

**The Art of Conflict Chic:
Imagined Geographies and the Search for a Post-Orientalist Condition**

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At a solo exhibition in Paris in 2011, I showed a work titled *Conflict Chic 1 & 2*. The piece was a critique of how the war in Afghanistan, and the expatriate life that accompanied it, had, over the years, become cool, artsy, and fashionable. In Hollywood, any number of movies could be found with some focus on Afghanistan and its war, or at the very least a reference made to it such as ‘like in Afghanistan’, while in Kabul expatriates could wear the latest in chic, overpriced neo-traditional fashion to the various dinners, parties, or concerts they attended.

The creation of Afghanistan as ‘conflict chic’ was also furthered as foreign governments began throwing money at a variety of art and culture-oriented projects through public diplomacy grants as part of their propaganda campaigns, trying to demonstrate how far Afghanistan had come since the invasion of the country in 2001. Although this included a range of nations such as France, Germany, and the United Kingdom, it was heavily led by the United States of America, whose public diplomacy budget totaled, according to the special inspector general on Afghan reconstruction, US\$111 million in 2010–11 alone; up from a total of US\$1.5 million between 2007 and 2009 (Sopko 2014). Although these budgets covered a wide range of activities, art and culture (under the umbrella of civil society) projects were given priority during this funding period.

These projects included a variety of mediums such as a fictional short film about young, impoverished boys with unrealized dreams of playing the national sport of buzkashi (which got a 2013 Oscar-nomination in the Best Live Action Short Film category, only reinforcing the point about Hollywood made above); a rock music festival (which actually began as a solid platform on which contemporary musicians could express themselves but later became an all-encompassing ‘performing arts’ festival, corralling any and every art form under the sun – because why focus on one thing and do it well when you can co-opt, and possibly get funding for, more?); a documentary film that sought to place every Afghan artist into a life-or-death, good versus evil, battle against poverty, war, and Islamic extremism; and a multi-media project that simply showed the ordinary, though sufficiently exoticized, banality of everyday Afghan life just being lived.

And journalists, of course, could not get enough of stories about Kabul’s ‘first female rapper’ or ‘graffiti scene’, as if there actually was a ‘scene’. The reality, however, being that journalists often exaggerated graffiti’s presence on the streets of Kabul, at times even dragging artists (all the better if it was a woman because that had so much more cachet for international audiences) to funky locations like the now demolished former Russian Cultural Center to spray something on the walls while the cameras went ‘click click’, serving as false witnesses to a growing ‘movement’.

But this was one country, and Afghanistan was unique in many ways, due to the massive war economy that had flowed into it and shaped life and society there – for better and worse. I was curious

to see what else was happening in the region, and so I attempted to look more closely at not only Afghanistan, which is where I had the most direct experience, but also at different Othered countries that are part of the broader region of Asia and the Middle East. I use this 'active' form of the term 'Other' as a tool in order to emphasize how the experience of being Other is an imposed system of differentiation rooted in Eurocentrism, rather than any place's or people's natural state. The approach is reminiscent of Arturo Escobar's use of the term 'underdeveloped' rather than 'undeveloped' in his arguments related to dependency theory and Latin America in a postcolonial era, whereby he asserted that the Third World was 'underdeveloped' as a direct result of Eurocentric policies imposed upon it after the Second World War (Escobar 1995).

Furthermore, and in particular, I wanted to look at countries that were either experiencing conflict themselves, or were somehow part of larger geopolitical conflicts being waged across these regions. However, for the purposes of my argument, rather than only armed battle or a state of war, I define 'conflict' more broadly as the experience of various forms of political, social, economic, and personal instability by countries in the regions mentioned. However, I will use the expression 'conflicted countries' rather than 'conflict countries' partially for the same reason described above – so as to avoid the implication that conflict is in some way natural to any of these places.

Once I started looking, I noticed that the last several years have seen a marked increase in the level of interest given by the Eurocentrics towards contemporary art from Afghanistan, as well as many different Othered countries in Asia and the Middle East, particularly conflicted countries. This includes work created by artists living within the specific geographically defined border spaces, as well as the broader cultural spaces inhabited by artists of the diaspora. We can see the manifestation of this interest across a variety of initiatives such as the Guggenheim's MAP programme and planned Abu Dhabi museum, the recently established Iraq, India and Bangladesh Pavilions at the Venice Biennale and the inclusion of Afghanistan in DOCUMENTA(13), to name just a few of the more institutional movements. There has also been a parallel boom in interest by commercial galleries and auction houses for art from these regions, or the artists thought to represent them. All of this has provided a greatly extended platform through which the work of Othered artists from conflicted Asian and Middle Eastern countries could be shown in internationally renowned venues and exhibitions, exposing their work to entirely new audiences and markets.

I would therefore like to argue that the increased interest and the relationships created by it cannot be understood outside of Eurocentric models of power and hierarchy rooted in colonial structures, and that can still be seen in postcolonial (though not yet post-Oriental) relations between the Eurocentrics and the Othered. That conflict has become a part of everyday life in many Othered countries that were once under some form of colonial control/influence, subsequently becoming a part of the Othered's contemporary 'exoticness', which can itself be understood as being rooted in these disproportionate historical structures that shaped so many unstable futures. Although it will be possible to also see market influences in this heightened interest by the Eurocentrics in art and artists of the Othered from conflicted countries, I argue that at its core one can still find the old attitudes of

civilizational superiority and colonial discovery that led the Eurocentrics' historical conquest of places and peoples. However, I will go on to argue further that it is also possible that these new spaces within the art world where relationships are enacted between the Eurocentrics and the Othered could provide, though not without difficulty, the type of 'Third Space' necessary to begin dismantling old, colonial-era knowledge-paradigms and power structures.

As a start, we should examine these new spaces of interaction between the Eurocentrics and the Othered in light of how modern notions of aesthetic authority, and the subsequent power to represent in the field of contemporary art, are complicated by these deeper, geo-historical relationships. French Marxist philosopher and sociologist Henri Lefebvre has said, '(Social) space is a (social) product [. . .] the space thus produced also serves as a tool of thought and of action [. . .] in addition to being a means of production it is also a means of control, and hence of domination, of power' (Lefebvre 1991 [1974]). I would argue then that this social space in the field of contemporary art as discussed above, due to its being intertwined with larger historical perspectives and political agendas (as well as to some extent economic initiatives), sees the same pattern whereby the productive space of Othered artists is also a space where Eurocentrics exercise their power to control and dominate aesthetic and artistic representation.

It is therefore necessary to look briefly at the person largely considered to be the founder of the Eurocentrics' understanding of aesthetics – German philosopher Immanuel Kant. In his theory, Kant argues that the judgement of taste, or what is to be considered beautiful, might be dependent on a subjective principle but ultimately has universal validity (Kant 2000). This notion of 'subjective universality' in the determination of aesthetically beautiful 'things' has served as the building block for the Eurocentrics' approach to knowing and controlling the notion of modern aesthetics. Though on the surface this principle allows for individual or relativist agency in aesthetic judgement, it is in fact rooted in the Eurocentric mindset rampant across Europe during the Enlightenment period of which Kant was a part. By this I mean to say that, although it appears Kant is honouring individual taste, he is not however attributing equal value to those tastes. Instead, he deems that the individual, subjective tastes of the European are the specific tastes that have collective, universal validity. In other words, a thing is beautiful if it is considered beautiful by a European. Therefore, the 'subjective' viewpoint that Kant was so insistent upon in his philosophy was the Eurocentric subjective, while the universal it was applicable to belonged to everyone else. Beauty and aesthetic judgement therefore belonged to Europe, and from there it attained universal validity for the rest of the world.

This Eurocentric model of aesthetic authority can still be found today in the contemporary art world, largely dominated by American and European curators, museums, dealers, galleries, and institutions. It is their authority to judge not only where the focus of the curatorial eye should fall, but what and whose work within those areas qualifies (i.e. achieves the expected level of aesthetics) to be exhibited and brought into the global art world. We can see further foundations of this attitude in Jean-François Lyotard's theories on the imperialistic nature of western science. He would look at the arrogance of the West in its belief that their science, such as in the field of medicine, was without a

doubt superior to that of other cultures. In that sense, western scientists, doctors, etc. felt they had the monopoly on knowledge in their fields (Lyotard 1984 [1979]).

Again we are confronted with the Eurocentric's belief in their own superiority and, in the context I am discussing here, we can see the Eurocentric curators, gallerists, museum directors, institutions and so on with their monopolies in the field of contemporary art knowledge, and how they seek to impose that knowledge on others; it is this imposition of monopolized knowledge that Lyotard equates with imperialist motives and approaches. This sense of authority over judgement contributed to justifying European colonial incursions around the world as missions to enlighten and civilize other cultures, while today the Eurocentric's in the art world are justifying incursions into the lands of the Othered where they impose their aesthetic value systems on works and artists that may operate on an entirely different aesthetic scale.

Moving from models of Eurocentric authority over aesthetics and the imperialist nature of knowledge to Eurocentric attitudes towards the Othered that were shaped and solidified during colonialism, we cannot ignore the writings of Edward Said in his classic work *Orientalism*. In this seminal work, Said argues how an entire region was 'almost a European invention, and had been since antiquity a place of romance, exotic beings, haunting memories and landscapes, remarkable experience' (Said 1978). These 'imagined geographies' were envisioned as exotic locales that served only to bolster the Eurocentric perspective in respect to hierarchical levels of 'civilization', whereby the Eurocentric's represented the highest echelons of cultural and intellectual development in comparison to the lesser-developed inhabitants of the 'Orient'. In his work, he made dichotomous distinctions between 'the West' and 'the Other' to highlight the schism that Eurocentric's had created between the two 'worlds'.

Since the fall of 'colonialism proper' (meaning direct political and military control), many countries of the Othered have themselves fallen into states of near perpetual conflict, driven by a variety of factors such as internal political agendas, poverty, ethnic intolerance, foreign invasion, religious extremism and dictatorial leaders. This adds another layer of complexity to the new Eurocentric interest in Othered art in the sense that widespread conflict in many parts of Asia and the Middle East can serve as ignition points of entry for Eurocentric curators, collectors, gallerists, etc. On the surface, it appears that the impulse comes from a desire to understand the complexities of the region 'from the inside', from the creative voices of artists living in (or at least with roots in) these Othered countries where conflict in some form has become a part of their everyday reality. However, it is difficult to dismantle the old colonialist models beneath the surface that are shaped by historical paradigms and continued disproportionality of power/control hierarchies.

When we see the dOCUMENTA(13) with satellite activities in Afghanistan, the relatively recent pavilions of Iraq and Bangladesh at the Venice Biennale and the Guggenheim's MAP programme, we should feel compelled to ask ourselves what drives all of these institutions to go so far away, to the lands of the Othered, in order to 'discover' or 'present' the contemporary artistic practice of these places. If it were just wanting to go where contemporary art is still under-represented, under-appreciated and/or in a nascent state of being, many rural areas in the United States and Europe could

offer the same challenge. But that is not where they are going. Rather, they are going to places where they can give a voice to the voiceless, an attitude often seen in Eurocentric approaches to Othered nations, particularly conflicted countries which cannot escape the yoke of the ‘white man’s burden’. One feels that the Eurocentrics see it as almost a necessity, a humanitarian burden they must bear to show the rest of the world what amazing work Othered artists in conflicted countries can create. One can almost hear the echoes of early anthropologists, and the Kipling-era colonialists they often accompanied, who set off on adventures to Othered lands where they could explore and discover local cultures. It is as if what was once the white, European anthropologist, locked in global colonial structures and defining for us the noble savage, has now become the still largely white Eurocentric curator/dealer/gallerist/institution defining for us the noble artist – the artist who can rise above the savagery of war and oppression of conflict that surrounds them.

A disturbing effect of this renewed interest in conflicted countries and their Othered artists has been that of the Othered beginning to self-promote and highlight their own Otherness for the benefit of the explorer curator – self-orientalizing themselves to create work that fits the model of what is expected by Eurocentric interests. Artists from conflicted countries of Asia and the Middle East have therefore become the spokespeople for a place and a people that the Eurocentrics need and want them to be. Questions are asked of them such as ‘What is Afghan about your work?’ or ‘What is Pakistani about your art?’, questions that are never asked of western artists. ‘What is American (or French, or British, etc.) about your art?’ is not a question ever heard. This is because the Othered are still believed (even when they convey individual, conceptual ideas through contemporary artworks) to be of one mind, one thought, one homogenous ‘local’ entity that lacks the individual diversity thought to be inherent in the developmentally advanced Eurocentrics. The fact that this has become a part of these new relationships only reinforces the stereotypes that have dominated Eurocentric attitudes towards Othered nations and their people for decades.

This blanket perspective on entire regions and peoples was a hallmark of colonial endeavours and Orientalism as a whole. The attitude has not disappeared. And unfortunately it is becoming adopted by many artists in these regions, believing that by creating what is expected of them they will eventually reap the rewards of their loyalty through participation in the Eurocentric-dominated exhibitions and markets. But is it truly necessary that the Othered artists create work that directly reflects the exoticized conflict they are somehow deemed to be an inseparable part of? Must they be a ‘voice’ of their people in troubled times, just waiting to be heard? What happens if an Iraqi artist for example wants to paint something else, something ‘un-Iraqi’ (as defined by the Eurocentrics), something abstract and without a sociopolitical message? Would it be judged on the quality of the work or only on whether it says enough about the artist’s troubled identity and environment?

With so many factors playing a role in shaping these new relational spaces between the Eurocentric art world and the Othered artists, it becomes necessary to also look briefly at how perhaps the Eurocentric-dominated art world has simply become bored and saturated with what is being produced in Europe and the United States and is therefore looking for different perspectives in art from

conflicted countries in Asia and the Middle East, and subsequently for new products for their markets. It is a fact that some 'emerging markets' seem to coincide with these conflicted Othered countries and have become a very hot topic in the business world. Why wouldn't we see similar inroads into these new, potentially economically fruitful, zones by the commercial art market? From galleries to collectors to auction houses, conflicted countries of the Othered have become all the rage. Looking at Christie's auctions of modern and contemporary Middle Eastern art that take place in Dubai as an example, the confluence of cash and conflict is striking. One has the impression, while sipping on champagne, that the deeper the crisis, the heavier the conflict behind the work, the more the work of art will sell. Working in emerging markets already has its complications, whereby largely Eurocentric investors often take a certain paternalistic approach to investment in new markets. When coupled with the problematic surge of interest by the contemporary art world in work from conflicted countries which also double as emerging markets, we can try and separate the purely economic interests from the Orientalist-based interests of the Eurocentric.

But perhaps things have become so intertwined that it is not about separating them, but rather about trying to understand what this intertwined approach and perspective means for the future of contemporary art from conflicted countries of Asia and the Middle East. Therefore, although the inspiration for these new relational spaces comes from a place of disproportionate power structures and colonialist-rooted attitudes towards the Othered, perhaps they can also become spaces where a radical shift can take place – a shift towards a new era of post-Orientalism, and a new social space of alternative identities and relationships that through contemporary art can move us beyond the cultural legacy of colonial-era mindsets. What might be the possibilities if there developed a true 'Third Space' which, as a discourse of dissent, has been presented as taking two forms, 'one is that space where the oppressed plot their liberation: the whispering corners of the tavern or the bazaar. The other is that space where oppressed and oppressor are both able to come together, free (maybe only momentarily) of oppression itself, embodied in their particularity' (Bhabha 1994).

The notion of 'Third Space' as a postcolonial theory on identity and community, largely accredited to Homi K. Bhabha as part of his arguments on 'hybridity' and discussions on where culture might actually be 'located', attempts to explain the uniqueness of each person beyond the colonial-era, Orientalist 'lumpings' of entire peoples and places into a form of exotic homogeneity. It can also be seen as rooted in the early works of Henri Lefebvre seen earlier in this chapter in his discussions on the production of space, particularly his ideas that influenced contemporary discussions on the notion of spatial justice and equality of representation within spatial realms. It is therefore the second form within the Bhabha quote above that contributes to the potential these new relational structures might provide for the various individuals and institutions involved. In his seminal work *The Location of Culture*, Bhabha further defines the modality of a Third Space as part of a postcolonial condition where there exists 'unequal and uneven forces of cultural representation' (Bhabha 1994).

It is this inequality of representation that concerns us here. For just as the notion of a Third Space could contribute to a certain form of liberation by Othered artists of conflicted countries in Asia

and the Middle East from the disproportionate power structures at play, it may even further provide a platform through which a sort of post-Orientalism can be attained. But what would post-Orientalism look like? How could these relationships become more egalitarian? A major obstacle is the idea itself of a 'post' anything. When we talk about postcolonial, we imply that the legacies and attitudes of the colonial era are now behind us. But unfortunately this is not the case, and it is much like calling Afghanistan 'post-conflict' (which it is more often than not in reference to 'post-conflict development') when a conflict both domestic and international is still going strong throughout the country.

Since the end of the Second World War and the appearance of a so-called Third World, academics and geopoliticians began speaking of 'postcolonialism', as if by becoming self-governing nations that were no longer politically ruled by western powers these places were now somehow independent (or indeed free from) their unequal relationships with their now former colonizers. The reality is very different. After years of exploitation, including that of human and natural resources, the newly 'independent' countries went from being politically oppressed to being economically dependent, and the relationships simply shifted from the governmental realm to the financial one where loans were dispersed by former colonizer (Eurocentric) countries to formerly colonized (Othered) nations that ensured their ongoing dependence and guaranteed that their politicians would make policy decisions favourable to their former colonizers. As a result, these restructured relationships did not facilitate the kind of transformation necessary in order to move beyond the colonial mindsets that perpetuate unequal political and economic dynamics between nations of the colonizer and colonized. Instead, the struggle for liberation from control by Eurocentric nations has continued over recent decades, and therefore the attitudes that shaped pre-Second World War relations can still be found not only in political and economic circles, but in artistic and cultural ones as well.

This then brings us back to the discussion of how we can truly create a Third Space, as opposed to a Third World, in order to achieve the liberating state of a post-Orientalist condition. What would it look like if or when we did create it? Of course, we are not talking about a space in the traditional sense, with walls, limits and boundaries. Quite the opposite in fact – we are talking about a space that erases borders, blurs identities and levels inequalities; or a space where those 'unequal and uneven forces of cultural representation' are made equal and even (Bhabha 1994). The challenge is how such a space can be made lasting, a more permanent space where these new, restructured and more egalitarian relationships can continue to exist, to grow and to disrupt previous power dynamics. For in the world today, the possibility of a Third Space is still limited by its impermanence, by its predictable dissolution resulting in large part from the resistance of Eurocentric-dominated structures and institutions to facilitate such lasting changes.

But the reality is that no matter what kind of resistance these actors may have, the changes themselves could very well be inevitable. As the shared experiences within Third Spaces increase, without oppressive relationships and where the particularity of individuals, in fact the complex hybridity that makes up the post-Orientalist person, rises above the stereotyped collectivity of entire peoples and places rooted in older models of Orientalism, it will become less and less likely that the

oppressed or Othered will accept a return to their previously imposed inferior position. This unwillingness could be the spark that ignites a revolution of sorts in the way that the arts and artists of the Othered engage, and/or are engaged, within the global art world of exhibitions, institutions and markets.

When looking at societal class struggles throughout history, there is always a dominant class that is then challenged by the dominated in an attempt to bring about greater equality between classes. What I am talking about in terms of the possibilities that a Third Space could provide to Othered artists is in much the same vein as a class struggle, whereby Othered artists could in essence rise up against those who dominate the art world and demand greater equality in terms not only of access to but ownership of the production, dissemination, interpretation, exhibition, etc. of Othered art and artistic activity on a global level. In the same way that sources of capital are controlled by the dominant economic class, the sources of Third Spaces today where Eurocentrics and Othered artists interact are also still largely controlled by the Eurocentrics. Therefore, in order to achieve a truly revolutionary use of Third Spaces, the response would then include, and indeed necessitate, the increased participation of Othered curators, galleries, museums, collectors and institutions that, through their experiences in Third Spaces, establish their own artistic structures to challenge the dominant paradigms of today.

An example of just such an Othered institutional response is the Palestinian Museum, set to open in 2016. It has been developed as an institution that will ‘act as a dynamic, innovative forum for the exchange and development of knowledge and ideas’ and, furthermore, ‘be capable of transcending political and geographical borders, resisting the social divisions and restrictions to mobility imposed by the Israeli occupation . . . to resist the ghettoization and fragmentation of the Palestinian people’ (The Palestinian Museum 2015). Many involved with developing the museum project have been otherwise engaged in Third Space experiences for some time through the many Biennales, fairs, etc. that make up the international art ‘scene’. As mentioned before, these interactions and experiences can serve as the foundational potential for ambitious revolutionary projects such as the Palestinian Museum.

However, as with the museum, the new knowledge structures formed through Third Space interactions are not, in and of themselves, enough for this ‘revolution’ of sorts to reach its full potential across conflicted countries of the Othered. Another crucial component will be access to, and sources of, funding. All artists and institutions, anywhere in the world, look for funding to help realize their projects and exhibitions. But it is a fact that most sources of funding still come from Eurocentric individuals and institutions, with their own perspectives and agendas when it comes to Othered art and artists. This brings us back to the issue of the art market, and how Eurocentric institutions continue to hold the upper hand when it comes to funding Othered art, artists and institutions. Even with the Palestinian Museum, one sees many Eurocentric institutions serving as funding sources. Therefore although the museum has transcended certain Eurocentric constructs in its establishment, it still may potentially face some of the restrictions and/or limitations that come with Eurocentric funding structures. Othered artists and institutions, therefore, when looking for funds from Eurocentric sources, might be limited in terms of what kind of work or project they could get funding for because it may or

may not fit what the Eurocentrics expect of them.

It will therefore be necessary for Othered countries to also invest significantly in their own artistic and cultural futures. The investment should come from several sources, including governmental ones such as culture ministries and foundations for the arts, and the private sector. With this sort of investment, Othered art and artists will be able to free themselves from economic dependency on Eurocentric art structures and institutions. If this funding came from their own countries, there could very well be a more supportive synergy between funder and funded. This is not to say of course that Othered artists and institutions from conflicted countries (or any country for that matter) should only get funding from their own nations, but it is to say that if the sources of funding were more widely dispersed between the Eurocentrics and the Othered, then there could also be a more disseminated degree of control over the artistic and/or institutional production. One example of such an initiative can be found in the Samdani Art Foundation in Dhaka, formed by Bangladeshi entrepreneurs as a platform through which to support and promote contemporary art from Bangladeshi artists.

Therefore it is important that the Othered begin to create Third Spaces as well, so that these spaces are not only initiated by Eurocentrics. Whether they are exhibitions (such as the Dhaka Art Summit created by the Samdani Art Foundation), exchange programmes, collaborative projects, etc., by doing so the Othered will be able to further facilitate a new power structure both within these Third Spaces and outside of them. The experiences then had within Third Spaces could very well contribute to not only realizing a new economic model as discussed above for funding Othered artists and institutions, but also new knowledge structures that then ultimately can create more egalitarian power structures as well. Although not by any means self-evident, I argue that it will only be through these various Third Spaces that the Eurocentric-dominated field of arts in the global arena, particularly the recent popularity of Othered art and artists from conflicted countries in Asia and the Middle East, can be dismantled, reshaped and re-established in a more egalitarian form.

I have tried in this chapter to explore the complexities of a renewed interest by Eurocentric art circles, including galleries, museums, curators and institutions in Othered art and artists from conflicted countries in Asia and the Middle East. Not an easy task, nor one that I pretend to have made less complicated nor any less convoluted. It is a sticky mess when attempting to untangle the threads of history and their impact on our relational structures today. Furthermore, attempts at bringing about a sort of Derrida-esque deconstruction of Eurocentric assumptions regarding their own power in respect to Othered art and artists from conflicted countries is neither straightforward nor without its own set of limitations.

Perhaps this is why the concept of a Third Space is the most relevant here. What a Third Space does is take the disproportionate nature of the relevant power relationships and provide an opportunity to reset it so that the different actors, the Eurocentrics and the Othered, can play more equal roles in the construction of the relationships within that space. But, more importantly, it is through the Third Space that Eurocentrics and the Othered alike can accept each other in new ways, and then carry those new ways of understanding and interacting outside of the Third Space and embed them into the everyday

spaces of their lives.

But it is more than simply the will to do so that is needed. Eurocentrics must acknowledge the lingering forms of stereotyping and dominance that continue to colour their attitudes and approaches towards Othered art and artists from conflicted countries. They must realize that the burden is no longer (in fact never was) theirs to bear when it comes to ‘discovering’ Othered artists or introducing their work to the world. Simultaneously, Othered artists, curators and institutions must understand that although there is much that can be learned from, taught to and shared with the Eurocentrics through interactions within the Third Spaces of art exhibitions, Biennales and so on, it is not necessary to simply shape themselves into the particular mould that may be expected of them. Instead, the Othered should create work, projects, exhibitions and institutions that tell the stories they want to tell, in whatever voices they want to tell them.

There are no quick or easy solutions to the complexities inherent in this new vigor with which Eurocentrics are pursuing Othered art and artists in conflicted countries of Asia and the Middle East. I have attempted to shed light on some of the issues, as well as on possible paths through which these issues could be dealt with. Some may argue with me that I am being too judgmental, or putting too much into the situation by referencing colonialist structures and attitudes that in theory at least have not existed for decades. But I would beg to counter by referencing simply that just because there was a civil rights movement that resulted in a Civil Rights Act in the United States does not mean that racism, and its effects on the lives of black Americans, has disappeared.

However, with all of the now more complicated structures apparent in the art relationship between the Eurocentrics and the Othered, it is of course impossible to imply that there has been no loosening of the grip on power that has been historically held by Eurocentrics over the Othered. We also cannot say that Othered artists who come from conflicted countries of Asia and the Middle East are always and inevitably at the mercy of Eurocentric prejudices and agendas. Reality is never black and white, and it is true that today there is perhaps more grey, largely in the form of Third Spaces, found in the world than ever before. And this is likely to continue. But this is not a natural state of change. Rather, it is the culmination of the actions of many individuals, collectives and institutions – artists, curators, foundations, museums – who have, through the existence and experience of Third Space exhibitions, programmes, conferences, etc. disrupted the status quo and forged new relationships between the Eurocentrics and the Othered.

Will these new relationships last? Will the shifting power structures continue to challenge old models and help bring about a more not only global, but globally representative, art world? These are difficult questions to answer as they require the ability not only to be optimistic, but also to trust that the art world is perhaps made from a different kind of material in comparison to other Eurocentric/ Othered relationships we might find both historically and today; a material that is more malleable, more willing to take new forms. We must also be willing to acknowledge that art, and the international space it inhabits, is perhaps the one vehicle through which these old relationships can be altered – a space where political acts such as this can, through their abstraction, not only reach a wider audience but also

transcend the banality of historical limitations when it comes to defining this relationship.

The Othered artists from conflicted countries will no doubt continue to seek a more equal playing field, positioning themselves as serious artists with the will to work on the global level, rather than some form of endangered species in need of being saved and paraded internationally through a variety of venues. But it is still within these venues, as well as the ones that will be created by not only the Othered artists themselves but also Othered curators, institutions, and so on, that will provide the necessary Third Spaces where the traditionally oppressed and oppressor can reset the terms and forms of their engagement. By doing so, conflict could cease to be chic; entire places and peoples could cease to be homogeneously exotic; and the Othered could find themselves at the end of the search for a post-Orientalist condition.

Perhaps then the Othered would no longer need to whisper in the corners of taverns and bazaars.

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