GENERAL ARTICLES

Curating Conflict

Four Exhibitions on Jerusalem

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■ **ABSTRACT:** This article compares four Jerusalem exhibits in different geographical and political contexts: at the Tower of David Museum in Jerusalem, the Palestinian Museum in Birzeit, the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, and the Jewish Museum Berlin. It examines the role of heritage narrative, focusing specifically on the question of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which is either openly engaged or alternatively avoided. In this regard, we specifically highlight the asymmetric power dynamics as a result of Israel's occupation of East Jerusalem, and how this political reality is addressed or avoided in the respective exhibits. Finally, we explore the agency of curators in shaping knowledge and perspective and study the role of the visitors community. We argue that the differences in approaches to exhibiting the city's cultural heritage reveals how museums are central sites for the politics of the human gaze, where significant decisions are made regarding inclusion and exclusion of conflict.

■ **KEYWORDS:** conflict, heritage, Israel/Palestine, Jerusalem, museum, visitors community

"The heritage of Jerusalem is indivisible, and each of its communities has a right to the explicit recognition of their history and relationship with the city. To deny, conceal or erase any of the Jewish, Christian, or Muslim traditions, undermines the integrity of the site, and runs counter to the reasons that justified its inscription on the UNESCO World Heritage list."¹ These are the words of former UNESCO Director-General Irina Bokova, spoken in Paris on 14 October 2016, for the 40th session of the World Heritage Committee.

While the indivisible heritage referred to in this context reflects the reality of Jerusalem's Old City's intertwined historical, cultural, and religious legacies, it does not address the geopolitical conflict, in which ideological and territorial claims produce diverging heritage narratives. Jerusalem's status as a UNESCO heritage site is made necessary not only because of geopolitics but also because the Palestinians of and from the city live under an Israeli military occupation that constantly threatens their stability and permanence in the space. In this study, we examine four Jerusalem-focused museum exhibits from around the world to demonstrate how curators have shaped competing heritage narratives. These narratives also depend on the expected or targeted visitor communities and their positioning within the maze of religiopolitical identities.²

Which exhibition concept projects solidarity with one or the other national or religious visitor group? What kind of display nurtures, rejoices, or instead disturbs and even haunts the visitor as it explores head-on, or avoids and even annihilates certain realities of contested spaces in Israel/Palestine? We argue that the differences in approaches to exhibiting Jerusalem's cultural heritage reveal how museums are central sites for engaging or eliding conflict. This reveals the politics of the human gaze, meaning that powerful decisions are made about inclusion and exclusion. Who gets to see and who is blinded? Who gets to be seen and who is invisible? The answers to these questions are readily apparent to the discerning eye (on how displays in museums can manipulate the narrative, see Abu El-Haj 2001; Galor 2017; Hercbergs 2018).

Like other cities in settler colonies, Jerusalem's cultural heritage can never be showcased in an "apolitical" fashion. In fact, curatorial attempts to be apolitical are inherently mired in ideology, always incomplete and serving one particular political interpretation.³ Whether exhibits engage the geo-religious tensions openly, or avoid them entirely, they can never escape the reality of the conflict. Jerusalem's overwhelming cultural and aesthetic qualities and richness cannot be fully divorced from politics. Every aspect of the city's history, from its stones and rubbles to its human inhabitants, is deeply contested by constituents of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. These include advocates of Israeli state practice on one hand and advocates of Palestinian freedom movements on the other. Nonetheless, museums around the world have taken on the challenge to portray Jerusalem, often claiming not to partake in a subjective or one-sided narrative. With the goal to explore and compare different museological approaches to display Jerusalem's multifaceted heritage and cultural diversity, we, an Israeli archaeologist / art historian and a Palestinian anthropologist, visited four contemporary Jerusalem exhibits. We spoke with museum directors, curators, guides, and visitors at these shows. These conversations complemented our own observations of the exhibit spaces and the relevant artifacts, as well as the scholarly literature we consulted. The result of our fieldwork is an interdisciplinary approach to engage the fields of visual and material culture, social anthropology, and museum studies. In addition to this methodological approach, a central contribution of this article is to bring questions of cultural heritage into dialogue with conflict studies.⁴

Using these analytical and methodological tools, we made the following observations. We found that the Tower of David Museum in East Jerusalem represents the city in a manner that reinforces Israeli state-driven narratives about the Jewish heritage of the city, marginalizing the Christian and Muslim histories, while eclipsing Palestinian national identity altogether. Jerusalem as portrayed in *Tahya Al Quds (Jerusalem Lives)* in the Palestinian Museum in Birzeit located in the West Bank reflects the central role the city plays in the conflict as the central stage of Israel's oppression of the Palestinian population; Jewish connections to the city are acknowledged merely as linked to the Israeli state's appropriation of the history and cultural heritage in service of the eviction of Palestinians from the city. *Jerusalem 1000–1400: Every People Under Heaven* at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York proceeds as if there were no contemporary conflict, drawing on reified historical relics that represent a particular aesthetic of the city and a fantasy of pluralism so that the discomfort of bearing witness to conflict moves beyond the realm of possibility for their visitors. Finally, *Welcome to Jerusalem*, the exhibition at the Jewish Museum Berlin, highlights the city's complex human, cultural, and religious past and present, using stimulating visual and artifactual displays and projections while also incorporating the conflict into the portrayal of the city.

The completely different approaches to featuring Jerusalem in these exhibits were not determined exclusively by the curators. Rather, the divergent narratives are formed in synchronization with the anticipated visitor community. Most importantly, the differently positioned power dynamics of each museum contributes to their curatorial approaches. Additionally, the museum

professionals and visitors face dramatically different levels of resources as well as mobility, with Palestinians in the West Bank confronting the greatest denial of freedom. Our comparative approach exemplifies how contentious museum exhibits are, even when they claim to explore and display objective facts and actual visual and material testimonies.

The Museum as Aquarium

In drawing on his experience as a Holocaust survivor, Italian Jewish chemist Primo Levi has famously reflected on a particular moment during his examination by Nazi-employed Dr. Pannwitz. “When he finished writing, he raised his eyes and looked at me . . . that look was not one between two men; and if I had known how completely to explain the nature of that look, which came as if across the glass window of an aquarium between two beings who live in different worlds, I would also have explained the essence of the great insanity of the third Germany” (1996: 105–106). American author, essayist, and literary critic William Deresiewicz (2015) comments on Levi’s experience of being reduced to a “beast” by a mere glance, which made him feel “as if I had never in all my life suffered a more atrocious insult.” Deresiewicz continues in analyzing Levi’s subsequent memoir:

Beyond the obligation to bear witness, *If This Is a Man* is driven by a need to redress that affront—to assert to the world that its author is, indeed, a man. And not even to the world, per se. In 1961, 14 years after the book’s initial publication, a translation was made into German. In the preface, Levi writes that his one conscious purpose in life has been “to make my voice heard by the German people, to ‘talk back’ to the SS . . . to Dr. Pannwitz . . . and to their heirs.” Beasts do not talk back. In the camp, he has told us, you learn very quickly not to ask questions, because you’re not entitled to an answer. Communication goes in one direction, by means of shouts and blows. But now he has something to say to the Germans: “I am alive, and I would like to understand you so that I can judge you.” We are witnessing a very private interaction.

Levi demonstrates the political dimension and the inherent power of the human gaze that can observe from multiple vantage points, while Deresiewicz relies on Levi’s writing and legacy to affirm the practice of bearing witness that is so critical to the human condition. Our reading of Deresiewicz sheds further light on Levi’s understanding of the human gaze. Attention to the work of the gaze is fundamental to our analysis of how Jerusalem is curated in contemporary museums.

Anthropologist Sharon Kim drew specifically on Levi’s metaphor of the aquarium and extended that to the context of contemporary museums that explicitly address conflict and political violence. Reflecting on her visit of the Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum in Cambodia and her consideration there of mug shots of victims taken shortly before they were murdered, she described “the collision of two different realities—of mine and the victims’—in particular that had compelled me to return.” Kim, inspired by Levi’s writing and experience, implicates herself in the aquarium context, which she saw so clearly present at that particular museum. She writes of her impulse “to break that aquarium glass and reach out to the victims who had brought me back to this site” (2012: 7).

Aided by Levi’s notion of the aquarium, we analyze the relationship between the four Jerusalem exhibits and their visitors; the glass that separates artifact from spectator; and the story that is objectified from the gaze that penetrates. The question that guides us is the extent to which the visual and material aspects of these Jerusalem portrayals engage with the people of Jerusalem and the conflicts that shape their lives.

East Jerusalem

When Israel was established in 1948, and even when it captured East Jerusalem in 1967, many Holocaust survivors lived in the city, some of who shared similar experiences to the ones described by Levi. As the number of survivors has dwindled dramatically in recent years, it is the descendants, the second and third generations, who now draw connections between Jewish suffering in Europe during the Holocaust with Jewish suffering that has been global in reach and has spanned centuries. Certainly, the city of Jerusalem, with its ancient history of repeated persecution and destruction, discrimination and violence, is an incubator for such memories and narratives that often conflate the past and the present. The archeology and cultural heritage of the city is often mired in the politics of ethno-religious contestation grounded in a desire for redress from victimhood. Thus, for many or even most Jewish Israelis, Jerusalem represents the soul of the Israeli homeland. For some the actual experience, or for most the memory of having been robbed of their homelands during the Holocaust, explains the pressing need to feel rooted in a new homeland, with ties to a more distant but culturally and religiously more meaningful past (see, e.g., Garman 2015; Hercbergs 2018).

The city, however, is also home to its Palestinian population, for whom the narratives of victimization across time and space are equally palpable and filled with memories of their past histories (mostly Christian and Muslim texts) that intersect with the realities (including churches and mosques) of the present. Many among the city's Palestinian residents have lived through and experienced the effects of over seven decades of settler colonialism, military occupation, and apartheid policies imposed by the Israeli state. Thus, Palestinians, too, experience the archaeological and cultural heritage in Jerusalem and across Palestine through their own prism of national suffering, defined primarily by the context of colonial dynamics.

These links between recent and present political realities on the one hand and actual visual and physical reminders of histories on the other can be detected throughout the city of Jerusalem. Within the context of a museum exhibit, these confluences of facts and memories can be staged in an even more powerful way. Here, they are controlled by the curator, who directly or indirectly manipulates the gaze and experience of the visitor.

Theoretical Foundation

We ground the discussion featured in this article on Jerusalem museum exhibitions in the fields of cultural anthropology, history, cultural and museum studies, and peace and conflict studies. Our own research has led us to explore what we call "curating conflict," specifically in the deliberate choice of engaging or disengaging conflict. Our goal here is to conceptualize the role of curators in contemporary museums when exhibiting cultural heritage from conflict zones and their determinations related to inclusion and exclusion from the public gaze. As a result, in selecting what aspects of conflict to incorporate and render visible, these curators make decisions as memory entrepreneurs, meaning they legitimize particular interpretations of historical narratives and then maintain their enterprises in the public sphere. Ultimately, they determine whether the conflict will be elided to a broader public. We identify the potential for curating conflict to constitute an act of caring for the past. Curators also have the potential to address or elide conflict in a manner that perpetuates the logics of disputes, tensions, and violent confrontations.

The relevant literature is vast, and our reading of it was focused on the role of political tension, confrontation, and violence and the representation (or lack thereof) of conflict in contemporary

exhibition spaces. Jill Bennett reminds us that, in the context of art museums, “conditions of viewing matter” (2005: 64). Thus, we are concerned not only with the aesthetic particularities of curation but also with the politics of curation, namely the context that shapes the conditions under which a visitor is able, or not, to view the conflict that undergirds the representation of cultural heritage. Similarly, Katharine Hodgkin and Susannah Radstone recognize that historical museums produce public declarations about “what the past has been, and how the present should acknowledge it; who should be remembered, who should be forgotten” (2003: 12). Here, curators addressing conflict settings can be seen as “memory entrepreneurs,” a term borrowed from Elizabeth Jelin to describe individuals “who seek social recognition and political legitimacy of one (their own) interpretation or narrative of the past . . . engaged and concerned with maintaining and promoting active and visible social and political attention on their enterprise” (2003: 34). We argue that curators can be memory entrepreneurs in that they shape what narratives of the past become legible to publics in the present. This applies to the curators at the center of our analysis in this article who wield significant influence in shaping public consciousness on the heritage of Israel/Palestine. The narratives they advance are often linked to the ideological commitments and investments of the curators themselves, as well as from the demands of their respective audiences.

Erica Lehrer, Cynthia E. Milton, and Monica Eileen Patterson (2011: 4) remind us that the word *curate* derives from its root meaning of “caring for” and “allows us to expand outward from museums and exhibitions to encompass heritage sites, memorials,” and “care for the past.” They also highlight the role of curation as an “attempt to bear witness, to give space and shape to absent people, objects and cultures, to present violent conflict without perpetuating its logic.” Scholars such as Sameena Mulla (2014) highlight the violence that is potentially inherent to care. We see this in curatorial decisions regarding whose Jerusalem is chosen to be cared for at the expense of whom.⁵ When we erase the legitimate needs and presence of one community while “caring” for another, symbolic violence results against the former community.

Sociologist Victoria Alexander contextualizes the pressures that art curators in museums often face from external constituents, including donors, corporations, and politicians: “Curators do not represent the entirety of museums and the decision making that goes on within them. Directors, trustees, and educational personnel are among the other important actors. Various factions of museums are often in conflict” (1996: 803). Nonetheless, curators are also interested in maintaining their legitimacy and “to the extent that external demands conflict with curators’ ideas of what grants them legitimacy, they may actively resist these demands” (805). Alison Griffiths analyzes the balance that curators must strike “between civic uplift and economic viability” (2004: 381). In other words, financial models often depend on the popularity of exhibit themes and the ability to maximize pleasure and entertainment among the potential visitors, rather than engage difficult and disturbing topic that will almost automatically reduce visitor numbers. Griffiths does, however, explain that “the conflicting demands of scientific rigor and popular appeal remain a pervasive theme in contemporary museum criticism” (382).

As a result, the politics of curating conflict, namely engaging or disengaging conflict, are also tied to considerations of external factors, concerns about legitimacy, conceptions of civic duty, and scientific norms. Curating conflict to care for the past, instead of reifying conflict, can thus be buttressed or undermined by such factors. Charlotte Lee (2007: 382), for instance, identifies the efficacy in curators when not working in isolation. In this regard, her work demonstrates the value of collaborative curation projects and how they can help ameliorate conflict among curators internally as well as regarding the representation of external conflict: “Conflicts should not be seen as simply a matter of overcoming communication breakdowns, but also as a matter of cultivating the exhibition development team itself as a new community of practice. Managers

of exhibition teams have a particular responsibility to ensure that translation work occurs and to ensure that conflicts are not ‘smoothed over’ or ignored.”

Our fieldwork within the four Jerusalem-focused (permanent and temporary) exhibitions at museums around the world (Jerusalem, the West Bank, New York, and Berlin) illustrates the dynamics of engaging and disengaging conflict, both in a constructive and a counterproductive manner. Those who handle cultural heritage and its context of conflict with care are often better equipped to address conflict within the organization. And those who reinforce or elide the conflict are less equipped to engage with the conflict that results from external controversies directed at them and the undermining of curatorial legitimacy that ensues. In the next sections, we analyze each of the four exhibitions and the approach of the respective museum in engaging or disengaging the conflict surrounding Jerusalem. We can see how each exhibition curates the conflict in profoundly different ways, with a range of possibilities on the question of inclusivity and exclusivity of competing cultural heritage narratives.

Tower of David Museum

Our starting point is Jerusalem’s history museum, which claims to explore the city’s multicultural past while in reality focusing on its Jewish and Israeli heritages. The museum was established by an Israeli nonprofit organization that opened its doors to the public in 1989 and has since collaborated closely and successfully with municipal and governmental agencies (on the history of the museum and on how the curatorial choices reflect ideological choices, see Galor 2017: 79–80). Its primary mission is to instruct the public on the history of the city by using a variety of illustrative methods rather than original artifacts. It also serves as a cultural center hosting temporary shows, educational activities, and entertainment events. Located near Jaffa Gate, within the Old City, it signals the tension between Israel’s proclaimed ownership of the “united” city, as well as the official status of occupied territory as defined by international law. The museum presents itself to tourists as do numerous other heritage sites in the city: as a place free of Palestinians, ignoring their participation in the city’s history, past and present. The Tower of David Museum uses an ancient citadel to display Jerusalem’s historical legacy in chronological sequence (for more on memory and the Davidization of Jerusalem, see Hercbergs 2018; Hercbergs and Noy 2015). Centered on an open-air archaeological garden, the exhibit halls feature replicas, models, reconstructions, dioramas, holograms, photographs, drawings, audio and video recordings, and, as of October 2017, a high-tech innovation lab specializing in augmented and virtual reality that pioneers the use of new and interactive digital technologies to “enrich the visitor experience” along with the more traditional activities (Schindler 2017; on the use of digital technology and its implications for visitors, see Petrelli 2013; Tallon 2008).

In fact, the building is a significant testimony to Jerusalem’s Islamic legacy, integrating architectural remains from the Crusader, Ayyubid, Mamluk, and Ottoman periods.⁶ Yet, most of its original features, including the archaeological remains in the courtyard, are inadequately labeled.⁷ This is the case of the Crusader column capitals that greet the visitor near the museum entrance, the Ayyubid and Mamluk building inscriptions, and the Ottoman-period mihrab (prayer niche indicating the direction of prayer) and minbar (the pulpit used by the officiant to lead prayers and deliver sermons) in the exhibit hall dedicated to the museum’s condensed summary of the city’s Islamic and Crusader periods (Hawari 2010: 92). While the architectural design makes full use of the aesthetic and atmospheric qualities of the complex, the attention of the visitors is channeled toward the animated narrative of the exhibit halls.

Though all major historical periods featured in these halls are included, the focus is on events of significance to the city's Jewish and Israeli past and present. Indicative is the last room in the sequence, which until recently featured Israel's capture of East Jerusalem in 1967, commemorated as an Israeli national holiday called Jerusalem Day to celebrate the "reunification" of East and West. Curators did not incorporate the perspective of the Palestinian and international communities, who view this event as the beginning of occupation. The increasingly sensitive nature of exclusively highlighting the Zionist narrative of East Jerusalem's fate during and after 1967 clearly dictated the modified content. For the past few years, the last exhibit hall has showcased the British Mandate period, omitting the issue of post-1967 occupied Jerusalem. Most recently, a digital innovation lab was introduced to raise the curatorial profile, as well as to increase the existing number of approximately four hundred thousand annual visitors, which primarily includes Israeli and American Jews, as well as Evangelical Christians.⁸ These mainstream narratives appeal specifically to these visitor communities. The converging religiopolitical identity of the dominant visitor communities is thus matched with the ideological outlook of the display.

With the goal to "make the museum more accessible" and "to open this museum to the city," Eilat Lieber, director of the Tower of David Museum, announced the newly launched renovations expected to be completed by 2022 and estimated at a cost of \$40 million. In a recent interview, she said, "Jerusalemites are of varied nationalities, ethnic and religious denominations and languages," and thus, she concluded, "Jerusalem belongs to everybody. We therefore try to find, for each one of the groups or communities, a way for them to be part of its history" (Merlin 2018). The absence of any reference to the city's Palestinian community, however, is striking and at the core of Kaylin Goldstein's analysis of the Tower of David Museum. He questions "how and why . . . this municipal fortress [was] converted into a site of public history that would represent the competing claims of three religions." He examines how the process and the "failings as a national and anticolonial conflict was transmuted into a feel-good religious pluralism," which he defines as "multicultural fantastic" (2007: 173). Thus, this museum advances one story of heritage at the expense of others. Our analysis reveals the production of truth that becomes part of this museum's legacy. This is the kind of truth that is intimately linked to hegemonic power and legacies of domination and imperialism. The Tower of David Museum reifies understandings of Jerusalem that are aligned with Israeli and US state narratives aimed at erasing Palestinian history and life from the city.

The Palestinian Museum

The Palestinian Museum in Birzeit conceives of its heritage narrative from the perspective of the Palestinian national project. The museum is located in the West Bank, at only 25 kilometers away from Jerusalem but separated by a wall and checkpoints administered by the Israeli military, opened in August 2016. The museum was created as a flagship project of the nonprofit Welfare Association dedicated to humanitarian and development projects for Palestinians. The original idea of this museum was to commemorate the Nakba (literally the "catastrophe," referring to the ethnic cleansing of Palestine and the near-total destruction of Palestinian society in 1948), which later developed to a broader vision of documenting Palestinian history, society, art, and culture from the beginning of the nineteenth century (on the original intentions for the establishment of the museum, see Anani 2013). As the inaugural exhibition, *Jerusalem Lives* (*Tahya Al Quds*) opened in August 2017 and closed on 31 January 2018.⁹ The narrative focused on the impact of Israel's occupation of Jerusalem, on the city and its people, by exposing the

“failed project of globalization” from an economic, political, ideological, and cultural point of view. The Palestinian Museum’s concept of failed globalization is meant to undermine the Israeli state’s efforts to project a false image of Jerusalem—and Israel more broadly—as cosmopolitan, multicultural, and tolerant of all religious and ethnic backgrounds.

Curators organized the exhibit halls in a zigzag fashion featuring multidisciplinary displays, including scale models, original artifacts, maps, posters, and videos, some of them interactive. They highlighted contemporary artworks and sound installations by Palestinian, Arab, and international artists that are scattered on the grounds, specifically on the terraced gardens. Among the noteworthy highlights are Vera Tamari’s installation “Home,” which features a caged stairwell in commemoration of the once interconnected Palestinian homes in Jerusalem’s Old City, today fenced for “security reasons”; Khalil Rabah’s “48 percent, 67 percent,” which is a part of the artist’s *Palestine after Palestine: New Sites for the Museum Department* (2017) project, meant to embody the traumatic events of ethnic displacement; and Nida Sinnokrot’s “KA (Oslo),” two 1993 JCB 3CX backhoe arms, which acts as a symbol of the physical destruction of Palestinian homes and villages as a result of Israel’s occupation—all three of which are installed at various levels of the museum garden terraces. Though celebrated on the opening day by a select group of the Palestinian West Bank community, visitor numbers for this achievement of architectural and landscape design, as well as for the show itself, were regrettably low. The reality of the occupation—the difficulty of access for most Palestinians, as well as tourists who increasingly visit the West Bank, not to speak of the inadequate humanitarian conditions in the region that limit the luxury of partaking in cultural events—will likely maintain the minimal exposure of the museum for the duration of occupation (on the impact of the humanitarian condition on Palestinians’ daily life, see Feldman 2012: 155–172).

Palestinians such as Sharif Kanaaneh have fought for many years to have a national museum for the Palestinian people. In some ways, he and others have succeeded more with intangible than tangible cultural heritage. Kanaaneh links this to the Palestinian national struggle, with scholars contextualizing such efforts as caught between the Palestinian “state-building project” on one hand and “anticolonial resistance” on the other (see De Cesari 2010: 625). Israel’s military occupation of Palestine impedes the ability to establish a Palestinian state and engenders anticolonial resistance. The struggle to claim cultural heritage in Palestine cannot be divorced from the logic of occupation and is inherently linked to this project of resistance. Thus, representation of Jewish heritage in Jerusalem in a robust manner has not been a priority for the Palestinian Museum’s exhibition.

Apart from shared experiences of occupation, victimization, and brutalization, curators face an additional problem. The question arises as to what links Palestinians into a single heritage, or into various ones, given the heterogeneity of Palestinian identities and experiences. The society is geographically fragmented among the Diaspora, Israel, the West Bank, and the Gaza Strip. Palestinians also claim different religious legacies of Islam and Christianity. Furthermore, Palestinians are diverse ideologically in terms of secular and Islamist orientations, which impacts their understandings of the politics of cultural heritage. As a result, addressing Jerusalem’s heritage in an inclusive manner is a major challenge for the Palestinian Museum.

The Metropolitan Museum of Art

On 26 September 2016, the Metropolitan Museum of Art launched a three-month show entitled *Jerusalem 1000–1400: Every People Under Heaven*, claiming an evenhanded projection of the city’s Jewish, Christian, and Muslim heritages. The show featured some two hundred works of

art from around the world.¹⁰ Rather than building on the concept of failed attempts of globalization—the thematic focus of the Palestinian Museum’s show—the narrative of the Met evolved around the positive projections of religious coexistence, trade and economic prosperity, artistic reciprocity and symbiosis, and ethnic and cultural diversity.¹¹ Conflict and violence, poverty and disease, the hallmark of medieval Jerusalem as of most contemporary agglomerations, were left aside, to present nothing but the most precious, stunning, and aesthetically beautiful artifacts, evocative of Jerusalem, or at least of how the city was imagined and projected, both by peoples of the past and curators in the present. Artifacts on display included architectural fragments, glass, metal, and ceramic vessels and objects, jewelry, textiles, manuscripts, and maps, only a handful of them with a Jerusalem provenance. Some noteworthy examples included the fourteenth-century painted and gilt Mamluk mosque lamp of Sultan Barquq from Syria; the twelfth-century Chasse of Ambazac made of gilded copper, champlevé enamel, rock crystal, semiprecious stones, faience, and glass from Limoges in France; a fourteenth-century illustrated Passover Haggadah manuscript page from Catalonia with the words “next year in Jerusalem, amen”; and several intricately sculpted twelfth-century limestone capitals from the Basilica of the Annunciation in Nazareth, an artistic tradition that does not reflect contemporary architectural details in Jerusalem, one of several poor curatorial choices (on the singularity of Crusader architectural details in Jerusalem, see Galor and Bloedhorn 2013: 207–208; Kühnel 1994: 164–168).

Video interviews with Jerusalem historians and citizens and photographic projections of the city’s skylines and monuments on the exhibit hall walls compensate for this lack of locally produced, consumed, and discovered artifacts. Capitalizing on the name of Jerusalem and the notion of its Jewish, Christian, and Muslim legacies—of interest to much of the Western and non-Western world—curators knew how to market this concept to a large consumption-friendly visitor community receptive of a globalized vision of Jerusalem’s religious and artistic legacies. The Met provided a most generous stage and budget, in which the glamour—projecting a skewed image of Jerusalem’s middle age cultures—professionally and successfully diverted from past and present realities. Visitors’ expectations were matched, targeted, and satisfied, and the show was documented to have seen more than two hundred thousand visitors.¹² The Met’s approach to curation of Jerusalem largely whitewashed the conflictual nature of Jewish, Christian, and Muslim histories, avoiding the contested nature of Israeli and Palestinian heritage narratives.

Jewish Museum Berlin

Two thousand years of history, organized thematically rather than chronologically and inclusive of all three Abrahamic heritage narratives, were displayed in *Welcome to Jerusalem* at the Jewish Museum Berlin from 11 December 2017 to 30 April 2019.¹³ Displaying authentic artifacts, maps, models, reproductions, artworks, and numerous media installations, this temporary exhibit engaged with history, religion, and people’s daily lives without shying away from the political implications of the recent Israeli-Palestinian conflict. As one of Germany’s most frequented museums (it documented more than 10.8 million visitors from 2001 to 2016), the museum’s primary mission has been “to study and present Jewish life in Berlin and Germany and to create a meeting place for the wider community” (JMB 2020). More so than any other German city, and probably any other place that participated in the Holocaust, Berlin takes full responsibility for the crimes committed between 1933 and 1945; it deals and engages with the past, individually and collectively—the process known as *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*—and commemorates its victims.¹⁴ This awareness has had implications for the critical evaluation of Israeli politics, which supporters of the Israeli state at times automatically label as a form of anti-Semitism.

Showing support for the Palestinian cause, even in liberal circles, can be sensitive in Germany (Atshan and Galor 2020: 11–24). It would not have been surprising for this Berlin museum to have focused exclusively on Jerusalem's Jewish legacy.¹⁵

However, in addition to highlighting Jewish history, sites, and artifacts, the show included Christian and Muslim heritages. It engaged with the complicated and sensitive issues of ideology and conflict. Structurally, the exhibit explored conventional themes such as changing geographies, pilgrimage, sacred sites, monuments, and artifacts; however, it also explored more controversial issues such as Zionist ideology, religious fundamentalism, and the Israeli occupation of East Jerusalem, documenting facts and presenting different religious and political views. Illustrative examples include the room dedicated to "Religious Perspectives on Jerusalem," which featured various forms of engagement with religion among the Israeli public, such as the anti-Zionist, ultra-Orthodox community that participates in protest marches in support of Palestine; the failed attempts of breeding a red cow by members of the Temple Mount Movement; and Israeli Minister of Culture and Sport Miri Regev wearing an evening dress with the image of the Dome of the Rock along with the critical reaction in Israeli social media, featuring photo-shopped images of the dress displaying, for instance, the separation wall instead of the Temple Mount. A further example of this open, critical, and explorative approach was the so-called Film-Rotunda labeled "Conflict" in which a compilation of historical footage from different archives was projected in a 20-minute video survey. This Jerusalem exhibit, more so than the aforementioned shows, was clearly more inclusive, more multidirectional, and more interactive and participatory in its approach.¹⁶ Though all exhibits analyzed in our research were required to contend with the fraught political positioning of their national locations and the types of narratives of Israel/Palestine that are hegemonic in these respective contexts, the Jewish Museum Berlin proved unique among the four museums in that it actively challenged the narratives of Israel/Palestine dominant in Germany's contemporary public sphere.

Despite repeated efforts to distort the carefully documented and evenhanded approach to display Jerusalem's complex socio-religious history and ongoing political conflict from a multifaceted perspective, numerous voices have criticized the show as being "non-Jewish," "Israel critical," and "pro-Palestinian."¹⁷ Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's demand directed personally and directly to German Chancellor Angela Merkel to withdraw state funding from the Jewish Museum given the show's lack of a clear focus on the Israeli Zionist state narrative, however, resulted in the latter's refusal to do so (see, e.g., Landau 2018). Targeted visitor communities included Jews, Christians, Muslims, locals, and visitors from around the world. The displays could be explored at different levels, visually and audibly in a passive manner, or in a more in-depth and engaged fashion by using various support materials. These displays were accompanied by manuals with explanatory information, employing virtual reality high-definition exhibit tools, by video and film projections, and by an elaborate exhibit catalog. Visitors were also encouraged to attend specialized guided tours, lectures, and other educational and entertainment programs.¹⁸ The curatorial choices were sophisticated and multidimensional—technically, aesthetically, and intellectually—yet at the same time accessible to audiences from different backgrounds, those who were informed, and those without any prior knowledge. Most visitors, though, knew this exhibit was not meant as light and pleasing entertainment but as critical engagement and exploration. The show thus reflected Berlin's ambition to be open, integrative, explorative, innovative, and critical, for both citizens and visitors. Despite criticism in particular from Netanyahu, Israeli Ambassador to Germany Jeremy Issacharoff, and Director of the Central Council of Jews in Germany Josef Schuster, this exhibit attracted large visitor numbers and engaged rather than disengaged the conflict amid a show that ultimately focuses on the city's multicultural history, heritage, and society.

The Exhibits' Social Lives

What underlies cultural heritage curation is not necessarily and exclusively a commitment to narratives about the past but is rather about sustaining and crafting politically palpable realities in the present. The four exhibits examined here have social and political lives, and we observed how their respective audiences interfaced with the political narratives on Jerusalem that were curated for them. The Tower of David Museum is a magnet for Israelis and tourists from around the world who keenly embrace the Israeli state narrative. The museum's educational department employs a variety of guides who can address the different visitor communities, including secular and Orthodox Jewish Israeli visitors, Jewish and Christian tourists from various countries, and Evangelical Christians. During our visit, we were informed that an Arabic-speaking guide had previously been fired for straying away from the official script. The interest in engaging with the educational aspects of the museum site are apparent but seem to be matched and perhaps even surpassed by visitor's enthusiasm for entertainment opportunities, including theatrical performances and contemporary art shows. The vast majority of Palestinians in Jerusalem pass by these activities with feelings of profound alienation from them, understanding the ideological undercurrents that animate the museum's political mission.

We visited the Palestinian Museum on two separate days, first at the opening event for the *Jerusalem Lives* exhibit and later during a regular weekday. The opening attracted an excited crowd. This special moment brought together journalists, intellectuals, artists, and a privileged group of spectators from the Palestinian and international cultural elite in Israel/Palestine. We were fortunate to have been invited by the museum's director. When we returned several weeks thereafter, our Palestinian taxi driver expressed discomfort with joining us, sharing that he had never been inside a museum and was embarrassed to not know how to comport himself. This revealed to us how inaccessible the museum is to many residents of the West Bank, and this is even more the case when considering the Israeli military roadblocks that make travel so challenging. During our second visit, fewer than a dozen Palestinians, some clearly more privileged and others from middle-class backgrounds, walked through the Jerusalem exhibit with great care and attention. It was clear that the displays resonated deeply with their understandings of Jerusalem's cultural heritage, affirming their relationship, as Palestinians, to the sacred city.

The Metropolitan Museum of Art brought together a mix of New Yorkers, Americans from across the country, and tourists from around the world. Considered one of the city's cultural highlights, the museum serves as a primary destination for visitors from many walks of life. As is the case with most other shows at the Met, the appeal of the Jerusalem exhibit is centered on the aesthetic qualities of the objects and surrounding space. Our experience was that the exhibit did not go beyond this visual appeal. The Met's Jerusalem displays were catered to an audience drawn in primarily by the magnificence of the architectural space, matched by the beauty of the artifacts on display. As we observed the crowds, we almost felt as if we watched a social performance, where visitors paced their steps, interrupted by regular stops that served to contemplate objects and read labels. Neither visitors nor journalists who wrote about the exhibit seemed to notice the fact that almost no artifact came from Jerusalem. It was mostly the projected photos on the walls that related to the title of the show.

Finally, it was at the Jewish Museum in Berlin that we found ourselves wanting to visit numerous times, and appreciating each visit. The dynamism of the place and the intense focus of its visitors on the Jerusalem multimedia display cases and spaces were inspiring. The museum's audiences were clearly not daunted by the many different facets of Jerusalem's peoples, past and present, that were captured in the exhibit. We noticed that the guides included Israelis and Germans who were sensitive to Jerusalem's Arabic and Hebrew linguistic heritage; the city's Jewish,

Christian, and Muslim religious connections; and Israeli and Palestinian communal enclaves and relations. The guides provided complex and nuanced understandings of the city's cultural heritage and visitors asked thoughtful questions. During each of our visits, the foot traffic and enthusiasm were palpable.

Conclusion

The indivisibility of the city, brought to the forefront of the media since US President Donald Trump's fiercely debated and much criticized recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital in December 2017, has different meanings and implications for those who occupy, those who are occupied, and those who are external to the conflict but take an active part in the discourse surrounding it. Though all four Jerusalem exhibits under scrutiny here incorporate the Jewish, Christian, and Muslim legacies, the different foci of the curatorial choices were clearly shaped by the conflict, intentionally or unintentionally taking a position on the city's contested heritage.

Displaying this heritage in a museum context, and making it accessible to the "global museum community"—according to the professional standards of excellence for the global museum community of the International Council of Museums (see ICOM 2020)—has proved itself a most complex, indeed, unrealistic task. The religious and historical legacy of Jerusalem has played a key role in the ongoing geopolitical conflict among Jews and Arabs, Israelis and Palestinians, and regardless of the mission of the exhibit or museum, the display in dialogue with the visitor communities takes an active role in fostering a particular narrative perspective and positioning within the related discourse. The different themes and narratives chosen, however, reflect and inflect the identity politics of the targeted visitor communities rather than an educational mission and platform that stands for itself.¹⁹ The visitor's knowledge and their understanding of the conflict remains nevertheless a product of engagement and dialogue, in which museum and visitors take part together in a form of silent political activism under the guise of cultural engagement (on the construct of identity as a key to understanding the museum visitors experience, see Falk 2016).

The Tower of David Museum, in showcasing Jerusalem's history through the lens of the Israeli settler colonial state objectives, while erasing the Palestinian presence and narrative perspectives, reinforces the existing confrontational national divides over Jerusalem. *Jerusalem Lives* at the Palestinian Museum engages the conflict by focusing on Palestinian narratives and by excluding Jewish narratives that resonate with the Israeli state, thereby reproducing some aspects of the prolonged conflict even as its curators have become memory entrepreneurs. Certainly, it is possible to simultaneously acknowledge Jewish cultural heritage in Jerusalem while not normalizing Israeli military occupation of East Jerusalem. Suffering from a relative lack of visitors, the conditions of viewing at the Palestinian Museum are shaped by Israeli state subjugation of ideas, bodies, and movement across lines of difference, mirroring the reality of Jerusalem for its Palestinian residents.

Jerusalem 1000–1400: Every People Under Heaven at the Metropolitan Museum of Art models how curating conflict can also result in the elision of the conflict, responding to desires of sponsors, visitors, and others who prefer a sanitized aesthetic, displaying artifacts and images from a reified past, and the illusionary gaze onto an imagined pluralistic rather than conflict-ridden Jerusalem. *Welcome to Jerusalem* at the Jewish Museum Berlin instead curates in a manner that engages the conflict, caring for the past and present of Jerusalem using an approach that has come to define so much of German state and society's sensitive and nuanced recognition of its own history and responsibility. In their unapologetic refusal to cease bearing witness to Israeli or Pales-

estinian cultural heritage, despite formidable external pressure to do so, we witnessed firsthand how the curatorial team has modeled collaborative curation. The high numbers of visitors to their Jerusalem exhibit demonstrates the strong desire among the larger public to face conflict, rather than averting their eyes. In this Berlin museum space, the aquarium glass shattered with each passing day (on the German-Israeli-Palestinian relationship in contemporary Berlin, see Atshan and Galor 2020).

Our analysis of museum curation in this and other contexts where there is an asymmetrical distribution of power must acknowledge disparities in access to resources and mobility. Just as Jerusalem cannot be evaluated apolitically, these exhibitions cannot be evacuated of the role of power in their construction and curation. The four hundred thousand annual visitors of the Tower of David Museum, for example, are largely Israelis and tourists whom Israel welcomes while it polices the presence of tourists to the West Bank. The visitors to *Jerusalem Lives* of the Palestinian Museum are already circumscribed by whom the Israeli state invites to or keeps away from Jerusalem. Many of the West Bank Palestinians who attended the exhibit could not visit the city of Jerusalem itself. Additionally, the town of Birzeit has often been under siege by Israel, which makes it a very different space from the state-sanctioned Tower of David Museum, which enjoys Israeli governmental support. As a result, we must account for where museums are positioned and how they function in relation to state repression.

In conceptualizing curator practice through ethnography, anthropologists are attuned to the heterogeneous nature of curation and the power that underlies how particular narratives are privileged over others. This knowledge is critical to scholarship that connects museum studies with conflict studies. Thousands—if not millions—of visitors shape collective consciousness on whether museums should engage or disengage with the realities of global conflict. Debates surrounding cultural heritage shape how we imagine the future of contested places like Jerusalem.

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■ NOTES

1. For the statement in the context of the full speech, see Bokova (2016). This statement was made after a comment she made that was viewed as rejecting the historic Jewish ties to the Temple Mount and Western Wall, which resulted in a wave of critical media coverage (see, e.g., Sharon and Ahren 2016).

2. In John Falk's view, the construct of identity is the key to understanding the museum visitor experience. For an in-depth and up-to-date analysis of this concept, see Falk (2016).
3. As Sara Roy (2007: 56) reminds us, "pure objectivity is unattainable" in scholarship on Israel/Palestine.
4. We are grateful to John Comaroff, who encouraged us to engage this idea of these different museum exhibits on Jerusalem in writing.
5. Other scholars who have theorized the concept of care in different ways include Garcia (2010); Laugier (2015); Mol (2008); Mol et al. (2010); Stevenson (2014); Ticktin (2011). While such critiques of care are valid for many contexts, such as when this disproportionately burdens women, or when states deploy violence in the name of care, our use of the term care is a positive one. We see value in the ethic of care that is linked to humanitarianism and work toward the social good.
6. On the architectural history of the citadel and on the ideological implications of the museum, see Hawari (2000, 2014), respectively.
7. On the lack of labeling for Islamic artifacts at the Tower of David Museum, see Abu El-Haj (2001: 173–174). The chief curator of the Citadel has written on the minimal use of labels at heritage sites (see Sivan 1997: 53). On the use of labels in museums more generally and on the cognitive and psychological factors when absorbing information, see Bitgood (2000).
8. On the political aspects of evangelical tourism, see Belhassen (2009: 359–378). On the convergence of Zionism and evangelical support of Israel, see Spector (2009).
9. Though some cynical comments were made on the fact that the museum originally stood empty, a situation that resembled that of the Jüdisches Museum Berlin, the media coverage reporting on *Jerusalem Lives* was very positive (see, e.g., Al-Munayar 2017; Leech 2017; Vartanian 2017; Wilson 2017).
10. A catalog complements the show (see Drake Boehm and Holcomb 2016).
11. The media coverage of the exhibit was mostly positive (see Cotterh 2016; Farago 2016; Friedman 2016).
12. One of the keys to successfully promote the show and attract visitors is by reaching large and diverse interest communities and to highlight the visually and the contextually pleasant aspects. On successful museum marketing strategies more generally, see Kotler et al. (1998). Information on visitors statistics can be found on the museum website (The Met 2017).
13. The exhibit was planned to bridge the period of preparation toward the new permanent installation in the museum.
14. On *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* in postwar Germany, see Schaal and Wöll (1997). On the commemoration of the Holocaust in Europe, see Macdonald (2013). On Holocaust memorials in Berlin and Paris, see Carrier (2005).
15. This lack of focus on the Jewish heritage has been criticized in the press as radically anti-Israel (see Beck 2017). The German media was largely positive, and used the opportunity to incorporate Trump's recent recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital into the narrative (see, e.g., Bdelt 2017; Habermalz 2017; Wölflle 2017).
16. Mariana Salgado (2009) presented a conference paper on "Openness, Inclusion and Participation in Museums" that summarizes and analyzes the history of inclusion and participation as an approach to new curatorial initiatives.
17. Among an endless storm of media coverage on these issues, see, e.g., Eddy and Kershner (2018).
18. The sophistication of the exhibit is matched by the level of the catalog (see Kampmeyer and Kugelmann 2017).
19. Laurajane Smith (2017: 69) has made a similar argument in the context of identity politics and nationalizing narratives in American and Australian museums. She argues that museums may be more usefully understood as arenas of justification rather than resources of public education.

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