductions composed of a temple, a church and a mosque), their significance as religious objects is central, becoming even 'overthought'.

Unveil the connections

The visitor finds again the museological framing evoked above in one of the very last showcases, the one dedicated to the veil (Figure 6.2). Veiling is presented as not concerning Arab or Muslim women only, but as a phenomenon involving tradition, religion and sex gender, as suggested by the title 'The tradition of the veil for men and women'.

The variety of veiling is also illustrated by the objects inside the window, where a *mahatma marchoucha*, a facial veil formerly used by Tunisian brides, and a *tagelmust*, a Tuareg veil, are placed side by side. It is also interesting to see that the *tagelmust*, unlike the Tunisian veil, is a recent example. In fact, the caption signals that it was draped in 2012 by the Tuareg Iswhad and that it was destined for the Touareg market, which shows that this traditional dress is still relevant, while the use of *mahatma marchoucha* is rare among women in Tunisia. The veil is therefore neither primarily female, nor exclusively Arab. The origins of the veil are also plural, as shown by the presence of a veiled female statuette of the Hellenistic period inside the same box. 'The veil envelops women from ancient times, both in civilisations around the Mediterranean and in the East, as evidenced by this representation [Figure 6.2, bottom centre] of a woman from the Greek high society; only poor women were not veiled. The veil is not only a religious sign or a symbol of tribal affiliation, but also a social marker, well beyond the borders of the Arab world', as mentioned on the display sheet. The fact that the objects are arranged equidistantly in the showcase, in a circular fashion, with no culture or religion visually overriding the other is especially meaningful. What Stefan Weber (2013) calls 'crosscultural connections' are central at the IMA; similarities between diverse civilisations come before differences between them. The interreligious and intercultural displays, which reflect the

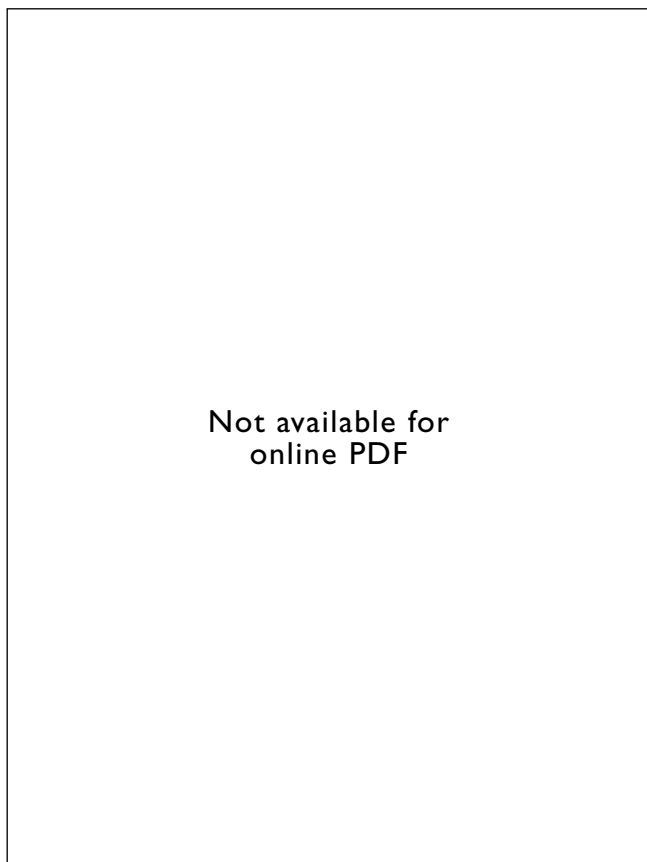


Figure 6.2 Showcase of 'veiling and unveiling'. Photograph by Diletta Guidi. Courtesy of the Institut du Monde Arabe.

IMA's co-direction between France and the Arab League, appear then as the main theme of the museum. It is also noticeable that all that can make the Other (i.e. the Muslim or the Arab, these terms tend to be used interchangeably at the IMA, the first category usually used to subsume the latter) radical or dangerous is not addressed. It is, in other words, 'eclipsed' (Kazerouni 2017, p. 14). Topics such as violence, conflicts and war, as well as sensitive themes like human rights (i.e. freedom of speech, belief, etc.) are absent from the exhibition. This is less the case at the Louvre. Here, the first showcase of the collection is entirely devoted to aniconism in Islamic art, thus deploying a deconstructive perspective in order to show that Islamic art cannot be reduced to being only ornamental and instead to present it as also figurative, and thus as like many other forms of Art.¹⁶ Moreover, although it does not foreground such concerns, the AID also mentions conflicts that took place in ancient history of Muslim dynasties (e.g. Mughal era, Ottoman time). Unlike the Louvre, the IMA chooses not to address these topics, emphasising

instead what brings Arabs and non-Arabs/Muslim and non-Muslims together. So, the visitor comes out of the IMA with an image of 'the Other' as relatively familiar and remarkably pleasant. The museological framing of Islam here, then, appeals to both non-Arab/non-Muslim and Arab/Muslim visitors, by providing each audience with a positive image of the Other and of oneself.

Islam as a fashionable event

The visitor's cultural 'journey' does not end with the museum. Indeed, at least once a year, the IMA hosts a big temporary exhibition. By listing those exhibitions, I noticed that Islam as a religion is being increasingly frequently addressed. Thus, the public has been offered topics including pilgrimage to Mecca, the prayer at the mosque, and veiling in exhibitions like *Hajj. Pilgrimage to Mecca* (Institut du Monde Arabe, 2014).¹⁷ Inspired by a show created a few years before by the British Museum (2012),¹⁸ the IMA presented one of the most important Muslim rituals. Mixing old Islamic art masterpieces with contemporary creations, archaeological artefacts with recent testimonies of *hajjis* (Muslims who made the pilgrimage to Mecca), the museum sought to familiarise French audiences with Islam. Especially since the pilgrims whose testimonies were shown mostly were from France, this made them appear closer to the visitors who attend the museum.

In the last few years, the IMA has seen increased attendance on account of these exhibitions.¹⁹ Despite Islam's current widespread negative reputation, the IMA manages to make the religion fashionable. Indeed, associating Muslims with hip hop music and street art (e.g. tags, graffiti), as in the exhibition *Hip Hop: from the Bronx to the Arab streets* (Institut du Monde Arabe, 2015)²⁰ it even makes Islam cool! Moreover, hosting these kinds of events as well as inviting Islamic feminists, Muslim artists and business leaders to speak up during the Institut's numerous symposia help to produce the image of a free Islam, which is emancipated and modern, successful and open-minded. This image of Islam also seems to be attractive to politicians. As noted above, if yesterday the government favoured the Louvre, today the IMA is becoming the privileged museum of the French state, in particular when it comes to discussing contemporary questions related to Islam, dealing with the local Muslim community or considering diplomatic and economic partnerships with the Middle East countries. It is becoming the default choice for public announcements, political gatherings and other diplomatic events. The IMA, it seems, has come to be the institution more in line with the current policies of the French government. It is on these policies that the last part of this chapter focuses.

Conclusion

This chapter shows that in France today, there are two major models of representing Islam in public museums. The first one, embodied by the Louvre, can be called the 'secular type' because of its particular treatment of otherness, especially religious. Indeed, in the Louvre's AID, Islamic art is portrayed as the result of a political and cultural – and only marginally religious – system influenced by Western Art.

The Louvre ‘frenchifies’ Islam, erasing its potentially problematic particularities, and moulding it to fit neatly within an idealised concept of the nation. The storyline promotes a unified and equalitarian – but nonetheless ethnocentric – definition of the ideal nation as one that ensures social peace. In this perspective, religion is understood as the ultimate difference and is thus regarded as a threat to the common good. This has especial traction given that in France memory of the Religious Wars (sixteenth century) is still vivid, and the *laïcité* (i.e. ‘secularity’, the French principle of separation between of church and state) is itself considered a national value (Baubérot, 2014). Art, unlike religion, is seen as a harmless ‘proof of humanity’ common to all civilisations (Winegar, 2008), and, as such, as unifying. Thus, throughout the Louvre exhibition circuit, the aesthetic takes precedence, and topics such as religion or colonisation, or contemporary issues, are barely addressed. The Louvre presents the masterpieces of Islamic art; it shows a refined and peaceful Other, a sort of Islam *à la française*. Muslim otherness is assimilated – it is presented as capable of being integrated into French society.

The second model of framing Islam in French museums can be found at the IMA. Unlike the Louvre’s assimilationist type, the IMA offers a more ‘intercultural’ treatment of otherness (both Arab and Muslim), based on the expression of differences to promote common living. Cultural and political, as well as religious, particularities are valorised. However, this is never a valuation *per sé*. The differences are positioned in a *continuum* – in a common logic – to identify what is similar between them. Islam as a religion is the continuation of Christianity, which is itself the extension of Judaism, and so on. This interreligious approach is also intercultural. Indeed, Islam as a culture is placed under the ‘Arab world’ label, inserted in a network, connected with old and distant traditions and civilisations (Mesopotamian, Graeco-roman, etc.) as well as with contemporary and close groups and communities (Berber, French Muslims, etc.). Even if this is not ethnocentric, the IMA tends to present an idealistic and quite stereotyped definition of otherness, especially of Muslimness. Islam is made friendly and nothing that might jeopardise social peace is allowed. The ideal Muslim should have a moderate religious practice, fight only for just causes (in favour of feminism, against racism, etc.) and ideally be successful in French society (start-upper, intellectual, renowned artist, etc.).

At first glance, these two exhibitionary regimes appear as parallel and in competition, suggesting that the French state oscillates between being conservative (i.e. attached to its own national unity and tradition) or liberal (i.e. open to recognise the pluralism of individuals beliefs and lifestyles). However, a deeper look reveals more nuance. My research on historical representations of Islam, starting from the first World Art Fair in the mid-nineteenth century (Bancel, Blanchard, Boëtsch, Deroo & Lemaire, 2004) and up to current exhibitions, concluded that the Louvre type framing remained unchallenged until the 1970s when the IMA’s type appeared and slowly started to compete, recently becoming the prevalent one. In response, the Louvre began to adopt a new cultural policy. Yannick Lintz, the AID’s current director, has been more willing to discuss issues like colonialism, integrating topics like religion and hosting contemporary art events (Göle & Lintz, 2018).

Thus, from a political point of view, the evolution of both models confirms, as Sharon Macdonald (2003) argues that rather than being static, many – and especially national – museums adapt to wider nation-state developments. It is notable that the Louvre's assimilationist model was prevalent in the 1900s, just when the idea of the nation-state was in the making, when dominating the Other was crucial to build a national identity (de L'Estoile, 2010). In the same way, the fact that the IMA's intercultural model has spread since the very end of the twentieth century, prevailing in today's post-national and global context (Badie & Smouts, 1992; Gauthier, 2019), shows that the state develops cultural policies to address contemporary needs (Levitt, 2015; Proesler, 1995).

For now, IMA's liberal model seems to be the preferred one, showing a willingness of the French state to be more open to the expression of its nation's plurality with respect to Islam, one of its largest religious minorities. This preference suggests awareness by the State on the issue of islamophobia in France (Hajjat & Mohammed, 2013) and the need to deal with it by proposing alternative narratives. Furthermore, this model could favour diplomatic relations between France and other countries, especially Arab ones. Notable here are the cultural and economic partnerships with the Gulf countries, such as the recently opened Louvre Abu Dhabi museum, generating great economic returns for French national museums (des Cars, 2013; Kazerouni, 2017). After the lease of the Louvre's label, the IMA has been attracting the interest of Middle East investors, who recently met there to discuss economic cooperation and cultural diplomacy.²¹

How these various changes will be reflected in France's museums in the future remains to be seen. There are also influential counter-movements, especially the rise of populism (Norris & Inglehart, 2018) with its rejection of policies of diversity (Kaya, 2019). What is clear is that by continuing to observe the staging of Islamic art, it will be possible to contribute to a better understanding of Islam in French cultural policies (Frank, Dornhof & Arigita, 2013) and, more broadly, will enhance understanding of the representation of Muslims in Europe.

Notes

- 1 This chapter summarizes the main results of my research on Islamic museums in France. Guidi (2019), *L'islam des musées: sociohistoire de l'islam dans les politiques culturelles françaises. Les cas du Louvre et de l'Institut du monde arabe* [Islam at the Museum: sociohistory of the (re)presentation of Islam in French cultural policies. The cases of the Louvre and the Institut du Monde Arabe] (Unpublished PhD thesis). University of Fribourg and École Pratique des Hautes Études, Switzerland and France. I want to thank Gora Conley for his help with the English translation.
- 2 See the latest annual report published by the Louvre about the museum attendance: <https://presse.louvre.fr/8-1-million-visitors-to-the-louvre-in-2017/>
- 3 The total cost of building the Department of Islamic Arts is 98.5 million euros. Of this sum, 31 million was paid by the French State, 9 million by foreign countries (Morocco, Oman, Kuwait and Azerbaijan) and 30 million by private patrons in France or abroad. Finally, the Louvre participated with an amount of 11.5 million euros.

- 4 In addition to the Louvre and the IMA, the sample included the Institut des Cultures d'Islam, the Cité de l'Immigration, the Musée du Quai Branly, the MuCEM in Marseille and the Louvre Abu Dhabi.
- 5 The term 'exhibitionary regime' to define Islamic art is coined by Finbarr Barry Flood, inspired by Tony Bennett's concept of 'exhibitionary complex', himself influenced by Michel Foucault's work on prisons. Bennett considers museums as 'exhibitionary complex' ruled by the government to exercise control over the citizens. See Bennett (1988).
- 6 Institut du monde arabe. (2015, April 28–July 26). *Hip Hop: du Bronx aux rues arabes*. Paris; Institut du monde arabe. (2020, January 24–26). *IMA Comedy Club*. Paris.
- 7 This selection is based on the results of an inquiry conducted by the Louvre on the AID's visitors (Louvre, 2014).
- 8 Louvre museum. Lion de Monzòn [display sheet]. Retrieved from http://cartelfr.louvre.fr/cartelfr/visite?srv=car_not_frame&idNotice=33644
- 9 'UNESCO and Issues of Colonization and Decolonization', University of Dakar, 5–6 October 2009; 'Decolonization and Restitution: Moving Towards a More Holistic Perspective and Relational Approach', ICOM Kyoto conference 2019.
- 10 On the bridges of understanding narrative in Islamic art exhibitions in the West, see Winegar (2008).
- 11 For Hauser, to name an object is to confer on it a magical power, a religiosity, by extension the process of appointment is a magical, religious act too.
- 12 Quote from the statement mentioned *supra*: <http://discours.vie-publique.fr/notices/127001659.html>
- 13 IMA. (2013). Préambule de l'Institut du monde arabe à Paris [Preamble of the Institut du Monde arabe in Paris]. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FGQGKqXNUNE>
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- 15 See the IMA's website: <http://www.imarabe.org/manuel-valls-assiste-une-reception-oecumenique>
- 16 On this matter see for instance Grabar (2003).
- 17 Institut du monde arabe, *Hajj. Le pèlerinage à la Mecque*. Paris (2014 April 23–August 10). On a similar topic, see also *A secret art. Talismanic scripture in West Africa* (2013 February 14–July 28); *The Dome of the Rock* (2013 March 25–June 2); *Treasures of Islam in Africa. From Timbuktu to Zanzibar* (2017 April 14–July 30).
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The materialities and legalities of forgetting

Dispossession and the making of Turkey's (post-) Ottoman heritage

Banu Karaca

In November 2011, the Metropolitan Museum of Art (MET) reopened its Islamic art section, now named 'Art of the Arab Lands, Turkey, Iran, Central Asia, and Later South Asia'. More than a superficial reshuffling, the gesture of renaming implicitly responded to critical examinations of Islamic art as a field of art history, its historical formation and its analytical frames. The redesigned galleries include two rooms featuring works from the collection of Ottoman-Armenian archaeologist, art dealer and pioneer of Islamic art Hagop Kevorkian (1872–1962). They frame a gallery sponsored by the estate of Turkish businessman Vehbi Koç (1901–96). While dedicated to 'works created within the borders of the Ottoman Empire', the gallery in fact mostly surveys art from within the boundaries of present-day Turkey.¹ The immediate adjacency of these collections reproduces silences rooted in state violence, dispossession and the displacement of peoples and artworks. To interrogate the silences, this chapter maps episodes of violence against non-Muslims in the late Ottoman Empire and the early Turkish republic in the course of which artworks were expropriated, looted and displaced. It proposes that beyond individual intentions or professed institutional mission, violence and dispossession have created the material conditions for forgetting in art historical accounts and in museum narratives, and hence in the knowledge production at the intersection of 'Ottoman', 'Islamic' and 'Turkish' art. These histories have not only shaped national forgetting in Turkey but also pervade the representation of Turkey's past in the globalised category of Islamic art. These modalities of forgetting are further compounded by protections of cultural heritage formulated in response to European experiences of war in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The chapter probes how these formulations and the legal blind spots they have produced have shaped the perception of Islamic heritage in Europe when it comes to the Ottoman past of contemporary Turkey.

Constituting blind spots

The MET's physical layout and the narratives and erasures that the exhibition design produces, provide an opportunity to draw attention to an issue that has thus far been left out of critical engagements with the concept of Islamic art and its taxonomies, especially when it comes to the legal successor of the Ottoman Empire: the Republic

of Turkey. To dissect these erasures, let us first turn to the biographic positionalities of Kevorkian and Koç. Hailing from Kayseri, central Anatolia, Hagop Kevorkian seems to have settled in New York after the Hamidian Massacres (1894–96) that targeted Armenians and other non-Muslims and paved the way for the Armenian genocide (1915–17) two decades later. The genocidal violence was accompanied by extensive state-led expropriation during which artworks were lost, looted, made illegible or destroyed. Koç, in turn, belonged to a rising republican business elite that at times directly and at others indirectly benefited from what is often called the ‘Turkification of the economy’ – a process underwritten by state violence and discriminatory practices that was aided by large-scale dispossession of non-Muslims and that characterised the decades following the establishment of the Turkish nation-state in 1923 (Buğra, 1994). Together with the Armenian genocide, these waves of violence propelled people and ‘things’ into diasporic trajectories, shaping not only national memory and forgetting in Turkey but also making objects available for the national and international art markets.

These different registers of violence are not addressed in the MET’s display, and yet end up being reproduced through art historical taxonomies that conflate ‘Islamic’, ‘Ottoman’ and ‘Turkish’ art. Following the problematic notion of Turkish citizenship that despite its civic rhetoric has ethnicised religion in practice by defining all Ottoman Muslims as Turks, the interchangeable use of Ottoman, Muslim, and Turk in international museum settings reifies a nomenclature that obscures the lives and works of non-Muslim artists, patrons, collectors, and audiences when it comes to the territory of contemporary Turkey. This interpretation of the Ottoman past through the hegemonic conceptualisation of the national present, follows the logic of what Christine Philiou (2008) has called ‘the paradox of perception’. This paradox has also foreclosed pluralistic art histories of Turkey needed to capture the heterogeneity of its Ottoman and post-Ottoman formations, reducing them instead to a homogenous national frame. This reduction is not only constitutive of ‘Turkish national art history’ but also bears upon the ways in which artistic heritage from that part of the world is presented in international museums.

How can this obscuring of non-Muslims in the Ottoman exhibit of the Koç rooms be explained, especially as other galleries of Islamic art tend to the ‘interculturality of Islam’ and the role of non-Muslim artists, and patrons along with objects from other religious contexts (Rabbat, 2012)? This focus on the interculturality of Islam that can also be found in the new Islamic art galleries across Europe, with which the MET, like the US context overall, is intimately connected. Indeed, Islamic art collections across these diverse locations emerged in dialogue and sometimes in competition to each other not least because they were supplied by the same art dealers (like Kevorkian and Dikran Kelekian, to whom I will turn in more detail below; see also Wharton-Durgaryan, 2020). Notions of ‘cultural stewardship’ along an imagined East–West divide and the emergence of legal provisions that govern (and protect) cultural heritage, too, have been shaped by entanglements between Europe and the United States. Be it the British Museum, the Victoria & Albert Museum (V&A), or the Louvre, it is not that non-Muslim artefacts from the region that is today’s Turkey are absent from their collections. Rather their mere – and

numerically small – inclusion does establish an adequate account of Turkey's Ottoman past, its diverse populations and artistic producers. In the case of the MET, Armenian artefacts of Anatolian provenance are displayed in the Byzantine galleries, rather than the Ottoman ones (although being dated to the eighteenth century).² In the case of the V&A, for example, a ceramic plate depicting the Archangel Michael is firmly situated in the Jameel Gallery. Despite the object's visual inclusion into the Islamic art collection, the descriptive label tells the viewer nothing about Armenian presence in Anatolia, nor the centrality of Armenian craftsmen and patrons in the development of Kütahya's famed ceramics production.³ And yet, all of these more recently reconfigured Islamic art galleries have emerged in response to a long line of critical inquiries into the very concept of Islamic art (e.g. Grabar, 1978). These inquiries have questioned the prevalent periodisation in the field of Islamic art (Necipoglu, 2012). Others have called the field's geographical coverage and presumptions of homogeneity over time and space with regard to the religious and artistic practices of Muslims a 'mirage' (Blair & Bloom, 2003). They have tended to the role of religion in what is commonly designated Islamic art by deconstructing the *Bilderverbot* and notions of iconophobia long attributed to Islam (Flood, 2016), and problematised attempts to reduce Islamic art to a mere facilitator of the 'evolution of Western art' (Shalem, 2012), especially with regard to abstract modernism. The prevalent reduction of Islamic art to a vehicle for cultural diplomacy in the aftermath of 11 September 2001 has likewise garnered critical attention (Necipoglu, 2012; Shaw, 2012; Winegar, 2008), especially as Islam and Muslims have been increasingly identified as the main source of contemporary political predicaments, both in Europe and the United States. Given these expansive critiques, the silence on violence and artistic dispossession in the geographies of the late Ottoman Empire that make up contemporary Turkey, is especially striking.

While often hailed for its capacity to mobilise memory (Hirsch, 2012), this chapter examines art as a site at which forgetting is established and maintained materially and legally. The second part of the paper thus outlines how the late Ottoman and Turkish republican cases are not captured by provisions against crimes against humanity, war crimes, and the conventions on looted art elaborated first within nascent international law and then by UNESCO and the EU. I argue that state violence and dispossession have shaped 'the politics of our lack of knowledge' (Lowe, 2015, p. 39) as to what constitutes the artistic heritage of the post-Ottoman landscape of Turkey.⁴ Together with imperialist designs and colonial aspirations that other European powers and the United States (Bahrani, Çelik & Eldem, 2011) cultivated with regard to the later Ottoman Empire, the material and legal conditions of forgetting have enabled the acquisition and accumulation of artefacts classified as Islamic, and hence of material objects that are integral to the making of Islamic heritage in the international arena. By centring the question of dispossession, the chapter highlights the transmission and circulation of objects, rather than following art historical narratives that frequently end the history of Islamic art in the nineteenth century. I propose that this focus on transmission allows for working through the blind spots of existing legislation and regulations on the protection of cultural heritage.

The foreclosure of pluralistic art histories on Turkey's (post-)Ottoman formation that the adjacency of the Kevorkian and Koç galleries at the MET produces is also mirrored in the case of the Museum of Islamic Art (Museum für Islamische Kunst) in Berlin. This is despite its attention to religious difference in other parts of the world where Islam is a majority religion, including the Arab lands of the former Ottoman Empire exemplified by the museum's famed Aleppo room.⁵ The museum's mission statement begins as follows:

It is after the Museum of Islamic Art in Cairo the oldest and one of the most important collections of its kind in the world. It occupies an unrivalled position in Germany – no other institution contains such a systematic and comprehensive collection of masterpieces of art and applied arts and objects of material culture stemming from Islamic societies as well as the Christian and Jewish communities living among them.⁶

Yet, this mission statement and the cohabitation with non-Muslims that it generally acknowledges⁷ does not find expression in the exhibitionary regime in terms of the configurations of those parts of the Ottoman Empire that are encapsulated by contemporary Turkey. Indeed, just like in the MET's and in other Islamic art galleries in Europe, there is a notable lack of acknowledgement of how the Armenian genocide 'set free' art works and antiquities in the shadow of World War I (Polatel et al., 2012).⁸ While a growing number of studies have tried to capture the scope of dispossession during the Armenian genocide (Bardakçı, 2013; Onaran, 2010; Üngör & Polatel, 2011), Heghnar Zeitlian Watenpaugh's 'The Missing Pages' (2019) is the first study to trace concretely the complex itinerary of the one particular set of objects, namely the Canon Tables, from before to the aftermath of genocidal violence. Originally, part of a manuscript illuminated by Toros Roslin in 1256, the Zeytun Gospels (named after the town of Zeytun, today Süleymanlı in the Mediterranean region of Turkey) were cleaved at the time of the Armenian population's deportation. While the manuscript made it to the Republic of Armenia decades later, the Canon Tables were acquired by the Getty Museum in 1994. Watenpaugh summarises the ensuing legal battle as follows:

In 2010, the Western Prelacy of the Armenian Apostolic Church of America filed a lawsuit in Los Angeles County Superior Court against the J. Paul Getty Museum seeking the return of the Canon Tables, asserting that the holy pages had been stolen. The suit avowed that the pages had been removed from their mother manuscript, the Zeytun Gospels, as a result of the Armenian Genocide. The Church asserted the pages had been stolen, and that the Getty knew or should have known it was acquiring stolen goods. The museum's legal counsel maintained that the Getty owned the pages as works of art, having acquired them legally, that the Canon Tables had been in the United States for more than ninety years without anyone questioning their legal status, and that the suit should be dismissed without merit.

(2017, p. 754)

Violence and dispossession obscure the way in which objects are transmitted and in doing so shape frames of perception and (art) historical narratives. ‘The politics of our lack of knowledge’, to use Lisa Lowe’s term once again, are compounded by the low standards of what counts as sufficient provenance documentation when it comes to works from what is today Turkey (Bogdanos, 2016; Muscarella, 2012).⁹ As archaeologist and former Senior Research Fellow at the MET, Oscar White Muscarella, has noted, these standards have allowed for earlier auction sales to count as proof of provenance. Muscarella suggests a wilful obscuration of the way in which such objects became available for the market in the first place by those responsible for the acquisition of objects for museums, conditions that he proposes are unknown to ‘most scholars and the public’ (2012, p. 114). Provenance is not only a question of rightful possession but also a central means of knowledge making (Feigenbaum & Reist, 2013). The issue of provenance also raises questions with regard to the adequacies and inadequacies of existing legal frameworks, their possibilities and limitations to which I will return in the second part of the chapter.

Dispossession and the writing of Turkish and Islamic art history

In order to understand how the material conditions that structure understandings of Islamic cultural and artistic heritage as well as their blind spots have been created, let me now briefly sketch some of the processes of dispossession that brought present-day Turkey into being.

In Turkey, dispossession has been integral to the making of the nation-state and its periodic consolidation: founded on the remnants of a multiethnic, multireligious and multilingual empire, national homogenisation of the Turkish republic was achieved through violent and discriminatory means. The Armenian genocide engendered one of the earliest and most catastrophic but not the last in a long line of episodes of state violence – all of which entailed practices of dispossession. Apart from homogenising the population, the intent to create a Muslim bourgeoisie (Akçam, 2012) motivated the Armenian genocide as much as subsequent waves of violence (Ünlü, 2017). Among these violent episodes were the punitive wealth tax, instated in 1942, that ostensibly was enacted to close Turkey’s treasury deficit incurred in the course of the Second World War. Targeting overwhelmingly non-Muslims this one-time tax was instrumental in ‘Turkifying’ the economy (Aktar, 2000), that is, transferring property and capital from non-Muslims to Muslims. Monetary assets and entire households, antiquities and artworks were confiscated or auctioned off under duress to meet the tax. Those unable to pay were sent to labour camps. On the back of tensions with neighbouring Greece and competing claims to the island of Cyprus, the next two decades would witness further hostilities against non-Muslims. First, the ‘events of 6–7 September 1955’, a covertly organised pogrom during which non-Muslim-owned businesses, places of worship and homes were ransacked and demolished by covertly organised mobs (Güven, 2005). And then, in 1964, the Turkish government forcefully expelled around 13,000 Greek-Orthodox residents, mainly of Istanbul. Allowing the expellees to take only minimal personal effects and 20 dollars with

them, they were forced to abandon not only their homes but also most of their belongings, leaving them vulnerable to theft. Dispossession has been both a prerequisite for and a consequence of making certain populations into minorities (Tambar, 2016), and the very delineation between majorities and minorities is a central characteristic of state violence (Pandey, 2006). All of these events entailed dispossession in the form of sales under duress, of looting or confiscation, and all were facilitated by legal (such as the wealth tax) or extralegal means (lootings), or both. During the Armenian genocide, for instance, swift laws were enacted to end the pillaging by perpetrators and bystanders, and to regulate the redistribution of 'abandoned property' (Der Matossian, 2011). The oral histories that I have collected thus far, as part of my ongoing research project that examines how the dispossession of artworks has shaped the writing of art history in the post-Ottoman context of contemporary Turkey, suggest a surge in the number of artworks, paintings and antiques available at local art and antiquities dealerships in the days, weeks and years following the wealth tax. The lootings of 1955 were followed by impromptu yard sales, featuring objects from stores, households and places of worship. The trajectories and current whereabouts of these objects are largely unknown. The loss of the cultural assets and artworks that were part of these episodes of state violence, be it in material terms or in the form of obscuring the contexts out of which they emerged, have created the material conditions of forgetting by way of their absence. These absences have been compounded by decades of disinvestments, ruination and spoliation of non-Muslim sites, including places of worship, throughout Turkey.¹⁰

And yet what is absent, be it through material loss or through illegibility of origin, leaves traces and shapes how the material world is experienced (Hallam & Hockey, 2001; Meskell, 2010). Absences present 'cultural, physical and social phenomena' (Bille et al., 2010, p. 4) rather than pure nothingness. As violence and dispossession enable redistribution, they also create the material conditions of forgetting, including in art historical and museal knowledge production.

The practice of writing art history is a vital site at which absence and forgetting of art dispossessed through violence and discriminatory practices become inscribed and reproduced. Islamic and Turkish art histories as accounts of the past are deeply implicated in each other, even though Turkish art history has long been preoccupied with how to write 'modern Turkish painting' into the 'Western tradition' by divorcing itself from Islamic art and discounting Ottoman art altogether (Shaw, 2011). And yet, Islamic and Turkish art histories have long been complicit in obfuscating the work of non-Muslim artists under the impetus of nationalism. Anthropologists, like art historians, have deconstructed the concept of Islamic art and have identified the plunder of cultural assets, ranging from historical artefacts to libraries, across the Middle and Near East as constitutive for the field (George, 2010; Hirschkind, 2009; Shannon, 2009; Stokes, 2015; Winegar, 2008).

The persistence of these dominant tropes and blind spots in the museal presentation of art from the Near and Middle East is all the more striking when we consider watershed moments in the genesis of the field of Islamic art in the early twentieth century, such as the 1910 exhibition 'Meisterwerke Muhammedanischer Kunst' in Munich. The volume *After One Hundred Years The 1910 Exhibition*

'Meisterwerke muhammedanischer Kunst' Reconsidered edited by Andrea Lermer and Avinoam Shalem (2010) impressively demonstrates how many of the issues that have been raised to problematise the taxonomies of Islamic art were already present at its very inception. Among these issues was the question of how to position these works in space and time (Shalem, 2010). Other tensions arose from the differentiation between ethnic or religious cultural production and artworks, and from the question to what extent historical contextualisation is conducive to aesthetic appreciation in its own right.¹¹ This conundrum is perhaps best expressed by Eva-Maria Troelenberg's assertion that the very drive to 'emancipate' the exhibited 'object' 'from its historical background [...] incidentally, also serves as a justification for its Western contextualisation' (2010, p. 38). While many of these observations are true for 'non-Western' art and artefacts in general, this perpetual collapsing back into a self-referential and self-reifying frame has relied on and furthered the obscuration of non-Muslim cultural and artistic production in the case of what is present-day Turkey. The globalised category of Islamic art does not account for the experiences of non-Muslim collectors, audiences and producers, their loss, or the diasporic trajectories that survivors had to take. Nor does it account for the contexts out of which their artworks and 'cultural assets' – left behind or looted, stolen, and lost – emerged and the ways in which they changed hands.¹²

As dispossession creates the conditions for redistribution (Karaca, 2019), it also creates the material conditions of forgetting. These material conditions of forgetting shape museum narratives and exhibitionary orders as much as they shape the art historical archives that they rely on and produce. These archives are likewise not set up to capture this history of dispossession and the violence that enabled it. Such is the case, for example, of the archive of art dealer Dikran Kelekian (c.1868–1951) that is located at the MET. Born in Kayseri (central Anatolia) and educated in Istanbul, Kelekian remains an elusive figure, even though he is known as one of the important 'tastemakers' in the field of Islamic art. Within the archive and the sparse literature that exists on him, Kelekian's Ottoman-Armenian background and the mass violence directed against Armenians are addressed only in passing (DeCamargo, 2012). Notably, Kelekian was a patron to diasporic Armenian artists and bequeathed his entire estate to the Armenian General Benevolent Union (AGBU) before taking his life. Here, I do not mean to reduce Kelekian to his ethnic background – which itself would present a form of epistemological violence – yet it is striking that the question of how Kelekian experienced the Armenian genocide from the diaspora and how this experience in turn shaped his practice of collecting, acquiring, selling and exhibiting objects from the (former) Ottoman lands, including (Ottoman-)Armenian art has not received any attention.

Legal modalities of forgetting

The absences produced by dispossession in art historical and institutional accounts of Turkey's Ottoman past are mirrored in the legal realm. The interrelated cases of state violence and dispossession in the late Ottoman Empire and the Turkish republic sketched in this chapter fall through the cracks of the law: culture is left out of the

genocide convention (O'Neil & Hinton, 2009), and although the Armenian genocide informed the 'crimes against humanity' legislation, it is denied by Turkey and has not been internationally prosecuted. The subsequent episodes of dispossession are rooted in the kind of structural violence that relies on historical erasure (Farmer, 2004) or discriminatory practices that have remained concealed in understandings of the modern nation-state as ostensibly guaranteeing freedom from such violence (Skurski & Coronil, 2006).

Three vexing sets of issues continue to haunt the status of dispossessed art and other cultural assets from the former Ottoman Empire (and the region in general) in international law and the conventions on 'cultural property in armed conflict' and on looted art that have been elaborated since the 1970s in the framework of UNESCO and the EU.¹³ The first has to do with the somewhat triumphalist narrative on the development of these legal frameworks that puts the Nazi art loot, with the Nuremberg trials, at its centre (see, e.g. UNESCO, 2008). The Nuremberg trials did indeed achieve that the 1907 Hague Convention – that in the framework of 'the laws and customs in war on land' also regulated the fate of art, monuments, and museums in armed conflict – was accepted as customary international law (Schorlemer, 2009, p.140). But this narrative has also established discursive blind spots that continue to impact heritage-making. The much-cited genealogy of Nuremberg and the experiences of World War II as a turning point has obscured the actual legacies of the Nazi art theft, including the vast network of beneficiaries of the illicit trade with Nazi-looted art that stretches into the present day and that has significantly shaped private and public collections throughout Europe and the United States (e.g. Kohldehoff, 2014). It has fed into the idea that not only Germany but the European continent overall (along with the international art world) has faced and largely overcome this dark past.¹⁴ And finally, it has positioned the Euro-American powers once more as global stewards of world heritage in terms of capabilities, historical competencies, and the power to define what is worthy of protection.

While the idea of global stewardship of arts and culture has a long history in the self-fashioning of the 'West',¹⁵ its latest iteration in conjunction with the ongoing wars in Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria and other parts of the Middle East, cannot be thought apart from post-9/11 discourses of 'the Muslim' as the quintessential stranger, and migrant, in the Euro-American imagination.¹⁶ This Eurocentric perspective is illustrated, for instance, in a 2016 article by Francesco Rutelli, former Mayor of Rome (1993–2001) and Italian Minister of Cultural Heritage (2006–2008). He juxtaposes the destruction of cultural heritage by ISIS in Syria with the advances in cultural heritage protection after the painful experiences of World War II in Europe with the following words: 'These tendencies to respect cultural heritage (actually, heritage in terms of a shared, common legacy, even with its radical differences) were inherited from a painful legacy of accountability. It was, finally, a victory of the culture of the West' (2016, p. 145). Here, the notion of accountability does not extend to the colonial past but is limited to the experience of fascism and war. Recasting this experience as triumphantly overcome, Rutelli reaffirms: 'the West's' dominant position in heritage-making at a time when debates on decolonising the museum landscape have moved to the forefront.¹⁷

The persistence of the motif of cultural stewardship is echoed even in more nuanced positions, exemplified once more by the mission statement of Berlin's Museum of Islamic Art:

In the difficult climate currently surrounding the public discourse on Islam, the Museum für Islamische Kunst sees itself as a mediator of a culture of great sophistication. Its exhibitions uncover the history of other cultures, something which in turn helps foster a better understanding of the present. This lends the collection its sharp political relevance, both within Germany and abroad, as a cultural storehouse for Islamic societies and peoples.

The notion of an institution born out of imperial aspirations as a 'cultural storehouse', rather than one of active knowledge production remains wedded to understandings of the 'West' as a steward of global heritage, including 'Islamic heritage', however configured. This is not to reject the potential mediating function that museums possess – even though the idea of cultural diplomacy through art remains fraught because it reduces artworks to ethnic or religious cultural production, as mentioned in the beginning of this chapter. Yet, I would argue that this potentiality can only unfold – and the current modalities of forgetting can only be disrupted – when museums and other cultural institutions account not only for the ways in which their collections were accumulated but also probe the legal blind spots that protections of cultural property have produced. Such an interrogation must also include the ways in which museums have used these very protections to shield themselves from restitution claims. This is often done, for example, by citing the 1970 UNESCO Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property as a cut-off point, and by arguing that acquisitions prior to 1970 are not subject to this regulation.

The second, related, issue with regard to international regulations regarding the protection of cultural heritage concerns the lack of critical investigations of their central categories, their historical indebtedness to archaeology in its colonial and imperial formations, and the birth of the museum as an epistemic space. The growing literature on cultural heritage in armed conflicts, especially on the background of the waves of destruction under ISIS rule, has to contend with these historical formations and taxonomies as well the enduring question of whose heritage – or art – is at stake. As the legal successor of the Ottoman Empire that has both been subject to and engaged in the displacement of cultural assets, Turkey inhabits a complex dual position in the field, which has yet to be made productive in these debates.¹⁸

The third and final issue I want to raise pertains to perhaps the most basic assumption of regulations to protect cultural heritage under conditions of war. Their formulations with regard to safeguarding cultural heritage ultimately rest on the idea of 'civilis[ing] conflict (by international norms)' (Schorlemer, 2009, p. 141). However, this idea stands in contrast to the generally held notion of cultural assets being central to warfare. Indeed, the destruction and dispossession of cultural property (artworks, cultural sites and historical artefacts) is not a mere side-effect, or collateral damage, of war but also a weapon of war itself (Turku, 2018). It is not

only a symbol of dominance but also a means to cut off targeted communities from the sources of cultural production and reproduction. The official denial of this violence on the part of Turkey, compounded by blind spots in art historical accounts and in museums, ultimately presents a continuation of this violence.¹⁹

The unresolvedness of this central tension becomes evident, too, in the many iterations and reformulations of the protections of art and material culture that can be traced from the late nineteenth century onwards.²⁰ Some of these modulations were certainly related to developments in the technologies of warfare (such as protections from aerial and naval bombings); others seem to speak to a certain inefficacy or deficiency of existing legal and extralegal instruments, be they international protocols or memoranda of understanding. While these modulations signal a certain dynamism and possible paths towards more equitable and just approaches in the field of heritage, they also mark cultural heritage as a terrain of insecurity that is in need of ever more fine-grained legal codification. These codifications yet have to address the genocidal violence and discriminatory practices that enabled the large-scale dispossession experienced in Turkey. The growing number of countries officially recognising the Armenian genocide over the past few decades has thus far not translated into transnational heritage policies and knowledge production that substantially shifts discourses on Turkey's Ottoman heritage.

Since 2011, there seems to be a growing consensus that heritage protection should be moved from the narrower purview of International Humanitarian Law, that is provisions that govern times of armed conflict, to that of International Human Rights Law that governs peace times (Turku 2018, p. 5), or rather that govern what counts as peace at a given political conjuncture. This move, at least in theory, reconfigures both stakeholders' rights to cultural heritage (mainly mediated through the notion of access) and the responsibilities of states with regard to the preservation of the past.²¹ It remains questionable, however, how effective such reformulations will prove for the Ottoman-Turkish case and beyond as long as the historical inheritance, blind spots and asymmetries inherent in the very concept of cultural heritage, along with ideas of cultural stewardship and liberal formulations of both humanitarian and human rights law, remain – in essence – unaddressed.²²

Conclusion

The legal discussions sketched above shape understandings of how to deal with cultural objects in present conflicts. They also reinforce past heritage regimes. Important interventions and activism regarding the decolonialisation of museums notwithstanding, they naturalise and normalise how collections have been historically assembled and the narratives through which they are *now* accounted for. Many of these issues transcend the particular case of the late Ottoman Empire, or modern Turkey for that matter. But given that the episodes of violence and dispossession discussed in this chapter remain largely unrecognised both within Turkey and in the international arena, the larger dynamics that surround heritage regimes of this particular part of the (post-)Ottoman landscape remain similarly unproblematised.

The increased attention to restitution as part of historical justice, including art looted by the Nazis and during colonial times, and the art plunder and destruction accompanying

current wars in Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria has brought about new theoretical approaches to how cultural heritage is made and remade through processes of violence. It has also produced initiatives for alternate ways of preservation. Grassroots groups and universities, state and supranational institutions have initiated a variety of digital mapping projects and online archives, especially in the wake of the war in Syria.²³ Yet, the question remains as to how to address the violent conditions of the loss of cultural assets in the past, and how that loss continues to bear upon processes of knowledge production, including museum displays, art historical narratives and archives.²⁴

Turkey's past and its dominant conceptions of Ottoman or Islamic heritage are rooted in layers of obscured violence at the intersection of imperial and colonial power and the (structural) violence of the modern nation-state. Knowledge production in the museum, in art history and in the field of cultural heritage needs to address these layers as well as its own historical implicatedness in these processes. Under the conditions of ongoing wars in the region, the current moment, quite fatefully so, presents a chance to resist the reproduction of dominant knowledge about Turkey's Islamic art and heritage and to break with the operating logics that likewise dominant heritage discourses and practices have long relied on.

Notes

- 1 Based on a \$10 million donation, the gallery is to carry the Koç name for a duration of 75 years. See the press release, 'Istanbul-Based Vehbi Koç Foundation Funds New Galleries for Ottoman Art at Metropolitan Museum', <http://www.metmuseum.org/press/news/2009/istanbulbased-vehbi-koç-foundation-funds-new-galleries-for-ottoman-art-at-metropolitan-museum>. The few exceptions cover artefacts from Egypt, Syria, Iran, and an Andalusian ceiling.
- 2 One such example is the following egg-shaped ceramic ornament from Kütahya: <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/478391?searchField=All&ortBy=Relevance&ft=armenian&offset=0&rpp=20&pos=3>.
- 3 The extended database entry on the object, after a short description of the visual motifs and the patron, includes the following information: 'the patron, Abraham Vardapet [...] was an Armenian cleric [...] in the Turkish town of Tekirdagh [...] The dish was produced in the town of Kütahya in western Turkey, where a group of Armenian settlers were involved in ceramic production. It shows that Armenian merchants and churchmen were the patrons of ceramic production in both Turkey and Iran, where Armenian immigrants lived in scattered communities linked by trade'. This description is notable since Tekirdagh (today: Tekirdağ) had a substantial Rum (Greek-Orthodox), Armenian and Jewish population but is described as a 'Turkish' town during Ottoman times. Secondly, why are Armenians involved in ceramic production in Kütahya designated as 'settlers' when indeed their presence in Anatolia (or Western Armenia) predates the arrival of Muslims/Islam in those lands? Why are they described as 'involved in ceramic production', and not as an integral part to it, given the existence of longstanding colouring techniques that explicitly reference Armenian craftsmanship. And lastly, why is Armenian patronage in Anatolia equated with that in Iran, implying that Armenians in what is today Turkey just like Eastern Armenians who migrated to Iran in the seventeenth century are immigrants rather than natives. This description is especially striking in the case of the V&A, since it acknowledges the Armenian genocide in another collection of the museum, i. e. in the Curtains Foundation Gallery ceramic section through a contemporary piece (see: <http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O1347548/dish/>) but not the Islamic art section. For the complete entry in the V&A database see, <http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O9327/plate-unknown/>

- 4 Throughout the chapter, I use 'art' when gesturing at objects as subjects of art historical inquiry. Cultural heritage in turn designates not only discourses and practices of a collective past deemed worthy of protection but broader political and disciplinary interrogations.
- 5 For an introduction to the Aleppo Room and its contextualisation within Berlin's Museum for Islamic Art, see: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4toX47mtAIE>
- 6 For the full statement, see <https://www.smb.museum/en/museums-institutions/museum-fuer-islamische-kunst/about-us/profile.html>
- 7 The formulation 'living among them' is itself problematic given the vast geographical coverage of 'Islamic art' (encompassing an array of political configurations of interfaith practices) but also because many of these communities predate the arrival of Islam in its diverse lands.
- 8 How the recognition of the Armenian genocide by the German Parliament in June 2016 might play out in German museums and art institutions remains to be seen.
- 9 Marine officer and New York attorney, Matthew Bogdanos, notes that the exhibition of the Shelby White and Leon Levy collection of 200 Greek, Roman and Near Eastern works by the MET in 1990 featured more than 90 percent artifacts of unknown provenance (2016, p. 120). It would be hard to imagine that such a massive lack of provenance documentation would have been acceptable in the case of 'European Masters' or 'European modernism', for instance.
- 10 For an example of contemporary forms of destruction and spoliation in the form of 'treasure hunting', see Bieberstein (2017).
- 11 Not unlike Sally Price's (2007) observations on 'non-Western' art in the holdings of the Quai Branly, these kinds of conceptualisations have reinforced long criticised yet stubborn dichotomies of 'East' and 'West', 'ethnic art' and 'art proper' (see Shatanawi, this volume).
- 12 As art historian Vazken Davidian has noted, Ottoman Armenian painters, for instance, have been doubly obscured, as they have been written out of Ottoman and as well as Armenian art history. Their work remains in a limbo of silence and is largely unacknowledged. Biographies of those who are called Turkish or Armenian painters have been in Davidian's words 'conscripted into the service of national project[s]' – and generally subject to (or rather non-subjects because of) what he calls 'hostile historiographies' (2014, p. 13 and p. 49).
- 13 Among these are the 1954 Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict, the 1970 Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property by UNESCO, the Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage (UNESCO, 1972), and the 1995 UNIDROIT convention that builds on 1970 UNESCO convention on stolen or illegally exported cultural objects.
- 14 It is important to remember that the 1938 law that regulated the confiscation of art by the Nazis was never revoked by the Allies, in part because the American art market that benefited considerably from the sale of confiscated modernist art from private and public collections (Petropoulos, 2017, p. 136).
- 15 While the history of the idea of cultural stewardship transcends the scope of this chapter, art historian Erin Thompson's work (2017), for example, critiques the idea of stewardship by analysing the arguments in favour thereof made by John Henry Merryman. She also offers an interesting intervention by highlighting the differences in museums' attitudes towards Nazi-era restitution versus restitution claims that cover archaeological and historical artefacts from 'non-Western' societies, not least by diagnosing a gap between scrutiny from outside and convergence of opinions within museums (Thompson, 2014).

- 16 In his unpublished keynote 'The Inheritance of Loss: Collective Memory, Collateral Damage, and the Ruins of Ruins', writer, poet and literary scholar Sinan Antoon (2016) has poignantly described the differential attention that 'ruins' and damaged cultural heritage have received first in Iraq and then in Syria, in contrast to the people who are living, or trying to survive in these war zones. The salvaging efforts and international attention that material culture has received raises questions regarding the valorisation of human lives in the Middle East (see also Brusius, this volume).
- 17 For a recent evaluation of France's cultural heritage practices and a roadmap for restituting artefacts to former colonies on the African continent, see Sarr & Savoy (2018).
- 18 It is notable that Turkey has pursued aggressive restitution campaigns vis-à-vis international museums, while being silent, for instance, on the significant Syrian and Palestinian artefacts, originating from its own imperialist past, in its public holdings.
- 19 In addition, the illicit trade of historical artefacts has become an important revenue flow, and increasingly finances armed groups in the Middle East (Charney, 2016).
- 20 For historical studies on the different incarnations of heritage protection and its legal formulations beginning with classical law and stretching into the present day, see O'Keefe (2006) and Kastenberg (1997).
- 21 It remains an open question how to legally pursue individual acts of looting versus state-led dispossession, especially in cases where individual acts were tacitly state-sanctioned.
- 22 For a critique of humanitarian law and its application in practice, see for example Tiktin (2011).
- 23 One such example is the Syrian Heritage Archive Project supported by the German Archaeological Institute (DAI). For more detailed information, see <https://arache.dainst.org/project/syrher>.
- 24 see also Brusius, and Shaw, this volume.

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Part III

Categories, connections and contemporary challenges



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Museum narratives of Islam between art, archaeology and ethnology

A structural injustice approach

Mirjam Shatanawi

The arrangement of collections of Middle Eastern art and culture, or broader, of the Islamic world, is a prime example of how colonial paradigms still live on in Europe's museums. The collections were formed in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, when archaeology, art history and anthropology became distinct scholarly fields. The process of dividing the Middle Eastern heritage that was present in European museums started in the mid-nineteenth century, in a period when multidisciplinary cabinets of curiosity transformed into public museums that were increasingly more specialised and separated by discipline.

This chapter traces the genealogies of the arrangement of these collections, using the Netherlands as an example. My point of departure is the idea of different types of museums – the archaeological museum, ethnographic museum, art museum, and the so-called universal or encyclopaedic museum – as a discursive chain. Tony Bennett attributes the emergence of the public museum in the nineteenth century to the development of academic disciplines:

The birth of the museum is coincident with, and supplied a primary institutional condition for, the emergence of a new set of knowledges – geology, biology, archaeology, anthropology, history and art history – each of which, in its museological deployment, arranged objects as parts of evolutionary sequences (the history of the earth, of life, of man, and of civilisation) which, in their interrelations, formed a totalising order of things and peoples that was historicised through and through.

(1995, p. 96)

In this period, processes of inclusion and exclusion unfolded and objects from European (and later Western) and non-European (non-Western) cultures were separated. The Dutch historian Susan Legêne (2002) has referred to this process as 'the creation of worlds apart'. The separation of cultures has been one of the most dramatic changes in the European museum landscape and this fundamentally altered the way in which culture and cultures are represented in museums. Today the dichotomous model on which the institution of the museum is based, and the underlying hierarchy of cultures, prevent museums from achieving some of the social goals they set for themselves, that is: 'to inspire hope and healing, improves lives and better the world' (Silverman, 2010, p. 2).

The examples presented in this chapter show that after the separation museums representing European cultures and those representing non-European cultures started to function as communicating vessels. In the course of their 'social lives' as things (Appadurai, 1986), objects were moved back and forth between different types of museums. What went in the glass case in one museum, went out in another. As archaeologist Christina Riggs explains, each type of museum was showing the self-image of Europe:

Museums provided a space where the fruits of colonial contact – art, artefacts, 'knowledge' of the colonized country – could be ordered and arranged to create knowledge of oneself and one's own society, the colonizer. To this end, museums displayed objects in categories presented as intuitive (Europe or other? painting or sculpture? early or late?), little acknowledging their own role in the creation and promulgation of these categories.

(2010, p. 1132)

The final part of this chapter deals with the ramifications of these divisions in the present. I argue that the narratives of Islamic cultures in European museums constitute a structural injustice which requires reconciliation beyond repatriation and re-interpretation of individual objects. To this end, I draw on the work of the Canadian political philosopher Catherine Lu, especially her application of the concept of structural injustice to colonialism. In *Justice and Reconciliation in World Politics* (2017), Lu argues that colonialism differs from other contexts, because in colonial contexts wrongful actions typically conform to, rather than deviate from, a morally defective baseline. Such a morally defective baseline can, for instance, be found in the colonial binary of European and non-European cultures and the subsequent need to separate and hierarchise them in museums. According to Lu (2017, p. 250), the identification of structural injustices, including those resulting from colonialism, 'requires us to go beyond conventional interactional accounts of both justice and reconciliation that focus on individual or corporate victims and perpetrators of wrongful acts'. A similar argument can be made with regard to museum objects, because underlying the individual history of collecting, presentation and interpretation of each object is a structural pattern of inequality that can be traced to a colonial worldview. I therefore argue that the attention paid to the histories of individual objects or groups of objects should be coupled with the decolonization of museum disciplines. Undoing the dichotomous exhibitionary frameworks that underpin the presentation of these collections, or 'undisciplining' them (Förster & Von Bose, 2018), is an essential step to make museums more relevant.

Art, archaeology and ethnology: the pattern of museum representations of Islam and the Middle East

Classification constituted the backbone of the modern museum when it emerged in the nineteenth century (Hetherington, 1999; Hooper-Greenhill, 1992). In the historiography of museums, the development of the modern museum and its obsessive

impulse to order, classify and rank knowledge is linked to European imperialism, in the sense that it legitimated colonial domination and modelled citizenship along race and place of birth (Bennett, 1995). With regard to objects from the Middle East, divisions were made along disciplinary lines, based on the social class of those for whom objects were made and the age of objects. Today, resulting from these histories of classification, in the museums of Western Europe, the representation of Islam and the Middle East follows a distinctive pattern. The division of collections over three different time periods exemplifies this, whereas those collections, tied to the disciplines of art, archaeology and ethnology, are positioned differently in relation to Europe.

Within this pattern, the ancient Near East as well as North Africa (Egypt in particular) in the pre-Islam period are part of archaeology collections and displayed as forerunners to European culture (see Brusius, this volume). Meanwhile, Islamic art is part of museums showing art in the European sense of the word, for example, the Louvre in Paris and the Museum of Islamic Art in Berlin. The vision behind this is depiction of the ancient Middle East as a cradle of civilisation and of Islam as a bridge linking the artistic achievements of Antiquity with Renaissance Europe (Necipoglu, 2012). The third time period, corresponding to the nineteenth and (early) twentieth centuries, and thus referencing the era of colonial domination, is represented in ethnographic museums, for instance in Berlin's Museum of Ethnology, selected objects from which relocated to the Humboldt Forum (<https://www.humboldtforum.org>) in 2020. This pattern of representing the Middle East in three disconnected stages can be found across the continent, sometimes partially and sometimes in full, in different variations, depending on the availability of collections. It implies a 'hierarchy of value' that connects to the hierarchies of difference within the European museumscape (Macdonald, 2016), assigning most value to museums of European art and archaeology and least to museums of the non-Western everyday life. The rather neat allocation of disciplinary divisions is the outcome of a messier historical process. Even if the individual trajectories of museums and collections greatly differed, there was a general direction in which the representation of the Islamic world developed.

The Paris museums provide an instructive example of how historical formations play out in the present. Middle Eastern art and culture are divided between two national museums: the Louvre and the Musée du quai Branly. The Louvre displays Islamic art dating from the eighth to the eighteenth centuries in a separate wing, adjacent to the antiquities of the ancient Near East and Egypt, again presented as precursors to European culture. According to the Louvre's website, the department, which opened to the public in 2012, 'reveals the radiant face of a civilization that encompassed an infinitely varied wealth of humanity'.¹ The gallery is organised chronologically, explaining the development of Islamic art through the successive dynasties and various regions of production, with a number of thematic excursions, such as the role of writing in art. It presents the Islamic world, defined by the museum as 'a civilizational area whose ruling elites adopted the Muslim religion' spreading from India to Spain, as a unified civilisation.² Islamic art, in turn, is described as historically created for the urban elites, living in the major cities of the Islamic world. Religion becomes secondary to the aesthetic value of the artefacts.

This Islam, emptied of its religious meaning, is allowed to be integrated into the French national heritage, regarded as secular (see Guidi, this volume).

On the other bank of the Seine, the Musée du quai Branly shows the material culture of the same countries from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, taken from the collections of two ethnographic museums: Musée de l'Homme (Museum of Mankind) and Musée national des Arts d'Afrique et d'Océanie (National Museum of African and Oceanian Art). The museum's North African and Middle Eastern section focuses on *les arts premiers*, the so-called 'primitive arts', and represents local populations rather than a unified civilisation, a world of nomads, peasants and urban craftspeople. There is no Islamic world section, although the objects from North Africa and the Middle East are presented in adjacent rooms, as part of the Africa and Asia galleries respectively. The exhibition labels explain objects in the context of local phenomena, rather than purporting the vision of a unified 'cultural zone'. An interesting difference can be noted regarding the type of object: the Louvre has a strong focus on calligraphy, whereas the Quai Branly selection has hardly any objects with script, no books or scientific instruments, focusing instead on clothing, household utensils and magical objects like amulets. Clearly, civilisation by French Enlightenment standards is situated in the Louvre's Islamic art department, and thus confined to the Islamic world up to the nineteenth century. Together these two museums convey the colonial trope of a once highly civilised population that went in decline and needed to be saved by European rule. Moreover, the division of objects between museums reveals processes of inclusion and exclusion; who belongs to 'us' and who to 'them'; even though the objects themselves are often 'in-between'.

The divisions between art, archaeology and ethnology collections that characterise the Paris museums can be found across Europe. They operate as separate museums or separate departments within a museum, as is the case in the British Museum in London where Near Eastern antiquities, Islamic art and ethnology share one roof, and are increasingly mixing even if they remain part of different curatorial departments. In Brussels, for instance, the Art & History Museum has departments of Islamic art and Near Eastern archaeology, as well as European decorative arts and Asian art but no ethnographic collections. These, however, are housed in Antwerp's Museum aan de Stroom (MAS), which opened in 2011 as a merger of the maritime, city and ethnology collections. Initially, the ethnographic collections were part of the Museum of Antiquities to be separated in the 1920s (Vercruyse, 1989). Neither Islamic art nor the ancient Near East were a major focus of collecting in Antwerp's museums. In Hamburg, however, considerable collections from the three different time periods can be found. The Islamic art collection, ranking second in importance in Germany, is kept in the Museum für Kunst und Gewerbe (or 'Museum for art and design') as is the antiquities collection comprising 5,500 artefacts from the ancient Near East, Egypt as well as Greek, Etruscan and Roman art. Ethnographic collections from the societies in North Africa, West Asia and Central Asia, predominantly from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, can be found in MARKK (formerly known as Museum für Völkerkunde). MARKK is unique in the sense that it is the only ethnographic museum in Germany having a Europe collection.



(A)



(B)

Figure 8.1 A) Display of Islamic art at the Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam. Photograph by Thijs Gerbrandy. B) Gallery of West and Central Asia. Museum of Ethnology, Leiden.

Representations of Islam and the Middle East in the Netherlands

In the Netherlands, the Ancient Near East as well as Egypt in the pre-Islamic period are part of archaeology collections. Two large museums, the National Museum of Antiquities in Leiden and the Allard Pierson Museum of the University of Amsterdam, exhibit collections from the Near East and North Africa, in both cases shown as forerunners to European culture. No museum has an extensive display of Islamic art, though the Rijksmuseum has a small collection display and a larger collection can be

found in the Kunstmuseum in The Hague, even if the latter collection for the greater part is kept in storage. These collections came about as result of historic relations as well as the attempt to revive Dutch decorative arts in the early twentieth century (De Hond, 2011; Gemeentemuseum, 2018). Both museums follow the conventional timeline of Islamic art that stops at the nineteenth century and they also follow its geographical boundaries: Islamic-period collections from Indonesia, once the premier colony of the Netherlands, are not grouped under the heading of Islamic art. Visitors longing to see collections representing the Middle East during the past two centuries or from Islamic Indonesia are served by the ethnographic museums of the National Museum of World Cultures (Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen), an umbrella organisation for the collaboration of four museums: the Museum of Ethnology in Leiden, the Tropenmuseum in Amsterdam, the Africa Museum in Berg and Dal and the Wereldmuseum in Rotterdam.

Two decisive moments marked the separation of European and non-European collections in the Netherlands. The first one happened in 1883, when the Royal Cabinet of Curiosities was split up, and the second moment occurred in 1903 when the Leiden Museum of Antiquities made the decision to deaccession its non-European collections.

Separating ‘Europe’ from ‘Islam’: The Royal Cabinet of Curiosities (1816–1883)

The Royal Cabinet of Curiosities (Koninklijk Kabinet van Zeldzaamheden) was founded by the Dutch King Willem I in 1816 and it was housed in various buildings in The Hague, including a renowned seventeenth-century building known as the Mauritshuis, until its dissolution in 1883. Its collections were an eclectic mix consisting of objects relating to important events in Dutch history, as well as ethnographic collections and objects acquired through trade relations, in particular during the days of the Dutch East India Company, such as weapons from Sri Lanka and jewellery from Mughal India. The cabinet contained a number of royal collections, for example, the curiosity collection of Stadtholder Willem V, including luxury objects made from gold, silver and ivory. A large part of the collection was dedicated to objects from Japan and China (Effert, 2008, 2011; Legêne, 2002).

When in 1883 the Royal Cabinet of Curiosities was dissolved, most of its collection of around 15,000 objects was divided between two museums. The ‘ethnographic’ objects were given to the Museum of Ethnology in Leiden and the European objects as well as objects relating to ‘comparative decorative arts’ (*vergelijkende kunstindustrie*) were donated to the Netherlands Museum for History and Art (NMHA), housed in the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam.³ This sparked a debate among the museum directors in charge of the division: didn’t many non-western objects belong to ‘comparative decorative arts’? They agreed that objects belong in the museum of ethnology if they ‘enhance the knowledge about the customs, habits, and nature of the peoples outside Europe, with the exception of objects that directly belong to the domain of art and crafts’.⁴ Accordingly, they decided to determine for each group of objects whether its aesthetic value or

functional use was more important. The resulting division now may seem arbitrary, but it nicely followed nineteenth-century lines of thought.

Aesthetic value was measured by 'beauty in shape, colour, material or craftsmanship'.⁵ The division reveals what was considered 'good art' and 'bad art' (or no art) according to nineteenth-century European norms, as we can see in the case of the objects from Mughal India: made in approximately the same period. A painted bowl and other glass work ended up at the Rijksmuseum, but all the miniature paintings were sent to the Museum of Ethnology, where they could be studied as illustrations of royal life in India.⁶ A collection of Indian jewellery was sent back and forth between the Rijksmuseum and the ethnology museums a couple of times, as curators were not sure if they were indicative of Indian craftsmanship or above all had ethnological meaning.⁷ Finally, in 1972, they ended up in the Asian art department of the Rijksmuseum.

The respective directors of the two museums quickly agreed on a number of categories. Objects from Africa and Oceania, without a doubt, had no artistic value and belonged to the Museum of Ethnology. Yet China and Japan, but also Indonesia, were a different story. David van der Kellen (1827–1895), the director of the NMHA, complained about his dispute with his colleague Lindor Serrurier (1846–1901), director of the Museum of Ethnology, over the fate of the Indonesian objects, in particular the 'sophisticated and prized' kris, daggers of which the most valuable examples are decorated with precious stones, gold and silver or rare types of wood.⁸ According to Van der Kellen, it was clear that objects like these could have as much value in terms of origin, function and use as they do in terms of beauty in shape, colour, material and decoration. In that case, 'a random decision' should be made to which museum the object was to be assigned.

Serrurier agreed that any division would be to some extent artificial. He, however, came up with a more detailed set of principles that would guide his judgment. 'All objects originating from a people' belonged to the domain of ethnology, while the decorative arts limited this selection to those 'objects of daily use, which through their decoration witness of the artistry (*kunstzin*) of a people'.⁹ For the latter category, the value of the material and the elaborateness of the decoration were of vital importance, while ethnology attached importance to the extent of information available about the nature, use and origin of the objects. In accordance to these principles, Serrurier claimed to have only added Asian objects made from gold and silver to his selection if he had information about their origin and use. Yet he also announced that he has allocated to his museum 'all objects of entirely uncivilized and less civilized peoples, like Negroes, Papuans, Southsea islanders, red skins, Eskimos as well as the people of the East and West Indies'.¹⁰ From his writings it is evident that Serrurier conceived of the Museum of Ethnology as a gathering place for the material culture of primitive cultures: '[...] the museum will be, while retaining its scientific character, a school for everybody who wants to know how the wild, the barbarian and the half-civilized peoples have materialized their ways of thinking' (1895, p. 4). By contending that the population of the Dutch colonies was to be equated with the 'entirely uncivilized and less civilized', Serrurier made the winning bid.

Serrurier's prime selection criterion, the availability of information, favoured objects from the Dutch colonies. Objects in museum collections advanced Dutch scholarship in the field of ethnology, and likewise the colonial context provided ample opportunities for gathering scientific knowledge about the material culture of the colonised people, to the benefit of museums (Legêne, 1998). In turn, the growing body of object collections, and hence the associated knowledge about the colonised people, facilitated colonial government; knowledge was regarded as 'a prerequisite for colonial rule' (Scheffold & Vermeulen, 2002, p. 5). Yet, in the end, the resulting division of objects between the museums shows that not scientific knowledge, but rather perceptions about the level of development of cultures were crucial. Correspondingly, the selection of the Museum of Ethnology included objects about which Serrurier and his staff had little or no knowledge, such as the Indian paintings, but which simply did not fit the criteria of '*kunstzin*' (artistry) as employed by the NMHA. There are also cases when the division seemed to be completely random, demonstrating once more that the process of creating museum collections is as much a systematic enterprise as it is arbitrary and unwieldy.

European or extra-European?

All European objects were transferred to the Rijksmuseum, because they were, according to NMHA director David van der Kellen: 'indispensable for the history of the intimate life of our ancestors', because even when they were not produced in the Netherlands, at least they were used there.¹¹ The Museum of Ethnology in turn declared to exclude any object that displayed European influence, since such an object was corrupted and unfit to study the 'pure' core of non-western cultures. This included 'objects copied after European models, with decorations derived from European motifs or made for Europeans'.¹² 'Collect before it is too late' was the slogan under which Lindor Serrurier ran the museum (Van Wengen, 2002, p. 37). In line with the notion of salvage ethnography that emerged in the late nineteenth century, he saw European civilisation as one of the largest threats to non-Western cultures, because 'more than ever before the products of European influence are spread into the entire globe and supersede the native's weapons, his household utensils and clothing'.¹³ Islam was also accorded a place among the forces responsible for the destruction of primitive societies, 'who wants to collect, must hurry. With the penetration of Islam in Africa and in our East Indies possessions, idols are becoming more and more rare'.¹⁴ Serrurier's theoretical perspective was that of comparative evolutionist ethnology, which claimed that every civilisation went through similar stages of development. His ultimate aim was to establish 'an ethnographic museum, as comprehensive as possible, studying all of humanity as far as it had not been levelled out by the influence of Western civilisation'.¹⁵ As a corollary of these ideas, he considered objects infected by European culture to be useless for comparative ethnology.

The in-betweenness of things

Through museological framings like 'Islamic art' or 'European art', items in museum collections become 'epistemic objects': objects that are illustrative of particular

codifications of knowledge or that embody such knowledge as specimens (Alberti, 2005; Basu, 2017). But, as Paul Basu has argued, museum objects are in themselves not constrained or determined by the 'order of things' imposed by the museum. Basu describes the in-betweenness of material culture, quoting Paul Gilroy, by its 'essential connectedness', a double consciousness born from 'histories of borrowing, displacement, transformation and continual reinscription' (Basu, 2017, p. 2; Gilroy, 1993, p. 102). To look at things as 'in-between' is to understand them as being transitive and always on the move.

Let's look again at the objects from Mughal India in the Dutch museums to examine this proposition. I begin with the miniature paintings. In 1883, the Museum of Ethnology insisted to exclude any object that displayed European influence. Still, the 26 Indian paintings the museum inherited from the Royal Cabinet of Curiosities were made for a Dutch clientele and in a Europeanised style. Indian paintings were curiosities in late seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century Europe, they were exotic objects from distant lands, much like ostrich eggs or coconuts. Regarded as rare and precious, they were worthy collectibles for princes and the nobility. As Pauline Lunsingh Scheurleer (2017) has described, Amsterdam was an important hub for the trade in miniature paintings, most of them had been commissioned by employees of the Dutch East India Company. The paintings for the early European collectors were not made at the Mughal court, but in market towns where Europeans were active, like Golconda, Ahmedabad and Surat (Becherini, 2018; Lunsingh Scheurleer, 2017). Painters refashioned imperial Mughal images to fit European taste, both in subject matter and style, as we can see in a painted portrait of the Mughal emperor Aurangzeb (fig 2), who reigned between 1658 and 1707. Mughal emperors were a favourite subject for European buyers, who thought they were exotic as well as awe-inspiring. The simplified style made the paintings easy to produce and at the same time appealing to a wide audience, which made them easier to sell on the open market. The European interest in the paintings continued until the late eighteenth century. By the late nineteenth century, the paintings were still seen as curiosities and mediocre works of art, maybe due to the lack of perspective in the paintings. In any case, the appreciation of Indian painting and its re-inscription as 'Islamic fine art' arrived fairly late in the Netherlands, around the 1920s. In many ways, the paintings are just as European as they are Indian. Instead of telling a story of purity, like the Museum of Ethnology imagined, they show us a world where 'artistic permeability' between India and Europe was increasingly common (Becherini, 2018).

A similar story of in-betweenness is attached to the Indian jewellery. It consists of a group of 41 pieces of jewellery, donated in 1754 to Stadtholder Willem V by Julius Stein van Gollennesse (1691–1755), an official in the Dutch East India Company. It was collected as an ethnographic sample, as can be seen from the accompanying note, which describes the gift as three sets of jewellery: one for a Hindu woman, one for a Muslim woman and one that could be worn by both. The gift also contained two stone statuettes to be fitted out with the jewellery, in order to demonstrate how the jewellery was worn (they are now lost). A list of Gujarati names of each piece, also donated, further confirms that the collection was compiled for exhibition and as evidence of ethnographic knowledge (Gommans, 2018, p. 131; Lunsingh Scheurleer, 1996).



Figure 8.2 Portrait of Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb, Deccan, c. 1675–1725. Transferred from Royal Cabinet of Curiosities in 1883. The Dutch connection can be seen from a Dutch note on the back: 'Ourang Seeb als prins'. Collection National Museum of World Cultures inv.no. RV-360-992.

Heterogeneity was also the main reason why the Islamic objects of the Royal Cabinet of Curiosities existed in relative obscurity after the dissolution of the cabinet in 1883 and the re-distribution of the collections that followed. After the great split of the collection of the Royal Cabinet of Curiosities, objects kept moving from one collection to another, when museum directors and curators decided that they no longer fitted the profiles of their collections. In fact, a large proportion of the Islamic objects of the former collections of the Royal Cabinet of Curiosities demonstrate a hybridity in style, and a distinct in-betweenness in relation to Europe and the Islamic world, regardless if they ended up in the collections of the Rijksmuseum or the Museum of Ethnology.

Separating 'Islam' from the 'Ancient Near East': The Museum of Antiquities (1820–1903)

The division of the Royal Cabinet of Curiosities has demonstrated how the separation of collections according to European perceptions of belonging was fuelled by the gathering of scientific knowledge in the context of imperialism and colonisation. The second moment of separation occurred in 1903 when the Leiden Museum of Antiquities (Rijksmuseum van Oudheden) and the Museum of Ethnology ('s Rijks Ethnographisch Museum) decided to mark their respective territories. Throughout the nineteenth century, the two museums had based their demarcation on 'dead' versus 'living' cultures while both museums collected from regions outside Europe. Caspar Reuvens (1793–1835), the first director of the Museum of Antiquities (established in 1818), had defined antiquities as 'the remains of people who either do no longer exist or who have undergone a complete transformation, usually resulting from foreign domination or an overall change of religion'.¹⁶ With this last remark, he referred to Islam. Reuvens was determined; the borderline between what belonged to the respective domains of archaeology and ethnology should not be drawn based on the age of objects, but whether they belonged to 'dead' or 'living' cultures:

It is important for scholarship that the Indian [*i.e. Indonesian*] antiquities are not separated from the Egyptian and other artefacts. Otherwise, in the near future, there will be no longer a Museum of Antiquities, because also Roman and Greek objects will be placed in a Museum of Living People, the former labelled as Italian, and the latter among the objects from the Hellenic Commonwealth. The borderline, as I may repeat, is this: the disappearance of a people, or its later civilization, by its complete transition to the Christian or the Muslim faith.¹⁷

But now, at the turn of the twentieth century, there was a shift in focus; it was decided that the Museum of Antiquities would focus on European culture only.

Two major developments guided this decision. The first was the development of ethnology as an academic and museological discipline in the wake of Dutch colonialism. During the second part of the nineteenth century, ethnology became an established discipline in Dutch universities, with the first professorship set up at Leiden University in 1877. Material culture was at the forefront of this development, and a number of museums and collections were founded to assemble and study objects, including the Museum of Ethnology in Leiden in 1837, the Colonial Museum (the current Tropenmuseum) in Haarlem in 1864 and the Museum of Ethnology (the current Wereldmuseum) in Rotterdam in 1885, as well as a number of specialised collections in military museums and in training centres for civil servants or missionaries. The rise of museum ethnology resulted in a fierce competition with the Museum of Antiquities, which held a sizeable collection of non-European artefacts. The advance of ethnological knowledge ultimately resulted in a situation which led the Museum of Antiquities to conclude it no

longer possessed the competences to study these collections. Hence, when requesting permission to transfer the non-European antiquities to the Museum of Ethnology, director of the Museum of Antiquities Antonie Holwerda (1845–1922) argued that only in the former museum the objects would get the scientific treatment they deserved, while in his museum they were only standing in the way of a proper arrangement.¹⁸ With this remark, he referred to an increasingly demarcated idea of Europe, which included the Near East and North Africa but excluded the rest of Asia and Africa, and the Americas.

The second development was rooted in the rise of nationalism and colonialism, which combined with the predominance of evolutionism in ethnology and archaeology, led to the idea of a single and superior European culture that should be separated from other cultures. When archaeology developed as an academic discipline, nationalist and ‘continentalist’ approaches, aiming to define the distinctive features of European civilisation and its superiority, emerged side by side (Trigger, 2006). The idea of Europe as a conceptual category in archaeology emphasised the uniqueness of Europe in opposition to the Orient (Jones & Graves-Brown, 2013; Larsen, 1995). Yet at the same time, archaeology appropriated the ancient pasts of Near East and North Africa (see Brusius, this volume). Furthermore, these ideas tied in nicely with the imperialist aspirations of European nations, as archaeologist Bruce Trigger points out: ‘a scheme of prehistory that treated the Western European nations rather than the modern Arab peoples as the true heirs of the ancient civilisations of the Middle East helped to justify European colonial interventions in that region’ (Trigger, 2006, p. 229). In the Netherlands, archaeologists were interested in the Middle East since the time of Caspar Reuvens, and since the 1880s, the Museum of Antiquities had collected from the region (Hoijtink, 2012; Petit, 2014). By 1900, the idea of Europe, with the Middle East as its cradle of civilisation, was firmly established, hence Holwerda’s remark on the other collections as ‘standing in the way of a proper arrangement’. In 1901, a committee was formed to advise on the future of the ethnographic museum and its collections, in which both the Museum of Antiquities and the Museum of Ethnology were represented. One of its principal conclusions was that ‘the antiquities of the peoples of North Africa, West Asia and Europe whose civilisations are considered forerunners of our civilisation, should be placed in the Museum of Antiquities, the remaining antiquities in the Museum of Ethnology’ (Commissie van Advies, 1903, p. 8).

Following this recommendation, 4,838 objects from Southeast Asia, the Americas and Sub-Saharan Africa were transferred to the Museum of Ethnology, while the collections from Pharaonic and Coptic Egypt and the ancient Middle East could stay. Among the objects that were sent away were also some from Yemen, Turkey, Iran, Iraq, or the Hejaz from the Islamic period, as well as Islamic objects from Menorca and Greece. Two arguments played a role in this decision: the notion of Islam as a living tradition and the presumption that Islam was no ‘forerunner of our civilisation’, as emerges from the discussion on other living traditions of the Middle East and North Africa, namely Christianity and Judaism. In contradiction to the idea of ‘dead cultures’, indicated by a ‘complete transition to Christianity’, Coptic Egyptian artefacts were a serious part of the collection policy and, for instance, the

Coptic manuscripts, textiles and pottery collected by Jan Herman Insinger in the 1880s were eagerly accepted (Raven, 2018).¹⁹ It is indeed remarkable that none of the Coptic objects in the collection were transferred to the Museum of Ethnology, even if they stemmed from the same time period as some of the Islamic artefacts and both Islam and Christianity were still practised in Egypt. The few Jewish objects were divided over the two museums. As a result of the 1903 transfer, Islamic objects, regardless if they were from Greece or Iran, were placed in the Museum of Ethnology and thus supposedly isolated from European objects. Thus, the distinction between the Islamic and pre-Islamic periods of the Middle East and North Africa reinforced the idea of Islam as a non-European entity.

The representation of the Middle East: a structural injustice

At this point, I would like to return to the proposition with which I started: that the European museum narratives of the Middle East and the Islamic world constitute a structural injustice. Political theorist Iris Marion Young (2011) describes structural injustice as a practice of privileging some people over others and a situation in which the cause is not traceable to individual actions or particular policies. Instead, they are to be found in unjust social structures and processes, as embodied in discourses, practices and institutions, museums being one of them. Structural injustice typically occurs as a result of various actions combined, even if the individual actions are within the limits of accepted rules and norms (Young, 2011, p. 52). Such a claim could be made for the museum representations of Islam, which are embedded in the disciplines of archaeology, art history and anthropology. As the above analysis of the historical formations of Dutch museum collections shows, each of them developed in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, that is, in the context of the perceived racial and cultural superiority of Europe. It is, however, their combined narrative that is adversarial. In this narrative, we see a movement of inclusion and exclusion from Europe, in which the ancient pre-Islamic past is taken as Europe's own, pre-modern (or actually, pre-colonial) Islam is reluctantly and conditionally accepted and modern Islam perceived as a full outsider. In this manner, the museum landscape continues to reproduce colonial inequalities, despite the many attempts of individual museums to decolonise their collections and exhibitions in recent years.

Furthermore, the continuation of the use of the categories 'Islamic art' and 'Muslim cultures' by Dutch museums aligns with the current political discourse which sets apart Muslims as a unified community. With respect to art history, we witness a problematic relationship with the modern past of the Muslim world. The notion of Islamic art developed in late nineteenth-century Europe in the context of both archaeology and Orientalism. In contrast to the teleological narrative of progress of European art, the narrative of Islamic art follows a model of rise-and-fall, of medieval blossoming followed by decay in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (Graves, 2012). In the binary set up of museum representation emerging under colonialism, the Islamic Middle East was assigned an intermediate position

as having at one time been subject to development but subsequently degenerating. Thus, the contemporary Middle East was allotted a position in between Europe and the ‘primitive’ cultures or *Naturvölker* (natural peoples). This leads to a broken representation in the present, as I argue elsewhere:

The idea of a declining Muslim world, partially supported by ‘evidence’ of an art in decay, was central to the colonial project. Yet exhibitions of Islamic art rarely, if ever, question this timeline nor do they explain the particular context in which it was construed. Meanwhile, the lack of collections from the colonial or postcolonial periods forces museums intending to promote a ‘bridge of understanding’ to locate the greatness of the Muslim world in the past (Flood, 2007, p. 39). Consequently, it reinforces the proposition of a contrast between contemporary Islam (stagnant and intolerant) and early Islam (advanced and tolerant), which informs much of global politics.

(Shatanawi, 2012, pp. 178–179)

This challenge is partly taken up by museums of modern and contemporary art, with several museums in the Netherlands collecting and exhibiting artists from the Middle East and other regions of the Muslim world, even though few cover the modernist period; it is ‘a postmodernism without its relevant modernism, which is, [...] informed by a curious disregard for a critical and historiographic knowledge of the Middle Eastern modernisms to which such an artistic trend would be “post”’. (Babaie, 2011, p. 136). Moreover, museums representing the everyday culture of contemporary Dutch Muslim citizens are few and far in between.²⁰

The net result of this combined narrative is alienation, in the sense of a hindered self-realisation, of Dutch citizens with Islamic or Middle Eastern backgrounds and their disconnection from European heritage as *Europeans*. In the current museological infrastructure, there is no place where full recognition is realised. As a result, identification tends to happen through the Islamic art collections, even though these objects are far removed from the audience in time as well as cultural background (Grinell, Berg, & Larsson, 2019). Yet, it is not the precise nature of the objects that seems to be crucial for identification but their appreciation within the context of museums associated with national identity formation as well as the allocation of prestige. When I worked as a curator at the Tropenmuseum, I was approached a number of times to lobby for the installation of Islamic art at the Rijksmuseum. My interlocutors, most of them of Muslim background, saw presenting Muslim heritage in non-art museums as relegating them to second-class status.²¹ The reputation of the ethnographic museum as non-prestigious, as the ‘dustbin of history’, in itself a colonial echo, must have played a role here, as well as its inability to locate Islam in the here and now (Keskinikliç, 2015). Still, the identification through Islamic art is a flawed one, as it extends only to a past and filtered Muslim identity and it is ultimately dependent on its ranking within the worldview of the national or universal museum which takes European culture as its benchmark.²²

Finally, the three stage-representation of the Middle East is a structural injustice because it supports patterns of discrimination. Museum representations of Islam

and the Middle East are happening in the context of a Europe where anti-Muslim racism and discrimination are widespread and the marginalisation of Muslims is on the rise (Bayrakli & Hafez, 2018). It is clear that in the Netherlands, as in other European countries, ‘museums have been complicit in the construction of physical and cultural hierarchies that underpinned racist thought from the Enlightenment until well into the twentieth century, in marked contrast to the inclusionary role that many now seek to fulfil’ (Lynch & Alberti, 2010). Without exception, the museums discussed in this chapter intend that their presentations play a role in challenging prejudice and reaching out to the Muslim communities of Europe (see the Introduction of this volume). Yet their efforts are undermined by the concepts inherited from colonialism. As anthropologist Michael Herzfeld observes, this reflects ideological positions in our society at large:

the very notion of a distinction between high and low culture betrays the insidious and continuing presence of attitudes that not only stem from the colonial past but also perpetuate its worst conceptual excesses in the guise of the class structures and global inequalities of the present. [...] A society that can cheerfully continue to build art museums and ethnological museums as separate entities has perhaps not yet broken with the prejudices attendant upon global dominion.

(2007, p. 37)

On a structural level, dichotomous conceptual frameworks – art versus ethnology, Islam versus Europe – still pervade the arrangement of collections, and worse, they translate into the hierarchisation of people today.

Conclusion

If we look upon the hierarchisation in museums as a form of colonial injustice extending into the present, then we need to raise the question if and how redress can happen (Vawda, 2019). A starting point would be to look at objects in their permanent state of being in-between, being messy and unwieldy, in order to break down the walls between the various institutions and rethink their collections. The undoing of colonial formations is hindered by policies of prioritising collections owned by the museum in galleries; yet such policies are maintained by many of the museums discussed here, such as Berlin’s Museum of Islamic Art, the Rijksmuseum, the Tropenmuseum and Leiden’s Museum of Ethnology. In Paris, the national museums operate under a system of shared collections: they can choose from the full repository of objects in the national collections and exhibit those that fit their thematic choices. Indeed, many objects on display in the Louvre’s Islamic galleries belong to other collections, including the ethnographic museums. Yet even though in theory the choices seem endless, the Louvre and the Quai Branly museum work in agreement: each honouring the dividing lines of time and social status. More important than the division of labour by discipline is the agreement not to trespass on time zones: the Louvre collects and exhibits Islamic art until 1800, while

anything after that is the domain of Musée du quai Branly. When historical collecting practices dominate galleries, the idea of the museum itself prevails over other interests, as art historian Hans Belting (2007, p. 170) has argued.

Still, there is a movement detectable towards the undisciplining of the representation of the Middle East and Islam in museums. Increasingly, the traditional parameters of the field of Islamic art are being stretched through the expansion of the temporal borders and the inclusion of hitherto neglected geographical regions. This goes hand in hand with the study of material culture that was formerly excluded from the discipline. The *Albukhary Foundation Gallery of the Islamic World*, which opened in 2018 in the British Museum, breaks the boundaries between art and ethnology by showcasing medieval Islamic treasures and contemporary art alongside everyday things used by ordinary people. The objects on display represent an area stretching from West Africa to Southeast Asia, from the seventh century to the present day. Such boundary work is more than just an exercise to update or correct museological discourse; it is a necessary starting point to create a more inclusive narrative. Ambitions to make museums places of identification and belonging for the current Muslim populations of Europe cannot simply be placed on top of older collections, when the historical categories embodying racial and cultural hierarchies are left intact. It is the idea of the museum itself that has to change.

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Notes

- 1 Musée du Louvre (n.d.). The New Department of Islamic Art. Retrieved 15 June 2018, from <https://www.louvre.fr/en/opening-new-department-islamic-art>
- 2 Exhibition label as observed on 14 June 2018.
- 3 The Rijksmuseum currently owns 3,681 objects with a Royal Cabinet pedigree and the Museum of Ethnology owns 10,259. The original number must have been higher, as between 1883 and now hundreds of objects have been lost.
- 4 Letter David van der Kellen to Minister of the Interior, 18 December 1880. National Archives 2.04.13/1952.
- 5 Memorandum David van der Kellen, 16 February 1882. National Archives 2.04.13/1952 no. 473.
- 6 There is no archival information on why the 26 paintings were assigned to the Museum of Ethnology and how they were appreciated there. From the available information, it seems they were not exhibited until the late twentieth century. Collection National Museum of World Cultures inv. nos. RV-360-990/993 and RV-360-6998/7001 and RV-360-7346/7363.

- 7 Jewellery, Surat, c. 1750. Collection Rijksmuseum inv. nos. AK-NM-7050/7089 and AK-NM-7121.
- 8 Memorandum David van der Kellen, 16 February 1882. National Archives 2.04.13/1952 no. 473.
- 9 Memorandum Lindor Serrurier, 2 February 1882. National Archives 2.04.13/1952 no. 320.
- 10 Ibid.
- 11 Memorandum David van der Kellen, 16 August 1876. National Archives 2.04.13/1952.
- 12 Memorandum Lindor Serrurier, 2 February 1882. National Archives 2.04.13/1952 no. 320.
- 13 Letter Lindor Serrurier to Minister of the Interior, 5 May 1882. National Archives 2.04.13/1952 no. 1288.
- 14 Memorandum Lindor Serrurier dated 1 August 1881, sent to G.F. Westerman (director N.A.M.), probably on 17 August 1881. Archives of the City of Amsterdam/Archives Koninklijk Zoölogisch Genootschap 'Natura Artis Magistra' 395/1876.
- 15 Letter Lindor Serrurier to Minister of the Interior, 24 November 1880. Archives of the Museum of Ethnology NL-LdnRMV-A1-5-350/65.
- 16 Letter Reuvens to Minister Falck, 25 November 1820. Archives National Museum of Antiquities 17.1.1/1.
- 17 Ibid. Translation as in Halbertsma (2003, p. 55).
- 18 Letter Antonie Holwerda to Trustees of Leiden University, 24 September 1903. Archives of the Museum of Ethnology NL-LdnRMV-A1-40-252/253.
- 19 For example, Coptic pottery, Egypt, Coptic period. Collection National Museum of Antiquities inv. nos. AES 1-6. Ninety-two Coptic manuscripts, Egypt, Coptic period. Collection National Museum of Antiquities inv. no. AES 40. Coptic textiles from the necropolis of Akhmim, Egypt, Coptic period. Collection National Museum of Antiquities inv. nos. AES 155/159 and 162/172.
- 20 These are typically city museums working with Muslim communities on a project-by-project basis. Examples are the exhibition *Bekeerd: moslim worden, moslim zijn* (Converted: to become Muslim, to be Muslim, 2014) at the Amsterdam Museum, the photo project *Hipster/Muslim* that was adopted in 2019 by the Kunstmuseum (previously known as the Municipality Museum The Hague) and the exhibition *Haagse herinneringen aan Turkije* (The Hague memories of Turkey, 2012) at the Historical Museum of The Hague.
- 21 Similar pleas were made in the Dutch news media (see Shabtay, 2011; Shatanawi, 2009; Van Egteren, 2009).
- 22 For a critique of the Eurocentric worldview of the universal museum, see O'Neill (2004).

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Connecting the ancient and the modern Middle East in museums and public space

Mirjam Brusius

Due to nineteenth-century austerity measures, the Fourth Plinth on Trafalgar Square, one of the most significant squares in London, never got the planned equestrian statue of royal or military figures of significance. Instead, it had to wait empty until 1999, when it became a prominent site of display for contemporary art, providing an ever-changing and free exhibition space for pedestrians passing by to evoke their own personal stories.¹

In spring 2018, a recreation of an ancient winged bull statue, reportedly destroyed by ISIS in Iraq in 2015, was unveiled as the penultimate installation to perch atop the Fourth Plinth. The artwork by Iraqi-American artist Michael Rakowitz, constructed from 10,500 empty date syrup tin cans, resembled the original ancient sculpture of a lamassu, a mythological winged bull creature with the head of a man that once stood guard over the royal palace of King Ashurnasirpal II (883–859 BC) in the city of Nimroud, ancient Mesopotamia, today's Iraq, for over a 1,000 years.

To see these original ancient sculptures, people in Europe do not have to travel far. For more than a century, archaeologists and philologists have been able to admire and study them in the major museums of London, Paris and Berlin. In London's British Museum, for example, they have been on display since around 1850, after British forces had excavated them in Mesopotamia from the 1840s onwards. In Victorian Britain, the region was marked as part of the Victorians' own history; the 'cradle of civilization', supposedly rediscovered by the British. The artefacts they found, including the famous winged bulls and lions, were meant to become material witnesses known from the Old Testament. They made the Bible tangible and 'historical', an aspect that was enforced by thousands of cuneiform tablets that had yet to be deciphered (Bohrer, 2003). They were, for example, believed to contain Biblical places and names of people, besides giving insight into ancient scientific and mathematical knowledge (Robson, 2008; Robson, 2019). This context as well as the fact that the objects themselves had to be studied, measured, contextualised, taxonomised and deciphered in order to be interpreted according to Western scholarly standards, turned them into 'epistemic' objects, yielding knowledge from ancient times. In many non-Western museum collections, these taxonomies and conceptions of ancient artefacts have remained largely unchallenged since the nineteenth century. These displays, merely focussing on ancient objects and archaeology as an expert 'scholarly field', however, had often



Figure 9.1 Michael Rakowitz in front of *The Invisible Enemy Should Not Exist* in Trafalgar Square. Photograph by Caroline Teo.

omitted their ‘afterlife’, that is, the social and religious function of objects throughout history subsequent to their making until today.

Rakowitz’s artwork did not evoke scholarly or biblical knowledge, fascination or even sensation and curiosity. Neither was his statue built to last. It even undermined the preservationist ideas that its counterparts in the museum so strictly adhere to. Objects in the museum are meant to be preserved for the unforeseen future, if not on site in Iraq, in an exhibition hall or the museum’s storage area, notwithstanding the fact that some of the stored objects might never be seen. Instead, his artwork was dedicated to a specific configuration of ancient objects from Mesopotamia in society, involving not just art experts, scholars and exhibition professionals, but also politicians, the media, and the wider public.

As an example of how fluid the meaning of such artefacts can be, it was, above all, not a replica but a ‘revival’ of the sculpture that it intended to evoke. Rakowitz, whose Arab-Jewish family had to leave Iraq in 1946 for the United States where he was born, provoked some pressing questions: Should heritage be preserved, replaced and reproduced, for example, at a time when war and violence make other matters more urgent? His work answered the question by showing that art can instead create something new, *evoking* the loss and absence of humans. As a placeholder for something else, ‘reborn’ from ordinary objects of everyday life, the sculpture was, as the artist described it ‘a palimpsest of loss’ (Kennedy, 2018) for the people of Iraq, their cultural history, and a once great export industry.

When media and the public responded to Rakowitz’s sculpture, war and the current destruction of archaeological sites in Iraq were obvious reference points. Only few mentioned the ‘real’ sculptures that ‘lived’ not only in Iraq but in fact peacefully only a few miles away in the British Museum, and other Western museum collections. In fact, it was in the British Museum, where Rakowitz

initially saw these sculptures as a 10-year-old boy. Yet the kind of context we find in such museums could not be more different since the present-day realities of the place whence the objects once came rarely play any role. Museum visitors sometimes even struggle to realise that ‘ancient Mesopotamia’ still ‘exists’ in as much as it lives on in modern countries such as Iraq. This is because museums have disconnected and still largely disconnect these kinds of sculptures from a range of ‘alternative narratives’: those that connect them with more recent histories of violence and war; those that acknowledge the role of these artefacts as ‘signifiers’ from the ‘Islamicate World’ both for the modern societies in this region and for Europe’s large Muslim diasporas, as well as those that embed them into the long history of Western imperialism and expansion in the Middle East. Indeed, as museum critique and writer Sumaya Kassim reminds us in the context of a recent British Museum exhibition on orientalism, what most museums call the ‘cradle of civilization’ has in fact been a war zone for a long time:

I am standing in what I am told is the centre of civilisation, and yet all I see are flames. For many of us, the past few decades have been nightmarish. In the past few weeks alone, Muslims have been rendered stateless, put into concentration camps, the most powerful man in the world threatened to bomb Iranian cultural sites, air strikes on Mogadishu, Yemen, Iraq... Enclosed in this intricate, delicate space one might not think of the fire that has been burning and burning for centuries. And I, seeing this, recognise that Britishness is characterised only by its harrowing disconnect from reality. Nowhere is this more profoundly experienced than in the British Museum. What would an exhibition look like if it took seriously the desire for self-determination? What would an exhibition look like if it accepted our agency and the political consequences of that agency? What would happen if an exhibition showed how the British purposefully and brutally extinguished the hopes of their colonial subjects? What would it have looked like for a public space, like a national museum, to have cared and provided space for us?

(Kassim, 2020)

Could a museum display of Middle Eastern artefacts evoke reactions similar to those evoked by Rakowitz’s artwork? What prevents museums from connecting the ancient and the modern inside the museum walls, just as Rakowitz managed to achieve in a public square? The aim here is not to engage in finger-pointing, or to provide a solution. Those who have worked in museums are familiar with institutional obstacles and difficulties when it comes to changing permanent displays. Instead, I would like to reflect on how a future narrative breaking from the legacy of colonial discourses could be envisioned, hereby initiating a dialogue between historians and museum practitioners.

The Middle East in the museum

Since the nineteenth century, museums in Europe and ‘the West’ have displayed Mesopotamian objects as part of their ‘own’ history. These canonical ideas, shaped

by Western European readings, have influenced museological and public notions of progress and decline, the organization of historical time, but also scholarly disciplines. They did so by means of key concepts in history of science, such as ‘origin’ and ‘discovery’, which account for a single and teleological narrative rather than for dynamic flows of exchange between spaces.

In museums, the Mesopotamian artefacts that I will focus on here, for example, are not only geographically but also epistemically dislocated and detached from the region where they were once excavated: Ancient Mesopotamia, for example, occupied the same space as much of modern-day Iraq, Syria and Iran. In Western museums, however, artefacts from Mesopotamia are often presented in direct proximity to objects deeply embedded in the Western canon, such as Classical Greek sculpture. Objects from the same region that derive from after the coming of Islam are often separated from their more ancient geographical counterparts, and displayed in other areas of the museum, including Islamic Art departments. This dislodges them from narratives that museums developed around the category of ‘Islamic Art’. In other words, the authoritative voice of the museum orders geographies and temporalities, hereby establishing distances and proximities through its display (Shatanawi, this volume).

The epistemological implications this narrative has for the perception of history has been denounced, for instance, by Zainab Bahrani (1998). Prevailing European narratives link their historical present to mythical beginnings in the Middle East via the notions of a classical Graeco-Roman Antiquity. They identify Egypt and ancient Mesopotamia as the ‘cradle of Western civilizations’. These ‘lost civilizations’ were incorporated into European narratives and identity, subsequently and supposedly ‘discovered’ by European archaeologists and explorers. The designated taxonomy of Ancient Near Eastern Art as ‘European’ creates a problematic vision of the Middle East, suggesting a period of decline from the seventh century AD onwards. What counts as canonical in Western traditions and what is subject to alienation is thus a temporal rather than geographical dichotomy.

As museum visitors make their ways to the ‘Islamic’ department, however, they will often find the exact opposite; that is, a display not centring on decline from the seventh century AD onwards, but on the idea of a flourishing Middle East. Here, the categories of ‘Islamic Art’ (Shalem, 2012; Shaw, 2019; Karaca, this volume) alongside ‘Islamic Science’ are generally used to refer to the medieval ‘Golden Age’, during which the Muslim world is considered to have made important contributions to natural philosophy, medicine and mathematics. The category of Islamic science was created in 1976 for a London exhibition to offer a sense of inclusiveness for a particular British public (mainly Asian-born and of Muslim origin, such as the large Western Kashmiri population; Harrow & Wilson, 1976; Al-Khalili, 2010).

Even if created to help build the self-esteem of a particular community, however, displays foregrounding Islam often run the risk of presenting an alternative orientalist trope – one of the flourishing medieval centre of the scientific world in an otherwise ‘eternal, unchanging East’ deprived of modernity. Further, ‘Islamic instruments’, such as astrolabes from the ‘Islamicate world’, one could argue, are neither solely scientific instruments, nor dependent on religious categories. They also come from a

wide-ranging geographical area. As living objects, they were subject to circulation and continuous interaction. The imbued meanings that derive from such interaction are as manifold as the multiple audiences that encounter them in museums. What had turned these objects into 'Islamic Science' in the first place? In how far is the 'history of science' as a discipline of history building and canonising complicit as a resource for building such narratives? While both labels, 'Ancient Near Eastern' and 'Islamic' are both problematic, the former (unlike the latter) has long been unchallenged in museum practice. Like many museum categories, it has become invisible as a constructed category that warrants critical analysis in its own right.

In recent years, however, several curators have become aware of the one-dimensional nature of most current displays (Emberling & Petit, 2019; Gansell & Shafer, 2019).² The ongoing restructuring of some museum spaces, including planned changes of galleries displaying Egyptian and Mesopotamian artefacts in institutions such as British Museum and the Pergamonmuseum, reflects discomfort with this status quo, although not always in favour of a more even and unifying approach. In museums, the 'ethnologization', that is, the 'othering' of Islam, still pushes the Middle East to the margins, while the 'religionisation' of the Middle East often does the same in academic contexts. Islam, as Kassim notes 'is still seen as a menacing spectre haunting the West' (Kassim, 2020). If exhibitions foreground Eurocentric narratives, including orientalist approaches, however, it implies that they are premised on an assumption that take for granted that the audience is White and 'western' (European).

The problematic categories of museum spaces are mirrored in the naming of university departments throughout the world, which tell a story of their own: How religious does the Middle East's history has to be in order to be taught in Islamic studies (*Islamwissenschaft*, for example, in Germany)? How 'oriental' is the Middle East to be approached as part of 'Oriental studies'? How ancient does the Near East have to be in order to be 'Near'? And how ancient Western Asia in order to be 'western'? How modern the Middle East in order to be in the 'Middle'? And how much in the middle does the East have to be in order to be 'modern'? All these questions are important, albeit somewhat cumbersome, routes to provoke the following discussion: How can museum display today respond to these disciplinary discourses; and how can it make *ancient* Near Eastern artefacts relevant for people in and from the *modern* Middle East?

Lastly, besides more specialised academic and museological discourses, there is also a broader public media debate (Brusius, 2016; Brusius, 2017a). In particular, in recent years, when conflict and violence dominated the news about the region, discussions on heritage and its destruction in the Middle East became monolithic. Most media often equated 'the Orient' with destruction and 'the West' with salvage. As pointed out by a number of scholars, however, these tropes are deeply problematic (Bernbeck, 2013; Bohrer, 2015; Riggs, 2011). They still replicate nineteenth- and twentieth-century stances of imperialism – a context in which many museum collections have their origins. Archaeology as a mediating discipline connecting the present with the past was particularly fundamental in creating and undergirding museological taxonomies. Even though many have critiqued the

legacies of formerly colonial structures in recent decades, the vital role archaeology played in European imperial expansion in the Middle East must still be fully explored (Díaz-Andreu, 2007; Meskell, 1998; Pollock & Bernbeck, 2005). In museum displays, this role is mostly absent. Colonial histories would provide the missing links between the appropriated ‘Ancient Near East’ and the ‘othered’ nineteenth-century Middle East (then largely consisting of the Ottoman Empire). For it was during the height of colonial expansion in the nineteenth century that both alienating ‘images’ of the region were constructed. Visitors must learn how and why these categories came into being.

Ghosts

Rakowitz sculpture has been described as ‘the life-sized “ghost” of the Assyrian originals (Armitstead, 2018). The artist himself used the expression to describe it as something capable of more than a placeholder or a model:

The salvage of date syrup cans in this work makes present the human, economic and ecological disasters caused by the Iraq wars and their aftermath. [...] The reconstruction of the lamassu set on the Fourth Plinth allows an apparition to haunt Trafalgar Square at a time when we are witnessing a massive migration of people fleeing Iraq and Syria. I see this work as a ghost of the original and as a placeholder for those human lives that cannot be reconstructed, that are still searching for sanctuary.

(Rakowitz cited in Luke, 2018)

Public reactions echoed these humanist intentions: ‘Here is my country, for real here in the middle of this city, for so many people to see – wonderful, but I have tears also’, a Londoner of Iraqi descent wrote (Kennedy, 2018). Another passer-by praised the cultural complexity behind the installation on social media: ‘An Assyrian winged bull made out of Iraqi date syrup cans by a Jewish artist unveiled by a Muslim mayor. I BLOODY LOVE LONDON!’ (Shamouel, 30.3.2018). A number of aspects set a new tone for the display, and the reactions it provoked. They differed considerably from the canonised and museological context in which audiences in London would have encountered Mesopotamian artefacts otherwise, for example in the British Museum: the unorthodox material the artist used to recreate the sculpture; the pop-up kiosk across the square, selling small books of recipes, cakes and treats involving date syrup (Searle, 2018); the connection to the artist’s family history, as they had to flee Iraq in 1946;³ but also the very fact that it could be seen by a diverse range of audiences on Trafalgar Square without the social ‘pressures’ that museums tend to bring along by catering mainly to the White middle class (Sherman, 2008). London’s mayor Sadiq Khan even claimed its prominent display in a place where millions of people could see it might make it ‘the world’s most high-profile piece of art’ (Kennedy, 2018).

Yet with the highly politicised space also came political patronage and a moral message. Khan described the sculpture ‘as an act of resilience against tyranny and

religious fanaticism, and a celebration of pluralism' (ibid.). Others praised the connection the sculpture made with the artist's home country and Britain's involvement in its politics, grounding these arguments on more specific observations. The British daily 'The Guardian' noted, for example, that the sculpture turned 'its back to the National Gallery, gazing south-east past the Foreign Office and the Houses of Parliament towards its spiritual home in the Middle East'. It thus turned its gaze towards Nineveh, past the place where the 2003 British invasion of Iraq was decided. This gaze can be considered a human reference to conflict, not simply a nostalgic one to a past, or a 'heritage', that no longer exists. Of course, these questions referenced the context of enunciation surrounding the sculpture. Can its official endorsement by public authorities of a country that attacked Iraq (the political party of the then Mayor of London actively supported the Iraq war) neutralise its critical message? And does this recent history influence the forms and content of its *mises en scène*?

A political stage for display

Rakowitz's open-air exhibition was not the first event that displayed an object reminiscent of Middle Eastern heritage on Trafalgar Square. When, in February 2015, a footage emerged of the destruction of artefacts in Iraq and Syria, heritage organisations and policy-makers were quick to discuss how these physical gaps left by those who destroyed Middle Eastern sites could be filled. They too used public display as a means to make a political point. High profile politicians took sides, such as London's then mayor Boris Johnson who materialised his position in the debate with the help of a replica of Palmyra's destroyed arch, which he – just like his successor Sadiq Khan several years later – personally unveiled in London's Trafalgar Square. Palmyra, an oasis in the Syrian desert, north-east of Damascus, a UNESCO heritage site with monumental ruins of one of the most important cultural centres of the ancient world, had come under attack in the Syrian war. Digitally developed in Oxford, materially manufactured in Italy from Egyptian marble, and set up in the centre of London (and subsequently in New York and Dubai), the arch was a sumptuous statement of cultural authority.

What made the already disputed undertaking further problematic, was – in contrast to Rakowitz's artwork – not only the high costs associated with it, but also the imperial setting in which it was first presented. The replica arch was exposed right in between Nelson's Column and the National Gallery, a museum that, like many others, stands for the idea that this is where heritage should be persevered. Even more so if it is under threat elsewhere. Yet lacking the ability to speak to various audiences in a metropolis with a large Muslim and Middle Eastern diaspora at a time when Islamophobia continued to be on the rise, this heritage was not presented as 'their heritage'. While Rakowitz's work resisted the topographical challenges and wider implications (under a new Labour Mayor of London), the replica arch and the rhetoric that surrounded it did not. Instead, Johnson saw it as an act of pride; an act against violence 'in the quest to share the experience of this irreplaceable artefact with as many people as possible' (Oliver,

2016). Roger Michel, the director of Oxford's Institute for Digital Archaeology, who carried out the project, declared 'when history is erased in this fashion, it must be promptly and, of course, thoughtfully restored' (Brown, 2016). Others interpreted the display as an 'act of defiance' to show that restoration of the heritage site can be made possible 'if only the will is there' (Brown, 2016). The majority of the public seemed to echo those opinions, and so did many public museums in the Western world. Around the same time local and foreign specialists united to plan the resurrection of the ancient ruins in Syria with the help of photography and 3D printing (Cunliffe, 2016).

Meanwhile, the discussion surrounding Palmyra was entirely detached from human voices like the one of Syrian archaeologist and a former inhabitant of Palmyra, Salam al-Kuntar, who knew the site as a 'living site' just like Rakowitz's family knew Iraq:

I have a special love for Palmyra because the Temple of Bel is where my mother was born. My grandfather was a policeman serving in Palmyra and my grandmother wasn't even 20 years old when she got married and moved to Palmyra. The Palmyrene women taught her how to make bread and cook. I hear many stories about the building, how people used the space, how children played around, including my mum. So that's what it means to me. This is the meaning of heritage – it's not only architecture or artefacts that are representing history, it's these memories and ancestral connection to the place.

(Tharoor & Maruf, 2016; see also Shaw, 2018)

Historians pointed out that inside the ruins a village was once located the inhabitants of which were expelled when the French authorities reconstructed Palmyra as a monumental tourist site during the Mandate period.⁴ Yet these insightful and moving testimonies were quickly forgotten in light of eager and scientifically informed discussions about digital reconstructions and museological safeguarding.

Needless to say that, compared to the sleek 3D-printed 2016 replica of the Palmyra arch, Rakowitz's individual take on the matter made 'for a more thought-provoking and powerful piece of public art' (McEwan, 2018) than a 3D arch, which compensated an event of destruction that was part of the very same violent, destructive and Western imperial discourse, without making those links in public. In turn, 'for an artist whose family escaped Iraq only to witness their new country invade their old, Rakowitz's mission is a poignant one', writes McEwan. She highlights that 'the choice for him to fill the plinth that looks down Whitehall to the site where Britain's decision to invade Iraq was broiled up seems somehow natural in the current political climate' (ibid). The sculpture thus allowed for a historical reference, from the spatial and political division of the Ottoman Empire into European mandates in the early twentieth century, to Britain's responsibilities (e.g. invasions) in these conflicts and the subsequent destruction of people and buildings today, which also included a number of important Islamic shrines. By contrast, when the 3-D arch was installed, media and statements by academic bodies or heritage organisations seemed to suggest that there was 'A Middle East', 'An antiquity' and

'A heritage' deemed valuable collectively, and therefore in need of saving, irrespective of the fact that 'the past' was never a finite resource and the very definition of 'the past' has always been a contestable idea in the Middle East. Here, over the past 150 years, different political leaders have had entirely variable preferences about their respective material heritages, intimately tied to political and religious ideologies (Abu El-Haj, 2001; Galor, 2017). Authoritarian rulers such as Saddam Hussein in Iraq or Reza Shah in Persia, for example, identified with ancient kings like Nebuchadnezzar resp. Cyrus the Great. Finally, the debates rarely considered that preservation and destruction were never necessarily binary concepts or even opponents. Instead, they have always been potential accomplices, when objects were sometimes destroyed precisely because they were considered worthy of preservation by opposing parties. Often, attacks on 'shared heritage' are in reality targeted subversions of the very Western 'heritage paradigm' (Brusius, 2019).

So how longer can museums ignore Europe's historical responsibilities in the emergence of the very same conflicts that cause many to believe objects are 'safer' in Western museums? The fact that imperial interventions and recent wars were initiated by 'the West', or that President Trump threatened to attack cultural heritage sites in Iran in early 2020 (Trump, 2020), only highlights the many ironies at play in the current museum and heritage discourse. Albeit condemned by some high-profile Western institutions such as the Getty Institute, Western response (see e.g. Cuno, 2020) exemplified once again that unlike their Islamic heritage 'counterparts', ancient sites are considered 'shared heritage', that is, sites that seemingly belong to 'everyone'; a concept which so called 'universal museums' often adopt for their own end. Taking responsibility, and acknowledging human value and suffering, by contrast, would go beyond the simple paradigm that objects are 'saved' by the West in times of conflict in the Middle East, and must be replicated. Rakowitz brought home the point about the 'ultimate dehumanisation of the Iraqi people and its culture from 2003 onwards' and the 'tendency towards thinking that anything can be replicated as long as you 3D scan it. [But] you can't 3D print the people who lose their lives along with the cultural heritage that suffers' (Luke, 2018).

Kings and oil

The British Museum all of the sudden became a space for the many when the BP-sponsored exhibition 'I am Ashurbanipal: king of the world, king of Assyria' opened in 2018 and attracted a diverse range of visitors. But rather than marvel the spectacular finds from Mesopotamia, Iraqi Londoners and other activists gathered in the museum to sing and chant in a huge crowd outside the doorway of the exhibition. Making the link between BP, climate change, colonialism and the 2003 invasion of Iraq, these protests continued long after the show closed, and culminated in a 3-day mass event at the British Museum in February 2020. The activist Yasmin Younis (2019) described the movement with the following words:

The most formidable years of my life were filled with self-hatred and self-doubt as the world turned against my people and 'Iraq' became synonymous

with ‘war’ and ‘violence’. Whenever I tried to learn about my history or my culture outside of intimate familial settings, my searches were limited to violence, war, and casualty. This is a sad reality for all Iraqis, as our culture is rich and beautiful and should be celebrated with dignity and respect. I should be able to learn about my culture without moral conflict. Iraqis in Iraq should be able to learn and celebrate their culture and history, but they can’t as these artifacts were stolen from them... To BP and the British Museum, I say how DARE you use my culture and my history as an attempt to hide your colonialist skeletons. Not my culture, not my country. No war, no warming!

Demanding not only ‘historical facts’ but also a ‘space to mourn, to meditate, to collectivise’ (Kassim, 2020), calls for a more genuine engagement with the British Museum’s imperial past subsequently became louder and louder. Younis explained that she looked ‘forward to the day when the British Museum stops promoting a destructive oil giant and starts genuinely addressing the colonial nature of so much of its collection and its displays. Until then, this feels like a movement that is only going to keep on growing’ (Younis, 2019). ‘BP must fall’, in other words, also meant ‘decolonising the museum’. The request was founded in the conviction that the institution must also acknowledge the colonial structures on which its collection was founded. After all, the Western concept of ‘heritage’ and values of preservation, including the discipline of archaeology itself, emerged through colonial trajectories of fieldwork, survey and imperial expansion. As a nineteenth-century invention and imperial tool shaped by Western ideology and power, archaeology was also deeply enmeshed and inextricably linked with the oil business and economic exploitation.

The lack of critical display of colonial histories played a crucial role in these protests, and does so to this date. As of yet, most of these artefacts are rarely discussed in the context of imperial and colonial histories or modern conflict. The ‘journey’ and subsequent display of objects is almost never told as a history of contingencies, and one that heavily relied on local expertise. Instead, museums mostly tell a triumphalist story about their excavation and arrival, focusing on single archaeologists, and rarely on the anonymous labour behind the digs (Quirke, 2010). Albeit an abundance of archival sources gives plenty of insight into the challenging logistics involved in transporting the objects, and even their loss during their journey, we learn next to nothing about these ‘difficulties’ on display. While lesser-known written sources, for example, the minutes of the British Museum’s trustees, hardly give the impression that the excavations had clear aims, published nineteenth-century sources held up an image of success. Until recently, research had not sufficiently distanced itself from these published primary accounts. The famous 1848 publication *Nineveh and its Remains* by Austen Henry Layard (1817–1894), who was first in charge of overseeing the excavations, narrates the expedition as if it had a clear purpose, emphasising the successful integration of the finds into European canonical formations. It suggested that the excavations had been a target-oriented undertaking, well organised and thought out, a narrative that museum display has largely taken over and perpetuated until today.



Figure 9.2 Reception of Nineveh Sculptures at the British Museum, *The Illustrated London News*, 28 February 1852, 184.

A now canonical image appeared in an 1851 issue of *The Illustrated London News*, for example. As visual construct, another *mise en scène*, it retrospectively legitimised the arrival of objects from Mesopotamia that took place a few years earlier. A winged lamassu is being hauled up the entranceway of the British Museum, into a building, which had only just been completed. The statue's gaze is directed outwards, as though it were to take its last look at freedom before entering the canonical order of the museum's interior (be reminded that Rakowitz's lamassu was granted open-air enclosure where its gaze was directed towards his former home Iraq, as well as Westminster, where the UK parliament sits). Yet such images can be read along and against the grain (Stoler, 2009) by not treating them as a value-free historical record (Brusius, 2012). Like any museum display, they must be read alongside other sources and within a wider context.

Mid-nineteenth-century expeditions were not yet a means to an end for institutionalised disciplines – archaeology as a university discipline did not yet exist – but subject of antiquarian investigation as part of British and French imperial 'adventures' in the eastern part of the Ottoman Empire. The published visual and textual sources – a 'display' of second order – staged these expeditions as events under control and a clear goal, not uncommon arguments in the historiography of empire. In historical research, this European self-presentation has only been challenged by few publications so far that have also created more awareness for hitherto lesser known Ottoman agency and attitudes towards the excavations (Bahrani, Celik, & Eldem, 2011; Bilsel, 2012). These newer and more recent narratives, however, have yet to appear on labels on museum walls. Instead, the British removal of artefacts continues to be told as a heroic narrative in most museum displays that only know one side of the story. If they get mentioned or shown at all, locals are presented as passive observers or aiders.

Accounts of the actual transport and integration of the finds also tell a different story. People like Layard relied heavily on mediators such as the Assyrian Hormuzd Rassam (Reade, 1993). Several objects went adrift in the river Tigris or during transport on their way. Those that made it arrived in Britain around 1850 after often cumbersome transport routes, heavily relying on the infrastructure of the British Empire. Artefacts, as Fred Bohrer argued (Bohrer, 2003), appeared to shift between being objects of research, trophies or curiosities. Instead of being considered enrichments of the collection, many considered them a burden. Particular names and places on the cuneiform tablets did not match the ones mentioned in the scripture, and ended up in storage because they threatened canonical biblical ideas, rather than confirming them (Brusius, 2012).

Museums rarely tell stories about objects backstage, where keepers asked themselves what in the world they were going to do with certain objects, such as the huge statues and the thousands of undeciphered cuneiform tablets. In storage, the objects sometimes lay around for years before specialists endowed them with importance (Brusius & Singh, 2018). These kinds of stories can be unearthed once one re-reads museum archives and visual images more critically and without the ‘end product’ of museum display in mind. They show how the actual material legacies of the Middle East turned out to be utterly ambiguous. What can be revealed here is a narrative of museum objects that complicates the master narrative – one that is not always about European heroism, preservation, staging and display, and not even about clear starting and end points. Instead, we find stories about uneven power structures, local agency, Western neglect, and the contingency of Western collecting.

We will see, for example, that the apparent triumphalist story of arrival and appropriation of objects in European’s museums and their supposed cultural ‘home’, is also a story about how artworks were ‘lost’ in space over long periods of time. This can be particularly argued for the very first expeditions in the Middle East as carried out by the British and the French (the latter under Paul-Émile Botta and then Victor Place in the 1840s and 1850s) but did not necessarily change once archaeology was institutionalised in museums and academies around 1900. When the architect and archaeologist Robert Koldewey (1855–1925) returned to Berlin with objects from his expeditions to the ancient city of Babylon in 1898, for example, it was not clear either where to ‘fit’ Babylon within the broader narrative. Fragments were also stuck in transit or stored in preliminary buildings on Berlin’s Museum Island for decades before the Ishtar Gate and the Processional Way were finally reassembled and put on display in the 1920s (Brusius, 2017b). Many of the bricks are not displayed until even today. It is an accepted fact that large parts of the Ishtar Gate consist of reproduced tiles because they fit the reconstruction of the gate better than the original tiles. How is it justified that a large number of the fragments that had not been used are still kept in storage facilities, and for what purpose? Objects are frequently removed and collected for the sake of accumulation, to accommodate an anxiety of loss (Morgan and Macdonald, 2020). But the purpose of these objects in store is ill-defined, especially if never to be displayed, and never to be studied. This applies in particular to objects from Mesopotamia,

culturally appropriated by European museums and yet too ambiguous to fit existing taxonomies easily. These questions gain momentum at a time when museums are under increased pressure to respond to calls for repatriation. In Babylon, various attempts were made of a reconstruction with fake tiles, while the original bricks remain safely archived in Berlin. How should we approach such realities today, as the public role and image of museum is changing, and marginalised groups demand its democratisation?

Archaeologies of the community

One could even ask whether objects are not safest when they are not excavated at all, in particular in light of destruction. Those sculptures never unearthed by nineteenth-century European archaeologists in Mesopotamia, for example, cannot be easily destroyed by natural disaster or in violent acts. Assyriologist Eleanor Robson explained how in the case of Mesopotamia, large areas of Assyrian cities have actually never been surveyed, excavated and displayed. There are millennia of archaeological deposit underneath the standing remains on the royal citadels at Nineveh, Nimrud and Assur. Dozens more winged lions still lie untouched under their earthen mounds underneath the ones that were destroyed (Robson, 2015). Experts suggest that it is the unseen objects that are the safest of all.

Robson also challenged the stark contrast drawn between heroic Victorian antiquarianism embodied by figures such as Austen Henry Layard, and the Western idea of oriental iconoclastic barbarism. This view is simplistic, she argued, and ignores Iraqi professionals who have been studying this material for decades. A small number of archaeologists now prefer to invest into projects, which serve local populations as well as scholarship and the public thirst for 'heritage'. Successful contemporary community projects, partly conducted with international collaborators, show how communities are increasingly becoming involved in 'heritage projects', such as excavation of ancient structures, informing analysis of its past and helping improve present conditions and understand sites in their regional context from a holistic approach. On the ground, however, destruction is ongoing through the dismantling of scholars and institutions in conflict zones, which often prevents local academic expertise and community infrastructure in the places where the artefacts were excavated, such as Iraq, to do their important work (Robson, 2015). In spite of these difficulties, residents have made valuable contributions to the preservation and study of their heritage; and they can surely do so in museums as well.⁵

Such practices acknowledge that 'archaeology', or more precisely, preservation, can thus also go beyond official forms of excavating and the subsequent safeguarding and displaying of objects in museums. In fact, what is now considered 'heritage' has often been required to reuse (and thus preserve and display) objects in new urban structures. Well-known examples include Rome's Pantheon, a Christian conversion of a Roman building (Altekamp, Marcks-Jacobs, & Seiler, 2013). Not long ago in Europe, an ancient object dug up by civilians was not necessarily considered part of a criminal act. This shows that parameters for what the right

'destination' for ancient objects are shifted considerably in post-war Europe.⁶ Recontextualisation and the vivid memory that came with objects can be considered as another form of museological memory. Only the twentieth century brought significant changes to this cultural activity when archaeology became a professionalised discipline, and looting a crime, which too must be seen in context. As William Carruthers (2015) stated: 'without understanding what it is that actually motivates people to loot artefacts, stopping the practice will be almost impossible. We also risk alienating groups of people who, ultimately, may not have much of a choice when they loot. Rampant inequality and poverty clearly play a role in their actions'. These kind of modern realities in which Western museums participate, in as much as they have long relied on the trading of antiquities, are also part of the story; as much as measures to control and prevent illicit trade have been implemented (though not always successfully).

So could reworking past material also be considered a form of display and these object biographies become a new form of knowledge? In the context of tangible heritage and its destruction, it has been argued that material sites and buildings should be considered dynamic and ongoing processes that cannot be attached to one particular moment or display in time (Holtorf, 2015). Yannis Hamilakis has shown that ancient objects were subject to a multisensory manner, including the tactile, not just vision. They were activated multiple times, and co-existed with various antiquities of different eras (Hamilakis, 2011). Objects were thus often fully embedded in the domains of contemporary life, public space, working, farming, and places of worship. Display, in other words, does not necessarily mean that objects become museological trophies (Rico, 2016). It means that stories are in themselves injected in the material, and that various knowledges can exist in parallel. When will these stories count as 'knowledge' on museum display?

Conclusion

This chapter examined how the authoritative voice of the museum mostly continues to tell the story of humanity, geographies and temporalities through its display without addressing the needs and concerns of a potentially more diverse, and not exclusively White-European, audience. Analysing current tendencies in respect to tribulations and interpretations of Middle Eastern archaeological artefacts, it pointed to the malleability, fluidity and lack of palpability of such objects. The display of these objects is an example *par excellence* for the articulation between scholarship, religion and science popularisation in museums in as much as it shows the limits of how value and significance is attached to objects from regions such as the 'Islamicate World'. Epistemic meaning, scholarly knowledge production and Western expertise are currently to the fore of display, but this happens at the expense of political and cultural connections, which could provide other meaningful content for audience members. Such critical interventions are often left to artists, and rarely commissioned with a permanent framework in mind. The Middle East, in most of these displays, is mainly located in the past, but rarely in the present.

The BP protests at the British Museum, in particular those that took place around the Ashurbanipal exhibition in 2018 and 2019, can be described as a significant moment in the history of Ancient Near Eastern Art and its relation with Middle Eastern diaspora communities. For some participants, it was the first time ever in a museum, or even in their supposed home country (in this case Britain), that they felt they ‘belonged’:

For the majority of my life it seemed like the world had turned against my people, and didn't care that Iraqis were slaughtered, demonized, and dehumanized so long as it meant that gas prices were low and oil ‘flowed’ freely in the West. But on that day in the rehearsal room and later at the museum, where hundreds of allies showed up dressed in black and chanting proudly in solidarity, it felt as though times are changing and people around the world care about me, my culture, my people, and my homeland.

(Younis, 2019)

Rakowitz' display connected the material and the human, the ancient and the modern in unique ways. The situated and contextualised way in which his lamassu connected Mesopotamian antiquity and present geopolitics by publicly displaying a resignified and remade archaeological object raised questions about the present and historical role of British colonialism and the participation of the UK in the Iraq wars. How can a lamassu in a museum become both a signifier of local communities and of imperial histories in the Middle East that find their continuation today? Why is it often so difficult to create such a sense of belonging in museum displays?

In order to make the display of Middle Eastern artefacts relevant for the future and broader audiences, their display would have to, first, break with the legacies of colonial discourses. They would have to attest to the fact that these artefacts represent traces of Europe's early ‘mapping’ of Middle Eastern territory, with all its (destructive) consequences. Museum taxonomies are attempts at classifying objects and people, in this case dividing them into artificial categories that mostly and exclusively label them as pre- or post-Islamic. Museums, secondly, must therefore adopt a self-reflexive approach that creates distance by explaining why objects ended up in particular departments with a particular label, and also how they ‘arrived’ in a museum in the first place. Stories of objects in transit, and corresponding explanation on their shifting character as they circulate across natural, social and later even taxonomical worlds would help break with the existing essentialist spell of museums.

Thirdly, collections must be programmed in order to make the very basic link with people's humanity. Kassim argues that national institutions have an ‘obligation to reach out to communities who are othered by exhibitions and engage with Islam as a lived and living tradition’ (Kassim, 2020). Some museums have recently introduced tours by so-called ‘refugee’ guides to show that Middle Eastern artefacts can be approached in various ways. But will this kind of predominantly precarious work ever become one of equal knowledge-making in museums? Will visitors ever learn in these museums that refugees arrived in Europe, because countries like Britain once invaded the countries they once called their home, building on long imperial

projects of expansion of which archaeology was an integral part? Will we ever learn that many of the objects the destruction of which they mourn in their display were destroyed as a result of these invasions? The silence surrounding these questions goes to the very heart of the museological preservation paradigm. ‘Mises en scène’, or displays, are almost always acts of a political nature. At a time of immigration from the Middle East to Europe caused by violence and conflict, the display of Middle Eastern artefacts requires a new historical context. This will then allow visitors to make personal connections, unlimited by class, education, gender, race and religion.

Museums will have to decide if they want to remain depositories of artefacts that make reference to selected layers of the ancient past and triumphalist accounts of imperial histories, or instead turn towards personal and individual engagements as well as the uncomfortable aspects of Europe’s past. There is more and more demand that such objects become placeholders for something other than symbols of the ‘cradle of civilisation’, mostly integrated into displays that ‘celebrate white, middle class male intellectuals’, as Paul Collins, a curator at the Ashmolean Museum, who is willing to change these structures put it recently (Collins, forthcoming).⁷

As museums are undergoing ‘crises’, this raises larger, more fundamental questions about their future functions, which the International Council of Museums suggested should also involve ‘social justice, global equality and planetary wellbeing’ (Small, 2019). In the current politically transformative era, analysing questions of display from all sides is a condition for creating a more humane model for the display of artefacts. Such an approach would leave behind the linear idea, which assumes museums are natural end points for the objects it holds. Recognising cultural diversity can then lead to a different engagement with museum displays, acknowledging that local stakeholders have had and still have different relationships with their various constituent pasts. These questions concern the very epistemic concepts that currently surround knowledge-making about objects in museums.

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Notes

- 1 The plinth was designed by Sir Charles Barry in 1841 and intended for a figure on horseback to join George IV in Trafalgar Square’s north east corner. British military stalwarts Sir Charles Napier and Henry Havelock occupy the others.
- 2 For the UK (London and Oxford), see in particular Chapter 2 and 5; for Paris Chapter 4; and for Berlin Chapter 6. See also the Samarra project: <https://www.museumsfernsehen.de/museum-fuer-islamische-kunst-kurzfilme-ueber-samarra/>
- 3 Both aspects relate to one another due to his grandfather’s import-export business (dates were one of Iraq’s most important exports before the trade was damaged by two successive Gulf Wars).

- 4 Various photographs of Palmyra and Tadmour, Syria, taken by the American Colony, 1920 (approximately to 1933) are held in the Library of Congress, Photo Department, LC-M32.
- 5 For some recent project examples, see <http://www.ummeljimal.org/> and <http://www.ucl.ac.uk/nahrein>
- 6 In Italy, for example, unearthing ancient objects was a widespread activity for centuries (Rose-Greenland, 2014). Artefacts were removed from the soil and re-incorporated into the social realm as votives and treasure. Women and men knowledgeable about ancient objects and sites were considered respected human repositories of history.
- 7 Personal communication with Paul Collins (Jaleh Hearn Curator of Ancient Near East in the Department of Antiquities at the Ashmolean Museum).

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Reframing Islam?

Potentials and challenges of participatory initiatives in museums and heritage

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Over recent decades, the question of how to open up established heritage organisations – especially museums – to a greater range of contributing voices has resulted in numerous initiatives. Such initiatives aim in various ways to involve those who have previously been ignored or marginalised within existing representation, or who have only been the objects of representation by professional authorities, as participants in aspects of the work of organisations themselves. Often seen as a major shift in representational authority, reducing that of professional heritage staff in favour of according more to lay participants, this development has been variously hailed as ‘widening participation’, ‘inclusion’, ‘engagement’ or the ‘democratisation’ of museums and heritage. Such labels, however, cover a broad range of motives and aspirations, as well as practices and experiences. In this chapter, we consider some of these in relation to this book’s theme of Islam and heritage in Europe.

In examining the potentials and also challenges that may be involved in participatory heritage initiatives that relate – directly or indirectly – to Islam, we deploy the notion of ‘framing’. This allows us to come into discussion with previous work on Islam and museums, which has often used it, albeit typically with little theoretical elaboration, to draw attention to the contexts or narratives within which Islam is presented, and thus to how Islam is, variously, defined.¹ To attend to framing is not only to look at what happens around an already known subject – in this case ‘Islam’ – but also to investigate how that very subject is constituted. Throughout this chapter, when we refer to ‘Islam’ our intention is to consider what is invoked in specific uses and contexts rather than to predetermine what is meant. The recent research project, *Museological Framings of Islam* by Klas Grinell and colleagues, uses ‘framing’ to refer to many ways in which knowledge or expectations are structured and thus ‘shape the way in which humans enact or interpret their experiences’ (Fillmore, 2008, p. 1, cited in Grinell, 2019, p. 2).² Our understanding in this chapter, which also considers ‘framing’ as ‘ways of selectively carving up experience’ (Butler, 2016, p. 35), is broadly similar, though we find Judith Butler’s insistence that framing relates to what is even apprehended, not only to modes of interpretation, an important refinement (2016, p. 24). Regarding framing as concerning not only ‘conceptual forms of knowledge’ but also ‘sensing and perceiving’ (2016, p. 24), also means – to some extent contra Butler’s own argument – that it need not necessarily

be instrumental or instrumentalised. Certainly, it may be but, as our research suggests, it can also be inadvertent and collateral. To help grasp this, we not only consider the more ‘top-down’ societal and institutional framings identified in previous research but also others highlighted through our ethnographic approach. This entails extending the existing research concern with finished exhibitions to considering framing by various participants during the process of exhibition-making, as well as in other kinds of heritage and museum work, including that of participatory practices themselves. This allows us to address the important question of whether new participatory initiatives can break out of frames that previous scholarship identified as limiting, as well as to consider further frame effects that may arise.

In addition to drawing on existing studies and argumentation, this chapter presents research on three recent initiatives in major museums located in Berlin. Beginning in 2015 or 2016, all three initiatives were designed within a wider context of concern over growing Islamophobia in German society, amplified during and following the so-called ‘refugee crisis’ and ‘long summer of migration’ of 2015 and 2016.³ While not all of those who arrived in Germany in 2015 and 2016 were Muslim, they were often depicted as such in the media and even more so by anti-Islamist groups, especially Pegida, the Patriotic Europeans against the Islamization of the Occident, that had been founded in 2014 (see Bock & Macdonald, 2019). Against this turbulent backdrop, we looked at a selection of participatory museum initiatives that in various ways related to it to see whether, and if so how, these had any implications for the issues of framing Islam in Europe that had been raised by previous research. Importantly, as we go on to explain, this included initiatives in which ‘Islam’ itself was not a specific or explicit focus – in which, in other words, it seemed ‘out of frame’. By bringing such different approaches together, we seek to highlight the various potentials and challenges involved, and thus to contribute to the development of future practice.

Changing museum approaches

The findings of the *Museological Framings of Islam* research project include the following. Firstly, that ‘Islam and Muslims are mainly represented in Islamic art collections’ (Grinell et al., 2019, p. 370) – in other words, they are primarily ‘framed’ within discourses of art and aesthetics. Secondly, that Islam is ‘generally (if not always) presented [‘framed’] as ‘a dead religion’ (ibid.). And thirdly, that there are very few exhibitions informed by ‘socially concerned’ approaches to contemporary Muslims and Islam in Europe (2019, p. 371) – that is, that take up the possibility of a more present-day and socially oriented framing. As the research also acknowledges, however, exhibitions that do not directly address contemporary social and political considerations may nevertheless be devised in relation to such concerns, especially by presenting ‘another face’ of Islam, intended to counter adverse stereotypes. Strategies and alternative modes of framing for doing so include emphasising Islam as a peaceful religion; exhibiting Islam within examples of flourishing multicultural and multireligious societies from the past; or highlighting migration as having occurred throughout history, bringing many benefits (see Introduction to

this volume). Indeed, simply showing the beauty of ‘Islamic’ objects is regarded by some curators as countering negative impressions (Reeve, 2018; Shatanawi, 2012b).

The idea that museums might more directly address questions of Muslims and Islam in contemporary societies has, however, been growing. It connects to wider trends towards museums explicitly being engaged in the work of social cohesion (e.g. Sandell & Nightingale, 2012; Silverman, 2010). The director of the Museum of Islamic Art in Berlin, Stefan Weber, for example, has recently argued that ‘exhibitions of Islamic art are, whether we like it or not, sites of identity negotiation where relations to “me and my world” are established. This means that whatever we present also serves in forging identity and therefore has socio-political implications’ (Weber, 2018, p. 238). That visitors hope or even expect to learn about contemporary Islam in Europe is backed up by visitor surveys, including one commissioned by Stefan Weber shortly after he took up the directorship in 2009 (Junod et al., 2012, p. 12). Earlier visitor surveys conducted by the V&A had shown likewise; and that visitors presumed that the term ‘Islamic art’ would mean they would be informed about religion (Fakatseli and Sachs, 2008; Moussouri and Fritsch, 2004; cf. Shatanawi, 2012a, 2012b). This, however, is only rarely the case – and usually only tangentially – in such museums.

A related trend in museums in many parts of Europe, is the growth of initiatives to engage with broader segments of society, in order to include those who are less likely to visit museums, such as local diasporic populations (e.g. Golding & Modest, 2013). One strategy for doing so, but also going a step further, entails involving non-professional participants in the making of exhibitions or other kinds of museum production (e.g. Lynch 2013; Mensch & Meijer-van Mensch 2015; Puzon, 2019). This takes a wide range of forms and goes under various names, including ‘participation’, ‘engagement’ and ‘collaboration’, with some commentaries and analyses making differentiations between these or constructing typologies within them (e.g. Gerbich, 2018; Goodnow, 2010; Graham, 2017; Simon, 2010). As yet, such participative initiatives are not widespread in relation to Islam, for reasons that include ‘museum practices that focus exclusively on the object, on its provenance and its physical condition’ (Junod et al., 2012, p. 12). Nevertheless, there have been some examples, mostly involving forms of consultation: notably, the early work of Nima Poovaya-Smith in the British cities of Bradford and Leicester, in the UK (Macdonald, 2003, 2013; Poovaya-Smith, 1988), as well as more recent initiatives within national museums, such as for the *Hajj* exhibition at the British Museum (see Berns, 2016; Frost, 2014); and at the Museum of World Culture in Gothenburg (Grinell, 2014). The project *Experimentierfeld Museologie* (Museological Experiment Field), initiated by Susan Kamel, comprised a raft of ‘experiments’ designed to increase inclusion and improve education at a range of museums in Berlin, including the Museum of Islamic Art (see Bluche et al., 2013; Kamel & Gerbich, 2014). At the latter, the innovative Museum Diwan (designed primarily by Christine Gerbich), brought together people from different backgrounds, including but not restricted to different migration backgrounds, to discuss ideas for the content and display of a new exhibition (Gerbich, 2014; Kamel, 2013, p. 76). Another example, which has been analysed in-depth, is that of *Urban Islam*, at the

Tropenmuseum in Amsterdam. We now turn to look at that in more detail as it highlights unusually well some of the key challenges – and questions of framing – that such initiatives may face.

Framing ‘Islam’ in *Urban Islam*

Opened at the Tropenmuseum in 2003 (and later also exhibited at the Museum der Kulturen in Basel, Switzerland), *Urban Islam* was the first concerted attempt to undertake participatory work with lay Dutch Muslims that the museum had undertaken. As one of its curators (and authors of the current chapter), Mirjam Shatanawi (2012a; see also 2012b), points out, the fact that the exhibition was framed as about ‘Islam’ from the outset itself constituted a problem. Having framed it this way made sense in a context of high levels of contested public debate about Islam. But that very fact also allied it to that framing, risking perpetuating a public discourse conducted in such terms, with an accompanying essentialisation and stereotyping. Early on in the making process, Shatanawi and her co-curator, Deniz Ünsal, found that some of the Muslims approached to participate in discussions about the future exhibition refused to do so on account of this framing (2012, p. 69). Invoking Muslim participants as ‘a community’ was likewise problematic, she argues. Again, being a top-down ascription, it can essentialise into ‘a collective’, ignoring both people’s own self-identifications as well as differences (e.g. of religious affiliations, migration histories and culture) between them. It also acts as a kind of shorthand for ‘others’ – a framing that in this case was influenced by the fact that the exhibition was in an ethnographic museum. As such, the exhibition’s attempt to deal with cultural diversity risked becoming a matter of addressing the difference of others, rather than creating ‘the opportunity to connect to heritage in multiple, less predetermined ways’ (2012, p. 77).

In order to try to counteract the problems of essentialising or ending up just working with those who present themselves as the official voice of ‘communities’, the Tropenmuseum curators worked with ‘Dutch Muslims of different backgrounds’, especially young adults (Shatanawi, 2012a, p. 69). On the one hand, this produced some marked divergences in perspectives about what it was important to say about Islam, especially on the question of whether religion or culture should be given most emphasis, and also on whether religion should be presented as ‘pure’ or not. On the other, however, all participants were in agreement with each other that the exhibition’s aim should be to ‘correct the public image of Muslims’ (ibid.). While this was understandable, especially in light of the contentious political context, it also meant that the mainstream public discourse was in effect the governing frame. Furthermore, Shatanawi points out, it positioned the Tropenmuseum as ‘a stronghold of mainstream discourse’ (2012a, p. 72), and, moreover, as one for which the audience would be non-Muslims rather than themselves (2012a, p. 70). And although the curators wanted to expand the visitorship, to include new participants, it was indeed the case that most of the audience would be – and was – non-Muslim.

To further try to address the plurality of Islam, as well as to deal with the fact that there were such different perspectives among those who participated, the museum curators decided to make the differences among participants a core aspect of the exhibition. While this tackled the issue of essentialisation, it also drew criticism from some of the participants, who felt that the presentation through complex individual stories failed to properly express 'true Islam' (2012, p. 74). For the curators, the idea that there was a single 'true' position was problematic. But in seeing it as such, and devising a more multiperspectival exhibition, thus taking a more relativistic stance, they asserted their curatorial authority, and consequently compromised the shift or sharing of authority to which they had aspired.

Alerted to these important challenges for participative museum work in relation to Islam, then, let us fast-forward over a decade since the making of *Urban Islam* and to a different national context, namely Germany. In addition, we will also shift our focus from an ethnographic museum to various other kinds of museums. These shifts of temporal, spatial and institutional frames open up the question of whether the same challenges will arise or not, as well as whether there are others that need to be addressed.

Recent participatory initiatives in museums in Berlin

Despite the shift of time and nation, it is clear that the wider contextual framing of public concern and debate over Islam in which *Urban Islam* was created similarly characterises the German situation over 10 years later. Here too, a tendency in public discourse to present Islam as a 'threat to ... society and values' (Shatanawi, 2012a, p. 68), though also 'with some forces actively contesting' (ibid.) this position, was evident. In Germany, as in the Netherlands, 'the debate on Islam [was] closely intertwined with the question of integrating immigrants. Migrant culture was equated with Islam' (Shatanawi, 2012a, p. 68), especially during and after 2015, when over a million people, mainly from the Middle East, especially Syria and Iraq, and North Africa, but also other countries including Afghanistan, arrived in Europe seeking refuge.⁴ Many were escaping war; others were fleeing violence and repressive regimes. Not all were Muslim, though a majority was, at least according to the official modes of classifying them. Germany's already diverse Muslim population – from Balkan as well as Middle-Eastern, African and former Soviet countries – was expanded, with some new arrivals, especially Syrians, becoming sizeable minorities, though with Turks remaining the largest 'Muslim community' by some margin.⁵ In 2016, the total Muslim population in Germany was estimated to be just under 5 million, 6.1% of the overall population.⁶

It was, then, within a prevailing context of longstanding public concern and negative stereotyping of Muslims, now intensified in the face of the new arrivals, that the three initiatives that we discuss below were realised. Launching in January 2016, the idea for the *TAMAM* project had been formed in a cooperation between the Institute for Islamic Theology (Institut für Islamische Theologie) in Osnabrück and the Museum of Islamic Art (ISL) in Berlin.⁷ It brought together various local youth workers and volunteers who played roles in what were called 'mosque

communities'. Not tied to a specific intended museum 'product' (such as an exhibition), it was nevertheless hoped that the project would bring new insights to museum practice. Primarily, however, as its website states, *TAMAM* 'is a project by Muslims for Muslims, to enable more cultural education in mosques'. In particular, it used the collections of the Museum of Islamic Art to produce materials for downloading to engage Muslim youth during religious lessons in mosque communities.⁸ As the website explains: 'the museum has made its frames [*Rahmen*] and objects available' to the service of the mosque cultural education programme. The full name of *TAMAM* was, thus, *Das Bildungsprojekt von Moscheegemeinden mit dem Museum für Islamische Kunst* (The Mosque Communities Education Project with the Museum of Islamic Art). Significantly, the name was also selected for its hopeful aspirations, *tamam* meaning 'OK' in Turkish and colloquial Arabic, and 'perfect' or 'complete' in more formal Arabic.

Officially launched just a month earlier, in December 2015, the *Multaka* project likewise took a name from Arabic, in this case, one meaning 'meeting point', as in the project's subtitle *Museum as Meeting Point*. According to its website, *Multaka* entailed 'Syrian and Iraqi refugees ... being trained as museum guides so that they can then provide guided museum tours for Syrian and Iraqi refugees in their native language'.⁹ The idea for the project came from people affiliated with the Syrian Heritage Archive, a cooperation between ISL and the German Archaeological Institute. The Museum's director secured government funding for it and also put the idea to three other museum directors, who also quickly agreed to host 'refugee guides'.¹⁰ Those other museums were the Museum for the Ancient Near-East, which like ISL is located within the Pergamon Museum; the Bode Museum – which houses a mix of collections but with a focus on European Byzantine, Gothic, Renaissance and Baroque art, much of which is often described as 'Christian'; and the German Historical Museum (DHM), which is Germany's museum of national history. All of these are in effect 'national' museums, being funded by the German Federal government in collaboration with the federal states;¹¹ and all are located near to one another on or next to the capital's central Museums Island complex. *Multaka*, then, existed in a range of organisational frames – albeit all within major museums – only one of which was explicitly labelled 'Islamic'. Unlike in *TAMAM*, whose members participated as self-identified Muslims, this was not the case in *Multaka*.

Our third initiative neither took place within an organisational frame marked 'Islamic' nor directly addressed Islam or the position of Muslims. We include it, however, like the range of *Multaka* cases, because it allows investigation of what, if anything, ensues for the representation of Islam and Muslims when these are not explicitly to the forefront but only more tangentially through wider societal representations of refugees and migrants as predominantly Muslim. In this case, another state museum was involved, namely the Museum of European Cultures (MEK), located in the Berlin suburb of Dahlem. Although the museum had conducted many other kinds of participation work previously, this project was the first time that the museum had undertaken a form of participation in which it primarily acted as a host (as it was described – and as some participation literature, e.g. Simon, 2010 and Mörsch, 2012, sees as especially advanced in its relinquishing of museum

authority). This was to a ‘participatory art and research project’ called *KUNSTASYL* (meaning ‘Art Asylum’) ¹² which involved the residents of a shelter (*Heim*) for those who had become homeless, mostly due to fleeing their former homes during the refugee crisis (though not all had arrived at that time or were seeking refugee status). As such, being Muslim was by no means a criterion for participation, with at least half of the approximately 20-strong group being identified as such, though such identification, and questions of Islam more generally, were rarely discussed. As described by the director and a curator of the MEK, the group ‘took over the exhibition rooms of the museum’ to devise an exhibition documenting ‘the experiences, wishes, perspectives and lifestyles of refugees by artistic means’ (Tietmeyer & Neuland-Kitzerow, 2017, p. 4). The resulting exhibition opened in July 2016 under the title *daHEIM* – meaning ‘at home’ or ‘the home’ – and with the subtitle *Einsichten in flüchtige Leben*, officially translated into English as ‘Glances into Fugitive Lives’. ¹³

All of these initiatives were researched as part of a multiresearcher ethnography of ongoing transformations in museums and heritage within Berlin: *Making Differences – Transforming Museums and Heritage in the 21st Century* – and specifically within a research strand within it called *Representing Islam*. ¹⁴ Directed by Sharon Macdonald, three researchers conducted in-depth ethnographic research with each initiative. *TAMAM* was studied by Christine Gerbich, who helped to devise it as part of her existing long-term engagement with ISL and who worked as the official evaluator of the project over its initial 2-year phase. In this role, Gerbich participated in many of the project events and also undertook interviews with participants, and wrote a report for the museum that informed the subsequent development of the project. *Multaka* was researched by Rikke Gram, who over a period of a year attended a wide range of workshops and training sessions connected with *Multaka*, as well as attending tours, going with guides over their tour routes while discussing these with them, and conducting interviews. Katarzyna Puzon likewise investigated the *daHEIM* project through ethnographic approaches of participant-observation and interviews, as well as analysing the finished exhibition and participating in events that accompanied the project.

By looking at these three very different participatory initiatives together, then, we consider some implications of their various modes framing. Drawing on our discussion above, we consider the explicit framing of the initiatives involved, in terms of what we call ‘focal framing’, namely the focus under which the scope of an initiative is established, as well as ‘organisational framing’, the effects of the kind of museum/s in which it takes place. In both cases, however, we extend the consideration beyond the ‘top down’ framings, to also consider framing – or breaks with the existing framing – introduced by participants. We then turn to some implicit framing brought in by participatory models themselves.

Focal framing

All of the initiatives managed to avoid the problem (discussed above) identified by Shatanawi (2012a) of framing in terms of, and thus reifying an idea of, ‘a Muslim community’. They did so, however, through significantly different approaches. *TAMAM* deployed the notion but as already in use among Berlin’s Muslims to refer

to those within the constituency of mosques – the German term being *Gemeinde*, which can mean ‘parish’ as well as ‘community’. As such, the initiative could tap into existing structures within the city, linking with imams and others, who could act as what were called ‘multipliers’, taking the insights and ideas developed in and with the museum back out into local communities. While the fact that the multipliers were practicing Muslims meant that there was in effect a religious framing of the initiative, they were from various denominations; and the idea of the multiplier rather than the representative meant that rather than certain individuals ‘standing for’ a collective, they were to undertake the work of diffusion. Furthermore, although *TAMAM* was specifically framed in terms of ‘Muslims’, it did not reify ‘Muslims’ as a category of ‘Others’ because they were the actors – ‘by Muslims and for Muslims’ as the website put it. Indeed, to an unanticipated extent, the project itself strengthened not only ideas but also feelings of being part of a community. As participants commented to Christine Gerbich, they appreciated what they saw as a chance to ‘work together’, to ‘push things forward’ and to ‘become one’. This is a point to which we return in our discussion of participatory models below.

Neither of the other two initiatives deployed the terms ‘Muslim’ or ‘Islam’ in their framing. *Multaka’s* primary framing was in terms of ‘refugee’ – the project’s sub-subtitle being ‘Refugees as guides in Berlin museums’.¹⁵ That it is a refugee project is frequently mentioned on its website and in the press, as is its winning of prizes for its refugee work.¹⁶ Positioning it as such tapped directly into the concerns and also the funding opportunities of the moment.¹⁷ In fact, not all guides were necessarily refugees in a formal sense – many were students or even held work visas in Germany. As Rikke Gram found, some of them were uncomfortable with being framed as refugees, not only because of not holding this status formally but also because, as one explained to her, doing so turned them into a category, making them different from other people engaging with the museum. Referring to the refugee participants in tours, this guide explained: ‘They are just normal people, they’re just newly coming here. They just came here recently because of a certain, you know, uncontrollable situation. They didn’t choose it’. She preferred instead to refer to those on her tours as ‘our guests’. Nevertheless, this guide also recognised that there was the potential to do good under the label, and, amidst the considerable discussion of the term among the guides, there were some who embraced it, arguing that it should not be understood legalistically but as a more inclusive term for those, not least including themselves, ‘not able to be at home’ (as they put it). Not only were not all guides refugees in a formal sense, not all were Muslim, as with *KUNSTASYL*, and among themselves Islam was rarely mentioned.

This was despite the wider context of ‘moral panic’ over refugees and Islam (Kosnick, 2019). *KUNSTASYL* and its *daHEIM* exhibition worked carefully to devise a nuanced stance on this. Involving participants who might be classified as refugees, the project connected to the wider issues through its reference to a ‘Heim’ (shelter) and the word *flüchtige* (which can also mean volatile or subject to movement) in its subtitle, which contains the root term for flight (*Flucht*) as does ‘refugee’ (*Flüchtling*). It did so too through visual allusions such as the metal-framed beds that had been shown in many news reports of makeshift housing for refugees, and also the painting of a large wave on a main wall of the exhibition, which conveyed



Figure 10.1 Metal-frame bed in the exhibition *daHEIM: Glances into Fugitive Lives* at the Museum of European Cultures. Photograph by Katarzyna Puzon. Courtesy of Staatliche Museen Berlin.

not only the perilous sea voyages that had brought many refugees to Europe but also a prevalent metaphor of them as arriving like a great wave or surge.¹⁸

At the same time, however, the exhibition's creators were keen not to restrict the focus of the exhibition to the current 'crisis' and, indeed, were, like the *Multaka* guide quoted above, also critical of categorising people as refugees (Caveng, 2017). As one of the *KUNSTASYL* members said: '*Flüchtling* is a word indicating a permanent status... But when you find shelter, then you have a name'. To address this, the exhibition displayed the inscription 'call me by my name' and contained many historical as well as more recent life stories from around the world; for example, a communist writer who had to flee Germany from the Nazis in 1933. This mix of cases, with the focus firmly on individual experiences, meant that the experience of flight was not framed by ethnic or religiously affiliated categories. That also constituted a significant challenge to contemporary stereotypes in its severing of the widespread public elision of refugees with Muslims.

In what ways, then, did these framings interact with those of the organisations in which they took place? We turn to this next before then also considering how these were further shaped by features of participatory practices themselves.

Organisational framing

The role of ISL in the founding and running of both *TAMAM* and *Multaka* meant that 'Islam' was visible in their organisational framing, though in the case of *Multaka* there were also the organisational framings of the other museums too. What this

'Islamic' means, however, differs for participants. The opening text of ISL states that the term refers not to 'religious art... but to the art and architecture of the cultural region moulded by Islam in the broadest sense of the term'. As the visitor surveys noted above might seem to predict, the visibility of the term 'Islamic' did lead to expectations of a focus on religion. This was clearly the case among visitors on the tours, who often told the guides at the beginning that they wished to visit the 'Islam Museum', persistently leaving out the word art. Such an emphasis was not, in fact, absent from the organisational framing itself. On *Multaka's* website, for example, it is explained that the tours in the Bode Museum 'make reference to the inter-religious roots and the common origins of the three world religions of Islam, Judaism and Christendom'.¹⁹ It may also be a tendency towards religious framing that was involved in a guide at the DHM being criticised, as she explained to Rikke Gram, by some on her tours for talking a lot about Christianity and scarcely mentioning Islam. Yet this was something she saw no way out of, given that Christianity was so much part of German history. More generally, however, it was evident to Gram that neither guides nor visitors felt strongly constrained by the organisational framing of the museums in the narratives that they told. *Multaka* visitors seeing the Aleppo Room in ISL, for example, would often talk of the famous Arab dish, *foul*, that they had eaten in Aleppo – thus drawing neither on the 'Islamic' nor on the 'Art' of the Museum's title. And on tours, some guides, drew on various museum objects – such as nineteenth-century paintings of ships in stormy weather at the DHM – to talk about current migration, not least the perilous journeys to Europe undertaken by many of the visitors on the tours.



Figure 10.2 Participants in a guided tour of the project *Multaka: Meeting Point Museum* at the German Historical Museum. Courtesy of Staatliche Museen Berlin, Museum für Islamische Kunst / Milena Schlösser.

Even when Islam was directly discussed by Muslim participants, what it referred to and meant could vary significantly. In a *TAMAM* workshop in which museum objects were used as a focus for discussion, for example, the moderator showed a photograph of a small lead pendant and asked participants what they thought it might be, from where it might emanate and how old it was. Having identified it as a *khamisa*, a Hand of Fatima, a talisman to ward off danger, one participant stated emphatically: ‘This is *not* an Islamic object! Orthodox teachers prohibit superstition. This object is the *opposite* of Islamic. We need to think whether we keep it in the project. The Fatimids were on the edge of what is allowed. In the Fatimid period, many things were problematic from a theological perspective’. While this participant tried to reject the object in the name of ‘true Islam’, to put it in terms of Shatanawi’s discussion above, another participant insisted that it was relevant to the project because it is ‘part of our culture’. Involved here, then, were alternative framings by different Muslim participants. What was against (‘true’) ‘religion’ for some represented an expression of piety for others. Here, it is also worth noting that while curatorial discourse typically makes a distinction between ‘religion’ and ‘culture’ or ‘the sacred’ and ‘the profane’ – a frame that is severely criticised by some scholars (e.g. Ahmed, 2016; Shaw, 2012) – this works differently from the way that these are mobilised by Muslim lay participants here (Shatanawi, 2012b, 2021).

In the case of the MEK, Islam was not part of the organisational framing, as well as being absent from the focal framing, and indeed most discussion, informal as well as formal, during the making of the exhibition. As we have emphasised, this was part of a laudable approach in which forced flight from one’s homeland was represented through numerous individual stories, thus disconnecting it from any national, temporal, religious or other categorisation. As such, it was – even if not expressly stated as such – a significant alternative to the popular and media tendency to see those who were part of the ongoing ‘refugee crisis’ as Muslim. At the same time, however, it meant that Muslims were not made as visible in the MEK as they might otherwise been, thus not disrupting criticisms of their relative absence in this important institutional site for imagining Europe (De Cesari, 2017). Nevertheless, Islam was not entirely absent from the exhibition. Before describing its presence, however, we turn to how the participatory process itself – rather than some planned top-down edict by the Museum – framed what resulted.

Participatory framing

In the *daHEIM* project, not only was the exhibition created by the group *KUNSTASYL*, its making-process included devolving the creation of texts and other exhibition content to the different members, most of whom were from the shelter. In terms of participatory process, this showed a clear commitment to provide an alternative to established authority and to allow the participants to speak for themselves. Thus, various participants provided accounts of their stories of flight. Amidst these often harrowing recollections, the words ‘Islamic’ and ‘Muslim’ only appear in three instances in the exhibition’s final text. Two concern individuals fleeing from the ‘Islamic State’ and one is an individual who due to the stigma

of their illegitimacy was seeking to move to ‘a country in which no Muslims lived’. Clearly, including such mentions is entirely valid: this is these participants’ experience and part of wider reality of the time. Equally clearly, for museum curators to have sought to ‘balance’ this with some kind of more positive examples of Islam – in order to try to avoid wholly negative ones – would have contravened the principles of the participatory process.

Our other case studies also highlighted ways in which the participatory framework could be bound up with certain ‘apprehensions’, which might be more felt than verbally articulated, and that could have unanticipated effects. In the case of *TAMAM*, the very fact that it generated such strong feelings of collectivity seemed to Christine Gerbich to contribute to participants being keen to aim for consensus, thus avoiding in-depth discussion of certain questions and topics. In the Hand of Fatima example above, despite the clear difference of views, the potential conflict was quickly damped down by a participant who moderated the discussion. On other occasions too, Gerbich witnessed swift conflict-avoidance or a sidestepping of topics that might have brought uncomfortable differences of view to the fore. Instead, as part of the desire to maintain what members of the group frequently praised as its ‘good atmosphere’, their tendency was to avoid voicing or addressing issues that might cause conflicting viewpoints regarding the Museum’s representational strategies. As Gerbich makes clear in her own analysis (which she is developing further elsewhere), if we heed Chantal Mouffe’s (1999) claim that raising, debating and enduring conflictual opinions is a fundamental part of democratisation, then participatory practice, in this instance at least, seems to be hampering its own democratising aim.

The avoidance of differences that might lead to conflict was evident in various other instances, including in relation to the museums and their staff. Reinforcing this was a framing in terms of hospitality. The language of ‘hosting’ in participation positions those ‘invited in’ to the heritage organisations as ‘guests’. Visitors too are sometimes seen in such a way, as also by the *Multaka* guide quoted earlier. In many respects, this is a positive framing – one that challenges more instrumentalist or economic forms of transaction. In hospitality relations, hosts are supposed to take good care of their guests and exhibit generosity and good guests should respect the hosts’ rules and show gratitude. It is a model that was widely invoked as part of the ‘culture of welcome’ in Germany during the refugee crisis. But although it was much praised, it has also been criticised for positioning the new arrivals as recipients of pity and contributing to a discourse of them being insufficiently grateful (Bock, 2019; Partridge, 2019). In the early days of the *daHEIM* project, some of these tensions emerged, with some museum staff feeling that some members of *KUNSTASYL* were behaving with a lack of proper respect and gratitude for the extraordinary leniency of being permitted to make an exhibition ‘in our house’, by, for example, doing things like eating in the galleries. At the same time, members of *KUNSTASYL* sometimes resented what they experienced as rules that seemed to run counter to what they expected from genuine hospitality. As time went on, each came to understand the position of the other, thus showing that these difficulties can be surmounted, especially when projects have enough time to evolve and sufficient avenues for ongoing communication.

In both *TAMAM* and *Multaka*, a sense of behaving as good guests may have contributed to the reluctance to voice criticism not only of the views of other multipliers but also of the museum and its staff. One area that this concerned was colonial provenance. During a workshop, for example, *TAMAM* participants were presented with some short information about ISL's famous Mshatta façade having been brought to Berlin due to the 'friendly relationship' between the German Emperor and Ottoman Sultan of the time. While Gerbich witnessed some strained facial expressions and ironic quips about this, there was little discussion and no direct criticism of the museum was uttered. When she asked one participant about this later, her interlocutor explained: '*TAMAM* is not the place to discuss this. If we open *this* box, and raise the issue of orientalism, it will really get messy'. Likewise, in *Multaka*, while the guides were given information about the colonial provenance of museum objects and there was no prohibition on talking about this, they generally chose not to bring it up themselves in their tours. As was expressed to Gram, there was a sense that it was a complicated matter, in which their own position might be misunderstood, but also a matter for which some guides felt themselves not sufficiently trained to steer the discussion. Thus, while some participants were sometimes critical of the international relationships that had brought certain objects to the Museum, they were also aware that the presence of the objects in Berlin provided the opportunity to do the work that they were doing – which was generally much appreciated. So too was the idea that the objects were, like themselves, now safe from the harm from which they had escaped; and that the objects afforded both guides and visitors possibilities for senses of affective connection. As one guide said to Gram of the project and the experience of guides and visitors:

I think it's giving a more strong way to connect to here, to the object itself, but to the place, when they feel there is a connection, not only with the object itself. With the object itself it means I have something similar, I have something I feel is like home.

Evident in all of these cases, then, is how participatory initiatives may raise a range of views and feelings, both 'recognised', in the sense of verbally acknowledged, and more diffusely experienced or 'apprehended', to deploy Judith Butler's distinction (2016). Not all of these are necessarily easily accommodated together, and some of them may even run against the grain of other explicit intentions.

Conclusion

As with earlier research that has drawn attention to framing in relation to questions of the representation of Islam and Muslims in museums, ours too shows that it is significant and worthy of detailed attention to the unanticipated, as well as more predictable, effects that it may have. Framing – both explicit and even that which may be only partially apprehended – infects upon experiences and outcomes of practical museum and heritage work, sometimes to the extent that it can

compromise explicit aims. As we have seen, participatory practice does not mean that framing, including questions of what we have called organisational and focal framing, becomes irrelevant. It does, however, to some extent shift these – and the authority for setting the frames – as well as bringing certain further framing through the model of participatory practice itself.

All of the cases that we have discussed here provide significant alternatives to the prevailing negative media and public framings of Islam and Muslims. None of them worked with essentialised or homogenised notions of ‘a Muslim community’. *Urban Islam* sought to directly counter this by working with participants with very diverse positions of what it meant to be Muslim. *TAMAM* involved a narrower range but one that drew on existing framing by Muslims in Berlin. *Multaka* and *daHEIM* eschewed a ‘Muslim’ framing altogether. Each of these, together with the focal framings that were instead deployed and the organisational framings involved, had particular implications. *TAMAM* and to some extent *Multaka* were self-bounded projects insofar as they were framed not so much for a general public as for their own specified group – ‘by Muslims for Muslims’, ‘by refugees, for refugees’. As such, the content of the initiatives was not intended, at least initially, to reach beyond these significant target groups. Nevertheless, the very fact of the initiatives – that Muslims or refugees were positioned as the authorities – itself constituted an important disruption of wider stereotypes. A next step, then, that our research suggests, is that such participatory initiatives extend further, to change reshape outputs for wider publics.

Our other case, *daHEIM*, did just that. It did so, however, not under a label of ‘Muslim’, which necessarily meant that it did not explicitly challenge stereotypes about Islam and Muslims. Nevertheless, in providing an alternative account of forced flight from that predominating at that time, in which Muslims were often negatively stereotyped, it acted as a significant counterpoint. Moreover, it disrupted the very category of refugee itself – instead emphasising shared humanity and individual life stories.

daHEIM might also be seen as an example of an approach discussed in the introduction to this volume, namely that of ‘mainstreaming’, in which Islam and Muslims are neither the organisational nor the focal frame but nevertheless are included where relevant. What the case discussed here shows is that if this is approached in terms of the selection of individual exhibits, this can lead to collateral effects, such as the adoption or exclusion of certain angles in unintended ways. On the basis of this research observation, we suggest that close attention to framing at such detailed levels – to which case studies such as this one can contribute – might help in future.

Our ethnographic research, with its attention to practice, made evident that there are aspects of participatory process that themselves can have collateral as well as intended effects. In the *daHEIM* example, the very giving of authority to participants (each wrote their own text) led to the effect involved (a limited representation of Islam). It should be noted that such an occurrence is not confined to participative exhibition-making – many exhibitions are made without extensive analysis of the way in which certain inputs will come together. More

specific, however, though also not absent from more conventional exhibition-making, is the idea that the participants' perspectives should not be questioned. The example of *Urban Islam* showed especially clearly how difficult that could be, particularly as participants had such different views and that even to show that went against the perspectives of some. This may well be an 'unsolvable puzzle' as Shatanawi suggests (2012b, p. 192). Nevertheless, bringing it to awareness – again, not least through such examples – might be of some assistance. In effect, this would be to develop a museological practice of co-criticality.²⁰ This might also be of relevance for addressing tendencies to avoid controversial topics that we have suggested that participatory practice might inadvertently encourage through its framing in terms of hospitality, as well as an emphasis on 'good atmospheres'.

In all of the cases discussed here, the lay participants brought their own perspectives – their own frames – to bear. They variously discussed objects and made inputs into the tours and exhibition that were rooted in their own experiences and ways of seeing things. As such, they broke with prior frames that had been set. This could even involve questioning categories in use, such as refugee.

There is even further that this could go – especially into more substantial and durable change to museums' collecting practices, permanent galleries and staffing. Here, we might also note that the very idea of an 'initiative' – rather like the visit from a guest in hospitality metaphors – is time-limited. Certainly, the hope is that it sets something in motion for the future. But longer production in which this can more substantially develop – providing the opportunity to go beyond the misunderstandings and heightened politeness that may characterise early encounters – is especially important in such work. This is already happening in some of the cases discussed above as they have progressed. Moreover, what may become even more possible over time is to engage in deeper reframing, drawing on alternative notions of heritage inspired by certain Islamic ideas or Muslim practices, including of the kind highlighted in other chapters within this volume. All of the cases discussed here – and participatory initiatives more generally – are important impulses towards reframing the diversity of Islamic arts, cultures, beliefs and life styles in museums and heritage in Europe. It is to further inspired and effective reframing that we hope our analysis in this chapter contributes.

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Notes

- 1 See, for example Bier (2017), Gonzalez (2018), Heath (2007), Naguib (2015), Spielhaus (2013), Winegar (2008).
- 2 The core of the project looks at the UK and Germany between 1945 and 2014, concentrating on permanent galleries, though it also entailed wider discussion with scholars (including Macdonald and Shatanawi, who were both members of its advisory board) working elsewhere. Grinell et al. (2019) is a short summary of the main results; see also Grinell (2020).
- 3 The phase 'refugee crisis' was widely used in the media and public discussion and continues to be referred to as such. Some have criticised its use, suggesting that it implies that the refugees are the cause of the problems or that it suggests a temporary difficulty, thus ignoring more long-term dimensions. See Bock and Macdonald (2019).
- 4 From the end of 2014 until July 2016, about 580,000 people were granted legal status as refugees in Germany, making the total number of refugees 1.1 million, not counting the 200,000–250,000 people whose status was still being processed (Brücker et al., 2016: 1). See also Wech (2016) for the situation Europe-wide.
- 5 See <https://www.destatis.de/DE/Themen/Gesellschaft-Umwelt/Bevoelkerung/Migration-Integration/auslaenderstatistik-stichtag.html> (accessed 27.4.2020).
- 6 See the Pew report: <https://www.pewforum.org/essay/the-growth-of-germanys-muslim-population/> (accessed 30.4.2020). In 2010 Germany's Muslim population was about 3.3 Million, 4.1% of the population. In 2016, 4.9% of Europe's population was estimated to be Muslim, with figures ranging from 0.2% or less in Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia and the Baltic states, to 11.1% in Bulgaria, 8.8% in France and 8.1% in Sweden (and figures not available for Balkan countries).
- 7 We use the abbreviations for the museum names that are already in use in Germany.
- 8 See the *TAMAM* website: <https://tamam-projekt.de/wer-ist-tamam/> (accessed 27.4.2020). The website is in German and translations are our own. For further information on the project, see <https://multaka.de/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/Multaka-Concept-and-Content.pdf> (accessed 27.4.2020).
- 9 <https://multaka.de/en/project-2/> (accessed 30.4.2020).
- 10 The funding was from the Bundesministerium für Familien, Senioren, Frauen und Jugend (BMFSFJ).
- 11 The DHM is a foundation directly under the Federal State, the others are all part of the State Museums of Berlin, which are governed by the Prussian Cultural Heritage Foundation.
- 12 <https://www.kunstasyl.net/en/eg/4> (accessed 30.4.2020).
- 13 See the exhibition's online website at: the exhibition on the museum website: https://artsandculture.google.com/exhibit/_wKCbLGQzCazKA?hl=de (accessed 4.6.2020)
- 14 See <http://www.carmah.berlin/making-differences-in-berlin/> (accessed 30.4.2020).
- 15 <https://multaka.de/en/project-2/> (accessed 30.4.2020).
- 16 <https://multaka.de/en/1031-2/> (accessed 30.4.2020).
- 17 The funding from the Bundesministerium für Familien, Senioren, Frauen und Jugend (BMFSFJ) was specifically for a refugee-linked project (Stefan Weber, interview with Rikke Gram 25.11.2016).

- 18 As explained by the exhibition creators: <https://www.kunstasyl.net/en/eg/4a> (accessed 30.4.2020).
- 19 <https://multaka.de/en/project-2/> (accessed 30.4.2020).
- 20 As proposed in Sharon Macdonald's lecture 'When can museologists make a difference? Co-criticality and creative engagement', Reinwardt Academy 11.11.2016. See also Tinius and Macdonald (2020).

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