

When legitimate claims collide: Dealing with critiques of dialogical efforts in Museum work

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Abstract

The article and presentation builds on the experiences around an exhibition called *Jerusalem* at the *Museum of World Culture* in Gothenburg, Sweden. It is a photo exhibition portraying LGBTQ (GayLesbianBiTransQueer) persons from the Abrahamic faiths *in situ* in Jerusalem. Some of the photographs mix LGBTQ-negative quotes from the three Holy Scriptures with Nude depictions of LGBTQ persons and activities. The exhibition will open in November at the time of the ICOM general assembly. The process is thus ongoing.

The Museum held dialogues with religious persons on how to handle the questions and images of this exhibition. No one we talked to wanted to stop the exhibition, but many were critical of the artists mixing of Holiness and Nudity/Sexuality. The problem for them was not homosexuality, but putting sexuality in what they considered holy spaces and situations.

The artist was critical of our efforts to meet these critics, and a media debate on censorship and freedom of speech followed. The Museum was criticized for bending to fundamentalist pressure, assuming that we had plans to stop the exhibition.

The Museum of World Culture tries to promote an intersectional understanding of the world, and wants to address and acknowledge both the right to be LGBTQ, and to be religious, and involve both parties in dialogue.

To understand what happened during this media turmoil we need to think about the concrete situatedness of the Museum, and the discursive belonging of it. How can a state governed institution like the Museum deal with legitimate and opposing claims, and counter both heteronormativity and islamophobia? What discourses is the Museum as an institution inscribed in? What power relations follow from that? Can the Museum be an arena for open debate? Or is it, due to historic, bureaucratic, and cultural legacies, tied to certain positions and affiliations in the public space? Is it thus possible to deal with different legitimate claims equally, or are we a part, institutionally supporting one side? Concepts like situatedness, intersectionality, and dialogue are used to try to critically examine these challenges.

How challenging can a state governed museum be? Present mistakes and possible future strategies are discussed.

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I. INTRODUCTION

This article and presentation explores and discusses the experiences around an exhibition called *Jerusalem* at the Museum of World Culture in Gothenburg, Sweden, to open on the 10th of November 2010. It is a photo exhibition portraying LGBTQ (LesbianGayBiTransQueer)-persons from the Abrahamic faiths *in situ* in Jerusalem.¹ The photographs, some with nude depictions of LGBTQ persons and activities, are accompanied with LGBTQ-negative and patriarchal quotes from the three Abrahamic Holy Scriptures.

The dialogical efforts of the Museum in the preparatory stages of the exhibition work gave rise to a media debate interpreting the Museums wish to dialogue with religious persons, and to give them a voice in the museums presentation, as bending to fundamentalists and acting as censors, denying the freedom of speech of the artist. The article tries to understand how and why this happened, what it means and what we might learn from the process. It should be made clear that I have been a part in this work and debate. I can not claim objectivity, but an insider's desire to reflect. I will try to be self critical in my reflections, focusing on problems, constraints and dilemmas, rather than excuses or defenses. Of course my reflection will have blind spots, and I urge the reader to find them and reflect upon them. My views are not necessarily shared or supported by my colleagues, or in accordance with the museums official stances.

I take inspiration from Fethullah Gülen's insistence on reflection as "the heart's lamp, the soul's food, the spirit of knowledge, and the essence and light" of a good life. Without honest reflection life is "lived at such a superficial level that it is devoid of meaning and

¹ There is no consensus on in which order to put the letters, it is mutually possible and usual to use the acronyms QTBLG and GLBTQ. The choice of acronym does not signal any particular theoretical affiliation, but I find it appropriate to start a sequence aimed at questioning heteronormativity and patriarchal structures with a non-male factor. Since the theme is largely homosexuality I do not use the more queer orientated QTBLG here.

profundity.”² In the course of the presentation I hope this starting point will become understandable.

The Museum

The Museum of World Culture is a new museum. It opened its door to the public in late December 2004. Financed by the Swedish Government, the Museum of World Culture is under the auspices of the governmental authority the National Museums of World Culture. That agency is one link in a nationwide initiative aimed at adapting the collections of historical and ethnographic museums to the globalization process, as well as to accelerating intercontinental migration and multicultural societies.

According to our mission statement the Museum of World Culture wants to be an arena for discussion and reflection in which many and different voices will be heard, where controversial and conflict-filled topics can be addressed, as well as a place where people can feel at home across borders. The museum of world culture shows temporary exhibitions with a focus on global contemporary issues, using a multimodal form with photography, museum objects, contemporary visual art, music, label texts, poetry, voices of personal experience, et. al. Together they shall mirror the world’s diversity and dynamics.³

2009 the Museum had 248 000 visitors, around 60 % of them under the age of 30. The Museum of World Culture where the best visited museum in Gothenburg, and it was awarded *Swedish Museum of the Year* by Swedish ICOM.⁴

2 Gülen, M. Fethullah. 2004. *Emerald hills of the heart: Key Concepts in the practice of Sufism*, vol. 1. New Jersey: The Light, p. 10.

3 A more elaborate presentation of the museum can be found in Lagerkvist, Cajsa. 2008. “The Museum of World Culture: A ‘glocal’ museum of a new kind” in *Scandinavian Museums and Cultural Diversity*, eds. Kathrine Goodnow & Haci Akman. London: Berghahn Books.

4 <http://sweden.icom.org/verksamhet/arets-museum/> (retrieved 17 Oct. 2010)

The Museum tries to promote what can be called an intersectional understanding of the world (I will say more about that later), and wants to address and acknowledge both the right to be LGBTQ, and to be religious, and involve both parties in dialogue. At its launch the museum got a lot of positive reviews and was described as “a bold and radical experiment that works remarkably well.”⁵

II. PRE-HISTORIES

Elisabeth Ohlson Wallin

The *Jerusalem* exhibition has a long prehistory. The photographer Elisabeth Ohlson Wallin is one of Sweden's most well known artists. Her rise to fame came in 1998 with the exhibition *Ecce Homo*, an exhibition portraying Jesus in contemporary environments, together with homosexuals, transsexuals, leathermen and persons with AIDS. The twelve photographs in the exhibition are all connected to, and shown together with, quotations from the Bible. The exhibition was made from a Christian believing perspective. The artist, a lesbian, and her queer friends also wants to have a place at Jesus side, said the exhibition. It was made to counter the anxiety that people dying of AIDS were going to go to hell for their sins. Mutual love cannot be a sin, no matter who loves and who is loved, was the message.

When *Ecce Homo* was shown in Uppsala Cathedral, the home of the Archbishopry of the Church of Sweden, it launched a big and far reaching national debate about the Church's stance towards homosexuality and LGBTQ-persons. The decision to show the exhibition in church, supported by the then Archbishop K G Hammar resulted in bomb threats, and made Pope John Paul II cancel a previously granted audience for Archbishop Hammar.⁶

5 Pes, Javier. 2005. “Brave New World: Review of the Museum of World Culture” in *Museum Practice Magazine*, summer.

6 Kriz, Heidi (August 2, 1999), "Blasphemy or Divine Inspiration?", *Wired News*, <http://www.wired.com/culture/lifestyle/news/1999/08/21012>. Retrieved 23 Sept. 2010.

The importance of Elisabeth Ohlson Wallin's work in the public debate and thus in pushing for improvements in legislation on LGBTQ rights in Sweden is hard to overestimate. After ten years and some ten exhibitions on other excluded social groups and themes Ohlson Wallin wanted to return to the theme of *Ecce Homo*. The then director of the Museum of World Culture Margareta Alin, who in her previous work place *Kulturen* in Lund had shown the *Ecce Homo* exhibition, initiated contacts with Ohlson Wallin and a proposal for an exhibition called *Jerusalem: love and hate* was drafted.

The Museum, LGBTQ, and religion

The Museum of World Culture has a strong link to LGBTQ themes. The museum was one of the co-founder of, and is a venue for, the LGBTQ festival in Gothenburg; it has produced and shown the exhibition *Gender Blender* on transsexuals, and hold queer theory as an important inspiration for its work.⁷ Gender perspectives are a constant part of our pedagogical and curatorial work.

Religion and religiosity has not been strongly represented during the Museums five years of practice. Still the museum has been involved in a previous media debate on religion and art. This case has been closely analyzed by my colleague Cajsa Lagerkvist in *Museum and Society*.⁸ In the exhibition *No name fever – Aids in a globalized world*, a section called “Desire” included a painting by Louzla Darabi called *Scene d'Amour*. The picture showed a nude couple making love (in a vague painting style) together with a quote in Arabic of the opening sura of the Qur'an, al-Fatihah. The Museum received a lot

7 Queer theory is not only applicable to questions of sexual normality and normativity, as Lee Edelman described its potential in an early formulation “queer theory curves endlessly toward a realization that its realization remains impossible” (p. 346) or as Annamarie Jagose states: “its most enabling characteristic may well be its potential for looking forward without anticipating the future.” (p. 131). Edelman, Lee. 1995. “Queer Theory: Unstating Desire” in *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, 10, and Jagose, Annamarie. 1996. *Queer Theory: An Introduction*. New York: New York University Press.

8 Lagerkvist, Cajsa. 2006. “Empowerment and anger: learning how to share ownership of the Museum” in *Museum and Society* 4:2 (<http://www.le.ac.uk/ms/m&s/issue%2011/lagerkvist.pdf>). It took place before I started working at the museum.

of comments that it was offensive to show these holy verses together with figurative images, especially a lovemaking couple. As Lagerkvist writes: “Most of [the] approximately 600 e-mails were polite and respectful. However, a couple of them were aggressive and threatening.” The Museum decided to meet the complainants requests and worked with the artist to replace the painting with one from the same series with a similar motive, but without the qur'anic text.

This decision came under heavy critique. ”Cultural journalists, art critics, museum personnel and even politicians held the Museum of World Culture responsible for putting freedom of speech at risk. Tabloid evening papers focused on the two threatening letters among the large majority of respectful ones, and blew up stories about how the museum had given in to fundamentalist threats”, Lagerkvist writes.⁹

When the story of *Jerusalem*, evolving round what seemed to be a similar case, caught the media's attention the paradigm was already in place. The Museum of World Culture is jeopardizing the defense of fundamental rights and bending to bigot and narrow minded religious critics, just because they represent groups seen as multicultural.

Lagerkvist conclusion is that rather than learning to avoid controversy, we might use it to challenge the role of museums. Now we are there again, and can try to understand how this controversy challenges the role of museums, and if, and in what ways, the Museum of World Culture is a challenging museum.

One challenging aspect, then and now, is the museums firm insistence of multimodal presentations. “Different voices shall be heard”, is a reoccurring phrase in the museums communication. In practice this means that almost all exhibitions that have been shown in the museum are produced in house and have included multiple modes of display. Ethnographic objects are there, art works are there, voices of stake holders are there, expertise statements are there – but they are all parts of a thematic. Neither art nor objects

⁹ Lagerkvist. 2006, p. 61.

from our collections are displayed for their own sake. They are there to challenge each other and to inspire dialogue and reflection.¹⁰ This has proved challenging. One way to avoid controversy would have been to act more like an art museum or a gallery in the exhibiting of contemporary art. But the museum has kept its commitment to let art be one voice in its multimodal displays. Part of the critique in both these cases relate to this unconventional and thus challenging approach to art.

The messiness of everyday practice

In the period between the first contacts and the actual making of the pictures for the Jerusalem exhibition, and the discussions on who to show the exhibition the museum director Margareta Alin retired and the directorship was held by an acting director. Lagerkvist, head of exhibitions and research, who took part in the initial discussions around a possible cooperation, was on parental leave when Ohlson Wallin started the actual work on the project. The producer and the curator (that is, me) at the museum where employed after the initial contacts and thus had no prior knowledge of informal understandings, outside of what had been noted in the protocols.

These details might seem overly internal and personal. But I think it is important to show the complexities and messiness of everyday practice. In any specific process there are always a number of contingent factors shaping developments. Practice is always messy, even if this project was more affected by disconnections than what might be the average case. Too often scientific descriptions hide this aspect that work is always carried out by living persons, subject to all kinds of everyday happenings, strains and preconceptions.¹¹

The discontinuity caused by the time passed and the staff changed meant that a room for misunderstandings unfortunately where created. Ohlson Wallin held the belief that she had an agreement about developing the exhibition independently. In the project group at

¹⁰ Lagerkvist, 2008, pp. 92.

¹¹ Law, John. 2003. "Making a Mess with Method", <http://www.comp.lancs.ac.uk/sociology/papers/Law-Making-a-Mess-with-Method.pdf>. (Retrieved 16 Oct. 2010).

the museum we worked under the assumption that the final shape should be a joint process, where the input from our dialogical outreach work would be a central aspect.

It is not of much use in this context to argue about whose understanding best reflected what was contracted. What from a practical side can be learned is that the Museum of World Culture should be more careful and precise in the formulation of the contracts it signs, and make sure that each part articulates and agrees upon what the contract means.

As it now evolved a disagreement and a conflict arose, giving birth to an understanding in the media that the Museum of World Culture (once again) had censored an artist because she upset religious sentiments towards the public display of sexuality.

III: THE EXHIBITION

The Jerusalem images

As stated the Jerusalem project meant a continuance of the themes of the *Ecce Homo* exhibition. As the project evolved after the first contacts between the museum and the artist also the form of the exhibition came to resemble *Ecce Homo*'s. The project is cooperation between Ohlson Wallin and theologian Lars Gårdfeldt, author of the dissertation *Hatar Gud bögar? (Does God hate fags?)*.¹² Each of the images in the exhibition is connected to a quotation, this time from one of the three Abrahamic Holy Scriptures. There is no central character, as with Jesus in *Ecce Homo*. The same documentary method has been used though, meaning that the models in the images are LGBTQ-persons living in Israel/Palestine. The images are highly stylized, inspired by Baroque painting such as Caravaggio's. The images adhere to the classical art tradition of using nudity as a symbol for sexuality. Therefore a number of the images depict nude or semi nude men (but no women). All images stages a situation or practice that are

12 Gårdfeldt, Lars. 2005. *Hatar Gud bögar?: Teologiska förståelser av homo-, bi- och transpersoner, en befrielse teologisk studie*. Stockholm: Normal förlag.

condemned by the accompanying quote from either the Tannach (Old Testament), the New Testament or the Qur'an. The theme is the Abrahamitic condemnation and oppression of women and LGBTQ-persons.

The expressed aim of the exhibition is to discuss questions about faith, sexuality, heteronormativity and oppression. The exhibition is to be side lined with programs giving voice to many different voices and stances to these themes.

The process leading up to the exhibition

As an initial step after receiving the first rough drafts of the images in late April the Museum initiated dialogues with religious persons from the three faiths concerned on the questions and images of this exhibition. The participants were not chosen because they were representatives, or representative, of their religions. Some of them work as rabbis and pastors, but they did not represent anyone but themselves.¹³

In these dialogues Lars Gårdfeldt from the exhibition team took part, introducing the images and the themes they depict. Ohlson Wallin, living in another part of Sweden, did not take part. Nobody that was invited and participated in these dialogues made any comments or efforts to censor or stop the exhibition. A few of the images where by many felt to be provoking, and questions were raised about the purpose of showing them. But everyone made clear that they respected the museums decision if it wanted to show the exhibition, since the theme of LGBTQ rights was seen as important. Concerns that the images might lead to reactions giving rise to clashes and growing tensions, rather than enhanced understanding were voiced, and the effectiveness of provocation as a method was questioned.

13 Grinell, Klas. 2010a. "The Politics of Museums in Europe: Representations, diversity, doxa" in *European Journal of Economic and Political Studies* 3:1. <http://ejeps.fatih.edu.tr/docs/articles/40.pdf>.

Other interpretations of the quotes from the scriptures were discussed, and ways to be true to the Scriptures and at the same time tolerant and accepting towards homosexuality were argued for. Those who had objections towards certain images were mainly critical of how the artist treated holy spaces, and of the way the images intertwine holiness and nudity/sexuality. The aspect that made them feel uneasy and disrespected did not concern homosexuality, but the emphasis on sexuality in what they considered holy spaces and situations. We found the dialogues interesting and constructive and wanted to find a means to include the arguments presented in the exhibition, in order to show that religion does not have to equal prejudice and discriminatory practice. An initial suggestion to the artist was to have a condensed exhibition period where dialogues and programs had a strong presence, rather than a regular exhibition open for visitors with a few evening discussions on top.

Our own assessment was of course cautious about not getting into the same kind of situation as the *Scene d'amour* one. The populist party *Sverigedemokraterna* (Sweden democrats) started its election campaign in the autumn 2009 claiming that Islam was the greatest threat Sweden had faced since World War II. The party eventually entered the parliament for the first time in the September 2010 elections.

A growing public islamophobia was thus one of the parameters in our analysis of the possible impact of the Jerusalem exhibition. The explicit aim of the project according to the artist is to counter islamophobia, as the exhibition shows that the Qur'an is much less condemning of homosexuality than the other two Abrahamic scriptures. Still we had fears that the exhibition should be drawn into the ongoing debates about the Danish Muhammad cartoons and the Swedish artist Lars Vilks drawings of Muhammad portrayed as a dog. We wanted the exhibition to challenge and cause debate, but not to be seen as a similar provocation and caught up in the stalemate of this infected controversy.

Even if we wanted to include all the faiths in the dialogue, our analysis suggested that those having the hardest time coming forward in the public debate was the Swedish Muslim group. We did not want to further the more and more public opinion that

Muslims, taken as a homogenous group, are a threat to Swedish or European values. We found it problematic to run the risk of showing LGBTQ-persons as a homogenous group as victims, and Islam and Muslims as a homogenous group as perpetrator. The exhibition's conflation of the situations of Jerusalem and Sweden was also viewed as problematic. The everyday situation and the power relations in the two different places are very different, as is the public agency of GLTBQ representatives and religious representatives.

The Ohlson Wallin was critical of our wish to include opposing voices in the exhibition – opposing not meaning GLTBQ-negative, but voices arguing for a respect of religious sentiments concerning holy sites and situations. She thought a more plurivocal display would be confusing for the visitors, and run the risk of losing the message.

Media debate

When this caught the attention of the media a debate on censorship and freedom of speech broke out, on the (mistaken) assumption that the museum had stopped the exhibition. The Museum was once again criticized for bending to fundamentalist pressure, for being cowardly and relativistically naive. In a first response from the museum we tried to argue that striving to be nuanced is not cowardly, and that we had not taken any decision to stop the exhibition.¹⁴ This did not come through in the debate, which continued to analyze what the museum's stopping of the exhibition meant. Some saw it as an example of a multicultural lack of principles, some as plain cowardice. For many the very fact that we had expressed concern for how the exhibition would affect the situation of Swedish Muslims was provocative and questionable.¹⁵

14 <http://www.varldskulturmuseet.se/smvk/jsp/polopoly.jsp?d=1573&a=18138&p=0>. (Retrieved 16 Oct. 2010).

15 I can only refer to some of the input in this debate (all retrieved 16 Oct. 2010): <http://www.newsmill.se/artikel/2010/05/31/varldskulturmuseet-viker-ner-sig-for-frikyrkopastorerna>. The thread starting at this site gathers the contributions in the debate on the news site Newsmill. Other examples can be found at: <http://www.qx.se/kultur/14268/inga-jerusalem-bilder-pa-varldskulturmuseet>, <http://gt.expressen.se/kultur/1.2008108/varldskulturmuseet-missar-premiaren> (where links to

After a week the Museum bent to the media pressure and said it had reevaluated the situation and had now decided to show the exhibition in accordance with the artist's terms, hiring former director Alin to curate it. The Museum was interpreted to have changed its mind, bending for the public critique of its former stance. The media case was closed.

Still, the understanding that the museum had decided to stop the exhibition lingered on, effecting the Stockholm branch of the *Swedish Federation for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Rights* (RFSL) to nominate the Museum of World Culture to its anti gay award the pink thistle, alongside the Christian democratic minister of health Maria Larsson and the leader for the populist right wing party the Sweden democrats Jimmie Åkesson.¹⁶ This was a great sorrow for the museum, even if Åkesson 'won' the award and the museum has carried on with its cooperation with the RFSL Federation on LGBTQ-rights. RFSL will arrange an event inside the Jerusalem program.

With these two cases reported as Art and Freedom of Speech vs. Fundamentalism, the image of the Museum of World Culture as cowardly bending for multicultural pressure is probably going to stay. There is a lot to do in trying to find a more effective strategy for communicating what the museum does and how it reasons. But this is not the topic for this presentation.

IV. ANALYSIS AND REFLECTIONS

the papers other articles can be found), <http://www.etc.nu/30575/visa-wallins-bilder/>, <http://www.gp.se/kulturnoje/1.380362-museum-tvekar-om-utstallning> (also with links to further articles), <http://svtplay.se/v/2026611>, <http://ulfbjereld.blogspot.com/2010/06/varldskulturmuseets-velande-kring.html>
16 <http://www.mynewsdesk.com/se/pressroom/rfsl-stockholm/pressrelease/view/jimmie-aakesson-och-kaliber-i-p1-nominerade-till-rfsl-stockholms-priser-445301>. (Retrieved 16 Oct. 2010).

To understand what happened during this media turmoil, apart from the museums inability to communicate effectively, we need to think about the concrete situatedness of the Museum of World Culture, and its discursive belonging. How can a state governed institution like the Museum of World Culture deal with legitimate and partly opposing claims, and counter heteronormativity, homophobia and islamophobia? What discourses is the museum as an institution inscribed in? What power relations follow from that? Can the museum really be an arena for open debate? Or is it, due to historic, bureaucratic, and cultural legacies tied to certain positions and affiliations in the public space? Is it thus possible to deal with different legitimate claims equally, or are we biased, institutionally supporting one side?

The remaining part of the article will try to address these questions. No conclusive answers should be expected. This is an essay, an effort, a reflection in order to understand and learn, not a presentation of results.

Situatedness

One aspect of the Jerusalem case is that all participants consider themselves to belong to marginalized minorities, portrayed as somewhat suspicious by the public discourse. In my understanding they are all right. They can also all be seen as stake holders in this project and field. In the continued dialogues around the exhibition we have also invited gay religious persons with a foot on each side. Let's say that there are two main concepts that collide here: the concept of holiness, and the concept of sexuality.

Among the museum staff most employees have developed ideas and theories on sexuality, many have an education in gender studies and/or are familiar with the main outlines of queer theory. The language of the LGBTQ-perspective is familiar and understandable to us. Very few of the employees have similar developed ideas about holiness and religiosity, and the language of the religious perspective is unfamiliar and difficult to relate to. My suspicion is that the very same conditions apply for most of the

journalists writing about cultural issues in Swedish media, the ones engaged in the debate around this topic.

As political theorist Wendy Brown has argued the concept of critique, so central to cultural journalism, is closely tied to a wish to expose the mystifications and illusions of religion and idealism.¹⁷ The tradition goes from Voltaire, Diderot, Kant and Marx, via Nietzsche, Freud and the Frankfurt school, and on to Foucault, Habermas and Cultural Studies. At least in the cultural sector in Sweden we are all educated in faculties for the humanities teaching this as 'our' tradition. The same canon is at large what makes up the foundation for the field of Museum studies/Museology.¹⁸

I myself have worked as a university lecturer in Cultural Studies and the History of Ideas, teaching class after class inscribing this genealogy of critical humanistic thinking.

Swedish journalists at large tend to live in central, gentrified parts of the larger cities. Working class, low income or immigrant neighborhoods are very uncommon choices for journalists. Journalists live where the consumption of print media is high, where the level of voting is high. There is a positive correlation between the areas voting for the Green party and the areas where journalists live, and a negative correlation between the areas voting for the populist Sweden Democrats and the areas where journalists live. There is also an over representation of middle and upper class back grounds among Swedish journalists.¹⁹

There is no similar research available on the dwellings of Swedish museum workers, but much point to a similar pattern. This is at least my assertion.

17 Brown, Wendy. 2009. "Introduction" in *Is Critique Secular? Blasphemy, Injury and Free Speech*, eds. Talal Asad et al. Berkeley: University of California Press.

18 Bennett, Tony. 1995. *The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, Politics*. London: Routledge.

19 Ekberg, Kerstin. 2007. *Här bor journalisterna: En rapport om var journalister bor och vad det kan betyda för rapporteringen från olika områden (This is where the journalists live: A Report on where journalists live and its possible impact on their reporting)*. Stockholm: Simo.

This lead me to state that the large majority of the participants in the Swedish cultural discourse are situated in a similar segment of society, sharing a number of every day experiences and understandings, having a shared education, language and referential framework.

In Paul Zuckerman's contested attempt to measure the number of atheists in the nations of the world Sweden comes in first, with a percentage of non-believers at somewhere between 46-85.²⁰ It is difficult to judge what these numbers really measure, but it is an oft used statement that Sweden is one of the most secularized countries in the world. In relation to the above cited variables of the recruitment base to the cultural sector the level of religious affiliations is probably even lower than the national average. In this broad demographic description a lot of nuances are lost, but the tendency is clear enough to be the basis of a discussion.

Swedish Muslims at large tend to have another habitus than the cultural workers. There are differences in everyday practice, conceptions, canon and language. The cultural sector seldom share references with the Islamic canon, all the values argued for in the discourse of cultural critique find their grounding in the secular language of Western humanities. The sense of belonging and ease in the cultural institutions also differ. The representatives in the cultural sector most often see these spheres and spaces as theirs/ours, while there tends to be a more reluctant identification with state run institution from the non-State Churchly religious sector.²¹

Museums often identify and communicate themselves as agents of positive social change, but, in the words of Richard Sandell, “they have functioned to engender feelings of belonging and worth in some and, in others, a sense of inferiority and exclusion.”²² The

20 Zuckerman, Phil. 2005. "Atheism: Contemporary Rates and Patterns" in *The Cambridge Companion to Atheism*, ed. Michael Martin, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

21 SOU 2009:52. *Staten och imamerna: Religion, integration, autonomi (The State and the Imams: Religion, Integration, Autonomy)*. Swedish Government Official Report nr 2009:52.

22 Sandell, Richard. 2007. *Museums, Prejudice and the Reframing of Difference*, London: Routledge, p. 3.

universalism of expressions of freedom of speech, censorship and human rights are situated within a Northwest European context, a context also being the place where colonial imperialism, islamophobia and racism came from.²³

Museums, the Museum of World Culture included, often want to be arenas for discussions, inviting the public for free disputation. But it seems that there is a great difference in what segments of the public feel at home in this arena. In this specific case it was obvious that the actors in the public debate felt much more at home with one aspect of the question raised, to a point where peaceful and legitimate arguments for nuance went unheard.

But even if there might seem to be a conflation of the life spheres and canons of the spokes persons of the Swedish LGBTQ movement and the cultural workers, there is still a lot of discrete repression of LGBTQs also within this sector, and in society at large. It would be too simplified to argue that the LGBTQ movement is accepted just because most politicians and journalists support Pride festivals and feminism, or because queer theory is a popular perspective with parts of the cultural institutions, the Museum of World Culture included. LGBTQ is of course everywhere in society, also in sectors, communities and families where there is still a lot of heteronormative pressure and open hostility towards LGBTQ.

Intersectionality

Here I think we can be helped by an intersectional perspective. Intersectionality is a concept developed within feminist theory, at first by women of color as a way to show

23 The references could be innumerable, classics (with gender perspectives) are: Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. 1987. *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics*. New York: Methuen, Minh-ha, Trinh T. 1989. *Woman, Native, Other: Writing Postcoloniality and Feminism*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, Pratt, Mary Louise. 1992. *Imperial eyes: travel writing and transculturation*, New York: Routledge, McClintock, Anne. 1995. *Imperial leather: race, gender and sexuality in the colonial contest*, New York: Routledge.

how main stream feminists tended to universalize the experiences and conditions of white middle class women in theories of gender oppression. The concept stresses that there are factors besides gender that make up the specific way any person is oppressed, it also implies that categories like gender, sexuality, race, religion, generation and class are simultaneous and intersecting. Neither one of them can be said to be prior or more fundamental, they always intersect in any specific and localized situation. And, categories aren't fixed – the understanding of, for example, sexuality and religion are always construed in complex relation to other factors. The specific factors in play always constitute each other. Broadened uses of the concept of intersectionality have been criticized because it often misses that the concept was developed primarily to analyze oppression and power. It is a concept to see and analyze the intersections of different power structures, not merely a metaphor for multicultural identities.²⁴

Very few persons are privileged in all sections, a binary opposition between in and out is too coarse, being part of the discourse does not mean you are privileged as a citizen. Nor can an underdog position on one axis be universalized as a representation of the oppressed as such.

There is a great risk that the nuances of an intersectional analysis get lost when the power struggle is played out in an institution like the state governed Museum of World Culture. In relation to the Museum as a state agent both LGBTQs and different religious groups are of course in a weak power position. If the museum tries to speak against one group in the name of another groups interests there is a complicated and problematic mediation of power, as well as a risk of misrepresentation. The claim for a right to enter the arena of power and speak for oneself is legitimate, and the arenas concern that this free speech might harm other groups and individuals with limited power is a kind of oppression. It is not strange that some journalists and writers react when it is directed towards an oppressed group that they have enough identifications with which intersect. The mediator

24 Gillman, Laura, 2007. "Beyond the Shadow: Re-scripting race in women's studies" in *Meridians: feminism, race, transnationalism*, 7:2, and Mohanty, Chandra Talpade. 1989–90. "On Race and Voice: Challenges for Liberal Education." in *Cultural Critique* 14.

(the museum), trying only to govern over the practicalities of the arena, is a powerful actor, whose intentions are worth careful scrutiny, whose words should not be trusted uncritically.

One problem is that the same number of intersections between the religious groups and the keepers of the cultural discourse is rare. The legitimate critique directed at the keeper of the arena thus runs the risk of being one-legged and one-eyed.

It is difficult for us to see distinctions and specificities in arguments articulated from an unfamiliar point of view. All religiously informed opposition seems to conflate into one, the fundamentalist threat to freedom. The very concept of holiness seems to be awkward and strange, even scaring to many Swedes. As philosopher Judith Butler has pointed out in relation to the debate following the publication of the Muhammad caricatures in Danish *Jyllands-Posten* this inability and lack of interest in understanding why other people feel hurt or upset shows that taken for granted norms often overrides critical attempts to understand. This is a characteristic of moral dogmatism, shown by many on both sides in their response to the caricatures.²⁵ In the *Jerusalem* debate of this spring this dogmatism has mainly surfaced in the response from the secular side. And they have been the one's to criticize the museum for bending to dogmatic fundamentalists.²⁶ The brilliance of Butler's analysis, the founding author of queer theory, is worth quoting at a certain length.

Those who work within the presumptions of a single and adequate framework make all kinds of suppositions about the cultural sufficiency and breadth of their own thought. As a result, they will doubtless think that the refusal to accept this monolithic framework (secular, legal) is nothing but a covert way of taking up – and disavowing – a position

25 Butler, Judith. 2009. "The Sensibility of Critique: Response to Asad and Mahmood" in *Is Critique Secular? Blasphemy, Injury and Free Speech*, eds. Talal Asad et al. Berkeley: University of California Press.

26 <http://www.sturmark.se/?p=366>. (Retrieved 16 Oct. 2010).

within this framework. Such reasoning confirms the monolithic hegemony of the framework.²⁷

Some critics were quick to construct such chains of equivalences. Some participants in the dialogues gave voice to a questioning attitude towards the choice to portray LGBTQ-rights within the framework of the holy or to infuse situations of holiness with new, profane messages. These spaces are seen to approach people on a level surpassing their sexuality.²⁸ The perceived negative attitude to the exhibition was easily conflated with homophobia, misogyny, disrespect for democracy and freedom and all kinds of vague shadiness. The metaphor of 'bearded religious men' was used.

It is not farfetched to suppose that citizens notice that the hegemonic framework for this critique is the same framework that most of the discourse of the museums springs from - whether the topic is multiculturalism, intersectionality, environmental concerns or heteronormative critiques.

Western aesthetics, universal rights and neutral arenas

The architects of the Museum of World Culture wanted to create an open and inviting space in the center of the building. A large set of stairs were made to connect different parts of the building, explicitly making connections to the Spanish stairs in Rome.²⁹ The aesthetic, architectural language of this museum, and many new museums, is firmly inscribed in a (post)modernistic international competition framework. This architectural framework have been criticized for being more directed towards 'global style', interested in doing something that catches the eyes of the international architectural discourse, rather than catering for the broader citizenry at the site.³⁰ Poet and feminist Gloria Anzaldúa

27 Butler, p. 102.

28 Wiederhold, Lutz. 2004. "Profane and Sacred" in *Encyclopedia of the Qur'an*, ed. Jane Dammen McAuliffe, Leiden: Brill.

29 <http://www.brisacgonzalez.com/projects/mwc/mwc01.html>.

30 Davidson, Mark. 2007. "Gentrification as global habitat: a process of class formation or corporate creation?" in *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 32:4. See also the

have argued that this aesthetics of virtuosity is a trait found throughout Western high culture. “It is dedicated to the validation of itself. Its task is to move humans by means of achieving mastery in content, technique, feeling. Western art is always whole and always ‘in power’. It is individual (not communal). It is ‘psychological’ in that it spins its energies between itself and its witness.”³¹ Its products are meant to be displayed to others, to conserve, cherish and admire. Anzaldúa instead calls for a mestizo aesthetics, a borderland aesthetics, geared towards the communal, she also sees this direction towards mutual participation in culture as more prominent in other, non-Western, traditions.

Is art and architecture of this tradition of virtuosity really a good vehicle to invite people to dialogue and mutual discourse?

I can't find it strange that people might doubt the sincerity of inclusive approaches of the keepers of the public arena as long as the invitations are all articulated within this hegemonic framework. We are faced with what I want to call ‘the missionary's dilemma’. It is quite possible to make a distinction between the qualities of a message and the role of the messenger bringing it. For example was the Gospel of Salvation spread in the New World by the compatriots of the Conquistadors, looting, killing and enslaving the locals that the missionaries then came to save, the declaration of human rights penned by the French National Assembly was spread through Europe by Napoleon's army. Even if the message in itself may be both sound and well meaning, the position and behavior of the messenger might be suspect and arrogant. As the political philosopher Fred Dallmayr has stated:

Generally speaking, right-claims should always give rise to questions like these: Whose rights (or liberties) are asserted, against whom, and in what context? Do rights-claims advance the cause of justice, equity, and human well-being, or are they obstacles on this

special issue of *Architectural Design* 80:2, 2010, called “Exuberance: New Virtuosity in Contemporary Architecture”.

31 Anzaldúa, Gloria (1999), *Borderlands/La Frontera: The new Mestiza*, 2nd ed., San Francisco, Aunt Lute Books, pp. 89.

road? Basically, all these questions boil down to the simple query: Are rights rightly claimed, or what is the 'rightness' of rights?³²

Our public discourse is over full with issues where Islam taken as a monolithic entity (and to a lesser degree other religions) is articulated as a problem. Some argue that it is a misconceived problem, but the frame of discussion is still the same: as a Muslim (or religious person of other denominations) you need to prove that you are harmless, that you are an exception from the stereotype perceived as Islam, you have to state that you are a modern, moderate Muslim, as if a typical Muslim abiding to standard-Islam is by definition not in tune with Modern values and norms. As Butler asks: "What does it mean when the notion of freedom has been twisted to ratify discrimination, xenophobia, racism and nationalism? [---] And what happens when lesbian and gay freedoms are instrumentalized to harass religious minorities or to ensure that new immigrants can be denied entry on religious, ethnic, or racial grounds?"³³

The critique of religiously grounded misogyny, heterosexism and discrimination is of course very legitimate. It is hard to find any other institutions that have had the same power to condemn people's innermost wishes and life choices as immoral or sinful, as worthy of punishment. But any analysis of power must be constantly rearticulated and situated. A large part of the critiques of religious values in contemporary European public discourse is not directed against powerful institutions, but target minority groups as symbolically responsible for religiously framed violence and terrorism.³⁴

But the implicit conclusion to this line of argument runs the counter-risk of exempting minorities from critique for discrimination within their respective communities. There is one very important distinction to be made here. There is a fundamental difference between supporting other people's claims for justice, freedom and opportunities, and

32 Dallmayr, Fred R. 2001. *Achieving our World: Toward a Global and Plural Democracy*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, p. 52.

33 Butler, p. 130.

34 Allen, Chris. 2007. "Islamophobia in Europe" in *European Islam: The Challenges for public policy and society*. Eds. S. Amghar et. al. Brussels: Centre for European Policy Studies.

quite a different thing to argue for people's rights from the outside, without asking what kind of help they need. In this project this is complicated; there is an oscillation between Jerusalem, Sweden and religion as a global phenomenon.

Dallmayr's suggestion that we query about the 'rightness' of rights seems to imply that we can find an unambiguous answer. I would like to add the questions: Whose well-being and justice is advanced? Is it at the expense of others? In the example under discussion I do not find it possible to deliberate in any certain direction. Yes, every attempt to further LGBTQ rights should have our support. But every time we try to argue for one groups rights by pointing to the foundations for a structural discrimination we run the risk at spreading the blame too widely. Depending of the loci of annunciation a message has very different meanings and impacts. Our sound message might be caught and transformed by the contextual power relations and symbolisms. This is what an intersectional perspective might help us see. But it is still very difficult to transform this understanding into a better practice. We need to see the conclusions of our arguments, and do our very best to adapt them to our actions.

Dialogue and partial perspectives

In the magazine styled publication *So far*, produced to summarize the experiences of the first five years of the Museum of World Culture we can read:

Complicated issues call for discourse and several perspectives – not readymade solutions, served on a platter. Consequently, the Museum would like to assume the role of an arena for discourse and dialogue. Visitors should be brought face to face with perspectives and narratives other than those they encounter on an everyday basis. Different voices should be heard and controversial topics addressed. The goal is that everyone should be able to test their opinions and dare cross different boundaries that are automatically part of each and everyone's individual background. Arousing dialogue

[att stimuleras till dialog] can be difficult and something that the Museum of World Culture is constantly trying to develop.³⁵

The Museum wants to arouse dialogue, but does not say much about participating in it. The *So far* publication is in many ways a presentation of a *weltanschauung*, a frame through which the museum views the world. “There is no on universal truth; the voices, opinions and experiences are many and diverse” (p. 8). The museum tries to hover over this world of diversity, change and hybridity: “because the world is constantly changing, pluralism and variation are particularly important features of the exhibitions” (p. 10). But there have not been any exhibitions or presentation of this overall frame, rather the exhibitions cover exemplary themes of contemporary global issues. “With the focus on what changes the images, alters perceptions and turns things upside down, the definition of the world immediately becomes more complicated – and thus more interesting.” (p. 8) But surely not all kinds of complications can be viewed as interesting and positive. There is a normative strand emphasizing hybridity and interconnectedness that seldom come to the fore. Where does the museum stand? Maybe the museum has been too silent in stating its own normative position, even if many have felt it to be a multicultural politically correct institution.

By planting our feet in one and then in another country we take our position on one side and do not hover neutrally over both. In this way, we are located both *on this side and beyond* the boundary.³⁶

I think we lack both these steps in much of contemporary ethnographic museums. We are neither on this side nor beyond the boundary. There has been a lot of research about communities in museology.³⁷ But seldom do employees of ethnographic museums talk

35 *So far*. 2009. Gothenburg: The Museum of World Culture, p. 35.

36 Bernhard Waldenfels, quoted in Dallmayr, p. 130.

37 Karp, Ivan, Kreamer, Christine Mullen, Lavine, Steven D. eds. 1992. *Museums and Communities: The Politics of Public Culture*, Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press. Watson, Sheila, eds. 2007. *Museums and their communities*, London: Routledge. Crooke, Elisabeth. 2008. *Museums and Community: Ideas, Issues and Challenges*, London: Routledge.

about their own majority community. Communities are by definition marginalized minority groups. There has been a lot of important work empowering such groups through various community work in museums. This seems to be working best when a museum is located in an area where this group live, or when a museum is dedicated to a theme that has a clear stakeholder group.³⁸ But again, the museum professionals all too often assumes a role as unattached brokers, distributing power to the unprivileged and unrepresented groups in society. Or, they might be recruited from within the community under support and thus become part of the empowering work.

Most museum professionals in most ethnographic museums are not such persons, though. Still, we are all situated in particular genealogies, we all have partial perspectives.³⁹ If the partiality of this perspective is under discussion it is most often within a critique of patronizing, colonialistic and imperialistic traditions within the museum. This is very true of the Museum of World Culture.

Coloniality is definitely one aspect of the country where we have our feet planted. It has been very important to show this, since Sweden's historic lack of success in acquiring colonies, and the ability to stay away from the world wars, leads to an assumption that this was not our history. That Swedish progress and development was very much dependent on its privileged position in the international imperialistic system has not been part of our national history, where the anti-colonial stance of the late 1960- and 1970-ties has been more emphasized. The Museum of World Culture was founded in the late 1990-ties within a rather new born political discourse critical of Swedish compliance with nationalistic and colonialistic narratives and projects.

We cannot, and should not, escape this self critical aspect. But it would be strange to argue for the need of a communitarian identification that only focused on this negative aspect of our majority history. I think we really need to put our feet deeper in the ground

38 See for example the Smithsonian Anacostia Community Museum. <http://anacostia.si.edu/>.

39 Haraway, Donna J. 1991. "Situated knowledges: The science question in feminism and the privilege of partial perspective", in *Simians, cyborgs, and women: the reinvention of nature*, London: Free Association Books.

and start exploring what our local Swedish legacy can mean. I think we should highlight the fact that we speak a small language. That we always have had to think through another language to take part in the universalistic and universalizing discourses, be they in Latin, German, French or English. As Tariq Ramadan has argued: “it is impossible to start earnest dialogue about present diversity in one persists in denying the plural reality and the diversity of one's own past.”⁴⁰

There is a distancing potential in this. We can emphasize the marginality of our history. Official Swedish history has been trying hard to latch on to the idea of progressive Modernism.⁴¹ We were trying to look more modern than the originators of modernism. I think there are other potentialities in planting our feet in our local ground, seeing our dependence on, and interaction with, foreign ideas, foreign labor, and foreign capital. It is also important to trace the contrapuntal histories of the tradition. No tradition has ever been monolithic, and there are always dissidents, traitors against privilege and ideologies of supremacy that we can identify with.⁴² There are critical potentialities in this, in a non-chauvinistic local history. But the acknowledgement of our own situatedness, our own entrapment within a specific framework, would hopefully also make us more humble in our wishes to be the hosts of a neutral arena, thinking of ourselves as transparent brokers of other communities' interests.

We, as individual professionals and as a museum, are also tied to interests, and the fact that we tend share interests and framework with the privileged actors in the public discourse gives us a specific position, framing our acts to specific power relations and often putting us in what at best could be described as the missionary's dilemma. Maybe we should even question the quality of our message more often?

40 Ramadan, Tariq. 2009. *Radical Reform: Islamic Ethics and Liberation*. New York: Oxford University Press, p. 307.

41 Ruth, Arne. 1984. “The Second Nation: the Mythology of Modern Sweden” in *Daedalus* 113:1.

42 Martín Alcoff, Linda. 2000. “What should white people do?”, in *Decentering the center: philosophy for a multicultural, postcolonial, and feminist world*, eds. Sandra G. Harding och Uma Narayan, Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

My own reflections, and this presentation, is trapped within this same problem. All these arguments for the need of a more equal distribution of power and sensibilities are stated on the shoulders of thinkers and theories formulated in the academic power centers of the West, coming from only one side of the border. It is the same classical intellectual superiority complex at play. I know what is best for you, even if I have no contact with your living conditions or your intellectual tradition. I can represent you.⁴³ This is of course in part a telling image of the complete dominance of the Western intellectual tradition in international institutions and discourse. It is still very difficult to be heard with an argument building on non-Western resources and traditions.

What about this placing the foot also on the other side of the boundary, creating some kind of border thinking: Can this lead to an immanent critique? Is this something that can come about only from reference to another canon or tradition, or is there a need for identification as well?

To me there is a pressing need for what can be called border thinking, the development of an epistemological framework that include different canons, traditions and languages.⁴⁴ To be convincing and inviting, the articulation of why and how museums want to be an arena for all citizens must have other points of reference than the narrow Anglo-French-German tradition. At the same time we cannot escape our situatedness and historicity. We are a state institution, a museum, placed in Western Sweden, Northwestern Protestant Europe. With this come a number of legacies. Donna Haraway, who formulated the theory of situated knowledges, uses this predicament as an argument for the possibility and need to join forces with other knowers. “The knowing self is partial in all its guises, never finished, whole, simply there and original; it is always constructed and stitched

43 Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. 1988. “Can the Subaltern Speak?” in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, eds. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg, Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press.

44 Grinell, Klas. 2010b. “Border Thinking: Fethullah Gülen and the East–West Divide”, in *Islam and Peacebuilding: Gulen Movement Initiatives*, eds. Ihsan Yilmaz & John Esposito, New York: Blue Dome Press.

together imperfectly, and *therefore* able to join with another, to see together without claiming to be another.”⁴⁵ Knowledge must be dialogical in order to less partial.

Tariq Ramadan urges us to be cautious in our praises for dialogue, though. Just because they are theoretically possible and politically popular it doesn't follow that they are necessarily always good. “Depicting the 'dialogue of civilizations' as the positive ideology of our time to avoid discussing the strategies of political, economic, cultural, and military domination is a smokescreen and, when all is said and done, nothing but hypocrisy.”⁴⁶

Ramadan is, as can be seen, critical of many of the present initiatives for “dialogue between values and ideals”. There is too much empty talk in this, there are symbolic acknowledgements of the worth of other people's values, but policies and practices are left unexamined and unchanged. Dialogue is not merely about seeing the other and letting their voice be heard, dialogue should instead be a means to help us see our own short comings and the needs for reforms to be undertaken about oneself. To get there, Ramadan argues, dialogue must start with respect, not patronizing tolerance, or the high belief that our ideals can help others improve their practice. When dialogue is done in earnest each part is focused on self-criticism and assessments of concrete realities. Too often the aim of dialogue seems to be more dialogue, instead of addressing the questions that made dialogue necessary in the first place – that is power, domination, politics and economics. Too often it is believed that dialogue is better when sensitive issues are left out of the dialogue. But such dialogue cannot reach what is at the heart of the matters. Inequalities and discrimination can linger on beneath the understanding built on some idealistic mutual arena.⁴⁷

45 Haraway, p. 193.

46 Ramadan, p. 306.

47 Ramadan, pp. 304-310.

I think this is why the Jerusalem exhibition can be important and worthwhile. The sensitive issues are forced to the surface. But, it has so far been very hard to get a discussion focusing on self-criticism and respect. To get there all parts needs to acknowledge that there are many layers of discrimination in society. In the geopolitical site Jerusalem it seems very clear that the discrimination against sexual minorities is severe, and that discrimination in the name of faith or religion is less visible. Jewish LGBTQ-women can enter the Church of the Holy Sepulchre and be photographed kissing in front of the stone of Unction by a foreign, lesbian photographer, while Christian Palestinian heterosexual men cannot enter the Church to worship. Power is always played out in intricate ways, and people are always entangled by many different imposed or chosen identifications.

When a lesbian photographer and TV-show host from the platform of a state governed museum criticize Abrahamitic religion for its discrimination against women and LGBTQ-persons it might run the risk of putting further pressure on persons already portrayed as threats to our European values, persons never having the chance to communicate their possible acceptance of LGBTQ rights. But, if we as a museum can do our utmost to convince these persons that we want to be an arena where also they can voice their opinions, we might come to a dialogue where the difficult questions of inequality, misogyny, homophobia and heteronormativity are not hidden beneath a polite surface of patronizing tolerance. But our institution has a lot of legacies to overcome before such an invitation can be seen as sincere and non-patronizing.

V. CONCLUSIONS

This has been an explorative text. It is an essay, an effort to think as freely as possible, not trying to legitimize the museums actions so far, or anyone else's, nor trying to find easy solutions. One aspect of the problem is that there is more than one legitimate claim, and that they are partly colliding. The choice of action can only be strategical. Whose

interests are most pressing at this very moment, in this very situation, and what is possible for the museum as an institution to do?

A problem here is the pace of museum work. In the years from the first contacts until the actual presentation of the exhibition the contexts have changed, maybe calling for other strategic moves. But strategy is also always contested, and tied to ideological and theoretical positions. In this case the strategic analysis of the museum and the invited artist came to differ.

“It is one thing for the state [governed museum] to value freedom of expression and to protect expression, but it is quite another for the state [governed museum] to be the agent who decides whose freedom of expression will be protected and whose will not.”⁴⁸ As a museum we must make these decisions. It is obvious in this example that the museums efforts to protect the freedom of expression both of LGBTQ-activists and of religious representatives arguing for the sanctity of holy spaces have so far failed. In the public response the voices heard interpreted it as if LGBTQ expressions were being censored when threatened to be put side by side with arguments for non-provocative religious ways of advancing LGBTQ rights. I would agree with our critics that the stance of some of the religious representatives is similar to the patronizing tolerance that Ramadan wants expelled from true dialogue. To counter this we also invited religious LGBTQ persons and advocates to give their testimony of LGBTQ religiosity. Hopefully we will succeed in our efforts when the exhibition now actually opens and can meet its audience. There is still a chance...

Still, the conclusion to my essay is that I do not really know how to deal with the critique raised. It is not only that we have legitimate claims colliding, we also have legitimate critique of the way we have handled the issue so far. We tried to hold a firm curatorial grip of the exhibition, brokering the different and opposing interests that we could see. We tried to let people stake their own claims and to react to them. But of course one

48 Butler, p. 130.

specific agent had a privileged position, being the artist who conceived and produced the images to be displayed. In trying to cater for other groups interests we intruded on what is commonly seen as the area of artistic freedom. We were presenting solutions, rather than opening a dialogue between the artist and the stakeholders we had dialogued with. The process was too far gone to restart and develop a new mutual understanding; our work was hastened in order to meet production deadlines.

Dialogue does not seem to sit very well with the deadlines and time frames of production. I think this is one of the main reflections. Dialogue takes time; dialogues most build trust and understanding. If there is no time for this the broker and the arena will hasten things and impose their agenda on the other participants, in the name of repertoire, audience interests and its understanding of public trends. The power discrepancies are difficult to handle and any imposed decision will rightly be criticized. It is telling, though that only the critique from one of the claimants could be heard in the media. This is something we must take into account and assess in future work to develop exhibitions.

I think we need to be much more careful in analyzing who gets the first invitations, from what position we approach an important theme we want to dialogue and exhibit. When legitimate claims collide it is important that the strategically less privileged have a strong institutional grounding. In this case this was not the case. If we wanted to control the exhibition we would have needed to be much more involved in the process, participating in the search for participants, being there in the photo sessions and implementing the dialogue from the very beginning. When this was not the case, we should have acted as an arena: giving room for the artist's argument, and being careful to give room to the reactions coming when it first had been heard. This is also how the exhibition will be presented and how we will try to act while it is on display.

You cannot invite to a dialogue when the parameters are already set. This kind of outreach work is more like a customer survey. It might be important to evaluate how the audience will respond, but it is not a respectful invitation to dialogue. Inviting people to agree with your decision *is* patronizing. If dialogical work is not implemented at the very

heart and start of museum work then it might very well sow division, distrust and anger, rather than understanding and inclusion.

What I think we should do is to always refrain from simplified solutions, and mere polite celebrations of diversity and difference. Difference is a fact, as is shared values and histories. But we cannot merely state that, we must let stakeholders help us explore this from the very beginning, before we decide exactly when and how we are going to exhibit the process and its result.⁴⁹

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