REPORT ON THE TOPOI-FUNDED WORLD CAFÉ:
'ON COMMON GROUNDS?
RETHINKING (ISLAMIC) HERITAGE IN EUROPE
AT THE CENTRE FOR ANTHROPOLOGICAL
RESEARCH ON MUSEUMS AND HERITAGE AT
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11.4.2019   by Christine Gerbich (CARMAH) and Adela Taleb (HTW)

INTRODUCTION

The TOPOI-funded world café *On Common Grounds – rethinking (Islamic) heritage in Europe* was a joint endeavour between CARMAH (the Centre for Anthropological Research on Museums and Heritage, which is part of the Institute for European Ethnology at Humboldt-Universität)[1] and the Department for Museum Management and Communication at HTW (Hochschule für Technik und Wirtschaft) in Berlin. It emerged as part of a larger project titled *Dealing with heritage – Dealing with damage* initiated by the research cluster TOPOI. The aim of this sub-project was to create a space that allows for thinking about stabilities and instabilities of heritage, and the uses of heritage in light of perceived political and economic crises across Europe and elsewhere in the world.

This project incorporates four sub-projects that deal with questions such as legal perspectives on the preservation of heritage from an international perspective (*Translocations*), preservation of endangered heritage (*Art preservation during war*), and digitalization (*The Digital Heritage Protection Commando*). The fourth sub-project, *Searching for Common Ground* seeks to investigate different notions of heritage, and to trace the various ways in which they are negotiated in pluralistic societies. Such an investigation seemed crucial, especially in light of the European Cultural Heritage Year (ECHY) 2018 which had been promoted under the slogan "Sharing Heritage", thus giving renewed prominence to the idea of heritage as a facilitator in cross-cultural communication and exchange.

One of the foci of the World Café was to reflect on the ways in which museums contribute to practices of heritage "sharing" and to shed light on motivations and discourses that shape these practices, focusing especially on practices considered to promote democratic values. Another crucial aim of this event was to experiment with formats and methods that provide communicative spaces in which a multiplicity of perspectives become voiced, approaching heterogeneity in viewpoints as an asset for reflecting on the complexities of discourses on heritage.

One theoretical point of departure for this project was to approach heritage from an anthropological perspective. This means to not merely focus on material forms, but rather to conceptualize heritage as "an active process of assembling a series of objects, places and practices that we choose to hold up as a mirror, associated with a particular set of values that we wish to take with us into the future" (Harrison 2013). Thus, heritage is considered as a discursive, dynamic, and therefore "instable" construct. It is being reflected upon with regard to the people and processes, as well as the social, political, historical, and spatial contexts in which heritage is being produced (Macdonald: 2018).

A second point of departure was to suggest that processes of "sharing" in democratic societies are dependent on methods and forums that allow for the critical reflection and negotiation of multiple perspectives on heritage. The aim of *Searching for Common Ground* was therefore to experiment with formats that may contribute to establishing "Common Grounds" – that is, formats that encourage dialogic communication between various stakeholders in order to foster recognition about differences and diversities regarding cultural values, communicative styles etc. as inherent to such discussions. Theoretically, this was grounded in ideas of radical democracy as reflected in the agonistic model of democracy put forward by Mouffe (2013). Further advocates of such a poly-vocal space are Hardt and Negri, with their proposition to conceptualise multitude as "a diffuse set of singularities that produce

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[1] CARMAH is funded by the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation as part of Prof. Dr. Sharon Macdonald's Alexander von Humboldt Professorship, the Humboldt-Universität, the SPK and the Berlin Museum für Naturkunde.

a common life; it is a kind of social flesh that organizes itself into a new social body". (Hardt and Negri 2005: 349).

And finally, the project drew on a sociocultural approach to learning (Vygotsky 1978) which perceives this as a situated practice, as a process which is not happening on a cognitive level in the individual, but through people's participation in social interactions, and that this exchange is shaped by individual, as much as social factors.

The event, therefore presented both in terms of its thematic setting and the methodological framing, an invitation to scrutinise some of its key terms such as "heritage", "Islamic" or "Europe" in an interdisciplinary and international forum, providing new avenues of reflection.

(ISLAMIC) HERITAGE IN EUROPE: SOME REMARKS FROM CRITICAL EUROPEANISATION STUDIES

Museums cannot be considered neutral spaces, but rather to represent entities whose attribution of values and meanings of collections and practices follows specific poetics and politics of representation that may well be contested (Lidchi 1997: 205). In the context of the project, museums were thus understood "not merely as *material* assemblages, but also as *social* collections" (Byrne et al 2013: 4), as "a huge trading post of agencies" (Descola, 2014). This includes museums' tasks and functions, such as those proposed by the International Council of Museums (ICOM): "A museum is a non-profit, permanent institution in the service of society and its development, open to the public, which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits the tangible and intangible heritage of humanity and its environment for the purposes of education, study and enjoyment".

Museums as one of the loci in which heritage is produced and negotiated also play a crucial role in process of Europeanisation (DeCesari, 2017) and thus unsurprisingly did form strategic partners in the 2018 European Year of Cultural Heritage. Throughout 2018 various cultural institutions across Europe joined in a coordinated series of events orchestrated by the European Union under the slogan: "Our heritage: where the past meets the future" .

On the official webpage this 2018 European Year of Cultural Heritage (EYCH) is described as follows:

*"The European Commission has initiated a thematic year which calls on us all to help Europe be perceived not as something remote or out of touch with reality, but as something that **belongs to all of us**. **Our** cultural heritage tells us about **our shared European history,** wherever we are at home. The European Cultural Heritage Year will focus on **what we share and what unites us**. Where do we recognize our European heritage in our cities, towns and cultural landscapes? **What unites us? What do we want to change?** We want to increase awareness of our rich heritage and inspire a desire to preserve it. Let us discover our **shared roots, let us see our surroundings with new eyes, let us tell each other our stories***!"* (EYCH, 2018; accentuation by authors)

As this quote illustrates, the 2018 thematic year initiated by the European Union (EU), resonates with the longer running practice of EU institutions to refer to "culture" and narratives of "shared values and traditions", as one way to promote the idea of

"Europe" and to strengthen an " imagined-community in the making" (Shore, 2000; Sassatelli, 2002). To conceptualise Europe — as Europeanisation studies do — not as a given entity but as something "in the making", opens up insightful analytical venture points. It invites one to look into the black box of "Europe" and to describe in detail the multiple ways in which Europe is being made, transformed, debated over, and challenged. This process-oriented approach in researching "Europe" draws our attention to mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion marked by power dynamics and practices of remembering the past and imagining the future. This temporal dimension of creating an imagined shared past, and anticipating a collective future, is clearly operative in the aforementioned slogan of the EU "Our heritage: where the past meets the future" .

The research perspective of Europeanisation studies further encourages one to consider the current socio-political setting in which debates about Europe's past, present and future take place. It has been argued that the ways in which Europe's past and future are being narrated is intimately linked to the current moment (Hansen, 2002). By re-reading the above mentioned quote of the EYCH webpage in light of the political setting of 2018, one might wonder who is being addressed by the re-iteration of the "we" and "our" ? Who is being excluded and who is included in this imagined collective? Who is taking part in the sharing of past and envisioning of Europe's future? In the German context one might be inclined to read this EYCH-theme in light of the 2018-post-election moment, equally marked by the mobilisation of collective "we-s" and the drawing of clear-cut boundaries of belonging and not-belong to a German imagined community. The electoral campaign of 2018 in Germany, like in many national elections across Europe in the recent past, was starkly marked by narratives of national belonging in the face of challenges framed as "mass-migration". A statement by the newly elected minister of interior Horst Seehofer can be seen as symbolic for these strategic mobilisations of collective sentiments. In a public statement shortly after the elections, Seehofer claimed that "Islam does not belong to Germany … [but Muslims do?]". Though Seehofer's proclamation triggered heated debates across Germany, it presents by no means a novelty but rather fits smoothly into a longer running practice of a strategic use of the "Muslim Question" (Norton, 2013, Amir-Moazami, 2009). Ever since the German Ministry of Interior, under Wolfgang Schäuble, launched the German Islam Conference in 2006, the question of Islam and Muslims was closely linked to ministerial affairs of the Interior (Schiffauer, 2018). Every new minister in office since 2006, eventually made a statement on the nature of "the" collective German identity and to whether or not Islam and Muslims form part of this called-up-on German past, present and future. In this Germany surely is no exception, across Europe the matter of Islam and the increasingly visible presence of Muslim communities trigger symbolically charged debates. Iconic in this context is the figure of the veiled Muslim women: often positioned center-stage in these discussions.

In recent years, much has been written with regard to Islam, Europe and practices of "Othering", starting from the early and frequently cited intervention of Edward Said's Orientalism (Said, 1995). Interestingly enough though, fairly few of the post-Saidian reflections do pay close attention to the long-running genealogy of the "Muslim Question" and its relationship to the European project with its discourses of modernity and Enlightenment. Here the research perspective of critical Europeanisation Studies might offer some helpful additional analytical avenues.

Critical Europeanisation Studies (CES) builds on Europeanisation Studies, as well as post- and decolonial theory and combines important insights from these different theoretical traditions. At the heart of CES lies an inversion of the gaze when looking at Europe in at least two ways: From perceived center to the so called margins, and from marked foreground to unmarked background of the European picture. In doing so, it acknowledges those marked as "Other" and often conceptualised as being "outside" of Europe, as integral and important agents in processes of making Europe, of narrating other Europes, and of envisioning different futures. One example for this would be to consider the agency of refugees in challenging – while at the same time being subjected to – border regimes. CES inspired research might ask what kind of technologies of "Europe" can be observed in these struggles of refugees and what they tell one about the project of Europe as a whole?

As recent debates have shown, the figure of "the refugee" frequently merges with images of "the Muslim" debated across Europe long before the 2015 "long summer of migration". In this process the category of "the refugee" is collapsed into notions of "the Muslim", making every Muslim in Europe an eternal refugee, as well as islamising and homogenising people coming from various geographic regions and religious backgrounds.

With regard to Islam and Europe and more specifically practices of heritage-making, one might therefore ask:

What can we learn about "Europe's" past, and practices of remembering this past, by looking at it via the analytical window of "Islam"?

What kinds of heritage is being classified as "Islamic"?

What counts as "European" ?

What function and effects do systems of classification have within the heritage sector?

By using parentheses when referring to Islamic heritage in Europe, the organisers did question the term, and tried to draw attention to epistemological presumptions frequently present in debates on Islamic heritage. To what extend this invitation of the organisers to re-think the use of certain categories and terms, was part of the discussions during the World Café, will be adressed in in the final section of the report.

A FORMAT TO ESTABLISH COMMON GROUNDS: THE WORLD CAFÉ

Conference formats such as lectures, or panel discussions are useful to put the spotlight on specific themes, arguments, or ideas. Such formats usually give voice only to a restricted number of authorised speakers do provide only limited opportunities for participants to ask questions or to engage collectively with issues raised in a more nuanced manner.

Escobar (2011:12–13) has pointed to some of the challenges that can be connected to such models and their implicit assumption of knowledge "transmission". He argues that these may promote exchanges of monologues full of pre-packed arguments or

oversimplifications, posturing, the use of specialized jargon as an instrument of power, and the silencing of critical voices from the margins of a (scientific) community. The reasons for people not to actively engage in such discussions are manifold, and may include personal characteristics, language abilities, or power dynamics between participants.

An alternative mode of exchange would be presented by the *On common grounds*-format of communication enabled by the world café setting. During world cafés, participants move between a series of tables where they are welcomed by table hosts and engage in conversations, responding to specific themes, concepts or questions chosen and problematised by the group of table hosts. It is an explorative format, considered to facilitate open discussion between participants and link ideas within a larger group in order to trigger the collective intelligence assembled in the room and thus generate new ideas.

This approach perceives communication as a relational process that integrates different communicative capacities of participants, and facilitates dialogue. Here, "dialogue" is meant as a form of communication which is geared towards relationship-building and a way of interpersonal communication that is open-ended, free flowing, mutually responsive (Escobar 2011:22), even if opposing opinions are debated.

The *Common Grounds World Café* took place on May 4-5 2018 in the spaces of CARMAH, in Berlin-Mitte. Themes for individual tables had been chosen to allow debate on practices that have been identified as crucial to allow for museums to become "contact zones" (Clifford 1997). These five themes were: "creating multivocality", "transcending boundaries", "acknowledging difference and diversity", "dealing with conflict", and "negotiating heritage". The table host were previously selected by the organisers and consisted of a group of research-oriented academics and practice-oriented museum-practitioners. In addition to these different professional backgrounds, geographic diversity was reflected in the selected group by choosing hosts based and trained in the MENA region as well as Europe. Hosts were instructed to prepare for the discussion at their tables and stimulate debate by e.g. raising provocative questions, or by encouraging discussants to look at the raised topics from a different, sometimes unexpected perspective.

Overall, 40 people joint the event. Among participants were an international group of museum professionals, researchers, activists, and artists. As the world café was organised in collaboration with SAWA summer school – a joint endeavour of HTW and Sharjah Museums Department which brings together practitioners from Germany and the MENA region – 25 people were able to contribute perspectives from outside "Europe".

Interviews with table hosts from prior world cafés, e.g. the TOPOI *Archaeopub* in 2015, or the CARMAH *Otherwise World Café* in 2017 had revealed that many table hosts, especially if being asked to facilitate discussions on complex themes, feel that more time is needed to introduce themselves and their perspectives before initiating a dialogue on more specific questions. Learning from these previous experiences, the *Common Grounds World Café* provided space for such an introduction by hosts. After a brief introduction to the overall theme and aims of the event during the first day, followed by a dinner during which table hosts did also have the opportunity to get to know each other. The second day began with a brief welcome note and an introduction to the format. People were invited to join four rounds of 45 min discussions, followed by a two hours lunch break during which table hosts were putting together a summary of discussions which they presented to the forum in the afternoon.

With regard to the spatial setup of the world café, five tables were arranged in the conference room of CARMAH, each equipped with eight seats, a paper table cloth, a stand with the table's theme and the name of its hosts written on it, sticky notes, moderation cards and thick pens, so that people sitting on opposite sites would be able to read each other's notes. All facilitators had been instructed by organizers to ask participants to write down their comments, thoughts and ideas either on the table, or on the material provided. On one side of the room, refreshments were provided, which people were free to take while the world café was ongoing. After a brief welcome note from CARMAH's director, Sharon Macdonald, the beginning of the world café was announced by the moderator, Christine Gerbich. The moderator had introduced some of the rules to facilitators that are important for dialogic communication, such as addressing all participants, avoiding "peacocking", and reminding people to active listening. Many people had not yet met and it took a few minutes to get familiar with each other. After each 45 minute session, people chose where to move next, but where asked not to move en groupe.

Overall, the atmosphere on the tables was very friendly, and the discussions on the table filled the room with the café-like atmosphere where a world café owns its name from. Discussions on the individual tables were lively, and engaging, participants felt that 45 min had gone by quickly, that they had "just gotten into it". While some felt "being rushed" by the moderator, others experienced the time limit as useful, as it allowed them to get initial ideas about several topics, and to engage with a large number of participants. For future world café formats, especially when assembling people from diverse cultural and regional backgrounds, it might be worth to complement a world café format through other methods which allow people to become familiar with the diversity of cultural and professional perspectives that they may encounter and to engage into more detailed discussions afterwards. In the second event organized at part of the "Common Grounds" project, this was acknowledged, for example, by employing a first introductory "speed dating" round during which people introduced each other on a personal and a professional level, or group discussions following the world café format (see report on the On Common Grounds Workshop "Researching Public Engagements on Museums and Heritage Sites").

OUTCOMES OF DISCUSSIONS: VOICES FROM TABLE HOSTS

In the following section, the results of the tables as perceived by hosts are presented. These reflect the different styles, and ways of approaching the respective topics, and, moreover, the variety of perspectives, and issues addressed.

Creating Multivocality
- **hosted by Aisha Deemaz from Sharjah Museums and Miriam Kühn, Museum for Islamic Art, State Museums of Berlin, Prussian Heritage**

"The discussions on this table revolved around the role of the museum in critically engaging diverse audiences in the creation of a "common" yet "multivocal" perspective on Islamic heritage. In order to do so, we wanted to discuss examples of how Islamic history and heritage have been presented and worked on in museums. How can these representations be challenged in ways that invite visitors to critically engage in discussions around the topics presented in these examples? Departing from Rodney Harrison's suggestion to understand heritage not as stable, but as the result of negotiation processes through which values are attached to material

heritage, we invited people to discuss the divisions and categorizations that are being produced through the displays and what understandings of heritage (as completely separated, part of a wider sphere, parts of wider networks) they promote.

As a result, each group discussed multivocality differently. However, a common perception of all groups was that the overall aim of multivocality is to reach a diverse audience and that multivocality equals diversity. Multivocality was perceived as a means to bring people to develop their own thoughts and ideas. As a consequence the authoritative voice of the curator is not wanted any more or at least the authorship should be made clear and other voices added.

Although the discussion on our table rather focused on theoretical aspects of multivocality, examples from different practitioners in the museum field added interesting insights into practice.

From a personal point of view we profited a lot from the discussion in one group, who rather focused on the immediate visitors' experience in the exhibition. Participants were arguing against the idea of teaching art- or cultural history and for making the objects/exhibition relevant to the audience by relating to the visitors' contemporary social or personal issues. As one of the most promising ways to engage the audience was referred to guided tours/direct personal contact with people telling their personal stories regarding the exhibited objects. This perspective was challenged in another group, who was focusing on the cultural and historic dimension of objects. Their point of access to the audience today was to tell stories of connection and interrelations between different times and regions.

Practical restrictions of multivocality were seen in the limitation of the collections and that the variety of society is not represented in most of the collections. On a practical and very basic level, multivocality should be at least expressed in labels in different languages, which is not always the case.

For all participants it was common ground that multivocality is wanted in museums. However, on the level of implementation it was noted that there might be political circumstances or situations, where this might be difficult. A problem which was raised in most of the groups was how to deal with voices which we do not want to hear in a museum. A solution for this core issue could unfortunately not be found.

The approach to create multivocality was one of the main differences between the sessions: one group of participants wanted to stimulate the audience to develop own ideas and thoughts and thus create multivocality. Others preferred to create multivocality by displaying different voices and teach certain contents."

Acknowledging Difference and Diversity

- **hosted by Bahareh Sharifi and Lisa Scheibner from Diversity. Arts. Culture – Berliner Büro für Diversitätsentwicklung (DAC)**

"Museums should be places accessible for everyone, to engage and discuss culture, history and social issues. To ensure this it is crucial not only to work towards having a diverse audience, but also to represent different perspectives on all levels in the institution, the curatorial program and the permanent collection. However, until now

museums have been spaces of negotiation only for a small number of people, while most people do not have access or are not being addressed by the respective programs. The reason for the lack of diversity in the audiences but also within in the institutions are indicative of various kinds of systemic discrimination on an institutional level. As Diversity Arts Culture, the Berlin project office for diversity development, our aim is to provide a structural analysis of institutional barriers in the cultural field in Berlin and to develop appropriate measures to foster a better access for marginalized groups of artists and cultural practitioners. In our work with DAC we work with the German law of Equal Treatment (German: Allgemeines Gleichbehandlungsgesetz, AGG) that aims to prevent or to eliminate discrimination on grounds of race, sex, religion, disability, age or sexual identity. We also add the dimension of class, as it is an important indicator for social (im-) mobility and access specifically in the context of the arts section.

For this event we presented a first analysis that could be helpful in understanding the underlying work culture. We revealed how and why certain groups of people have better access and therefore larger contribution to the cultural field than others. The presentation explored how hierarchical structures that sustain hegemonic power shape institutions even in individual work arrangements. For instance through an unsaid and constant sense of urgency, lack of transparency about how decisions are made, paternalism, defensiveness or power hoarding. During the table discussions we started with a survey of the respective contexts participants are working in: Which areas of discrimination are they already tackling in their work? Which dimensions of discrimination are being addressed in their institutions, which are not? What would they actually like to change about the situation? In a collective brainstorming-process we subsequently collected ideas how these changes could be brought about in the respective contexts.

Starting point

Even though the participants come from regions that have a different judicial legislation, we used as a starting point the six dimensions of the German law of Equal Treatment plus the dimension of class and the working areas of cultural institutions as a Matrix. The initial questions were then "What skills and knowledge are we/I missing in our team/work?" followed by "How and where could I/ we find them and how could I/ we include them (in our work)?"

Outcome

As an outcome we identified three levels that can help to establish a culture of (critical, sustainable and inclusive) change:

Level 1: What can **I** change?

- Acknowledge your own resources: think not only in terms of financial resources but also time, infrastructure, lobby, support
- Hiring for potential: what skills do you value and why? How do you ensure the application process is accessible and that certain groups or people are not intimidated from applying? (Where do you place your job ads? What kind of language do you use in the job ads? Do you consider variety in someone's experience an asset or hindrance? When do networking opportunities occur, how can this be made more accessible?)

- *Change the canon: represent various perspectives within your program so different communities feel concerned/addressed*
- *Do research: Look out for best practice. Use it as inspiration for your own work and as a solid argument to start a dialogue about changes within your institution/ your team*
- *Ask for compulsory trainings (in Germany for instance: AGG-training)*
- *Make your building, website, etc. (more) accessible (Wheelchair-ramps and accessible bathrooms, videos with surtitles and in sign language, make website accessible for screen-readers etc.. Evaluate with experts of different abilities)*
- *Think about sustainability: how can knowledge and strategies from certain projects become part of the continuous work? Plan this already before you start a (new) project, not at the end*
- *Maintain contact to different communities*

*Level 2: What can **we** change (as a team)?*

- *Find allies within and outside your institutions*
- *Define a common term of discrimination, and strategies to prevent it*
- *Create a supporting community within your institution*
- *There is not one right way for change, sometimes it can be useful to create co-existing parallel strategies*
- *Try to implement/establish an equality office*
- *Change administration & job requirements to broaden the access to your institution*

*Level 3: With whom **outside your institution/team** can you work towards change?*

- *Do not expect that one individual can represent a whole community => work with groups, self-organisations, NGOs, etc.*
- *What can you offer communities? Make sure that what is offered is what they need or want (ask before!)*
- *Different groups have different needs, inform yourself by talking to people, research, reaching out*
- *Think about power relations (who makes decisions about what and whom?) Where could they be more permeable, so decisions are made in the best interest of everyone? (Who gets credit? Who receives funding, who does not?)"*

Negotiating Heritage

- **Hosted by Nasser Al-Damarki from Sharjah Archaeological Museum**

"My contribution to the World Café was a series of four sessions under the title, 'Negotiating Heritage", which was designed to focus on the archaeological field. In particular, I wanted to highlight issues in critical heritage and archaeology studies and discuss practices and conflicts generated by the inclusion of multiple points of view from the participants. My overall intention was to discuss how current university students in the archaeology field in the Arab world are not exposed to other aspects of museum work, such as curatorial studies which I believe are fundamental to ensuring that museum collections are accessible to their public. Students need a more holistic approach to the field to ensure that they have a broader outlook and understanding of interpreting material to audiences.

The world café consisted of four discussion sessions each lasting forty-five minutes and ending with a final presentation of team outcomes. Before the dialogue began, participants were asked to give a brief introduction of themselves to clarify everyone's diverse backgrounds including those from different nationalities and professions.

As the facilitator, to start the discussion, I posed six key questions (which were written on large sheets of paper) to stimulate the discussion and they included the following:

- How are ethics, laws and procedures similar and/or different from archaeologists in the East and West? What approaches might you advise to address them?

- When archaeological monuments and artifacts are being prepared to later be shipped to museums, how can we protect them from the looters?

- How have archaeological ethics changed and why?

- What further changes do you anticipate in the coming decades?

- Should archaeologists focus on sites or objects, or both? Should archaeologists minimize their concentration on the excavation of sites and focus more on curation?

- How have other skills and professions, such as scientists, influenced the practice of archaeology? Do you think universities should require classes in areas of curation, collections, and documentation management for archaeologists? Should archaeology graduate students be required to take other museums related courses before receiving a degree? Why or why not?

We discussed a number of ideas and topics which included; rescue archaeology of World War II and postwar reconstruction, research, engaging non archaeologists, excavation site management, artefact interpretation, land ownership and laws, education and advocacy, deaccessioning objects, community involvement, media etc.

I would like to describe one particular instance in the discussion which I found very interesting and eye opening. A participant from Jerusalem, Palestine described the unbelievably sensitive and complex current situation in disputed land in Israel/Palestine. She explained how, when artifacts are found by Palestinian land owners, they are required by law to inform and hand over artefacts to the Israeli government and in turn these artefacts become the property of the State of Israel and not Palestine (due to the ongoing conflict) thereby resulting in a very difficult reality for the Palestinian people that lose their claim to cultural material and in effect it changes the cultural identity narrative of the country."

Dealing with conflict

‑ **Hosted by Constance Wyndham, Institute of Archaeology, University College London**

"As table host, I invited participants to address the idea of conflict as it occurs between individuals and groups in relation to 'Islamic' heritage. The key questions that led our discussions throughout the four sessions were: how have conflicts over the display and interpretation of 'Islamic' objects or heritage sites arisen, and how are they addressed? How can conflicts over 'Islamic' heritage act as catalysts for change? What role do museums or heritage sites have to play in processes of searching for a 'common ground' between individuals and groups?

Who chooses heritage?

Here I will outline two focuses of our discussions in which I was particularly interested. The first, which is only tangentially about conflict, focused on the representation of Muslim women in museums in the Gulf and the role of museums and foreign experts in asserting negative stereotypes about Muslims. One participant discussed a country in the Gulf region which has focused significant funds on building a museum sector and imported foreign heritage consultants to design and curate exhibitions. We talked about the role of these international heritage consultants and their attached forms of expertise in asserting negative stereotypes of Muslim women through exhibitions which focus on themes such as the veil and the domestic lives of women in the Gulf. This brought to mind Tony Bennett's ideas around the 'exhibitionary complex' and the role of museums and exhibitions in disciplinary practices that assert certain forms of knowledge and give them power (1988). In the subsequent discussion about how to counteract these stereotypes, one participant highlighted the active role of a young generation of activists in the Gulf who are confidently addressing these labels applied to Muslim women via social media and are taking inspiration from movements such as Black Lives Matter in the US. This led on to a discussion, in a different session, about how museums can address stereotypes around Muslims and be forums for debate on these issues of representation. Someone suggested that museums can never be a forum for truly democratic debate for wider societal problems due to the inherent power asymmetries of their collecting practices (often the result of colonialism) and the fact that, by and large, the majority of museum audiences tend to be the educated elite. Someone called out "Shut down museums!", and laughed. At the time, we discussed what a truly democratic space for exploring heritage might look like, where all groups are on equal standing, and we had suggestions of communal living projects and even allotments, from the group. Only later did I think of a recent example of a museum acting as a forum for democratic debate: the recent calls to Decolonize Brooklyn Museum by protesters angry at the appointment of a white *woman as curator of African Art and the museum's role in the gentrification of local neighbourhoods. Through this protest and the debates that ensued in the media, we see how the Brooklyn Museum became a forum for addressing issues of representation and local economic problems through public protest and debate. In this case, while perhaps negative for the museum, we also see the positive role for conflict between the museum and these community groups in acting as a catalyst for wider debates about representation in American society.*

Categories and 'contact zones'

The second discussion that I will outline here focused on categories, or boundaries, established by processes of classification, and this morphed into how museums well meaning attempts to redress their histories of colonialism can be ill judged. As participants related their experiences of conflict in museum or heritage settings in reference to Islamic heritage, much of the discussions seemed to focus on the labels that are ascribed to cultural objects in museum settings such as 'art', 'archaeology', 'ethnographic', 'religion' or 'lived heritage'. We discussed the role of these labels in either inspiring or deflecting forms of conflict. One group talked about how modes of display of Islamic collections often have an Orientalist focus and celebrate aesthetic or artistic values of objects from Muslim contexts without exploring their function, or the range of theological or 'lived' meanings they inhabit. This choice to display something as 'Islamic art' also suppresses the history of collecting practices of European museums and the conflicts or power imbalances inherent in colonial collecting practices.

Subsequently, the conversation moved to the role of museums in addressing these difficult histories of colonialism. In recent years, the museum has been promoted as a 'contact zone', a productive site of encounter between museums and their source communities as a way to address these colonial collecting practices (Clifford 1997). However, one participant argued that although this approach is well intentioned, these initiatives by museums to act as spaces of engagement between cultures can also be misjudged. Someone noted that Islamic collections are not yet a focus of this approach which has tended to focus on African or Australian/Aboriginal museum collections. We discussed a case example of one such problematic 'contact zone' approach, an exhibition currently showing at an art museum in Berlin which displayed objects from the museum's African collection alongside objects of European sculpture, inviting the audience to view the objects through a different lens and to compare them as art objects. However, as someone pointed out, the category of 'art' which invites audiences to consider these objects aesthetic and artistic qualities, we suppress some of the violence and conflicts that are integral to the objects biography, such as how this collection arrived in Germany and the history of European colonialism. Someone else commented that by asserting categories such as 'African' and 'European', or 'Islamic', we create boundaries which obscure long histories of cultural interaction. Another participant questioned the zeitgeist of these exhibitions that purport to address the power inequalities inherent in museum collecting practices but which bear little relevance to a particular museum's history or collection. It was interesting to discuss how a well-intentioned exhibition, no doubt conceived in the spirit of 'museum as contact zone' between cultures, can get it wrong and end up asserting some of the very stereotypes and boundaries it means to address.

I was keen to not merely do an inventory of participants' negative experiences about the stereotypes that exist about the relationship between Islam and heritage and the conflicts over certain objects. However, there was a tendency to discuss the situation of Islamic heritage and conflict as it stands rather than move into more future oriented discussions. In order to focus debates more towards the future, next time I might reserve certain round table sessions throughout the day to explore a particular scenario as a group, such as designing a project or discussing a fictionalised exhibition, while leaving others sessions purely for questions and debate.

Transcending Boundaries: Shifting the Gaze

- **Hosted by Adela Taleb, Institute for European Ethnology, Humboldt Universität zu Berlin**

"The table I hosted was given the theme "transcending boundaries". When contemplating on the thematic framing set by the organisers, I decided to add „shifting the gaze" to the table theme in order to encourage further inquiry. One of the aims I pursued was to scrutinise the term "boundary", to investigate the mechanisms of boundary-drawing and the function boundaries play in different socio-political settings. More specifically I wanted to link the idea of "boundary" to the question of "Islam in Europe" thus speaking to the overall theme of the event: "Searching for Common Grounds — Rethinking (Islamic) Heritage in Europe".

My assumption was that a change in perspective, a shift of gaze, when thinking about the topic of "Islamic" heritage in Europe is crucial in order to transcend boundaries drawn between imaginaries of "Europe" and "Islam" two terms frequently conceptualised as separate, clear-cut entities in opposition to one another. With a group of discussants composed of professionals working in the museum and heritage sector in Europe but also outside of Europe (in regions with a Muslim majority population) I expected to encounter different ways of looking at "Europe" and "Islam". I further assumed that the kind of boundaries they encounter in their lives might differ given the different socio-political settings they and their work are embedded in.

The world café, with its dynamic and discussion-based format seemed a very good tool for stimulating such a change of perspective, bringing into conversation different points of view and allowing for the sharing of experiences. As a table host I perceived it my task to mainly function as a facilitator of discussions, to stimulate debate by intersecting questions and making sure that everybody is able to participate in the exchange.

Some of the questions I prepared beforehand in order to kick-off the debates at my table were:

- *What kind of boundaries do you encounter in your work? How do they materialise?*
- *What are ways of transcending them? What methods, techniques and materials can be used to transcend boundaries ?*
- *"Islamic" heritage: what do we mean by "Islamic"? How do you address the notion of "Islamic" heritage in your work? Does it occur?*
- *What does the term "Europe" mean to you?*

The internalised "western" gaze

I started my rounds of discussion by showing some of the work of the Iranian born artist Shirin Neshat who has gained considerable attention in the western art scene and has been based in the US for the past 40 years. Neshat is an artist well known for vividly playing the visual register of boundary-drawing, often arranging her

photography in stark black and white contrast and addressing questions of gender segregation in a visual language of dichotomy. She also can be seen (as I have argued elsewhere) as someone that engages in a mode of self-orientalisation, by tapping into the visual archive of depictions of the „the oriental woman" questioning but at the same time reproducing stereotypes of submission, militancy and sensuality of the gendered oriental subject.

Welcoming each of the four groups at my table with these visual examples of boundary drawing in Neshat's work, proofed very fruitful for stimulating debate. Admittedly, the perception of Neshat's work met me by surprise. While I expected critical voices with regard to the orientalising way Neshat portrays the veiled female body, particularly by discussants familiar with practices of veiling, it was precisely those coming from majority-Muslim contexts that seemed especially enthusiastic about Neshat's work. Due to time constraints there was no possibility to further inquire into were this fascination stems from and what underlying mechanisms might motivate it, but I would like to link this response to Neshat's art to another observation I made through the four rounds of discussion. Non-European participants seemed acutely aware of so call "western", or "European standards" within the museum sector (for example as regards the visual arrangement of an exhibition space) and proudly announced that they "met these international standards" in their museums. I would argue that a self-orientalising, internalised western gaze amongst some of the non-European participants features in both instances: in the reaction to Neshat's work, as well as their eagerness to meet international standards. This seems to be worth further inquiry, since it refers to the broader question of process of self-construction and how these happen in a context marked by entangled histories and power dynamics. In other words, one might ask: To what extent is it possible for non-European museum professionals to avoid an internalisation of a western gaze with regard to their "Islamic heritage" . Is the classification of "Islamic" heritage not in itself already an epistemic presupposition linked to an orientalist genealogy?

Transcending

Negotiating and finding ways to overcome boundaries they might encounter in their work was illustrated for example by the way some of the museum professionals coming from the MENA region dealt with addressing tabooed topics such as sexuality and nudity in the public sphere of the museum. Here two strategies were elaborated on. One is to frame sexuality in the context of the natural sciences (example from Palestine). This "scientification" of sexuality allows them to be more visually explicit in the kind of objects that can be put on display without risking disrespecting sensibilities of museum visitors. The other strategy was to restrict the display of nudity to objects that are detached from the current lived reality of visitors, because they stem from a long gone past (example from Egypt). This "historisation" of objects that displays nudity or addresses sexuality by creating distance to the now, displaying and framing objects in a way that clearly restricts them to the "ancient", "pre-Islamic" times. These two tools of strategic framing, either by scientificising (biologising) or historising, allowed them to deal with boundaries, to overcome them while keeping with social codes and respecting sensibilities.

The positive effects of boundaries

Another insightful moment during the discussions was when some participants referred to the positive effects of boundaries, highlighting the function boundaries can have providing protection and creating safe spaces. So speaking from a normative standpoint: boundaries should not always be transcended or overcome. In hostile environments and contexts marked by violence or racism safe-spaces, created by boundaries that shield from harm and aggression were seen as valuable. So can, or should museums provide these safe spaces? If museums address topics of racism and exclusion, how can they do this in a sensitive way? In a context of growing anti-Muslim hatred and racism, the question might be relevant of how museums in Europe should deal with Islam in their exhibitions. In this context an altered quote of Toni Morrison was stated: " The function, the very serious function of [anti-Muslim] racism is distraction. It keeps you from doing your work. It keeps you explaining on and on again, your reason for being". (Toni Morrison)"

EVALUATION

Participants' reflections on the format

To collect feedback, participants and table hosts were asked in a final session to comment on their experiences with the World Café. This feedback was, overall, very positive.

Participants commented that they wished to "have more of such discussions", or "forums", that it was "a privilege" to have "such discussions between researchers and practitioners", and that they could not "think of any other group like this in the whole world where people come together and discuss these things". One participant mentioned that she was keen to plan a similar workshop as she considered this a completely new approach of professional exchange.

A majority mentioned to have collected many different experiences and insights into professional fields unfamiliar to them, and the questions and issues related to these. A participant from Berlin said that the forum provided an opportunity for her to reflect on her own work and contextualize this from a broader perspective, another mentioned that the world café "pushed my boundaries". Some were surprised to discover many similarities with regard to professional practices, topics, and concerns despite their museums being located in different regions of the world.

In addition to this, table hosts summarized their experiences with the format a few days after the world café. These reflections provide useful hints that may inform future world café organizers.

Table hosts' reflections on the format

Aisha Deemaz from Sharjah Museums

As I have never attended a world café before, I was very curious. The main challenge for me as a table host was how to create an atmosphere, in which every participant could contribute equally her/his perspective and experience to the discussion. On a broader level I was wondering how the results of the quite diverse table topics could successfully be reunited at the end. The event excelled all my expectations. I profited a lot from the discussions on and beside the tables.

However, from my experience as table host I would suggest to skip or shorten the introductory part, we had on Friday evening. Somehow, the break between the presentations on the evening and the interactive format in the morning was a bit to abrupt. Furthermore this exposed the table hosts as special, which I personally do not perceive as essential for the discussion and output of the world café. I would have preferred a general get to together and get to know of all participants, which would have also been facilitated by name badges for everyone.

At the end, the participatory aspect was a bit minimized as the table hosts presented the "results" of the tables and most of the participants were just tired. A table-transcending discussion embedding the different topics into one whole concept was somehow missing. Therefore I would suggest giving the final discussion more space and time.

However, these suggestions do not minimize the format world café, which I got to know now as a very effective tool to give every participant a voice.

I personally tried to act as a facilitator and co-discussant for the different participants. As facilitators we first presented the group very shortly the topic of our table to open up the discussion. Then, during the discussions we linked the ongoing discussion with previous ones. Our aim was to stimulate the discussion and develop comprehensive ideas. This became easier during the course of the world café as certain topics emerged again and again. Thus I hope, we have succeeded in creating a very cooperative and group-transcending atmosphere. As a co-discussant, I was very surprised about and enjoyed a lot the different focuses of discussion within each group."

Nasser Al-Damarki, Sharjah Archaeological Museum

"The discussions in each session where lively, thought-provoking and at times caused disagreements and heated debate. The discussion points generated an unexpected connection with participants from different backgrounds including academics, students and museums professionals. (...) In conclusion, I really enjoyed my experience of the World Café. The diversity of about participants was very useful to ensure a discussion that prompted debates and in-depth analysis of ideas and themes. I found the participants to be very knowledgeable and willing to learn and listen to others. I particularly enjoyed the personal stories and experiences shared with the group. Finally I was surprised to learn so much from the participants themselves for instance, learning more about the future of technology and its effects on the field of archaeology. It was also very interesting to understand that the field

is continually evolving and has much promise for innovation in ways of working, mindset and tools."

Constance Wyndham, Institute of Archaeology, University College London

"I had previously attended a world café as a participant, rather than a table host, and was therefore familiar with this excellent format that inspires in depth discussions between small groups of participants focused around a series of themes or questions. I am an academic based at the Institute of Archaeology, University College London, where we often talk about including a range of perspectives on the values and meanings of the past, but the opportunity to share perspectives with colleagues working in museums, archaeology and heritage from the Gulf and Middle East is rare. So, it was an exciting prospect to have a whole day to hear from such a range of voices on the subject of 'Islamic' heritage.

As the only table host at my table, I found it a challenge to both contribute to the discussions and to take notes at the same time, and a co-host may have made this easier. We spoke in English which was the majority of participants' second or third language. The translation of some key terms such as 'heritage' and even a discussion around words we use to describe the past in different languages could have been instructive. The session length of 40 minutes worked well as it gave time for facilitating in depth debate both considering the range of expertise and experience in the room and the fact that English was not a first language for the majority of participants. The presentations on the first day also worked well as a means of freeing up more time to discuss at the tables the following day.

The world café format is a refreshing means of bringing together such a range of voices. However, it can be difficult to bridge the gap between an academic standpoint on the issues around Islamic heritage and the perspectives of those curators and conservators working in museums and at heritage sites. One means of keeping the debates focused was to discuss around case examples of exhibitions or scenarios involving Islamic heritage, rather than more complex ideas such as discourses of 'Islamic heritage'. Throughout the day I could hear fascinating snippets of conversations at the other tables and wished there could have been a chance for table hosts to join in these other debates around the room!"

Adela Taleb, Institute for European Ethnology, Humboldt Universität zu Berlin

"For me hosting a table was a very inspiring but equally challenging task. In terms of logistics I see it as crucial to always have two table hosts per table since one person might be overburdened by moderating the debate and at the same time making sure enough notes are taken (or taking notes oneself).

I also clearly saw that visuality facilitates debate. So starting the rounds by showing some of Neshat's artwork helped, but of course also equally influenced the debate by setting the scene in a certain way."

CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS AND OUTLOOK

While the above statements and an intensive reflection in the aftermath of the event bear witness to rich and multi-layerd discussions and are a sign for the success of the format itself, some questions remain. One major point of reflection concerns the overall make-up of the group of participants and the challenge of creating dialogue between people with different professional backgrounds. In addition to the diversity of professional backgrounds, which demands a particular effort to "translate" between different sets of knowledge, the thematic frame of the event bore the potential for heated exchange. The meeting of opposing points of view, if moderated in an appropriate way, can generate new insights, which was one of the aims of this event. However, reflecting on the atmosphere of the world café, the authors of this report discussed whether the "contact zone" - spaces of negotiation as suggested by Pratt (1991) and Clifford 1997) had turned into a "comfort zone", and whether it might be more fruitful to ask facilitators for more controversial statements to trigger discussion, so to create an "agonistic conflict zone" (Sternfeld 2009).

In the following section these thoughts shall be further elaborated and are combined with an outlook on themes and challenges worthy of in-depth further investigation with regard to content and organisation of future world café formats.

The challenge of bridging theory and practice

Overall, the received feedback shows that people felt inspired by content and format, and that they had been able to bridge gaps with regard to their own theoretical or practical knowledge. Many of them also felt that this forum of exchange, rather unexpectedly, showed that regardless of the different settings they operate in within the museum landscape, they did share common visions on what steps would have to be taken to equip the sector for the future. However, while reflecting on the themes discussed during the world café, the question arose whether and how to make sure that theoretical and practical knowledge is synchronized.

To value different kinds of knowledge, three tables - "Creating Multivocalities", "Acknowledging Difference and Diversity", and "Negotiating Heritage" – provided perspectives from museum professionals as these demands had already received attention in many museums. A reflection on the very challenges that may occur if these are turned into practice was thought to provide useful insights. "Dealing with Conflict", and "Transcending Boundaries" on the other hand were hosted by researchers to allow for a more theoretical reflection and an analytic discussion.

Reflecting on the discussions during the workshop, authors shared moments of ambiguity. One of these arose from the ways in which multivocality was addressed during the final discussion. This is a crucial issue, especially with regard to the interpretation of the arts and cultures of Islamicate countries in times of increasing anti-Muslim stereotypes. This discussion would have benefited from references to past debates in museum studies, by thinkers such as Cheryl Meszaros and her critical perspective on the "evil whatever interpretation" which urges museums to take over responsibility in making visible the "silent canons and busy ghosts of the past" (Meszaros 2006:15), that shape our opinions, and to rigorously put them into question. This short example illustrates the need to bring these different sets of knowledge (academic and practical) into a fruitful exchange. At the same time, one of the authors, who chaired the table on "Transcending Boundaries" met limitations

when it came to account for the on the ground rationalities of curating that often times require ad hoc fast reactions that leave little room to maneuver and challenge deep rooted power dynamics. One such instance was describe by one of the participants coming from the curating field in a majority muslim country and working on a joined exhibition with colleagues in Australia. Thus, one of our recommendations for future world cafés would be to have tables co-hosted by practitioners and researchers, in order to be able to complement theoretical and practical knowledge.

Creating dialogue between professionals from different cultural realms

Our second comment is with regard to the creation of dialogue between professionals whose practices of doing heritage has been shaped by similar, yet different traditions. Bhatti's (2016) ethnographic study on the context of Pakistan has revealed the challenges of translating Western museum practices in another context - and brought up questions with regard to the postcolonial. In the following, we are going to give two examples to illustrate our point that during the world café, discourses and canons of knowledge prevalent in the Global North were taken as point of departure to reflect on ways of thinking and doing the Museum.

The first situation happened during the final discussion, after hosts of the "Acknowledging Diversity and Difference" table had presented their results. One participant expressed her gratitude that the theme had been addressed, as this would only rarely be the case in her country of origin. She proudly provided an example from her own practice: a team of museum educators had developed an exercise to raise awareness for the situation of people with visual impairments during which people touched objects blindfolded. In her reply, a Western colleague appreciated the fact that the museum had addressed the issue. However, she criticized this as being "disrespectful", since the exercise would imply that it was possible to "step into the shoes" of people with visual impairments, neglecting the complex experiences of this group. Referring to the "blackfacing" debate in Germany, she pointed to the long-standing discussion on the necessity to provide a more holistic understanding for the situation of those born blind, and the issue of preferring one kind of disability for educational projects over others instead of approaching the issue from an intersectional lens. Her critique was well grounded in a Western discourse of critical diversity studies, and was well justified. At the same time, the comment referred to a Western discourse of ways to deal with with diversity, without acknowledging the specificities of other social and political contexts outside of Europe, where social and cultural diversity might be addressed and dealt with in different ways, e.g. due to different systems of care work, or the lack of resources available. Since the comment was phrased as critique rather than as a question, it appeared - even if involuntary, to devalue the work of non-western colleagues.

On another occasion, an archaeologist from the MENA region pointed to the difficulties of making people aware of the value of archaeological finds as material witnesses of the past and pointed to the significance of oral traditions for "common people". In his presentation, he also pointed to the challenges of translating Western standards to the context he was working in. On the one hand, in the context of the museum boom on the Arabian Peninsula, this raises questions with regard to the ways in which Western traditions of remembrance are being adopted in different contexts. On the other hand, however, his remark may be considered as crucial when considering how the region's heritage is being represented in Western museums, where more emphasis is put on the material side of things than on the myths and

narratives that constitute the memories of people living in the region. Moreover, this example highlights the very entanglements of global museum practices, and raises questions with regard to the demand to standardize how heritage is dealt with (Unesco) in different parts of the world.

Islam? Europe? - The absence of the constant present

Given the prominent position the organisers attributed to the terms "European" and "Islamic" by including them both in the title ("Searching for Common Grounds — Rethinking (Islamic) Heritage in Europe") it seems surprising how little critical engagement was noted with regard to these two symbolically charged categories.

On the first day of the event one of the introductory talks stressed the importance of reading current debates on "European" culture and values – and the place Islam might or might not occupy within these systems of norms – in light of colonial projects of the modern era. Consequently one of the central propositions of the talk was to neither approach "Europe" nor "Islam" as taken for granted categories, but rather to read them as having emerged in their current shape and form as a result of a longer running classificatory project of ordering and hierarchising the world and systems of knowledge.

Interestingly these reflections featured only sporadically during the various rounds of discussion in the world café the following day. Both terms "Islamic" and "Europe" did seem to be constantly present during the event – simmering in the background as points of reference – without being explicitly addressed or problematised. It would have been interesting to further investigate for example why certain objects are framed as "Islamic" and who is involved in this process of framing. Moreover following a more contextual approach it seems crucial to investigate the temporal setting of the performative act of framing. At what times, in which socio-political settings are certain objects framed as "Islamic"?

With the exception of a few occasions, these more complex and nuanced modes of inquiry hardly featured in the debates. If we return to one of the previously posed questions of: what can be learned about "Europe" by looking at it through the analytical window of "Islam"? we might be left with the impression that this window of analysis is somewhat opaque. Not letting us see central aspects of the picture and making it difficult to ask certain questions, or even strategically silencing them. Following authors such as DeGenova or Anidjar this silencing of certain questions is not unheard of. Asking the "European Question" and turning the spotlight of the investigative gaze to the unmarked "background" or "taken for granted" categories seems a worthy endeavor. One way to encouraging such a shift of the gaze might be to start with a different kind of thematic framing. Rather than seeking to look at "Islamic" heritage in Europe, we could inquire into "European" legacies in the heritage sector in the MENA region. Specifically questioning what is being framed as "European" about practices, rationalities and aesthetics in these spaces and tracing the way this kind of knowledge reaches these spaces and travels from there to other places.

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