

1 Introduction

Migrants who came to Europe from, for example, Turkey, Morocco or Pakistan in the 1970s and 1980s were referred to as Turkish, Moroccan or Pakistani immigrants. Today they are often labelled as Muslims. A symbol of this shift is the Rushdie affair in 1989. Different groups of immigrants, who had not previously been considered as having much in common, were suddenly lumped together into a large homogenous group: Muslims. A hitherto vague foreign threat had finally been given a face. The opposite of Europe, of all that was modern and civilised, was Islam. In 1989 it seemed obvious just how different Muslims were. They burned books (or at least a few hundred of them did). Ayatollah Khomeini, who was publicly portrayed as a spokesperson for the entire Muslim world, proclaimed a death sentence for a successful post-modern writer, one of the leading proponents of the notion of fluid and hybrid identities. However, the belief that Islam was the antithesis of modern, secular, European identity was not based solely on the violent reaction of some Muslims to Salman Rushdie's novel *The Satanic Verses*. Nor was it based solely on the fact that Europe had recently received many newcomers with a Muslim cultural background who also identified as Muslims, and practised Islam. Islam has always been a preferred opposite of Europe.

Even if the long history of Islamophobia is relevant, it is also important to note that contemporary Islamophobia has a specific context that distinguishes it from the millennia-old European denigration of Islam. Over the past thirty years the debate around immigrant Muslims in Europe has seen a shift, from a focus on ethnicity and foreignness to a differentiation of immigrant Europeans based on their religious identities (Allievi 2005). This new harsher focus on the religious identities of migrants is the effect of a variety of changes in European sociopolitical material circumstances, and in discourse. It is related to a growing Muslim presence in Europe, just as much as it is related to post-industrial emotional capitalism and neoliberal structural transformations. European social conflicts and migration, as well as armed resistance in the Middle East, South Asia and elsewhere in the 1970s, were regularly framed in socialist language. The major issues included imperialism, capitalism and class. Religion was rarely seen as a contributing factor, and social scientists even regarded it as an old-fashioned phenomenon in decline (Berger 1969). This has since changed. Religion is back on the societal radar (Berger 1999). 'Islam' is a prominent mobilising signifier for Muslims and non-Muslims alike.

The complex societal transformations of the past decades alluded to here have also led to a renewed interest in museums' collections of Islamic cultural artefacts (Junod et al. 2012). It might seem like a trivial subject when compared

to war, terrorism or discrimination. Still, this Element is about Islam in European museums. It might be that museums have an institutional role to play in the service of society and its developments – at least the museums themselves claim that they do.

All over the world there have been major recent investments in new museum galleries for Islamic artefacts, often with financial support from Saudi Arabian donors. For example, the Victoria and Albert Museum in London opened the new Jameel Gallery of Islamic Art in 2006 and the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford opened the Prince Sultan bin Abdul-Aziz Al-Saud Gallery of the Islamic Middle East in 2009. The Louvre in Paris opened galleries of Islamic art in 2012 (with the Alwaleed bin Talal Foundation acting as the principal donor), and the British Museum opened the Albukhary Foundation Gallery of the Islamic World in October 2018 (after the research reported here had been concluded). All of the benefactors just mentioned have Saudi origins, with the exception of Albukhary who is a Malaysian businessman. The Museum of Islamic Art in Berlin is working on a renovation that is planned to be completed around the opening of the refurbished Museum Island in 2025. As we will discuss, all of these museums claim that they can play a role in countering Islamophobia and fostering cultural dialogue and understanding.

Islam in the museum world is found mainly in large Western museums of the more or less universal kind, where it is presented as one of a series of civilisations or world cultures. Most often ‘Islam’ is identified as a medieval phenomenon that serves as a bridge between East-Mediterranean Antiquity and the European Renaissance. This framing of Islamic culture is still visible in the spatial place of exhibitions on Islam in museums such as the British Museum in London, the Ashmolean in Oxford and Berlin’s Museum Island, as well as in the Louvre in Paris, the Illinois Institute of Art in Chicago and the Metropolitan Museum of Art and Brooklyn Museum in New York. Sometimes Islamic culture is presented as a world culture disconnected from historical developments, as in the Museum Fünf Kontinente in Munich, the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts and the Ethnographic Museum in Dahlem, Berlin.

As this list of museums with Islamic galleries demonstrates, the presentation of Islamic materials is most often found in old and large national museum institutions. Even if it is often said that museums since the 1970s ‘have shifted their priorities from the presentation of authentic artefacts and established taxonomies to the production of experiences where design, the originality of the display and performance are central to exhibitions’ (Naguib 2015: 64), this shift is much less visible in these museums often called ‘encyclopedic’ or ‘universal’ (Cuno 2011; Lundén 2016).

We are only a few paragraphs into this text and already we have shifted between the terms Islam, Muslim and Islamic. With the renewed public prominence of religion, ‘Islam’ is on the tip of everyone’s tongue. One point of this Element is to show that people can refer to very different phenomena when they say ‘Islam’. This might give the impression that people, histories, countries and political developments that have very little to do with each other are driven by a monolithic force – Islam. In the seminal three-volume work *The Venture of Islam*, world historian Marshall Hodgson introduced the term Islamicate together with the term Islamdom as terminology that could differentiate religion from society and culture. Hodgson started by making a distinction between Islamic as a term for religious phenomena and Muslim as one for cultural traits common among Muslims. In order to discuss ideas and areas influenced by the Islamic religion, he coined the term Islamdom. Analogous to Christendom, Islamdom concerns the parts of society that deal with culture/civilisation. Hodgson urges us to talk about ‘the society of Islamdom and its Islamicate cultural traditions’. The term Islamicate thus entails culture which has been shaped by Islamdom (countries and societies influenced by Islam). This should leave Islamic as a term for the religious aspects of these cultural traditions; like the term Christian art, so Islamic art would thus only pertain to artistic expressions of religious ideas and functions (Hodgson 1974: 31–58). Many writers within the field of Islamic art acknowledge that this really is a misnomer. If Hodgson’s terminology had gained currency, the label would be Islamicate art instead of Islamic art (Blair & Bloom 2003). The label Islamicate is fitting when we want to include artefacts produced by Christians and Jews living within the lands of Islamdom. But the distinction between culture and religion attempted by the terminology has been shown to be impossible to uphold. Therefore we follow Shahab Ahmed’s suggestion that ‘*all* acts and statements of meaning-making for the Self by Muslims and non-Muslims that are carried out in terms of Islam . . . should properly be understood as *Islamic*’ (Ahmed 2016: 544).

At the same time, it is important to stress that we are not looking to produce a definition of what ‘Islam’ is. We have studied what a handful of museums have chosen to label as Islam. Throughout our text, the term ‘Islam’ could be put in quotation marks. On only a few occasions have we actually searched for artefacts that could be called Islamicate. For practical purposes we try to use the word Islam according to the commonly understood and general meaning employed by the Oxford English Dictionary (OED) as ‘The religious system established through the prophet Muhammad; the Muslim religion; the body of Muslims, the Muslim world’. Even if we were to try to describe how the

individual exhibitions understand Islam, we would also be assuming that most visitors hold the general understanding that Islam is the name of one of our world religions.

But what is a religion, then? Within religious studies there are a number of competing definitions that most often attempt to challenge the perceived Protestant bias which equates religion with an organised and scripture-based belief in God. Many in religious studies hold that a common definition of everything that even the different world religions encompass cannot be found. Others, such as Graham Harvey in his book *Food, Sex and Strangers: Understanding Religion as Everyday Life*, argue that religion has as much to do with the sacrifice of goats as it does with the belief in God (Harvey 2013; Stausberg & Gardiner 2016). The OED states that the most common definition of the term religion is the ‘Belief in or acknowledgement of some superhuman power or powers (esp. a god or gods) which is typically manifested in obedience, reverence, and worship; such a belief as part of a system defining a code of living, esp. as a means of achieving spiritual or material improvement’. Also, when it comes to ‘religion’, we see the merits of a critical and precise terminology, even if we sometimes utilise its laxer meanings.

Our investigations into the images of Islam are also very much related to another term which is both contested and vague: Islamophobia. It has often been criticised on the grounds that being critical of or against Islam has nothing to do with having a phobia. Still, the term has a strong following and does not need to be read as literally meaning phobia, but rather as a term which covers a distinct anti-Muslim racism. The most widely used definition of the term comes from the British Runnymede Trust which states that:

Islamophobia is any distinction, exclusion, or restriction towards, or preference against, Muslims (or those perceived to be Muslims) that has the purpose or effect of nullifying or impairing the recognition, enjoyment or exercise, on an equal footing, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural or any other field of public life.

(Runnymede Trust)

The Runnymede Trust stresses that this is not only an analytical definition; it is also aimed to point to recommendations on how to respond to it. As we shall see, the definition thus directly involves the museums who explicitly want to be part of this response. It is not a term we will use, and our discussion does not really involve any examples of Islamophobia. In our material we rather find a sort of misdirected and back-firing Islamophilia.

Even if there are a good deal of shared developments happening simultaneously in the USA and Europe, there are also important differences between

these two contexts. In Europe, heritage management has until very recently had a national frame, while in the USA it has been more multi-levelled from the outset (Harrison 2013: 20). The contemporary sociopolitical contexts also have important differences, making it relevant to focus on Europe here. Even if prejudice and animosity towards Islam are widespread and pronounced both in the USA and Europe, the everyday interactions affected by this discourse are quite different. This is due to differing histories of colonial domination, migration and the deep historical presence of Islam in many parts of Europe, among other things.

Some of the most vocal proponents of European intolerance today are populist nationalists who portray Islam as the single greatest threat to European values and culture. They claim that there is a fundamental incompatibility between European and Islamic values. Many studies have been done on the contemporary rise of Islamophobia and prejudiced representations of Islam. However, these studies demonstrate a systematic neglect of perspectives based on heritage and representations of Islam at museums (Allen 2010; Deltombe 2005; Fekete 2009; Yaqin & Morey 2011; Green 2015; Kundnani 2015). Pre-Covid-19, European museums had over 500 million visitors annually (EGMUS – The European Group on Museum Statistics), and museums have been central institutions to the formation of European national identities (Bennett 1995; Moore & Whelan 2007). A number of recent projects have investigated how museums still play an important role in the formation of European and national identities (Aronsson 2011; Kaiser, Krankenhagen & Poehls 2012; Peressut et al. 2013).

The museums in Europe with large collections of Islamic artefacts have hardly been researched within critical museology or heritage studies. These collections have been the domain of the almost autonomous field of Islamic art; that is, a field that is still self-enclosed and object centred, dominated by cultural history and the analysis of specific artefacts (Blair & Bloom 2003; Flood 2007; Junod et al. 2012; Necipoğlu 2013). This can make Islam seem like an exceptional case and can thus disconnect the knowledge on Islamic cultural heritage from contemporary questions of identity and political framing (Knell et al. 2012: 38). As Beshara Doumani says, ‘redefining the concept of Islamic art in the museum context is ultimately about reconfiguring Europe’s vision of itself and its relation to the Other’ (2012: 129).

In the more socially and theoretically engaged research on museums there is a vast array of works on how exhibitions are affected by political and social conditions (Vergo 1989; Karp & Levine 1991; Hooper-Greenhill 1992; Bennett 1995; McDonald 1998; Coombes & Phillips 2015), as well as advice on how museums should counter prejudice and promote integration (Sandell 2007;

Golding 2009; Lynch & Alberti 2010; Schorch 2013). Almost nothing of this literature concerns Islam or Muslims. Even the growing field of Studies of Religion in Museums gives surprisingly little attention to Islam (Paine 2013: 18–19, 32–33; Claussen 2010; Lüpken 2011; Minucciani 2013; Kamel 2013; Buggeln et al. 2017).

There are thus very few previous works with a sociopolitical perspective on Islam and museums (Shatanawi 2009, 2012a, 2012b; Kamel 2004, 2013, 2014; Norton-Wright 2020). In the UK there is good documentation on the re-imaginings of the gallery of Islamic art from the Victoria and Albert Museum and the British Museum (Moussouri & Fritsch 2004; Crill & Stanley 2006; Fakatseli & Sachs 2008), as well as a thesis in archaeology on the local representations of Islam in British museums with extensive data on displays and visitor surveys (Heath 2007).

The above-mentioned sociopolitical developments have meant that exhibitions of Islamic artefacts since 11 September 2001 have been framed as expressions of cultural tolerance, co-existing with both acts of terror and violence in Islam's name, and Islamophobic images of Islam as misogynist, homophobic and violent. This has produced a radically new frame for the exhibiting of Islamic artefacts which used to be directed at a select few connoisseurs (Grabar 2012). Within the heritage sector, cultural heritage is often said to be useful in promoting tolerance and global understanding (Report of the Working Group on Cross Cultural Issues of ICOM, 1997). But can the fear of a coming Eurabia be quelled into tolerance by using the Islamic cultural heritage from collections at European museums?

At least since World War II there has also been a broader frame for museum exhibitions. UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) and ICOM (International Council of Museums) were both founded following the end of the war, based on the belief that culture and heritage can foster international understanding and peace. The EU (European Union) later formulated policy declarations built on these postulates (Höglund 2012). At the 1972 ICOM assembly in Santiago de Chile, it was argued that museums should work harder to become 'an integral part of societies around them', and the definition of museum was complemented with the phrase that it should be 'an institution in the service of society and its development' (Report of the Working Group on Cross Cultural Issues of ICOM).

The current ICOM definition of museum reads:

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. (ICOM)

With the ICOM Cultural Diversity Charter of 2010 museums are called to stand for the ‘recognition and affirmation of cultural diversity at the local, regional and international levels and the reflection of this diversity in all policies and programs of museums across the world’ (ICOM Cultural Diversity Charter). This frames the way in which Islamic collections and galleries are presented, and it is also the frame for our analysis in this Element. We can see that museums have also adopted this frame:

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.

(Museum für Islamische Kunst, Berlin)

In a 2004 article in *The Guardian*, the former director of the British Museum, Neil MacGregor, argued that his museum could make important contributions also outside of the UK and Europe:

The new interim government in Iraq will have to consider how it defines Iraq’s identity. And it will be surprising if it does not turn, as every other government in the Middle East has turned, to historical precedents to define the wished-for future. There is nowhere better to survey those precedents than the British Museum. (MacGregor 2004)

The hopes that MacGregor expressed for recognition and understanding were striking. Their fulfilment has to do with a certain kind of temporal connection. It is believed that by looking back through history and visually exploring the artefacts connected with an Islamic past, we will finally understand Islam’s place in the current political situation. We journey from the present to the past and then back to the present, equipped with new historical knowledge that makes the present more readily understandable. Those who undertake this journey have been given the keys needed to unlock our current intolerant political situation. That is the frame. The problematic discourse on Islam can be counteracted, and the Muslim world can emerge as something other than a seat of conflict. A dialogue between cultures can be developed and fanaticism – both Muslim and European – can be resisted. Perhaps Iraq might even be able to find a new national identity. These are no small claims. In this Element we attempt to evaluate this ‘frame of tolerance’ by relating it to the (few) actual Islamic galleries at European museums that visitors encounter.

According to Gülru Necipoğlu, the recent past has seen an increase in stereotypes and outdated approaches to Islamic visual cultures, strengthened in part by documentaries, exhibitions and new museums of Islamic art. There is a gap between simplistic popularisations of Islamic cultural heritage and the growing complex academic interpretations of Islamic visual cultures (Necipoğlu 2013). The version of Islam presented in museums is framed as a separate civilisation of the past lacking any direct connection with Islam as experienced in today's Europe. This is also seen in the evaluation of the galleries of Islamic art at the Victoria and Albert Museum (Fakatseli & Sachs 2008). As we shall see in Section 2, this has a grounding in the existing collections of Islamic art and how they came to be. Later, the framing of Islamic art in European museums has been influenced by Traditionalism; an ideology that relies on a Romantic construction of mythical origins that frames Islam as an esoteric and traditional Wisdom, rather than as the faith of fellow European citizens. Taken together, this makes the European category of Islamic art ill prepared to fill the role assigned to it as a gateway to understanding living Muslims or Islam's role in contemporary Europe (Grinell 2018b, 2020).

Certain temporary exhibitions falling outside of the scope of our project have tried to portray Islam as a local lived aspect, but the large investments are still focused on Islamic art. Mirjam Shatanawi has argued that 'tolerant' exhibitions of Islamic collections might even reinforce 'the proposition of a contrast between contemporary Islam (stagnant and intolerant) and early Islam (advanced and tolerant), which informs much of global politics' (Shatanawi 2012a: 179).

This Element aims to give new critical contributions to both museology and the research on images of Islam in Europe. In order to do this, we might also need to use a less celebratory understanding of cultural heritage. The discrepancy that Necipoğlu saw and criticised between the scholarly and popular exposés of Islamic art might also be understood as the difference between history and heritage. David Lowenthal writes that 'collapsing the entire past into a single frame is one common heritage aim' and 'stressing the likeness of past and present is another' (1998: 139). Scholars in the field of Islamic art are engaged in historical research – they are trying to find answers to specific questions about localised materials. When history is used for contemporary political and identitarian purposes it transforms into heritage, to borrow Lowenthal's parlance. Heritage is something people do as they use history to understand, negotiate or market their identities (Lowenthal 1998; Harrison 2013).

European framings of Islamic heritage present it as a closed other, evoking the idea that the visitor should learn to respect the people and the traditions

that were able to produce such masterpieces. As Shatanawi writes, ‘the preferred strategy is to focus on universal love of aesthetics; substituting beauty for violence and artistic skill for backwardness’ (Shatanawi 2012a: 177).

This Element is the result of the research project *Museological Framings of Islam in Europe*, funded by the Swedish Research Council. From 2015 to 2018 we visited museums mainly in the UK and Germany which advertised exhibits related to ‘Islam’. We approached the exhibitions via framing theory.

A critical frame analysis starts by a ‘mapping of the different ways in which an issue is framed’ (Verloo & Lombardo 2007). Frames can have the form of mentalities, ideologies, structures, institutions, artefacts and behaviour, and function to organise experience and guide action (Goffman 1974; Snow 2011). In exhibition analysis we treat words, objects, design, architecture and all the minute details of an exhibition as frame elements that make the exhibited topic understandable (Bal 2015: 417). With inspiration from linguistic frame theory, we distinguish between invoked and evoked frames (Fillmore 2008; Petrucci 2008).

We read this in relation to Judith Butler’s argument that when a cultural phenomenon is not framed as an intelligible life, it will not be recognisable and will thus not gain social or political recognition. Lives that fall outside of the societal frames will not be guarded against injury and violence in the same manner as those inside the frame. Those that are framed as fundamentally other are thus not intelligible, and thereby not recognised as mutually precarious and injurable (Winter 2008; Butler 2009). Cultural, and museological, frames have social agency.

Our empirical analysis focuses on what framings of Islam are evoked by the exhibitions we have visited, in response to the above sociopolitical frame that we as visitors invoke (Grinell 2020). Our main question is if and how exhibitions of Islamic heritage evoke tolerant understandings of Islam, and thus fulfil the museums’ service to society.

More concretely, our analysis has been guided by four basic questions:

What is Islam? Is Islam a religion, a culture, an aesthetical tradition or something else? If it is a religion, is it a belief, a set of rituals, commandments or something else?

Where is Islam? Is it limited to the traditional lands of the Middle East and North Africa? Are other Islamic countries represented? Is there any mention of countries outside the Muslim world where Islam is a minority religion?

When is Islam? Does Islam have a pre-history before the revelations of the Prophet Muhammad? At what point in time does the presentation of Islam end?

Who is Islam? Is Islam represented by any actors or individuals? What are their ethnicities, class, gender, etc.? What social constellations are these actors inscribed in?

As said, ‘Islam’ here is an open label filled out by the exhibitions we have studied. Our aim is to present what European museums have to say about ‘Islam’.

2 Collecting

As already indicated, there is one particular form in which Islam is represented first and foremost in European museums: as Islamic art, or, in German, Islamische Kunst. Islamic art is usually found at larger museums – the kinds of museums that are well known and which appear on lists of places ‘one should visit in one’s lifetime’ because of their size or reputation. One thing they have in common is also that they are old. In terms of museum-historical measurements, they are considered very or fairly old. There are four such museums that we have visited: the British Museum and Victoria and Albert Museum in London, Museum für Islamische Kunst at the Pergamon Museum in Berlin and the Ashmolean Museum of Art and Archaeology in Oxford. (One can discuss to what extent the latter museum lives up to the criteria of size and fame. But there is no reason to be fussy here.) Museum für Islamische Kunst, as evidenced by the name, is devoted entirely to Islamic art. The other three each contain separate galleries for Islamic art (the British Museum has now remade its galleries).

These exhibitions display objects. The objects are, almost always, taken from the museum’s own collections, which contain many more things than those on display. The collections, therefore, offer the exhibition producers a great degree of freedom to decide what they want to display when they put together an exhibition. At the same time, since permanent exhibitions are meant to display the collection highlights, the collections frame the freedom of the museum (Svanberg 2015). The museums own many objects, but far from everything. ‘The Islamic world’ contains infinitely many more objects than the largest museum storage can accommodate. The collections, therefore, consist of a very specific selection of what has been possible and worthy for the museums to acquire and save. This selection has been made in accordance with specific principles and based on certain prerequisites. The principles deal, as we shall see, with what is considered to be worth collecting, classifying and storing (and possibly displaying). The prerequisites are primarily economic, political and logistical, and determine what is considered to be worth collecting.