Globalisation and Museum - Perspectives from North America, India and the Arab World

Lidia Guzy, Rainer Hatoum and Susan Kamel

Are museums symbols of cultural dominance or spaces of social participation and integration? For a long time museum studies have dealt with the functions of museums in different, but mostly western, societies (Bennett 1995; Dodd / Sandell 2001). Comparative investigations on non-western museums have been lacking. The museum research project "*From Imperial museum to the communication centre? On the new role of museums as an interface between science and non-western societies",* funded by the Volkswagen Foundation, tries to close this research gap (Guzy/Hatoum/Kamel 2006). The authors of this article share a scientific affiliation with the „New Museology", a theoretical framework which was formulated in the beginning of the 1980s within the circles of the International Council of Museum (Ganslmayr in 1989: 79-84). Inspired by museum professionals from the USA, Canada, Australia and New Zealand (Wessler 2007:17), the New Museology initiated a critical debate on the necessity of new forms of representation, thus responding to claims for participation put forward by indigenous groups. The New Museology aimed at their empowerment through cooperation between them, the museums and the general public. (O`Neill 1999; Watson 2007: 1-23). MacDonald describes this change of paradigm for museums as follows:

„…*in particular the ways in which differences, and especially inequalities, of ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and class, could be reproduced by disciplines – perhaps through exclusions from „the canon," „the norm," „the objective" or „the notable" – came under the spotlight*" (MacDonald 2007: 3).

The underlying thesis of our research project *"From Imperial Museum to Communication Centre?"* is that globalisation is changing the artistic and cultural expressions of non-western societies as they become visible in museum representations. In order to understand this process, the politico-cultural aspects of globalisation are comparatively examined in three different world regions (North America, India and the Arab World). The authors investigate how museum work - collecting, researching and communicating – is affected by processes of globalisation. Finally, the research project investigates different collection-related-issues (see illustration I):

1. Hatoum deals with changes in museum research in North America in the light of the Intellectual Property debates and demands made by indigenous Indian Nations.
2. Guzy links current changes in museum representation in India to the challenges of collecting and archiving endangered musical forms of expression.
3. Kamel analyzes museum narratives in the Arab World, considering especially the changing forms of representation and mediation in museums.

Illustration 1 Structure of the Research Project

The purpose of our project is twofold: to contribute to the democratisation and decolonisation of Museum Studies (see Healy / Witcomb 2007:2) as well as to gain insights leading to a better representation of non-western societies in European museum work. For a term of three years (01.11.2006-31.10.2009) the project is harboured at the Institute for Scientific Studies of Religions at the Freie Universität Berlin, at the Ethnological Museum in Berlin and at the Berlin Institute for Museum Research. In this article, the authors give an insight into their ongoing research and will present some first results.

1. North American Museums in Transition (Rainer Hatoum)

The exploration of the controversy about museums as a "western" institution going on in the U.S. and Canada represents one facet of the issue dealt with in the tandem-project "From Imperial Museum to Communication Center" as a whole: it deals with processes unfolding in nations shaped by European colonization, nations that on the one hand conceive of themselves as multicultural, liberal states under the rule of law, yet on the other hand also maintain special relations with the descendants of the colonized indigenous populations. Since the present study focuses on the function museums fulfil as places of intersection between "(western) scholarship" and "western" versus "non-western societies", a particular emphasis will be on the natural history museums that are very common in the U.S. Being part of the larger category of "science museums", and explicitly designed to be institutions fostering education and research, they are better suited for an exploration of the issues mentioned above than any other kind of museum with "ethnographic" collections.

The issue of representation

It is beyond doubt that the controversy about the institution "museum" has to be viewed as a result of the profound global socio-political changes that occurred in the second half of the 20th century. Both the American civil rights movement of the 1960s and the Native American movement aiming at a revitalization of traditional cultural values need to be viewed in that context. Besides reproaches concerning the colonial origins of ethnographic collections, the most frequent criticism uttered by Native Americans is that museums are mouthpieces of the dominant (western) elite. According to that view, museum-related discourses on history, art, and culture inadequately portray large segments of the American society, or even completely disregard them (Karp et al. 1992; West 2000; Blue Spruce 2004). The ensuing process of self-reflection at museums was thus characterized by a reduction of the question of "*pre*sentation" to that of "*repre*sentation" (Henderson et al. 1997; Hill et al. 1992). The issue of imparting knowledge became eclipsed by that of the "authenticity" of that knowledge, of those who impart it, and of the frame of discourse. The result was a veritable boom of newly emerging community museums of an ethnic character. Many of the Native American tribal museums sprung up in the course of that process (Casey 1996; Lurie 1981). The call of quite a number of the larger "ethnic" and "racial" groups, such as African Americans, Hispanics, Asians, or Native Americans, for a national museum for each of their own on the Mall in Washington, D.C., is also a result of the socio-

political processes mentioned above, and has grown louder and louder since the 1980s. As yet, the National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI) probably may be regarded as the only museum of this kind. Still, one for African Americans is already in the making (illustration 2).

Illustration 2 Panindian culture in urban space, National Museum of the American Indian, Washington D.C., 2007, Rainer Hatoum

Apart from these developments, however, a survey of the permanent exhibitions of renowned natural history museums all over the United States (e.g. The Burke Museum of Natural History and Culture in Seattle, Denver Museum of Nature and Science, Milwaukee Public Museum, The Field Museum in Chicago, American Museum of Natural History in New York or the National Museum of Natural History, Smithsonian Institution, in Washington D.C.) reveals that, in spite of a process of self-reflection that has been ongoing for almost five decades, surprisingly little has changed, at least with regard to the area of presentation. Admittedly, the exhibitions of Native American cultures and history have been touched up; yet most of the few existing exhibitions that deal with other regions of the world seem to be considerably antiquated. At the same time, not much has changed in the touched-up Native American exhibitions in terms of content: They basically remain committed to the environment/culture paradigm. Only at second glance do some changes catch the beholder's eye, such as almost universal attempts to refer to contemporary Native Americans' lives, and to incorporate Native American perspectives by means of quotations. In individual cases, a conspicuous emphasis on the Native American authorship of the explanatory texts testifies to efforts to stress an emic perspective. More subtle are those effects of the ongoing controversy that manifest themselves in "remaining silent on certain topics". Thus, certain objects and themes that within current usage are likely be interpreted as "sensitive" or "politically incorrect" by Native American activists are completely absent. When it comes to a conscious paradigmatic reorientation within the sphere of presenting culture, however, most Natural History museums still have a long way to go. The change in perspective and approach as realized by the Smithsonian Institution with its National Museum of the American Indian, for example, did affect the National Museum of Natural History only so far as it lead to the dismantling of the old exhibitions on Native Americans – but no new approaches took their place.

Even more problematic than the defensive manner of dealing with criticism at museums is the fact that no new ground has been broken in the thematization of the past, present, and future of human cultures, which lies at the very core of ethnographic exhibitions in Natural History Museums. Instead, one encounters the time-honoured concepts: retrospective presentations of indigenous, tribal, and exotic cultures of majority societies of the Third World – tradition, folklore, arts and crafts. These exhibitions mirror, in many ways, old ideas relating to collections, and hardly take into account more recent currents of thought in anthropology. Here, a recontextualization of ethnographica would not be the first of its kind within the history of museums. Ethnological presentations thus are an

extreme antithesis to the permanent or special exhibitions of other disciplines, which not infrequently – using state-of-the-art technical equipment – display the results of the latest research, and address current, controversial social issues (e.g., abortion).

The role of objects in museum research

Viewed against that background, the role of the "collected object", and thus also the role of collection-oriented "museum" research, are issues that gain increasing importance. First of all, however, we need to keep in mind that the collected object has a different status in anthropology than, for example, in the arts. Due to the discourse within the discipline, the "object" has lost its original, central role in anthropology (Bolz 1999; Lurie 1981). Following a relatively brief period of intensive collecting activities, the growth of ethnographic collections largely stagnated. Yet the comparison with the natural sciences, which are currently leading the field, and their actually quite unspectacular collections, reveals that the composition and "outdatedness" of the ethnographic collections are just part of the problem.

Because of a strict separation between "natural history museums" and "art museums" – with the latter, unlike European art museums, often also exhibiting "ethnic art" (ethnographica and/or modern art) –, some of the basic problems of museum-oriented anthropology become much more apparent in North America than in Europe. While in Europe exhibition concepts are "mixed" to varying degrees with regard to the question of "art" versus "context", those in North America tend to keep the two frames of discourse markedly separate from each other. And so - with European exhibitions reflecting "art" versus "context" debates fought out anew over and over again (while using a multitude of definitions) - one will tend to encounter a different picture in the North America: a future-oriented discourses on art on the one hand, and a rather statically historicizing, "anthropological" environment/culture paradigms on the other, with results of more recent research selectively reflected in special exhibitions, if at all. It is an open question to what extent the undiminished popularity of dioramas – devices of contextualization that have meanwhile become stigmatized as "too exoticizing" in Europe, but continue to be distinct features of the natural history museums in the U.S. – contributes its part to the contentual stagnation. As a matter of fact, no seminal alternative has yet emerged in those museums to replace the prevailing environment/culture paradigm, which is also still firmly etched in the minds of the general public. Based on the assumption that the existing ethnographic collections are of timeless validity, museums cling to an encyclopaedic, old-style concept of humankind. More recent anthropological approaches are frequently dismissed as "fads" that – because of their supposed short-lividness – are suited for special exhibitions, at the best. Due to that stagnation, hardly any new concepts of "knowledge", and novel strategies of imparting knowledge, have found their way into anthropological exhibitions. It comes as no surprise that this dysfunction affecting the role of museums as places of intersection between cultural studies and society in general has very concrete consequences in the sphere of anthropology when it comes to staffing: namely, the hiring of non-anthropologists, or the reduction of jobs for ethnologists in the respective departments of the museums.

Yet at the same time new trends in collection-oriented anthropological research have emerged. Here, I am specifically referring to research in connection with current legal proceedings that concern repatriation. The latter are a result of the Native American Grave Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA), which was passed in 1990; this legislation, in turn, is to be interpreted as a direct result of many years of protests by Native Americans, who explicitly criticized museums, among other things (Boyd 1992; Brown 2003). Rather than being part of any current culture-oriented theoretical discourse, this new form of "museum" research can most aptly be classified as provenance research. Just as in Canada and Australia, it first and foremost serves the purpose of facilitating, on a national level, a process of "healing" and "reconciliation" with the descendants of the indigenous populations.

A case study in research

In order to explore some of the basic problem areas inherent in this new form of collection-oriented anthropological research, the sub-project presented here uses a case study related to the NAGPRA problematics: the "Herzog/Navaho" collection, which consists of about 1.300 wax cylinders with ceremonial songs of the Navajo of Arizona and New Mexico that were recorded by the ethnomusicologist Georg Herzog in the early 1930s. This collection is part of the Berliner Phonogramm-Archiv (Berlin Phonographical Archive), which was proclaimed "world document heritage" by the UNESCO in 1999, and there are several reasons why it lends itself to an exploration of issues of intellectual and cultural property relevant in museum contexts. These issues have already become politically charged by a problematic "global claim" to local knowledge, and do not only have an impact on the sphere of law, but also on elementary problem areas pertaining both to concepts of knowledge and ethics. These play a particularly pivotal role within the context of a cooperative effort, initiated by the author, that involves the Ethnological Museum Berlin and the Navajo Nation. The question whether these ceremonial chants are an expression of human creativity or "dangerous" knowledge coming from a supernatural source, for example, is just as problematic as the issue concerning the general status of the knowledge kept in Berlin: Is this piece of "World Cultural Heritage" common property, or is it rather the "private" cultural "tribal property" of the Navajo? It is not difficult to imagine the potential for conflict inherent in the answers to these questions, and the possible consequences when it comes to accessing, handling, and using the collection under discussion.

Summing up, it can be concluded that the challenge issued by indigenous groups to museums as a "western" institution does not only call for a new debate about the central question "preservation for whom?", but also about the question of what "should" or "may" be preserved at all, and who is and/or should be in control of such decisions.

2. India's Museums in Transformation (Lidia Guzy)

In the context of globalisation theories (Appadurai 1996; Rectanus 2006: 382-385, Friedman 2000) and post-colonial Studies (Said 1978; Spivak 1988; Clifford 1988; Bhabha 1994) museums in India appear as cultural, political and imaginary spaces. They reflect global discourses as well as utopian experiments at actual places. Hence, Indian museums can be described as hetero-topies (Foucault 1990:39) or museo-scapes (see Appadurai 1996:33-37).

Indian Museums dramatically bear witness to the paradoxes of globalisation: On the one hand, they reflect de-territorialized global discourses and act within a framework of international conventions. On the other hand, they constitute iconic spaces of local traditions, where new forms of representation but also new forms of essentialisation of culture manifest themselves. In response to the UNESCO convention for the preservation of the immaterial cultural heritage, museums in India have started to focus on the documentation and preservation of the Intangible Cultural Heritage.

With the UNESCO convention for the preservation of the immaterial cultural heritage (cf. www.unesco.org a) - which was formulated on the 17th of October 2003 and came into force on the 20th of April 2006 - an international instrument to advance the protection and the "respect for the cultural variety and the human creativity" (UNESCO today 2/2007: 77) was created.

According to the definition of UNESCO, immaterial cultural heritage includes a) orally transmitted traditions and forms of expressions (language); b) performing arts; c) social actions like rituals and ceremonies; d) local knowledge systems about nature and the universe; e) local crafts knowledge (ibid: 77; www.unesco.org a); www.unesco b). Focussing on museum and music (ICOM 2003: 3-21) and museum and the Intangible Cultural Heritage (UNESCO museum International 2004: 3-43) UNESCO since 2003 has furthered the urgent task of preserving the endangered immaterial cultural heritage worldwide.

With the adoption of the UNESCO convention of 2003, which has since been ratified by more than 50 mostly non-European countries – amongst them India on 09/09/2005 and Egypt on 03/08/2005 - (www.unesco.org c) – highest priority has been ascribed to the collection and preservation of immaterial cultural heritage worldwide.

Encouraged by the UNESCO convention, the scientific and administrative organs of the Indian government have in recent years become increasingly aware of the urgent need to document and preserve the country's immaterial cultural heritage.

The Rise of India's Museums: the New Museum Movement

Today a 'boom' of national and local museums can be traced throughout India. But notably – and contrary to the assumption made above – it generally does not take the shape of a re-traditionalisation in the sense of a strengthening of traditional structures. Rather, new and dynamic

forms of handling and interpreting traditions seem to emerge. One of the most impressive examples of this creative effort is the biggest anthropological museum of Asia - the Indira Gandhi Rashtriya Manav Sangrahalaya or the Museum of Mankind which is particularly devoted to the traditions of rural and tribal India.

The Indira Gandhi Rashtriya Manav Sangrahalaya

The *Indira Gandhi Rashtriya Manav Sangrahalaya* understands itself as a model museum, responding to the challenges of globalisation and the socio-economic transformations it brings about (Basa 2005: III-IV). It aims at the preservation, strengthening and representation of the material and immaterial cultural heritage of tribal and rural traditions (Basa in 2005: V). The perspective of the museum centres primarily upon the culture of local communities as it manifests itself in a) ecological knowledge systems, b) architecture and c) specific visions of man and nature.

The museum defines itself as a post-colonial "living museum" and as part of the New Museum Movement in India (Chakrabarty 2005: 25). This movement was inaugurated in the 1980s and led to the Guwahati-Declaration of 1988, which formulated new guidelines for Indian museology (Bhatnagar in 1999: 63-65). The whole of India and its inhabitants are understood as parts and participants of a museum. Inspired by the philosophy of Mahatma Ghandi, local communities are seen as the museum's fundaments. The new museology of India is an eco-museology: It takes shape in a community-museum where representatives of local cultures act as curators, narrators and teachers of their own cultural heritage (concerning new museology in general, and eco- museums in particular see Wessler 2007: 8-9). The role of museum-professionals is restricted to supporting and mediating these activities.

The *Indira Gandhi Rashtriya Manav Sangrahalaya* was founded by Indira Gandhi in the beginning of the 1970s. It was located first in the offices of the Anthropological Survey of India in New Delhi. In 1985 it moved to Bhopal and took up its work as an organ of the Indian Government.

Today the Museum of Mankind is located on a site of 200 hectares of land hosting several Outdoor Exhibitions. An Indoor Museum with more than 10,000.00 m² has been opened in 2005. The Museum of Mankind distinguishes itself from other museums by its emphasis on open air exhibitions. The open-air area displays the ecological and socio-cultural diversity of India.

The Museum of Mankind embodies a new political and social sensibility: The long neglected and discriminated rural and tribal cultures of India are recognized and politically empowered (cf. Pfeffer 1997: 3-27). In focussing on the marginalised social groups of rural India, the Museum of Mankind is raising the "pre colonial people" (Chakrabarty 2005: 27) to a new notability: local communities are understood as pre-industrial and pre-colonial knowledge cultures which have accumulated a rich knowledge on sustainability. Such knowledge might gain substantial importance for the survival of India as an accelerated industrial nation (Chakrabarty 2005: 29).

With its emphasis on the immaterial cultural heritage, the Museum of Mankind is putting marginalised tribal and rural cultures in a position, where they can speak with their own voice. The valuable knowledge systems of particular societies are represented and thus preserved from extinction. The museum avoids the musealisation of artefacts. All objects are freely accessible and thus can be touched and sensually experienced. Building materials correspond to the ecological surroundings of the local cultures which are represented. Each year, the buildings of the open air exhibition are renewed by craftsmen from the local communities, using traditional methods of construction. Regularly representatives of local communities are invited to give lectures on traditional architecture, methods of construction, remedial therapies, religion or local art. To this end, the curators of the museum can draw on their contacts with local communities established during anthropological fieldwork. Workshops are announced in schools, by local newspapers or by an Internet newsletter.

An example for the vision and work of the Museum of Mankind is the so called *Mythological Trail* (see fig. 3): It is a mythological scenery created by narrators from different regions of India. The curators invited old men and women to tell stories or myths from their communities. Artistically gifted participants then transformed these myths into a new artistic form – for example pottery, bronze foundry, painting or sculpture. The results of this process are displayed at the *Mythological Trail* and were published in a special catalogue (Shah 2004).

Illustration 3 Symbolised Narmada Myth, Museum of Mankind, Mythological Trail, Bhopal, 2007, Lidia Guzy

With the mythological trail of the museum garden a new concept of art and artists takes shape. It can no longer be classified as folklore or traditional folk art. Rather, it could be described as contemporary rural or Adivasi art. The local artist gains an artistic identity; he or she is identified and distinguished in the expression of his or her creativity. This transformation from tradition to art not only saves local traditions from extinction, but also leads to the social and economical empowerment of the members of marginalised communities.

The vision of the Museum of Mankind is not to accept the silent extinction of the pre-colonial and pre-industrial cultural heritage of India but to create a bridge between local communities and the modern world. This bridge is open in both directions: towards urban as well as towards rural India. In experiencing the gardens, houses and artistic representations of the local communities, the visitor is lead towards recognising and appreciating the value of their knowledge-systems. In the Museum of Mankind a new national identity seems to take shape. This identity embraces the varieties of rural and tribal culture as well as the urban Hindu tradition.

There can be no doubt that the Museum of Mankind is an authentic effort to create a new national narrative of inclusion, embracing marginalised and up to now voiceless communities by means of the concepts and ideas of New Museology.

But the problem how to represent India's „*own other*" is still far from being solved. The history of the extinction of local pre-industrial lifestyles and societies in the course of economic or governmental interventions, which has not yet come to an end, is only implicitly reflected in the museum's exhibition. The Museum of Mankind does not explicitly address the topic of the very real loss of tribal and local culture still taking place in today's India. To a certain extent the topic finds a symbolic recognition which is in line with the implicit, symbolic language generally used by the museum: The very location of the museum can be understood as recognition of pre-industrial knowledge systems and societies. It is highly symbolic that the Museum of Mankind is situated in Bhopal, where on December 3, 1984 the biggest single environmental disaster in Indian history took place. Following a chemical accident in the plant of the American chemical company *Union Carbide,* at least 8000 people were killed and more than 150.000 injured; most of the survivors suffering from the long-term consequences until today. Thus, the museum can be seen as a memorial to industrial destruction, implicitly dedicated to today's victims of industrialisation. On a national scale, the Museum of Mankind represents an act of symbolic compensation directed towards the minority societies of India; a compensation for the social devaluation and physical extermination they had to suffer in the course of the modernisation process which led to the emergence of the urbanised and industrialised majority society of today's India. This – maybe belated - recognition of endangered local communities, finds its particular expression in the *Mythological Trail* of the museum. Here, a voice of artistic resistance against cultural extermination is raised by means of newly created forms of artistic expressions. But how audible is this voice, and how clearly is it allowed to express itself? The wide open but silent mouth of the artistic Narmada figure (see picture) may be read as an expression of the ultimately tragic and powerless position of the artists and local communities when facing the dominant forces of India's struggle for a place in the globalised capitalist world-order.

One should also keep in mind that the river Narmada which, in the local and national mythology, is venerated as a sacred river has become a symbol of national controversy about several dam projects in the Narmada valley, reaching from Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra up to Gujarat. Since the year 2000, the Narmada controversy has incited a national non-violent resistance and civil rights movement *Narmada Bachao Andolan.* This movement is directed towards an ecologic preservation of the Narmada river as well as against the forced resettlement of local tribal societies traditionally living by the riversides (see: www.narmada.org; Baviska 2005). The fact that a museum as a governmental body provides space for the artistic representations of a civil resistance movement may be taken as a sign of authentic pluralism and democracy. But, one might ask, is a museum exhibition which compensates for very real destruction anything more than the stage of an aesthetically silenced tragedy ?

Conclusion

The museum representation of tribal and rural cultures can be seen as India's answer to current global challenges. India pays respect to its *"own other"* which is represented in the spirit of recent UNESCO conventions. Highest scientific priority is ascribed to collecting as well as to the revitalisation and empowerment of local cultures in order to save them from extinction. Many museums throughout India which were inspired by the Museum of Mankind in Bhopal, as for instance the Tribal Museum in Bhubaneshwar or the Koraput Museum in Koraput, somewhat paradoxically reflect the ongoing destruction of the cultural diversity of India and the simultaneous national struggle to preserve the country's living cultural plurality.

Not only for the newly created federal states of Jharkhand and Chhatthisgarh but for the whole of India, museums play an important role in constructing a political, social and cultural identity facing the changes brought about by globalisation. In rescuing and preserving the manifestations of cultural diversity, museums often take over functions of cultural NGOs. The construction of art through museums, which takes place in institutions like the Museum of Mankind, seems to be an example for a global process of transformation from culture to art (Kohl 2007: 17-24). A possible danger could be the folklorisation of culture by means of museum representation. This might contribute to the creation or strengthening of political ethnicities.

3. Towards the new role of museums in the Arab world (Susan Kamel)

> "One of the central issues for an art exhibition in a globalized world is that of conveying specific knowledge, of presenting pictures that arise from local circumstances but go beyond them"
> (Announcement: for the symposium of the documenta12 in Beirut, cit. Abbas 2007: without page numbers)

The subproject on museums in the Arab World examines museums in countries which are often homogenized as "Arab" or "Islamic" world (the problem of these terms is discussed by Popp 2004:8 - to 29). Several goals are linked to this investigation:

First of all, the project connects Arab museums with their different socio-political contexts, namely Egypt, Yemen, Saudi Arabia andthe United Arab Emirates. It is assumed that museums in a centralistic state like Egypt play different roles than museums in the Republic of Yemen , in the Wahabiyyan monarchy of Saudi Arabia or in the booming megapolis Dubai. Secondly, the research focuses on (new) concepts of interpreting and communicating museum collections and conducts visitor surveys (fig. 4). The main aim of these studies is to find out whether museums in these countries recruit their visitors primarily from highly-educated groups, as has been shown for Western museums in the extensive and groundbreaking study by Bourdieu and Darbel 1966 (Hooper Greenhill 2006:364 - 365; Bourdieu, Darbel 1966, 2006).

Illustration 4 Young visitors fill in the questionnaire, Cairo 2007, Susan Kamel

Museums form and canonise knowledge (Pollock 1999; MacDonald, Basu 2007), which I will investigate in my subproject for so called „Islamic art" in contrast to 'Art from the Middle East', 'Egyptian Art' or 'Contemporary Egyptian Art' (Knopp, Odenthal 2003; Merali, Hager 2004; Kamel 2004; Ramadan 2005).[1]

In this article, I will concentrate solely on the new developments of museums in my main research area, which is Egypt. A historical example will be presented alongside three modern museums or exhibition spaces that operate as a platform for dialogue between new critical sciences and Egyptian societies. In the first, the Ethnological Museum in Cairo, I have looked particularly for representations of "the other".

From imperial museum…

The Ethnological Museum in Cairo was founded by the Geographical Society of Egypt in 1898.[2] Until the 1940's, Western amateur geographers dominated the society. Nonetheless, the Geographical Society of Egypt can be understood as the result of imperial interests also of the Khedive Ismail and the Egyptian elite: Egypt on the one hand wanted to expand its empire into Sudan and the horn of Africa; Europe on the other hand was planning to establish a 'representative' at „the gate to the unknown "Africa (after Reid 1993:541). Ironically, shortly after Egypt itself became a protectorate of the European powers (Reid 1993). The Ethnological Museum in Cairo shows objects from Egyptian rural life - in the manner of the old folklore museums, which construct, naturalise and present socially marginalised groups. One further group of exponents are Sudanese ethnographica as material evidence of the colonialised "other".

Interestingly enough, a third part of the exhibition focuses on the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869. The ceremonies for the Suez canalpresented an opportunity for the Europhile Khedive to present Egypt as a modern quasi-European state. Ismail evokes the unity with Europe in the following oath: "My country is no longer in Africa (…), we have made it part of Europe" (Schulze 2000:15). A whole room is dedicated to this scenario.

Thus representations of „the other" (Egyptian folk life, the Sudanese,) can be found side by side with self-portrayal of "the Self" (a white quasi-European Egypt).

According to the manager of the museum , Mr.Ahmad Makawy, in these days only an average of 100 visitors per annum come to the museum.[3] The Ethnological Museum seems to be the poor cousin (Stiefkind) within Egypt's museum landscape. There is not much hope that the Museum of Ethnology will play an important part in Egypt's future. Neither the catalogue of 1924 (Thomas 1924) nor the exhibition rooms were updated. Whereas ethnological museums in the West aim at being a platform for integration and social inclusion, this is definitely not on the top of the agenda in Egypt. Whenever

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1 An extensive study is presented by Kamel 2008 on "The Making of Islam". On Curating Islamic Art and Culture in Egypt", which deals with the Construction of "Islamic Art" in Egyptian Museums today.
2 There are only a few articles on the museum. See Duke 1961; Reid 1993 and 2002. A new initiative to revive the Geographical Society and thus also the museum is run by CULTNAT, the Center for Documentation of Cultural and Natural Heritage (see
http://www.euromedheritage.net/adopt/adopt_gallery/egyptian_geographic_society.htm, accessed 27/3/2008).
3 This assumption seems fairly likely. During my visits I was always the only one in the museum.

such efforts are made, they are initiated by influential representatives of such groups (e.g. the Coptic Museum) or by international Campaigns (e.g. the Nubia Museum).

If we turn our attention to recently opened museums now, I would like to show the ways in which they pay a tribute to the demands of the New Museology, by relying on context, participation and visitor-centered concepts.

A new era for museums in Egypt?

There is a boom in building new museums in Egypt, either as National Museums or as Site-Museums at archaeologically important places.

According to the Secretary General of the Supreme Council of Antiquities, Zahi Hawass, a new era for Egyptian museums has already begun: *„museums should be secure locations to display and preserve artefacts and also educational institutions"* (Hawass 2005:7).

Thus, a new focus is put on the communication of knowledge: Museums are meant to also address locals and to realize new concepts of mediating knowledge (see also Dodd, Sandell 2001; Kamel 2004; Hein 2006).

The master plan for museums in Egypt submitted by Hawass stresses the museums' role as educator and as researcher but does not mention the pillar of collecting (Hawass 2005). Hawass explains that not only the life of the elite should be represented but also that of "the Ordinary Egyptians' (P. 10). As an example of this, the Beyt Ababda Heritage Centre in Wadi el Gamal National Park in the Egyptian desert was opened in 2006 (Bos Seldenthuis 2007).

However, on the whole museums in Egypt are developing along strongly marked and narrow paths. In the following, I would like to present three examples which move beyond these paths: The Nubia Museum in Aswan, created under the guidance of UNESCO, is an example of the positive *and* negative effects of globalisation: It empowers the Nubian Communities but also creates a very static view of traditional Nubian Life. It can be considered to be a tool for development and retraditionalisation alike.

In closing I would then like to present museums as 'other spaces '(Foucault see note above) according to the wish, quoted above, for art exhibitions to 'convey knowledge': The Contemporary Image Collective (CIC) and the Townhouse Gallery, both in Cairo, are private Initiatives. It is within these spaces that questions of identity or representation of the 'other' are addressed in Egypt nowadays .

The Nubian Community Museum in Aswan

The Nubia Museum is - at least until the opening of the Grand Egyptian Museum in Gizeh or the National Museum of Egyptian Civilization in El Fostat - the museum in Egypt which is influenced by the New Museology (MacDonald 2006; Watson 2007). It was created and financed by UNESCO and its Nubian Rescue Campaign in order to save the Nubian monuments before the rising water of lake Nasser submerged them forever. The museum was already planned as a community museum

(Meguid 2005) and a vivid site for various activities of the Nubian Communities. Besides that it is a research centre for Nubian Studies, a place where Intangible Heritage is collected and documented. It is very much accepted within the Nubian population and interpreted by them as an empowering museum (Witcomb 2004). Our visitor survey, conducted in March 2008, has shown that it is visited mainly by school classes, as well as by highly educated Egyptians and non-Egyptians alike.[4]

The ethnographic part of the museum is dominated by life-sized dioramas, which aim to show the "authentic" rural life of the Nubians in their villages. Observation (carried out between February 2007 and March 2008) in many museums in the Arab World (Dubai, Sanaa, Cairo) has shown, that such "authentic scenes" were much appreciated by the audience (this was critiqued by Dioramas, see Moser 1999; Wessler 2007). As to authenticity, these "rural scenes" were exceeded only by a visit in an "authentic" Nubian village, the village Gharb Sehel. Here it is not dioramas, but real life scenes that tourists can experience: meeting "other" cultures here becomes placed back into very authentic spaces . The only thing that is missing here are labels on everything that moves: Nubian Women, 43, flesh and blood!

This village outside of Aswan is a mixture of an outdoor museum and a fun-fair and reminds me of the so called "Heritage Villages" (e.g. in the Dubai Creek), where actors play Berbers in a totally 'artificial' "living history museum". In contrast to these Heritage Villages, where you always remain aware that you are part of a show act, the "genuine" Nubian Village Gharb Sehel creates a relationship of "civilized man" vs „Professional Savages" (Poignant 2004), because it is hard to keep one's distance to the villagers' private spheres: The "authentic Nubians" encouraged their visitors to go as far as into their most private rooms. But unlike the "Völkerschauen" of the 19th century and the Heritage villages, the Nubians in the Gharb Sehel stay in their own "habitat". However, this simultaneous „folklorisation" and retraditionalisiation could indeed be political strategy. This is an aspect I am planning to investigate in my future research.

Two platforms for a critical dialogue in Cairo

The Contemporary Image Collective (short CIC) is an independent non-profit artist-run space in Downtown Cairo. It was founded in 2004 by a multinational collective of artists and photographers. The main goal of this collective is to "create a platform for an active, reflective local community that supports contemporary artistic and professional practices." (see www.ciccairo.com, access: 27th of March 2008). The CIC wants to promote the enrichment of the local visual culture in a country where the production of images is censored.

The CIC further wants to examine the "shifting dynamics between people and public spaces in the context of a mega city like Cairo" and to question concepts of "property, privacy, ownership, class, marginalized subcultures and gated communities" (Hamza, Molnar 2008: 5). The CIC as a public exhibition space is an important site for both Cairo and Egypt alike.

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[4] The survey was done by Christine Gerbich. The results will be published soon.

According to Arnd Schneider, contemporary art can help anthropologists to develop new strategies of "visual representation and research in regard to (1) conceptualizing closeness to and distance from the ethnographic subject, (2) the multiple positioning of the participant observer, and (3) developing new formal possibilities of visual representation." (Schneider 2008: 171)

A second example of an exhibition space, that explicitly doesn't want to be a museum (Wells 2006: 151-154) is also situated in Downtown Cairo: "The Townhouse Gallery was established in 1998 as the first independent art space in Egypt with a remit to make contemporary arts accessible to all." (self-portrayal of the gallery) The Townhouse Gallery runs a huge range of workshops for refugees, working children, street children, young Muslim girls and aspiring artists.

The exhibition „The Maghreb Connection: An international project of art and research" was shown during my visit 2007 in Cairo (see also Biemann 2006). A photo exhibition „The odd one out" (artist Ahamd Hosny) showed the life of the Bedouins in the exhibition space at the Townhouse gallery in March 2008. Both exhibitions managed to deconstruct stereotypes of "the other". In both exhibitions, artists managed to present investigative research projects, which also could have been shown in ethnological museums

According to the Egyptian artist and curator Amer Abbas, contemporary artists are "Semionauts": "The artist is permanently squatting every other field" (Abbas 2007: w.p.). It could be one aim for future curators of ethnographic exhibitions to do just that: squatting the field of contemporary artists, employing both, their languages and definitions of the subject, the ethnographic other.

Final remarks

The project *From imperial museum to communication centre?* collects and investigates stories about non-western museums. We would also like to communicate with museum professionals and scientists worldwide. Therefore we will organise a conference in autumn 2009 at which we would like to discuss our thesis with other scholars. If you would like to be informed or if you have any comments on this article, please contact us:

lidiaguzy@gmx.net
rainerhatoum@yahoo.com
s.kamel@gmx.de

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