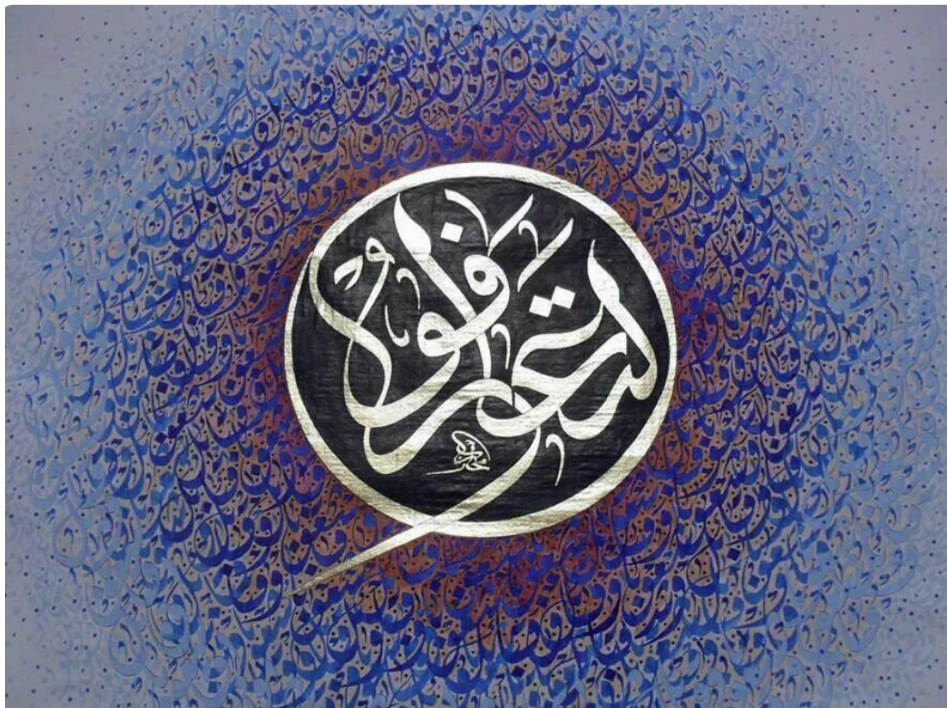


# Multiculturalism التعدد الثقافي

## Multikulturalismus

By Mariam El Marakeshy



*“So that you may know one another”*

### **Museums as Spaces for Multicultural Understanding: A Personal Perspective**

*Multiculturalism* in museums is about acknowledging and respecting the diversity of cultures, traditions, and perspectives within our global society. Museums should serve as spaces where stories from different communities are told, and multiculturalism ensures that these narratives are inclusive and representative. In an increasingly globalized world, Museums should become environments where cultural differences are not just acknowledged but also respected and valued.

Integrating multiculturalism in museum work empowers it to be more than just a repository of artifacts. By advancing inclusive storytelling, involving diverse communities, and prioritizing multicultural education, museums can actively result in a more empathetic and inclusive society. Through thoughtful representation and educational outreach, museums play an essential role in cultural exchange and bringing in our shared humanity.

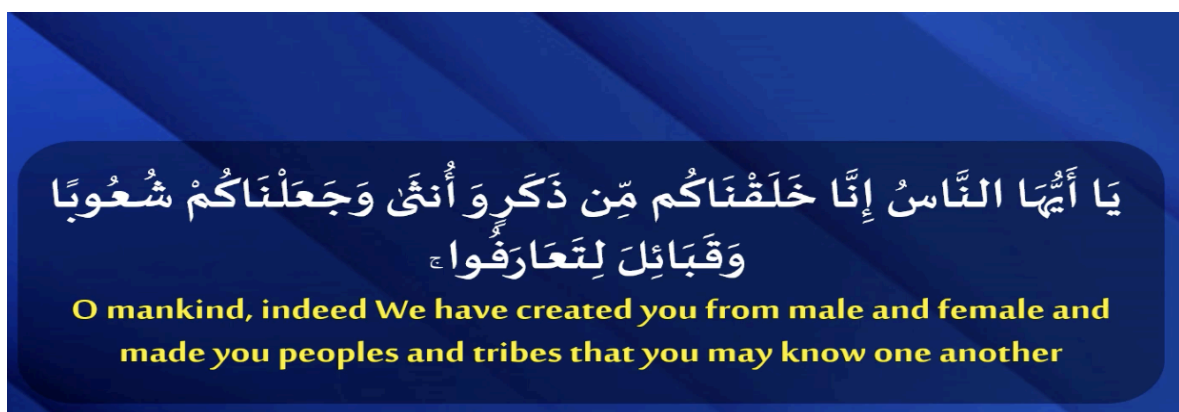
Through my work both inside and outside museums from a very multidisciplinary perspective, in different regions like MENA, Europe, Africa, Central Asia and beyond, I have come to the conclusion that multiculturalism plays a significant role in transforming museums into spaces that recognize and value the diverse cultures of our world.

As a Muslim, on a personal level, multiculturalism is not just an integral part of my work, it is even part of my faith. Talking about Islamic civilization and Muslim cultures, multiculturalism is an integral element of Islamic values and teachings, as included in the Quranic verse:

”وَجَعَلْنَاكُمْ شُعُوبًا وَقَبَائِلَ لِتَعَارَفُوا..“ ( [الحجرات: 13](#) )

“...and We made you into nations and tribes, so that you may know one another..”

([Surah al-Hujurat 13](#))



## Multiculturalism vs Cultural Diversity: Building Inclusivity and Social Understanding

Museums are keepers of human history and culture, making them significant platforms for advancing inclusivity. ***But what is the difference between multiculturalism and cultural diversity?***

**Multiculturalism** involves recognizing and actively allowing the inclusion and coexistence of multiple cultures within a society or institution. It emphasizes the idea of integration without the requirement for cultural adaptation. Multiculturalism is often associated with the equal rights for all cultural groups and the encouragement of intercultural interaction and understanding. Multiculturalism has developed as both a response to the fact of cultural diversity and a way of compensating cultural groups for past exclusion, discrimination, and oppression.

Multiculturalism is the view that various cultural or ethnic groups deserve respect and recognition, which plays an essential role in institutions like museums where diverse cultural narratives are preserved and represented. This means ensuring that exhibitions and educational programs reflect a variety of cultural perspectives, allowing visitors to explore stories from diverse backgrounds. Multiculturalism emphasizes not just the presence of different cultures but a respect and inclusion of their unique contributions.

**Cultural diversity**, on the other hand, simply refers to the existence of different cultural backgrounds within a given space. While cultural diversity acknowledges the range of cultures, multiculturalism goes a step further by integrating these differences into a cohesive experience. Therefore, a multicultural museum doesn't just showcase diverse artifacts, but ensures that all cultural voices are equally respected and represented, it actively

involves visitors in intercultural communication, aiming for understanding, empathy, and shared appreciation.

Multiculturalism, ideally speaking, involves actions and strategies that ensure equality and understanding among diverse cultures. While cultural diversity on its own, is just the fact of the presence of different cultures, but not necessarily taking an action to guarantee that equality or understanding exists, it could also involve some social division. Therefore, multiculturalism should be the main goal to achieve and work on in any culturally diverse environment.

### **Multiculturalism in My Work: A Multidisciplinary Perspective**

As a storyteller, educator, researcher and intercultural facilitator, multiculturalism has always been at the center of my work, influencing the way I tell stories, teach, research, and build bridges across cultures in different regions. For me, multiculturalism isn't just about diversity, it's a dedication to showcasing different cultural identities and realizing meaning across boundaries.

In my filmmaking and multimedia storytelling works, multiculturalism allows me to present authentic narratives that bring the voices of different communities, capturing their experiences from an insider's perspective. I believe in the power of storytelling to open minds and change perspectives. Multiculturalism guides me to bring in narratives that highlight the diverse human experience, while also showing the commonalities of our shared humanity.

For example, I have been working on subjects like migration, as in my award-winning films [Transit](#) about migrants from diverse cultures trapped in camps and islands in Europe, or [Misafir A Guest](#) on migrant education

and international students' challenges and contributions in Turkey, and on unique conservation programs like my [Scientists Education Project](#) in South Africa. I have produced multimedia projects and TV programs on social impact projects in different regions that bring innovative learning initiatives in multicultural environments. This approach ensures that my media projects go beyond shallow or biased representation. I have co-authored the [Report Diversity](#) EU media guidelines for ethical and inclusive storytelling. Through bringing diverse voices, I aim to eliminate stereotypes and create understandings beyond geographic and cultural boundaries.

In education, multiculturalism guides how I create inclusive and dynamic learning environments. For example, in my recent project to make educational games called the [SuperDiverse Games](#) for people from different cultural backgrounds, I aim to enhance learning in multicultural environments through empowering people to bring in their cultural identities in an actively respectful space. According to research, cultural identity is one of the most effective factors for improving learning (Arzu Sosyal Altugan, 2015). I believe that students learn best when they feel seen and valued. I encourage them to think critically about their place in a diverse world, which broadens their horizons and prepares them to be culturally aware citizens in an increasingly globalized world.

During my work as an accredited intercultural facilitator, multiculturalism is crucial to cultivating meaningful dialogue and cultural understanding. I work to create spaces where individuals from different backgrounds feel comfortable sharing their experiences and viewpoints on many controversial subjects. The aim of this kind of mediation and communication is to bring different perspectives and allow for changing wrong misconceptions about other cultures. I facilitate conversations that help participants eliminate biases, learn from each other, and build stronger connections, which enhance empathy and cultural awareness.

As a researcher interested in the concept of multiculturalism, and while pursuing my Master's degree in world cultures with a special focus on museums, I work on projects that explore multicultural elements of museum practices. For example, gamification projects for culturally diverse museum visitors, exhibition storytelling work, education workshops for multicultural visitors, and social media campaigns for museum outreach.

However, multiculturalism is more than a guiding principle in my work; it is an integral part of everything I do. It challenges me to create content and educational experiences that are both inclusive and transformative, leaving a significant impact on different communities. By actively integrating multicultural perspectives, I strive to contribute to a world where everyone's voice is valued, and where our differences are seen as strengths.

### **Multiculturalism in Museums Work: Using A Multidisciplinary Approach**

Through my work with museums, using this very multidisciplinary approach, and while I am integrating my experiences into the different museum aspects of storytelling, education, research and social impact within community work, I have come to the conclusion that multiculturalism is a key element in any museum practice, and without it, there will always be a lack of balance.

Bringing narratives from various cultures, whether through artifacts, art, or digital media, museums allow visitors to learn from experiences outside their own. These stories increase empathy, understanding, and help us recognize our shared humanity, while also preserving the uniqueness of different cultures. Multiculturalism plays a significant role in how individuals from different backgrounds experience and navigate museum storytelling narratives.



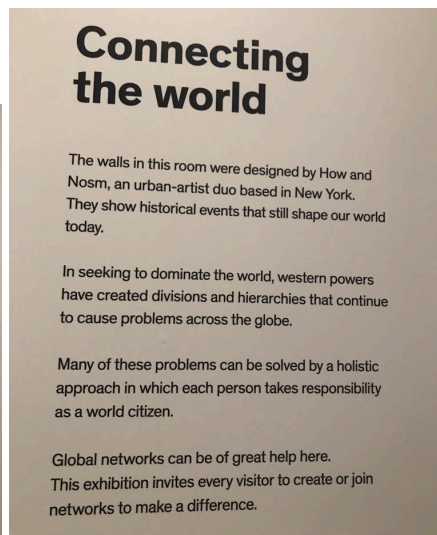
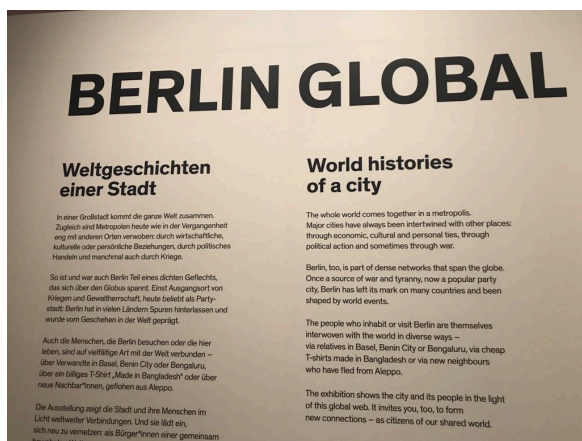
In the context of museum education, I have realized through some learning projects that I implemented into different museums, that multiculturalism offers an opportunity for learners of all backgrounds to explore multiple cultural experiences. Through exhibits, workshops, and interactive learning experiences, museums educate visitors about the complexities of our world, enhancing critical thinking about social justice, equality, and inclusion.

During my visits to many museums in different locations, for example in Germany, I have developed a strong perspective that it is only through multiculturalism that museums can become active spaces which reflect the world's cultural diversity, offering not just exhibitions or education, but a real immersive storytelling experience into the culture of others. As we visited the FXHB Museum in Berlin, multicultural storytelling brought the different voices of the surrounding community who come from diverse cultural backgrounds. I got immersed into the stories of migrant communities around the area, which was powerfully presented including interactive elements, integrated with maps to show the journey each immigrant has taken to come to this neighborhood. This gave a human experience that represented diverse voices while preserving their true cultural identity without the need for adaptation, but rather acknowledgment and respect



FXHB Museum Berlin, © Mariam El Marakeshy

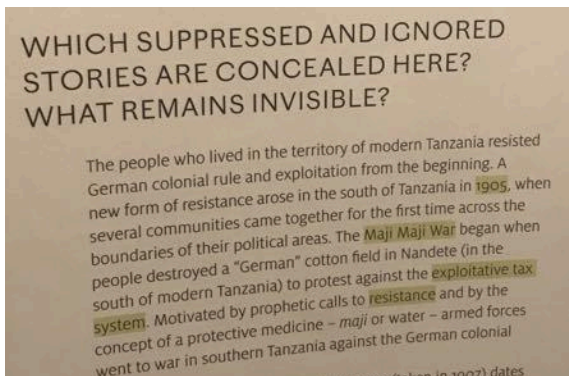
The Berlin Global, located in the Humboldt Forum, brings the multiculturalism aspect of Berlin to the audience, and investigates how this city is very diverse but yet still has its own issues to resolve. I was able to explore how multicultural interactive elements that have been included such-as tastes, scents, traditions, arts, and narratives, have all been employed to serve the overall perspective and objective of the exhibition. That is to show a multicultural Berlin, while exploring social dilemmas and issues that the city is subject to, and of which have been areas of criticism. The exhibition invites the visitors into an immersive intercultural dialogue that helps explore and raise curiosity, which is a perfect aspect for learning.



Berlin Global Museum, © Mariam El Marakeshy



The Ethnography Museum in Humboldt forum is also another good example where multiculturalism is employed in a way that connects it to other controversial issues in museums. I found that the incorporation of artifacts and objects from diverse cultures, while boldly highlighting the issues surrounding restitution and decolonization in museums, was a powerful element that could connect diverse audiences to the exhibitions. This helped to ensure that they not only feel that their cultures and traditions are authentically represented but also their struggles are heard and acknowledged, while providing some level of resolution. For example, one interesting observation in one of the exhibitions, that some displays were left empty, with a disclaimer that there was no consent from original owners, which has smartly translated into the meaning of ownership and restitution by various cultures who own the story and have the true voice to represent their objects.



Ethnography Museum in Berlin, © Mariam El Marakeshy

On the other hand, the complete opposite experience I had in the Neues Museum, Berlin, where I felt that one single story and narrative is employed. I didn't feel that the exhibitions bring multicultural perspectives or diverse observations, in addition to questions of colonialism and restitution. For example, the ancient Egyptian collections, where the controversial Nefertiti bust is kept in a separate restricted display, without conveying the issues surrounding its colonial acquisition, this interpretation makes this museum a bit controversial in terms of its authentic representation of objects. The museum is a good example of how multiculturalism is a significant element for authenticity and representation, and without it, the objectivity and balance of the narrative is at a disadvantage.



The Neues Museum, © Mariam El Marakeshy

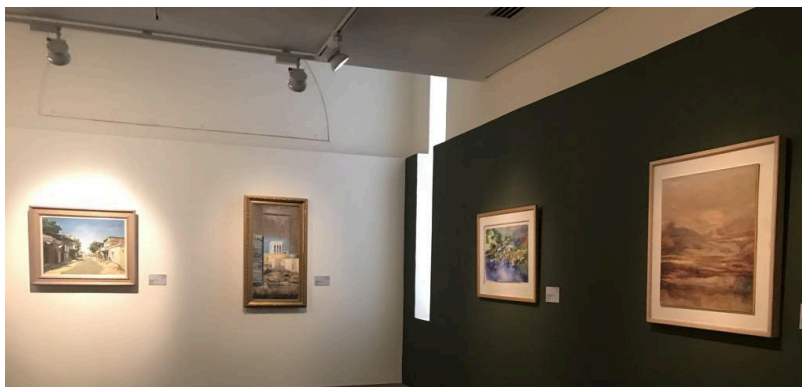
Talking about my experience with Middle Eastern museums, I have experienced another meaning of multiculturalism at some. For example, in the Sharjah Archeology Museum, the focus is more on bringing local and indigenous narratives, with some regional citations, but at the same time, it ensures that the space is very multiculturally friendly; in terms of multilingual interpretations, accessibility, the employment of interactive

elements, and there is an expansion of education programs in Sharjah museums to reach diverse cultural backgrounds.



Sharjah Archeology Museum, © Mariam El Marakeshy

The Sharjah Art Museum, was very multiculturally oriented in terms of its art collections bringing voices of artists from different regions, and ensuring a balanced representation. The Barjeel exhibition and the Arab Art Collection including the Light of the Orient Exhibition, brought arts from all around the Middle East and orientalist arts, where some of the art pieces focused on the subject of culture or resistance. For me, the diversity of narratives gave voice to different cultural representations which allowed for better interpretation of the meaning and artistic value of collections.



Sharjah Art Museum, © Mariam El Marakeshy

In addition, the concept of houses, which is used to name many of the museums in the UAE, is very unique in how it transfers the meaning of the place to the visitors. It gives more warmth and depth to the museum experience for visitors from multicultural backgrounds as they feel welcomed into someone's home rather than a repository of artifacts. It creates a connection with the exhibition and the place and gets multicultural visitors immersed into the local culture while preserving UAE cultural identity.



Bait AlNaboodah Museum, © Mariam El Marakeshy

### **Multiculturalism in Museums: Challenges and Opportunities**

Based on my own museum experiences, I believe that implementing multiculturalism is rewarding yet complex. Ensuring respectful, accurate representation and avoiding biased narratives requires ethical consideration and resources. Additionally, I think that museums should navigate the various expectations of a multicultural audience, where visitors from different backgrounds may interpret exhibits in diverse ways.

I am aware that multiculturalism is sometimes controversial, as it could result in both positive and negative responses, which influence how people interact, relate, and integrate within culturally diverse environments.

For example, individuals from minority cultures or migrant backgrounds, multiculturalism in museums can create a strong sense of belonging as it creates an inclusive environment where individuals feel valued. People could express positive reactions such as confidence and appreciation when they see their cultures being acknowledged and showcased. This sense of inclusion improves resilience and allows individuals to better integrate in multicultural settings.

Multiculturalism in museums could also encourage empathy by exposing visitors to different perspectives, values, and experiences. When people learn about cultures other than their own, they could develop an understanding and appreciation of the challenges and victories of people from diverse backgrounds. In multicultural museums, visitors are more likely to show behaviors that support social justice and equality, through recognizing the common humanity in others.

However, when I talk to different communities, I know that multiculturalism can sometimes evoke struggles and conflict. The responses to multiculturalism define how individuals and communities interact, and understanding this complexity is important for creating more inclusive museum spaces. For example, migrants may feel the need to adopt the dominant culture while also preserving their own culture. This can lead to confusion, isolation, or a sense of not fully belonging to any one culture. Museums need to be aware of how their cultural representations could be contributing to any negative responses, through ethical storytelling and interpretations as well as supportive environments to multicultural visitors.

Despite these challenges, multiculturalism offers museums unique opportunities to become agents of social change, by addressing issues like social justice, migration, and environmental sustainability through multicultural perspectives.



## Integrating Multiculturalism into Museums: Practical Strategies for Inclusion

To fully integrate the concept of multiculturalism, I would suggest that museums can implement some strategies such as:

**Increase Representation:** By incorporating diverse narratives, museums offer everyone a sense of representation and belonging. Multicultural exhibits showcase artifacts and stories that reflect the experiences of all cultures represented in society and bring together unique voices and worldviews, creating spaces where visitors can see their own cultures honored while learning about others.

**Provide Multilingual Content:** Offering information in multiple languages and providing resources like audio guides helps break down language barriers, making museums accessible to a broader audience.

**Develop Multicultural Programs:** Hosting cultural events and workshops encourages visitors to interact with diverse cultural practices through immersive experiences, enhancing understanding and appreciation.

**Integrate Multiculturalism in Educational Initiatives:** By integrating multicultural perspectives in educational programs, like workshops, tours, and events, museums encourage cultural literacy. Collaborations with schools and community groups to develop multicultural learning programs can extend this impact, making museums accessible learning hubs.

**Facilitate Intercultural Dialogue:** Museums can create spaces for public discussions on relevant social issues, encouraging visitors to share their own cultural experiences and learn from others.

**Inclusive Marketing and Outreach:** Collaborating with community organizations and using diverse outreach strategies ensures that museums are welcoming to all.

**Community Involvement:** Involving community voices in exhibit creation ensures authenticity and relevance. By inviting local communities to participate in curation, museums enhance trust and inclusivity.

Collaborations with Indigenous, migrant, and other groups bring cultural stories that resonate with the communities represented.

**Strengthening Cultural Identity:** For multicultural communities, museums can be spaces of cultural identity reinforcement. Exhibits showcasing their traditions and achievements build a sense of respect and belonging.

Research shows that cultural identity is a vital factor in enhancing learning (Arzu Sosyal Altugan, 2015). When visitors see their cultures represented, they connect more deeply with both the museum and their own culture.

**Multicultural Staffing and Leadership:** A diverse team enhances inclusivity and authenticity in museum offerings. When museums employ staff from various cultural backgrounds, they could create exhibits and programs which allow museums to serve as inclusive, representative spaces for all.

### **In Summary: A Reflection**

Multiculturalism transforms museums into actively respectful spaces of cultural exchange that reflect and acknowledge the diverse reality of our humanity. Through multiculturalism, museums can act as magical tools for real social change.

Integrating the concept of multiculturalism in museums is challenging yet rewarding, and it requires working on inclusivity and representation of diverse cultures while also implementing many ethical standards. With multicultural storytelling, educational programs, and inclusive spaces, museums can become influential places for enhancing the true meaning of multiculturalism, where cultural differences are not just acknowledged but appreciated and respected.