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Moving Knowledges: Towards a speculative Arab art residency proto-history

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Abstract

Art residencies are initiatives offering temporary living and working space for artists and researchers outside of their usual environments. Since the 1990s these spaces have expanded exponentially on a global scale. This unprecedented development has been accompanied by a comprehensive process of self-assessment. The significant numbers of seminars and conferences organized as well as the multiple studies and monographs published attest to the widespread interest, shared by practitioners and researchers alike, in reflecting on art residencies' assets and, most importantly, their challenges.

Even as these timely discussions take place, there is an important area of inquiry that remains under-researched, that is the invisibility of non-Eurocentered approaches in the history of art residencies. Indeed, the lack of a coherent body of work in this field demonstrates that the genealogical co-relation between artistic practice and the journey hasn't yet been critically approached from a cross-cultural perspective. As a result, the discourse that currently frames the history of art residencies continues to place Europe at the center.

An example of the lack of complexity in the history of art residencies can be found in the omission of the rich tradition intertwining mobility and knowledge exchange within Islamic and Arab cultures. The primary aim of this research is precisely to address, challenge and remediate this absence. To this end, by adopting artistic research, post-representational cartography, collaborative and intimate curating and experimental genealogy as methodological groundings a chronographic account representing several practices linking knowledge and the journey throughout medieval Islam and modern Arab and Ottoman history has been created. The aim of this endeavour is to discover unexpected lineages, to reside in the movement of knowledge and to rethink the assumptions embedded in a history that we believed was already written.

Keywords: Art Residency, methodology, genealogy, Islamic and Arab epistemologies, speculation, artistic research, cross-cultural resonances.

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Introduction

Challenging hegemonic histories

Art residencies are initiatives offering temporary living and working space for artists and researchers outside of their usual environment. These creative spaces are characterized by three concepts: mobility (normally art residencies require the artist to travel); knowledge (residents are expected to elaborate their practice, thereby enhancing new knowledge), and exchange (residents share and exchange ideas with fellow residents and often with the local communities they temporarily inhabit). Since their nomenclature first appeared in the 1990s, art residencies have expanded exponentially worldwide. This unprecedented development has been accompanied by a comprehensive process of self-assessment conducted not only by artists or art residency coordinators themselves but also by the networks that articulate the sector (namely Transartists[1] and Resartist[2]) as well as part of several studies (such as the ones carried out by On the Move[3] and the European Commission[4]). The significant numbers of seminars and conferences organized[5] as well as the multiple studies and monographs published[6] attest to the widespread interest, shared by practitioners and researchers alike, in reflecting on art residencies' assets and, most importantly, their challenges. Artistic homogenisation, hyper-mobility, ecological impact, community parasitisation and most importantly the effects of the Covid-19 are some of the issues that are being debated and confronted by art residency coordinators and researchers today.

Notwithstanding these important debates, there is an essential area of inquiry that remains under-researched, that is the invisibility of non-Eurocentric approaches to the history of art residencies. The hegemonic narrative that currently frames this history is the one proposed by Transartists[7], the most prominent network of art residencies worldwide. Transartists historical

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[1] Transartists [online] Available at: https://www.transartists.org/en/station-station [Accessed Day 15 May 2021]

[2] Resartis [online] Available at: https://resartis.org [Accessed Day 15 May 2021]

[3] On the Move [online] Available at: https://on-the-move.org [Accessed Day 15 May 2021]

[4] *Policy Handbook on Artists' Residencies* [online] Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/assets/eac/culture/policy/cultural-creative-industries/documents/artists-residencies_en.pdf [Accessed Day 15 May 2021]

[5] For a list of several seminars and conferences please visit Transartists/News [online] Available at: https://www.transartists.org/our-news [Accessed Day 15 May 2021]

[6] For a list of the several publications please visit Transartists/Readings [online] Available at: https://www.transartists.org/readings [Accessed Day 15 May 2021]

[7] See *Artist-in-Residence history* in Transartists [online] Available at: https://www.transartists.org/residency-history [Accessed Day 15 May 2021]. Interestingly enough, the Transartist account is replicated in the *Policy handbook on artists' residencies* Annex 1. *Artists' residencies – a short essay on their origins and development*. European Commission (2014) [online] Available at:

account places the 1800's expansion of artistic patronage and art colonies in northern Europe as art residencies' origin. The main objective of this research is to demonstrate that this historical narrative is not only conceptually limiting but remains comfortably stuck in Euro-centrism. To do so I propose to look at the epistemologies and practices that, linking the search for knowledge and the journey, has shaped Arab intellectual legacies. The suffix *proto-* in the history presented in this research is adopted to underline that the alternative genealogy of the art residency proposed here ends where the established historical narrative currently starts. In short, the *proto-* in the context of this research refers to a time when art residencies did not yet exist but where spaces that articulated the relationship between knowledge, creativity and mobility nonetheless flourished.

Epistemic Resonances

As a project that aims at unfolding *other* ways to narrate the history of art residencies, one of the persistent issues that has conditioned my research relates to how the *other* has been approached within the humanistic disciplines. Despite the many efforts currently being undertaken, Arab and Islamic cultures continue to be approached as the *other* from academic research, too often revealing a tendency towards either exoticism or disdain. In contrast to such tendencies this project critically approaches the privileges and limitations that affect research practices while, at the same time, giving an answer to the following question: Does epistemic diversity permeate and inform knowledge created in academic contexts? While better understanding a culture that is fundamental to my own, counterbalancing epistemic neglect, and restoring the fertile ground of cross-cultural pollination, the possibility of epistemological dialogue is a question that in many ways frames this project.

Linked to the above, *Moving Knowledges: Towards a speculative Arab art residency proto-history* cannot be understood outside its zeitgeist. Firstly, this project is framed by a particular research paradigm: decolonial theory. Based on the confrontation of epistemic traditions (Quijano, 2000; Mignolo, 2007; and Grosfoguel, 2012), the adoption of the decolonial theoretical corpus has become both an imperative and a challenge in my research process.
Secondly, the decision to challenge the current art residency historiography by focusing on Arab and Islamic intellectual legacies is also the result of my long term engagement in developing curatorial and research projects in conjunction with several cultural spaces and

https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/e6febc40-05f1-11e6-b713-01aa75ed71a1 [Accessed Day 15 May 2021].

art residency programs active in North Africa and the Middle East. The outcome of these collaborations are NACMM - North Africa Cultural Mobility Map[8] (2015-2017) and Platform HARAKAT[9] (2018-2021).

Critically investigating at the crossroad which links decolonial theory and my practice as a curator, this project unfolds through an approach which confronts cultural essentialism and endorses epistemic dialogue. To do so, I propose to investigate the synergies that can be found between Islamic research principles and artistic research methods.

Towards a fragile method

The process of investigating the resonances between Islamic research principles and artistic research methods has been not only enlightening but also demanding. Indeed, one of the main tasks proposed by decolonial theory is that of stressing and reflecting upon the privileges in which any academic endeavour is framed. Adopting positionality as an overall framework, the privileges I embody as a Western white male researcher materialise in the fact that I have had the necessary time and space to develop my work as a researcher. Thanks to institutional support, I also have had access to an overwhelming amount of resources. Indeed, several funding schemes allowed me to have a stable income, to have the necessary means to travel to several countries in North Africa and the Middle East, while at the same time undertaking intensive Arabic language courses in Barcelona, Marrakech and Algiers. Besides this privileged condition though, due to conceptual and practical matters I soon became aware about my incapacity to have access to the most adequate sources to investigate the topic at hand. This realization brought me to critically reflect upon an unexpected feeling: the impression that, due to my incapacity to properly understand and read Arabic, rigorous discernment was impossible to achieve. It was in reading the 12th-century mystic thinker Ibn Arabi that I found temporary relief for my frustration. In his illuminating book, *The Secrets of Voyaging*, Ibn Arabi enigmatically states that “the impossibility of perception is a perception in itself.” (2015). In light of Arabi‘s words, my decision to adopt certain methods and not others have become fundamental in understanding that complexity and fragility are tools that also enhance multiple and non-restrictive paths to knowledge. While further stressing the importance of epistemic complexity, fragility is proposed as a research framework with which to articulate different approaches to the methodology. Fragility, in the context of this project, refers to methods that are not ready-made, fixed and hegemonic but that respond to the context and emotions as

[8] NACMM - North Africa Cultural Mobility Map [online] Available at: http://www.nacmm.org/en/ [Accessed Day 15 May 2021]
[9] Platform HARAKAT [online] Available at: https://www.platformharakat.com/ [Accessed Day 15 May 2021]

well as the particular circumstances of each research situation. It is through a dialogue between Islamic research principles and artistic research methods that fragility is adopted as an important aspect of this project's inventive methods, namely al-Khaban cartography and autoethnography; Curatorial al-Barzaj and anecdotization, experimental genealogy and relationality.

My research path started 5 years ago with the development of several collaborative projects. Amongst them, NACMM - North Africa Cultural Mobility Map is the most relevant for this research. Through NACMM I was able to carry out ethnographic research through field trips, collaborative inquiry and data gathering as well as in depth interviews with art residency coordinators, artists and curators from the region. By its completion at the end of 2017, NACMM had established itself as a unique initiative that includes a cartography of 70 art residency programs operating in Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Egypt, Lebanon and Palestine; 40 video interviews with artists, curators, researchers and coordinators of art residency initiatives in North Africa and the Middle East; and a database of funding opportunities and resources with more than 90 entries.
Through participatory action research, the necessity of further strengthening collaboration between NACMM partners and having a direct and real impact on the ground led to the creation of Platform HARAKAT. By means of artistic and curatorial research and practice, Platform HARAKAT has evolved as a space of experimentation in which several art residency models have been tested. Within Platform HARAKAT two projects have become fundamental for this research. These are The art of getting lost[10] and Beyond qafila thania[11]. Adopting post-representational cartography, creative auto-ethnography and archival research, these projects have set the grounds to investigate on the *rihla,* a Medieval Islamic practice where travelling in itself was understood as a method of acquiring and documenting knowledge. As I will argue in this thesis, this has been the starting point to envision an alternative to the discourse that, until today, monopolizes the history of art residencies.
In addition to the multiplicity of materials gathered through both NACMM and Platform HARAKAT several sojourns at El Miracle monastery (Catalonia), Le18 (Morocco), the Centre Culturel et de Documentation Saharienne and Glycines (Algeria), and Darat al Funun (Jordan) have become fundamental in having the necessary time and space to delve in relevant literature and archiving material. Furthermore, mimicking the practice of Islamic men of letters when documenting their journeys through *al-kaban* travel narratives, the outcomes of these

[10] The art of getting lost [online] Available at: https://platformharakat.com/actions/the-art-of-getting-lost [Accessed Day 15 May 2021]
[11] Beyond qafila thania [online] Available at: https://platformharakat.com/actions/beyond-qafila-thania [Accessed Day 15 May 2021]

travels has materialized in the creation of several outputs, namely auto-ethnographic diaries and semi-fictional micro stories created by means of creative prose, photography and video-essays. All this material form the multiple voices that structure *An event without its poem is an event that never happened*, the portfolio accompanying this dissertation in which the speculative Arab art residency proto-history is presented.

Structuring *moving knowledge(s)*

Moving Knowledges: Towards a speculative Arab art residency proto-history is structured in three chapters. The first one, *Methodological journeys: Coming back from the South* focuses on research positionality through a constructive critique of decolonial theory while providing a framework from which to stress on the resonances between Islamic research principles and artistic research methods. *Towards a fragile method,* the second chapter of this dissertation, is dedicated to describe and critically analyze both practice-based research and the inventive methods previously mentioned. In the last chapter, tilted *Towards a speculative Arab art residency proto-history,* I develop a critique of the hegemonic narrative that currently frames the history of art residencies while providing an example of how to challenge and give an alternative to the established discourse both in terms of content and form.

In addition to the important arguments made in the dissertation, the outcome of my research journey is to be found in the portfolio. Titled *An event without its poem is an event that never happened,* the portfolio is a digital space developed in collaboration with Untitled, a curatorial and design duo based in Morocco. Through cross-temporal and cross-geographic trajectories *An event without its poem is an event that never happened* is structured in five narrative voices. These are: (1) the documentation of several contemporary art residency projects which resonate with the practice of journeying in search for knowledge through Arab and Islamic history; (2) definition of key concepts and practices which historically have shaped the relationship between knowledge and the journey within Arab and Islamic intellectual traditions; (3) the framing of these concepts in their particular historical contexts; (4) semi-fictional micro-stories informing the proposal through the experience of historical characters; and (5) auto-ethnographic diaries which link my own experience as a mobile researcher with that of the several personages that inform this genealogy.

By navigating through the portfolio*,* one will travel to Damascus to be part of the multiple scholarly circles that spread throughout the main urbes of the Islamic world during the 8th century. Therewe will meet the first r*ahḥālas,* the globetrotters of the age. Next, we will visit

the Syrian desert solitudes and the *sa'ihun*, or vagabond saints, continuing the path by residing in a medieval Muslim monastery or *zawaya*, while participating in a *halafat*, the scholarly and mystics gathering that spread throughout the Maghreb in the 1300s. Then we will move to a *Majāli*, an Ottoman literary salon, to conclude the journey by tracing the travels of several scholars and diplomats from Morocco and Egypt to London and Paris, through the *al-rihla Siffariya* - educational missions - while retracing the journeys of their European counterparts, the grand tourists, who travelled from Nuremberg, Paris and Edinburgh to Jerusalem and Istanbul during the 17th and 18th centuries. This trajectory, our own particular *rihla*, will end at an art colony in the late 1800s, where, as it is currently suggested, the current history of art residencies begins. .

Contributing to knowledge

This journey - the one proposed in *Moving Knowledges: Towards a speculative Arab art residency proto-history* and the accompanying portfolio *An event without its poem is an event that never happened* - cannot be read as a conclusion, nor as an assertive form of argumentation. Instead, what the reader will find in this thesis and the portfolio is a map in the making, the traces of a long-lasting research process in need of continuation. Indeed, the several research lines that this project proposes want to be the starting point to unfold further investigations, particularly in the fields of historiography and methodology.

Historiographically, this project not only provides an alternative to the western-centric narrative that monopolizes the history of art residencies but, in looking at Islamic and Arab epistemologies and practices, opens up a much needed cross-cultural approach. Furthermore, through artistic research, the alternative history proposed here challenges chrononormativity by tracing a dialogue that overcomes the limits imposed by time and space to open up historiography to cross-temporal and cross-geographic dialogues. The use of several narrative voices aims at enriching historiography from an epistemological perspective. By including historical analysis, semi-fictional micro-stories and auto-ethnographic essays, *An event without its poem is an event that never happened* can be understood as a prototype. As such, through paratext[12] and further commentary, the digital space it occupies allows for the inclusion of other voices and perspectives. Those complementary voices can take the form of textual revision, archival material or creative works which will complement and challenge the research account through a continuous

[12] That is the future unfolding of the portfolio through material associated with but distinct from the main body of this research produced by others than myself. This collaborative practice will evolve from the curation of several study groups which will further inform the research with text, archival material and artistic interventions.

feedback loop. In that sense, the potentials offered by the novel field of the digital humanities will need to be unfolded through collaborative practice.

By underlining fragility as an integral part of my methodology this project wants to stress on several realizations which I believe are worth further investigating. The first one is the fact that in research, practice often precedes the need to conceptualize and name the methods used. An example of that is the conceptual retrospectivity of the method's naming (participatory action research) in NACMM's development.
Furthermore, while proposing an alternative genealogy of the art residency by looking at Arab and Islamic epistemologies and practices, I felt the need to apply the same cross-cultural approach to methodological analysis. By stressing on the importance to maintain a sense of balance among practices, values, and customs of different research traditions this dissertation provides the ground from which critical genealogies can be traced also in methodological terms. A case at hand is the unfolding of the possible historical trajectories that might exist between al-Khaban travel narratives and post-representational cartography. Although the methods conventionally used in historical analysis might not have space for opening up the research endeavour to speculative and creative thinking, the holistic, experimental and practice based approach proposed by both Islamic research principles and artistic research methods might provide alternative perspectives that should not be undervalued. In that sense, and in conjunction with the work of historians and researchers on heritage, epistemology and methodology, this project wants to suggest and encourage trans-disciplinary investigations also in methodological terms while contributing to the current debates reflecting on critical, difficult or dissonant approaches to heritage hybridizations.

As a mode of conclusion, the edges that define my research path will not always be discernible nor evident but should function as dynamic guiding lines. On one side of this path, the margins open to an array of conceptual and creative landscapes in which to rest and reflect upon alternative genealogies of the journey. On the other hand, because of this path's absences and neglected structures, the wanderer will have the chance to follow detours and look for alternative routes through eclectic encounters and intimate dialogues. The aim of this endeavour is by no means to offer a consistent and structured alternative to the existing history of art residencies. On the contrary, what follows is an attempt to challenge the current discourse while also enriching it. The ultimate aim of *Moving Knowledges: Towards a speculative Arab art residency proto-history* and of *An event without its poem is an event that never happened* is precisely this: to shake, move and retool the current understanding of the notion of the art residency and advocate for the multiplicity of alternative histories.

1. Methodological Journeys: Coming back from the South

> “Stories about others, as well as commentaries on their differences,
> are but elements in the history of the same and its knowledge.”
>
> Mudimbe V. Y. (1988, p.87) *The Invention of Africa: Gnosis, Philosophy, and the Order of Knowledge*. Indiana University Press.

Introduction

The publication of *The Invention of Africa: Gnosis, Philosophy, and the Order of Knowledge* by Congolese scholar V.Y. Mudimbe, in 1988, marked a turning point in the study of the intellectual history of the African continent. Mudimbe’s work is nowadays widely regarded as being equally significant to the field of African studies as Edward Saïd's *Orientalism* (1978) has been to postcolonial research. In the opening pages of this influential work, Mudimbe states: “Western interpreters, as well as African analysts, have been using categories and conceptual systems that depend on the Western epistemological order. Even in the most explicitly Afro-centric descriptions, models of analysis, knowingly or unknowingly, refer to the same order” (1988, p. xv). Taking into consideration Mudimbe’s remarks, in the context of a research that aims at critically approaching western-centrism within art residencies’ narratives, this chapter aims at addressing the following questions: Is it possible to transgress the categories and conceptual systems of *Western epistemology*? How is one to put in motion the conditions that allow for an epistemological shift? And what are the contingencies and privileges that affect this task?

In the process of addressing the limits of sameness and otherness within academic research, often personal accountability is required. Accountability in this research project is all the more important if we consider how the space of enunciation this investigation occupies - that is, knowledge produced and validated by Western academia - is currently being scrutinised, not to say accused, of having historical imbrications with the various epistemicides perpetuated by colonial powers during the modern era. Decolonial thinkers such as Enrique Dussel (1998), Ramon Grosfoguel (2013), and Walter Mignolo (2014), to name but a few, insist that the process of trying to investigate *the other* - in the case of this research Arab and Islamic epistemologies and practices - through *Western* lenses has historically been and continues to be highly contentious.

Drawing on conceptual analysis and personal experience, in *Methodological journeys: Coming back from the South* I propose to reflect upon decolonial theory and the tendency of some of its main representatives to confront Western and non-Western epistemologies and methods.

In order to do so, in the first section of this chapter (1.1 *On the quest for epistemic resonances*), I will focus on the description of the proposals made by a highly influential school within decolonial theory, the group of Latinamerican thinkers and activists modernidad / colonialidad / descolonialidad, which has arisen from the Center of Study and Investigation for Decolonial Dialogues[13] (CSIDG). Particular attention will be given to the work of one of its founders, Ramon Grosfoguel. In the aim of grounding the topic of this research in methodological analysis, in the following section (1.2 *Include me out: decolonial self-sabotage*) I will propose a constructive critique of the conceptual corpus defining Grosfoguel's decolonial theory through three case studies. These are: my experience as participant in the Critical Muslim Studies: Decolonial Struggles and Liberation Theologies Summer School which took place in Granada (Spain) in 2016*;* the content and context of the 1:54 African Art fair's *Always Decolonise!* forum in Marrakech (Morocco) 2018; and the syncretic development of the post-avant-garde Casa Group in 1960s Morocco. Finally, in this chapter's last section (*1.3. Islamic research principles vs. artistic research methods?*) I will advocate for epistemic dialogue by stressing how some of the methods used within the Western academy are not antagonistic to those of non-Western knowledge traditions, as the aforementioned decolonial theorists propose. To support this claim, I will develop a comparative analysis between the theory and practice of Islamic research principles and artistic research methods.
In the conclusion of this chapter I will argue that, as a project that wants to challenge Western-centrism within art residencies' historiography, this dissertation could be seen to align with the demands made from decolonial theory. At the same time though, this project also adopts non-decolonial but nonetheless critical approaches which originate within and not in exteriority to the so-called *Western epistemological order*. Ultimately, I will suggest that in the process of constant revision, criticism and upgrading ingrained in academia, the challenging and innovative proposals made from the field of artistic research demonstrate that, if something called *Western epistemological order* does exist, then it should be defined not only as a monolithic entity grounded in epistemic racism/sexism as Grosfoguel (2013) insists but

[13] The CSIDG is a non-profit and non-governmental organisation promoting research, knowledge-making, education and public policy to invent and work towards non-competitive horizons of life, socio-economic organisation and international relations. Towards these ends, the CSIDG currently collaborates in the organising and hosting of several summer programs which have taken place in Barcelona, Granada, Mexico City, Bahia, Cape Town, Amsterdam and Santiago de Compostela. Through its history, the CSIDG has developed linkages with several other initiatives such as the Decolonising the Mind, Groupe Décolonial de Traduction and Les Indigènes de la République amongst many others. Dialogo Global, [online] Available at: https://www.dialogoglobal.com/granada/ [Accessed Day 16 August 2020].

also as a complex and ever evolving system of though that increasingly moves towards holism, that is, to a way of conducting research that also allows for the study of emotion, empathy and embodiment through positionality.

Before continuing in my argumentation, it is worth first reflecting further in the position I occupy within this research project. As Darwin Holmes states in *Researcher Positionality - A Consideration of its Influence and Place in Qualitative Research* (2020) “the term positionality both describes an individual’s worldview and the position the researcher adopts about a research task and its social and political context. The individual’s worldview or ‘where the researcher is coming from’ concerns ontological assumptions (an individual’s beliefs about the nature of social reality and what is knowable about the world), epistemological assumptions (an individual’s beliefs about the nature of knowledge) and assumptions about human nature and agency (individual’s assumptions about the way we interact with our environment and relate to it)” (2020, p. 1). Accordingly, positionality reflects the position that the researcher has chosen to adopt within a given study. In the context of this project, the reasons for investigating an alternative history of art residencies by moving away from Europe and focusing particularly on Arab and Islamic intellectual heritages respond to professional, experiential and spiritual circumstances. As part of my position as coordinator of the art residency program CeRCCa - Center for Research and Creativity Casamarles[14] (Catalonia), since 2009 I have been engaged with organisations and individuals developing artistic projects in North Africa and the Middle East. The intention behind establishing long term partnerships with similar projects in the Arab world was two-fold. Firstly, I wanted to address the persistent lack of acknowledgement of the historical ties and hybrid heritages that intertwine European and Muslim cultures. Relevant to my own position as a Catalan researcher, I find it important to keep remembering that the Iberian Peninsula had once been the house of Islamic civilization: al-Andalus designates the different Arab and Berber states that controlled these territories at various times between 711 and 1492. And so, Islam is a crucial part of my own heritage, one which to my experiences as historian continues to be neglected. Secondly, my intention has been to deactivate the multiple stereotypes and prejudices that exist in European societies regarding our southern neighbours. My thinking was that CeRCCa could become a catalyst in promoting artistic exchanges and community interactions between artists from both sides of the Mediterranean. By promoting shared knowledge(s), I thought, a more sympathetic relationship could be established. As part of this objective during the last 10 years I have been privileged enough to be able to travel to the southern Mediterranean region where, as a researcher in residence, I have spent extended periods of time. It has been by being in Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Egypt and Jordan that I slowly have grown an interest for Islam, not

[14] CeRCCa [online] Available at:https://www.cercca.cat [Accessed Day 16 August 2021].

only as spiritual tradition but also as a way of living. Being aware of the many issues affecting extremist and radical views and positionings particularly in terms of women and gender issues, I nonetheless have been able to understand and embrace certain Islamic practices and beliefs. This is, of course, a life-long process that needs to be cultivated and taken care of. It is due to these several alliances that I have become interested in engaging historical analysis of Arab cultures. Nonetheless, as I will argue, this choice brings my research project to an unstable position, one that is framed by multiple limitations and fragilities.

One of these many fragilities has been the impossibility to have access to the most appropriate research sources due to language barriers; another, my condition as a foreigner, an outsider.
Although as a researcher supported by a particular academic institution I acknowledge my privileged position, at the same, this same position is often stigmatized and objectified as knowledge created within the western academy is often seen as pretentious and disattached from other social and cultural contexts. The fact that besides the many efforts undertaken I can not speak or read neither Arabic nor Darija has been a key aspect in which my position as researcher has been made as privileged as has been handicaped and ultimately fragile.
In this context, Said's insights become relevant. In 1990, while reflecting upon the state of knowledge and its institutions in the Arab countries, Said wrote: "Our history is mostly written by foreigners, while we rely on personal and disorganised collective memory, gossip almost, and the embrace of a family or knowable community to carry us forward in time". He went on to add: "What I have is a sense of a sprawling, teeming history off the page, out of sight and hearing, beyond reach, largely unrecoverable"[15] (1999). Following Said remarks, my condition as a researcher tracing an alternative history of the art residency phenomenon by investigating Arab and Islamic epistemologies and practices might be defined by a particular gaze, that of the *foreigner,* the *Westerner,* the other. As such, this project, from its proposals to its conclusions, cannot elude otherness as a structuring ethos. Interestingly enough, however, in the same text, Said goes on to confront a history "written by foreigners" to a gossip-like "disorganised collective memory". Although I arguably could, or maybe even should, identify myself with this figure of the foreigner, I believe it important to stress that the alternative history I propose in this thesis is not assertive but rather concisely "personal" and quite "off the page" as Said puts it. It may indeed be called a gossip or, better yet, an "unrecoverable whisper". Even though, through ethnographic research, I have been able to acquire a preliminary

[15] Said, E (1999) *Farewell to Tahia. Copyright © Habibi Publications 1992-2002, Shareen El Safy, Publisher*. [online] Available at: http://thebestofhabibi.com/vol-17-no-4-dec-1999/farewell-to-tahia/ The quote is preceded by the following statement: ''*None of the Arab countries I know has proper state archives, public record offices or official libraries any more than any of them has decent control over their monuments or antiquities, the history of their cities or individual works of architecture'. Accessed Day 16 August 2020].*

understanding of Arab cultures, it is important to underline that this knowledge is in any case fragile as not being able to communicate in Arabic has been a frustrating impediment when trying to access testimonies and documents. In fact, as seen from the bibliography that has informed my research all the sources consulted are written in or translated to either in English, French or Spanish. Furthermore, it is important to stress that besides the many spiritual and cultural affinities, my condition as a 'foreigner', that of an outsider, hasn't been met with suspicion by those that have been my 'object of study' first and became my friends later.

Adopting positionality from a less personal standing point, it is important to acknowledge that a project reflecting upon mobility, knowledge and epistemic oversight within art residency research must address an specific historical period in which the interplay between these practices reached its most dreadful climax. As it has been argued by postcolonial scholars first (see Harlow, Carter, 2003; or Young 2001) and decolonial theory later (Thiong'o,1986; Dussel, 1998; Federicci, 2004; or Grosfoguel, 2011), through colonisation the multiplicity of histories that give form to human experience were siphoned into and repackaged as the history of European expansion; mobility and the journey were practised as a means of discovering and exploiting the other peoples; and knowledge was used as a tool to impose the Western understanding of the world as superior to the rest. It is hard to tell the stories of the coloniser and the colonised with just one voice, however. Indeed, as Acosta insists in *Unsettling Coloniality: Readings and Interrogations*, "colonialism is marked by its specialisations" (2018, p.7). Stressing on Acosta's argument, I will argue that contemporary debates around colonialism too often fall into simplification and grand discourses, obliterating the fact that the experiences of colonial domination are multiple and in some cases antagonistic. Indeed, oftentimes, ambiguity and complexity have not been seen as positive approximations to knowledge production, a tendency that narrows the potential of conceptual and historical analysis.

It is within this framework that, in the last decades, reaction to colonial trauma has given rise to a critical project within activist and academic circles, one which substantially differs from 19th and 20th century anti-colonial struggles and decolonial emancipatory movements. This critical project is contemporary decolonial theory. With its radical positioning and global scope, the adoption of decolonial theory in academic research can be considered one of the most important contributions to the long tradition of critique of what is defined as the *Western epistemic order*. Indeed, since its contemporary re-tooling, decolonial theory has made possible a much needed historical revision of the many oppressions and extractivist agendas which since colonial times still dominate power dynamics. As I will try to argue though, its questioning of the very grounds of Western knowledge as grounded on rationality and

positivism, is based on faulty assumptions. Although most of the focus has been on dismantling Western-centrism, in the following pages, I propose to reflect upon the limits of decolonial theory when adopted by those who are positioned in privileged positions. These appropriations, I will argue, might be in the process of undermining and not enhancing the decolonial project's potential.

Before continuing my argumentation, I want to underline that my critique of decolonial theory focuses on exactly that, decolonial theoretical corpus and not on the many efforts made by decolonial activist groups. Initiatives such as Rhodes Must Fall Movement, the Groupe Décolonial de Traduction and Les Indigènes de la République, to name just a few, are as needed as they should be supported. The second important aspect to underline is that as a critique of decolonial theory, my argument focuses on how many decolonial scholars (and not activists) develop their practice from within the *Western* academy, and so, funded by the *Western epistemic order* as decolonial thinkers call it. The case of the group modernidad / colonialidad / descolonialidad is a clear example of this. Although acknowledging other important contributions, such as the ones of Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (1986), Silvia Federicci (2004), Maria Lugones (2007), Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (2010), Sylvia Rivera Cusicanqui (2012), or Maria Galindo (2013), my critique of decolonial theory will focus on how decolonial theory is often articulated and promoted from within the same intelectual system being confronted.

But why focus on the work being done by the group modernidad / colonialidad / decolonialidad and no others? The reason to do so is that the work of their representatives (Enrique Dussel, Walter Mignolo and Ramon Grosfoguel) continues to be highly influential among activists and scholars worldwide. An example of that influence is the global expansion of the CSIDG - Center of Study and Investigation for Decolonial Dialogues through, for example, its expanding summer schools which nowadays are being organized in Barcelona, Granada, Mexico City, Bahia, Cape Town, Amsterdam and Santiago de Compostela[16]. In fact, and as I will further elaborate, it was due to my participation in two of these summer schools - Critical Muslim Studies: Decolonial Struggles and Liberation Theologies Summer School (Granada, 2016) and Decolonizing Knowledge and Power (Barcelona, 2017) - that made me realize the many contradictions that the decolonial project and its theorization faces. Research on these contradictions have been fundamental to my critique of decolonial theory and its commodification within the Western academy. Furthermore, my critique of decolonial theory is also relevant for the overall aim of this research project. While making visible forgotten histories and stories and enhancing epistemic diversity within the art residency field, this

[16] CSIDG - Center of Study and Investigation for Decolonial Dialogues / Dialogo Global, [online] Available at: https://www.dialogoglobal.com/granada/ [Accessed Day 04 June 2021].

research advocates for the dialogical encounter between travelling traditions while at the same time unpacking cross-cultural methodological resonances.

Consequently, as I will argue below, the objective of my analysis will be to stress two main ideas: The first one is the realization that often, the discourses that arise from decolonial theory evolve from within the *Western* critical tradition and not, as it is currently proposed, outside of it. The second is to emphasise that the tools to confront oppressive colonial and neo-colonial systems should exist in the emergence of solidarity networks that combine different forms of belief and practice. These synergies need to be promoted by engaging, and not confronting, diverse epistemological systems.

1.1. On the quest for epistemic resonances

As a project that aims at looking into non-Western epistemologies to reframe the discourse in which the current history of art residencies is made hegemonic, initially research into decolonial theory felt to me like a necessary task. To be sure, this project was conceived at a time of rising demands to decolonise academic and artistic institutions[17]. Being attracted to decolonial theory and to its critical stance towards academia and the histories it constructs, I was initially very strongly tempted to adopt the theory's postulates to challenge the production of knowledge within the institution in which I was developing my research. Indeed, the lure of otherness, framed by decolonial theory's tendency to look for *other* epistemologies, seemed to offer a path that would allow for the disclosure of new methodological approaches and investigate alternatives to euro-centrism within art residencies' historiography. Counter to this belief, the following pages are an account of a conceptual and methodological u-turn.

My analysis of decolonial theory is based in the positionings made by the Puerto-Rican academic and activist Ramon Grosfoguel in his seminal text *The Structure of Knowledge in Westernised Universities: Epistemic Racism / Sexism and the Four Genocides / Epistemicides of the Long 16th Century* (2013, p.7). It is worth noting that Grosfoguel's arguments are indebted to a current of thought developed by the group modernidad / colonialidad / decolonialidad formed by a constellation of Latin American thinkers and activists who follow the proposals traced by Enrique Dussel in his 1995 publication *Eurocentrism and Modernity*. Interestingly enough, the historical and philosophical work of modernidad / colonialidad / decolonialidad focuses on the demolition of Western-centric world-historical narratives, however, as previously pointed out, the group articulates from within the most prestigious

[17] See, for example, the different protests that spread from 2016 onwards demanding the decolonization of academic curriculums in Cape Town, Oxford, Cambridge and SOAS to name just a few.

institutions representing the *Western epistemic order.* Indeed, if we examine the contemporary development of decolonial theory, it is increasingly evident that its embeddedness in Western thought is due in considerable measure to the impact of globalisation and the ever increasing number of diasporic intellectuals and activists researching within the Western academy. The recent election of Enrique Dussel, one of the fathers of contemporary decolonial thinking, as a member of the prestigious American Academy of Arts and Sciences, becomes a particularly telling example of how the Western academy integrates its supposed critics. Another is the case of Grosfoguel himself; although some departments at the prestigious Temple University, Maison des Sciences de l'Homme and UC Berkeley, where Grosfoguel developed most of his career, might be considered as forming part of the South within the North (to use decolonial jargon), they are nevertheless rooted in the Western university's epistemological ethos.

Grosfoguel's particular understanding of decolonial theory aims at setting apart decolonial struggle from postcolonial thought. By accusing postcolonialism of being complicit with Western epistemology due to its engagement with Critical Theory and Postmodernism, Grosfoguel has given form to a current of thought that aims to uncover colonisation as the matrix from which modernity has been imposed on a global scale. Indeed, Grosfoguel's structuring argument is that Modernity and Colonialism are two sides of the same coin. He argues that the effects of European colonialism did not end with the decolonisation movements and the independence of former colonies during the 19th and 20th centuries, but persist still today in the form of a particular system of thought. This is not other than Western epistemology and the institution that promotes and frames it: the *Western* academy. In his text, Grosfoguel argues that epistemic racism is foundational to the knowledge structures of the West. To support his claim, he follows the arguments made by Walter D. Mignolo in *The Darker Side of Western Modernity* (2011) to argue that Western and Westernised structures of knowledge have their foundations in the dark side of Enlightenment. For Grosfoguel, the dark side of Enlightenment encompasses the four genocides and epistemicides that occurred over the course of the long 16th century, a period that expands between 1450 and 1650. These epistemicides are the ones carried out by Western powers against Jews and Muslims during the conquest of Granada in 1492; against indigenous peoples in the conquest of America during the 16th century and beyond; against Africans kidnapped and enslaved in the Transatlantic slave trade; and against women burned at the stake on accusations of witchcraft in Medieval and Modern Europe. Following Dussel's (1998) and Mignolo's (2011) arguments, Grosfoguel argues that these four epistemicides were not only driven by global capitalism's logic of expansion, but were also supported by Enlightenment reasoning and its focus on the *white man* as the measure of all things. As Grosfoguel affirms: 'When, in the 17th century, Descartes developed his theory summarised in the famous sentence 'I think; therefore I am,' in

the conventional sense of the times this 'I' could not be an African, a Muslim, a Jew or a woman. These subjects were already considered inferior under the global racial/patriarchal power structure of the time. The only one left as epistemologically superior was the Western man' (2013, p.75). From this juncture, Grosfoguel elaborates his critique of Western epistemology by proposing that “from its origins, Westernised universities internalised the racist and sexist epistemic structures created by the four epistemicides of the long 16th century” (2013, p.76).

Grosfoguel’s call for decolonial action can be summarised in three main demands:

(1) “To bring epistemic diversity to the canon of thought to create a pluri-verse of meanings and concepts where the inter-epistemic conversation among many epistemic traditions produce new re-definitions of old concepts and creates new pluriversal concepts” (2013, p.89). Through this demand, the idea of Indigenous methodologies has become essential to the contemporary re-imagining and adoption of indigeneity as a counterbalance to Western-centrism.

*(2) “*To break with the universalism whereby everyone is defined in terms of an epistemology based solely on the Western man and imposed through white privilege” (2013, p.89). In decolonial terms, the central idea of *white privilege* is that people who are white derive material benefits from the racist discrimination against non-white people, unknowingly in many cases, and that this explains the persistence of racism. The old concept of racial discrimination and the disadvantage imposed on non-whites is reformulated as a set of privileges enjoyed by those who do not suffer discrimination.

And (3) “To acknowledge the provincialism and epistemic racism and sexism that constitute the foundational structures of the 'Global North' as a result of the genocide and epistemicide that characterise the colonial and patriarchal projects initiated in the 16th century” (2013, p.89). In contemporary debates, this demand has been addressed by the study of white ignorance as an area of inquiry[18].

[18] As proposed by Sullivan and Tuana (2007), the epistemology of ignorance is an examination of the complex phenomenon of ignorance, understood as a gap in knowledge or an epistemic oversight that comes about due to lack of time to understand, a lack of knowledge, or an unlearning of something previously known for contrary purposes. Multiple studies are reflecting on the question of whether the epistemology of ignorance is embedded in Western thought and practices. These studies are articulated through feminist as well as critical race theory and de-coloniality. These studies argue that the impacts of the epistemology of ignorance are marginalisation, deprivation, and exploitation of different groups and individuals. They also result in the exclusion of vast populations of the planet from challenging, proposing, exchanging, and disseminating ideas and practices that could be of benefit in the present and future.

The current popularity of both decolonial theory and decoloniality[19] should not exempt decolonial statements from critical inquiry. To be clear, decolonial theory is understood here as the intellectual work articulating a broad rejection of Western-centrism by self-proclaimed colonized/racialized subjects. In turn, decoloniality is defined as the analytic approaches and socioeconomic and political practices opposed to coloniality and modernity, both understood as pillars of Western civilization. As the the associate professor of Latin American Cultural Studies in the Department of Spanish and Portuguese at the University of Arizona Abraham Acosta rightly suggests “given decoloniality's enthusiastic reception within academic institutions worldwide, no substantive collaborative study has yet been assembled to place its central claims and theoretical framework under rigorous scrutiny” (2018, p.4). The question, according to Acosta, is: “On what precise grounds can decolonial thought — or any mode of knowledge for that matter — be said to lie outside Western categories?” (2018, p.5). Indeed, from a disciplinary and theoretical standpoint, an urgent and pressing need currently exists to return to, examine, and more fully interrogate decoloniality insights and limits. “This revision should be carried out in the hope of advancing decolonial goals of envisioning models of social and cultural emancipation” (2018, p.7).

In line with Acosta’s proposal, and moving away from Grosfoguel’s thesis, the scholars in Indigenous and critical pedagogies Tuck and Yang argue that “decolonisation is not a generic term for the struggle against colonial oppressive conditions and outcomes. The broad umbrella of social justice may have room underneath for all of these efforts. By contrast, decolonisation specifically requires the repatriation of Indigenous land and life” (2012, p.9). For Tuck and Yang, “the seemingly exponential deployment of the term decolonisation needs to be reassessed as it's currently being co-opted by more establishment-oriented liberalism through social justice language (...) The easy adoption of the decolonising discourse by educational advocacy and scholarship (...) turns decolonisation into a metaphor. As important as their goals may be, social justice, critical methodologies, or approaches that de-centre colonial perspectives have objectives that may be incommensurable with decolonisation” (2012, p.17). Indeed, by failing to carefully consider decolonisation's meaning and history, liberal and activist adopters can end up stripping it of its value. Similarly, the Milton Keynes Open University academic Syed Mustafa Ali (2016) highlights the importance of thinking about time and history in terms of body-politics and geo-politics of knowledge. Although decoloniality continues to make moves in the direction of thinking differently, through border logics and epistemologies,

[19] See for example Gopal, P (2021) *On Decolonisation and the University* Textual Practice, 35:6, 873-899 [online] Available at: https://doi.org/10.1080/0950236X.2021.1929561 [Accessed Day 16 August 2020].

Ali is guarded about the extent to which colonial logics remain operative, despite the trail-blazing efforts of decolonial scholars. More precisely, he is wary that the terms in which the decolonial project tends to be articulated have not been subjected to a reflective decolonial critique. In short, he means that decolonial theory itself might be in need of being decolonised.

In light of these arguments, the issues affecting decolonial theory and its otherwise highly original, necessary and well-meaning critique of Western epistemology, can be summarised in the following three points:

1) Its stubborn will to remain 'outside of' Western epistemology;
2) The high level of abstraction of the concepts it uses; and
3) its tendency to essentialize identity and knowledge.

In short, while decolonial theory is fundamental in the important task of visualizing and starting to repair the imposition of oppressive hierarchies and dynamics of power, it also fabricates its object of criticism through the caricaturization of what conceptualizes as *Western epistemic order.* In turn, this *Western epistemic order* is placed in something called the *Global North* which exists in opposition to the *Global South* and its epistemologies. In a form of self-sabotage, this simplification of epistemological entanglements brings us to the dangerous lands of conceptual essentialism and reductive identity politics. My critical stance towards decolonial theory, and particularly the approach put forward by the group modernidad / colonialidad / decolonialidad, does not intend to discourage those who have dedicated careers and lives to teaching themselves and others to be critically conscious of racism, sexism, homophobia, classism and xenophobia. On the contrary, my goal is to consider how decolonial theory is just one particular approach in the pursuit of ethical consciousness and not a metonym for social justice. Failing to acknowledge this crucial fact might result in the metaphorization of decolonization. Indeed, while decolonial theory is growing in influence, its decolonisation, as proposed by Tuck and Yang (2012), Ali (2016) and Acosta (2018), is also becoming an imperative.

In the following section, and through different case studies I will suggest that, if the aim is to confront Western epistemology, a more accurate gaze is needed.

1.2. Include me out: decolonial self-sabotage

In order to better understand my, and, as we have seen, others' precautions towards the enthusiastic reception of decolonial theory within academic and artistic institutions

worldwide, I propose to look at three case studies. The first one springs from my experience as a participant in the Critical Muslim Studies: Decolonial Struggles and Liberation Theologies Summer School organised by the CSIDG - Center of Study and Investigation for Decolonial Dialogues. The second case study will attempt to disentangle the several contingencies affecting the 2018 edition of the 1:54 African Art fair in Marrakech and more concretely the conceptual framework of its side event, the *Always decolonise!* Forum. The third and last case study will further reflect upon the way in which the decolonial stamp is too often misused. To do so, I propose to have a close look at this misuse, taking as example the way in which the Casablanca Group, and its original approach to artistic production in post-independence Morocco, has been 'rediscovered' as part of a supposedly decolonial effort.

The Critical Muslim Studies Summer School

As previously stated, one of the concerns that has insistently conditioned this project has been the question of approaching the research endeavour through the seemingly unavoidable framework of sameness and otherness, or as famously stated by the Scottish-American historian Niall Ferguson in 2012 'The West and the Rest'. While thinking about the best way to approach this dissertation's research methods, the possibility to participate in the Critical Muslim Studies: Decolonial Struggles and Liberation Theologies Summer School organised by the CSIDG became an exciting opportunity to further investigate decolonial methodologies. After an intensive two weeks of talks and some discussions, I left the Summer School with more doubts than certainties. Soon after, and through analytical reflection, this confusion evolved into disappointment.

The Summer School took place at the charming, albeit highly elitist Carmen de la Victoria, a residency for researchers in Granada (Spain) in May 2016. As found on the CSIDG website, the Summer School was "inspired by a need for opening up a space for intellectually rigorous and socially committed explorations between decolonial thinking and studies of Muslims, Islam and the Islamicate"[20]. The text stresses that "Critical Muslim Studies does not take Islam only as a spiritual tradition, or a civilisation, but also as a decolonial epistemic perspective"[21]. The Summer School took place over two weeks, with daily lectures divided between morning and afternoon sessions. The lecturers included prominent figures such as Salman Sayyid, Farid Esack, Houria Bouteldja, Ella Shohat, Zaid Shakir and Nelson Maldonado-Torres. The content of the talks included topics such as democracy in Islam, progressive Islam, decolonising texts, alternative structures of knowledge, Islamic liberation theology and decolonization and Islamic

[20] Dialogo Global [online] Available at: https://www.dialogoglobal.com/granada/ [Accessed Day 16 August 2020].
[21] Ibid.

feminism. The connecting thread linking all of them was the critique of *Western epistemology* and the search for alternative ways of being and understanding the world in the framework of what, in decolonial theory, are called *Southern epistemes*. More than fifty doctoral researchers coming from the most prestigious Western and Westernised universities in Europe, the U.S, Australia, Malaysia and South Africa attended the Summer School. The fee for the two weeks sojourn in Granada, excluding food and accommodation, was 1300 euros. As it was the case of many other participants, this fee was funded thanks to the contributions of funding bodies linked to academic institutions. In my case, participation in the conference was made possible thanks to the generous support of the SGSAH – Scottish Graduate School for Arts and Humanities.

Looking forward to finally experiencing what a decolonial methodology would be like in practice, I was almost immediately puzzled by a seemingly irrelevant but, in my understanding, quite telling situation that relates to how knowledge is transmitted and disseminated. Quite unlike what I expected, the setting of the room where the presentations took place had a common standardised layout : chairs arranged in rows facing an elevated platform. On the platform, a long table was placed horizontally, facing the audience. Behind the table, chairs were placed for the speakers. Most of the speeches were supported by quite conventional powerpoint presentations. This set-up should not come as a surprise, as in fact the majority of conferences organised by prestigious Western and non-Western universities that take place all around the world have a similar physical structure. What is worrisome, however, is that the majority of these conferences do not aim to call into question how knowledge is transmitted and disseminated within the *Western epistemic order.*

The Critical Muslim Studies Summer School, however, was designed precisely with that aim. In this context, it is important to stress that, as I elaborate below, the conference format has been and continues to be challenged from within the Western academy. Indeed, the limits of this format is a legitimate concern that is widely felt. While challenging conventional conference formats, what some of these proposals have in common is the need to transgress the methods and the spaces in which so-called *Western thought* is being discussed and disseminated. In contrast to the multiple proposals made, the model of the eloquent expert preaching his or her discourse in front of an audience was the one adopted by the decolonial school. And so, in a formal sense, the event struggled to achieve its decolonial goal as it replicated the most conventional ways of transmitting and disseminating knowledge. If, as the introduction text to the Critical Muslim Studies Summer School stated, Islam is understood not only as a spiritual tradition, or a civilisation, but also as a decolonial epistemic perspective, wouldn’t it have been appropiate to adopt alternative modes of knowledge transmission that

exist also within the Islamic intellectual milieu? As I will further elaborate in the speculative Arab art residency proto-history presented in Chapter 3 and the portfolio, an inspirational model that could have been applied in the Critical Muslim Studies Summer School would have been, for example, the *Halaqah*. As we can read in *Exploring halaqah as research method: a tentative approach to developing Islamic research principles within a critical 'indigenous' framework* by Farah Ahmed:

> *'Halaqah* is a spiritual circle instituted by the Prophet Muhammad in his *tarbiyah* (education) of early Muslims. It is conducted purely orally with students and teachers sitting in a circle on the floor. An integral part of traditional Islamic education, *halaqah* continues to be core practice in Muslim cultures. *Halaqah* is credited with transformation of personalities, empowerment of individuals and communities through a social-justice agenda, and the development of Islamic intellectual heritage, including sciences, arts and mysticism. Although *Halaqah* can become highly normative, this mode of gathering and knowledge transmission is adopted also in quite non normative settings. A case at hand are the multiple *Halaqahs* that each evening are created in the Jemaa el-Fna square in Marrakech, where groups of listeners and performers gather in circles to listen and interact with the multiple story-tellers. Indeed applied to contemporary settings, the *Halaqah* can vary in format: it can be transmission-based, teacher-led, dialogic, student-led or can take the form of a collaborative group effort. In the *Halaqah*, the curriculum or content can be open and in line with the critical Islamic paradigm' (2012, p.11).

Indeed, *Halaqah* became a structuring practice in the transmission of knowledge amongst men of letters in the early Islamic knowledge tradition, and it continues to this day. In my understanding, if the aim of the Summer School was to challenge *Western epistemology*, the adoption of *Halaqah* as an innovative way of empowering dialogue and exchange could have provided a better format.

Interestingly enough, a month later I had the chance to be part of a workshop at the Glasgow Women's Library, as part of another Summer School this time organised by the SGSAH - Scottish Graduate School for Arts and Humanities. In that occasion, the setting was well thought-out following what is known as the 'jigsaw classroom' model[22]. Chairs could be moved around the space, low tables scattered in such a way as to resemble a kind of puzzle and so that they could be joined or separated according to the needs of the activity. There was no platform at all; we were all at the same level. The speaker, who was standing up, could move around, making the whole speech much more engaging and dynamic. In fact, the workshop at the Glasgow Women's Library seemed to me an exemplary way of deconstructing preconceptions about the ways knowledge should be transmitted within so-called Western

[22] For a study of this set up please see Walker, I. (2010) *Jigsaw classroom technique* in J. M. Levine & M. A. Hogg (Eds.), Encyclopedia of group processes & intergroup relations (pp. 492-493). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc. doi: 10.4135/9781412972017.n149

academia. Further examples of alternative knowledge sharing formats within artistic and research institutions can be found in Ethan Watrall, James Calder and Jeremy Boggs' *Unconferences in Hacking the Academy: New Approaches to Scholarship and Teaching from Digital Humanities* (2013), *Taking the matter into common hands symposium and publication* (2015) and *The anti-symposium: International Encounters of Community and Environmental Sociology* (2018 and 2019). Within this field, Neil Mulholland's contributions in *Re-imagining the Art School* (2019) become particularly relevant.

Furthermore, although for two weeks we spent most of our time in self-enclosement in Carmen de la Victoria and more specifically within the four walls of the conference hall, it is relevant to note that the Carmen, the place from which supposedly we practiced decolonial methods, was in itself a crucial space in the life of Islamic Granada. This is a fact that could have been taken as a starting point to open up further reflection into decolonial perspectives about the genealogy of alternative places and spaces to gather and share within Islam. In fact, the word 'carmen' comes from the Arabic term *karm*, meaning 'vineyard.' Its origin is to be found in the Nasrid dynasty, which ruled the Emirate of Granada from 1230 until 1492. During this time, *karms* became traditional rustic farms dedicated to gardening, the cultivation of vegetables and recreation. At the same time, they provided temporary residence for the owner and his guests, who were looking for time and space to work, exchange and create together. As Mulholland rightly states in *Re-imagining the Art School: Paragogy and Artistic Learning* (2019) educational theory and theories of experiential learning, such as the one proposed by David A. Kolb (1984), have investigated the role that learning environments play in teaching and learning. The common ground in these investigations is that habitat plays a crucial factor in systems of learning. How did the environment and habitat of the Carmen shaped the way knowledge was being transmitted in al-Andalus? What is to be learned from such informal habitats of knowledge exchange? As noted by Mulholland "carefully curating an optimum learning environment enables cohorts of students to establish educational practices necessary for their growth and development" (2019, p.7). As previously argued, this careful curating was nowhere to be seen in the Critical Muslim Studies Summer School.

Now under the aegis of the University of Granada, the Carmen de la Victoria is the only public Carmen in the city that has not lost its character as a house-garden. Before its acquisition by the university, it was the House of Morocco, a student residence linked to the School of Arab Studies, and subsequently a College. Today, it functions as a guest residence for researchers and university students. The history and epistemic relevance of the Carmen, as the space in which the Summer School was taking place, was never acknowledged. This epistemic oversight becomes relevant again in the context of this research. As spaces designed for

getting together to spend time exchanging ideas while taking care of the garden and the orchard, the medieval islamic *karms* resonate somehow with certain contemporary art residency spaces, where interdisciplinary approaches to knowledge creation mingle with the practice of taking care of the ecological milieu[23]. I am fully aware that stressing this possible synergy can be seen as problematic. However, my aim in doing so is to tentatively propose alternative models to the one chosen by the self-proclaimed decolonial organisers of the Summer School. Bearing in mind that the Summer school was made possible thanks to the fees paid by the participants through funds coming from academic institutions, and that its pedagogical methods followed the most conventional discursive standards, the question should be: how did the Critical Muslim Studies Summer School practiced decoloniality?

The issues affecting decolonial theory are not limited to the spaces of enunciation it occupies. They also affect its very conceptual framework. A case in point is the otherwise unlikely alignment between the demand to decolonise the academic curriculum and the Western universities' tendency to promote curricular novelty. As Johanna Williams stresses in *The 'decolonise the curriculum' movement re-racialises knowledge* (2017), 'academics, who have not voluntarily diversified their reading lists and updated course content to make it more inclusive, will find themselves under pressure to 'internationalise' the curriculum. Although the vocabulary might be slightly different, the intention is the same: to decentralise the Western intellectual tradition and the canonical works that comprised yesteryear's higher education' (2017). Indeed, contrary to the tendency to characterise academia as a sclerotic entity, as it was proposed throughout the Summer School, we need to understand that the Western university is an ever-evolving structure in which privileged and precarious individuals struggle to create new critical knowledge through the constant integration of counter-discourses and self-criticism. As Williams notes,

> 'When it comes to the curriculum, academics are again often ahead of the game in championing decolonisation. The pervasive influence of critical theory within humanities departments means that the days of expecting students to uncritically imbibe great books or enculturating a new generation into a monolithic Western canon are long gone. Rather than desperately clinging on to the traditional curriculum, many academics are all too ready to jettison the old. In this regard, rather than posing a challenge to institutions, the 'decolonise the curriculum' movement is simply confirming mainstream academic thought' (2017).

[23] Several examples intelinking art residencies and ecology can be found in *From one organism to the next: artist residencies dedicated to the ecological entanglement* [online] Available at: https://www.aqnb.com/2017/02/15/from-one-organism-to-the-next-artist-residencies-dedicated-to-the-ecological-entanglement/ [Accessed Day 16 August 2020].

In short, with its tendency towards innovation, the Western university is in fact one of the structures of knowledge production and dissemination that has the easiest time integrating the pluri-versal approach to knowledge proposed by decolonial theory. The case of the *Summer School* is not an exception in demonstrating that Western academia has a crucial role to play in the spaces of enunciation, articulation, and dissemination of decolonial theory. Indeed, one of the many ways in which Western epistemology operates is through the search for other, novel, socially responsible approaches to the production of knowledge, in a constant process of inclusion of the alternative into the mainstream. What has to be taken into consideration is that the model academia proposes is based on a process that generates challenging situations. In this context, besides the many impediments that have been put forward, preconceptions, abusive overlays and categories previously taken for granted are continuously being revised and questioned as research processes develop.

Much like the Critical Muslim Studies: Decolonial Struggles and Liberation Theologies Summer School*,* the 1:54 African Art Fair's *Always Decolonise!* Forum also enacted decolonial inconsistencies. We turn to this case study in the section that follows.

The 1:54 African Art Fair's *Always Decolonise!* Forum

Founded by banking financial advisor turned curator Touria El Glaoui, the 1:54 African Art Fair[24] (1:54 meaning one Africa composed of fifty four countries) is the first leading international art fair dedicated to contemporary art from Africa and its diaspora. Its first edition took place in London in 2013. In 2015, it expanded to New York. Three years later, in 2018, the African Art Fair finally took place on the African continent for the first time. The city chosen to host the event was what has become in recent years a hotspot for contemporary art: Marrakech. The fair showcased 20 leading galleries from Denmark, France, Italy, the UK, the US, Morocco, Côte d'Ivoire and Nigeria, which exhibited the work of more than 70 artists, both emerging and established, working in a wide variety of mediums.

As argued by the researcher on the fields of complexity studies, network analysis and creative practices Christian Morgner in *The Evolution of the Art Fair* 'Art fairs, these events have 'proliferated in recent years and can be found in large numbers all over the globe providing a crucial infrastructure for the sale and exhibition of works of art' (2014). Within the art fair context the works exhibited are normally accompanied by a series of talks, presentations and discussions. In the case of the 1:54 Africa Art Fair these public events were brought together as part of the fair's Forum. For the Marrakech edition, the name chosen for this forum was

[24] 1:54 African Art Fair [online] Available at: https://www.1-54.com/marrakech/ [Accessed: 16, August 2020].

none other than: *Always Decolonise!.* Organised by Moroccan curator Omar Berrada the *Always Decolonise!* Forum engaged with the notion that decolonisation is an everyday task, in constant need of re-actualisation. And so, in a series of talks, panel discussions, screenings and performances, the 9th edition of the forum foregrounded the need to decolonise knowledge production, to unlearn Eurocentrism and to build new futures by *'remembering the remaining fragments of folklorised pasts'*[25].

Before moving to reflect upon the *Always Decolonise!* Forum text, I would like to note that, as previously argued, the spaces of enunciation from which to continue decolonising our minds are as important as decolonisation discourse itself. In that sense, although the *Always Decolonise!* Forum took place in ESAV - L'École Supérieure des Arts Visuels de Marrakech and Le18, both spaces at the periphery of the main fair venue, the luxury hotel La Mamounia, where the fair took place, continued to be the centre. As we can read in La Mamounia Hotel website: "Just moments away from Jemaa el Fna Square in Marrakech, La Mamounia offers the sophisticated luxury and comfort of a five-star palace hotel. Boasting incredible views of the gardens, the Atlas Mountains and the Koutoubia Mosque, the rooms and luxury suites boast all the elegance of a five-star palace hotel, each with their own interpretation of the Moroccan art of living"[26]. The choice of the main venue might not come as a surprise if we take into consideration that the founding director of the fair is the grand-daughter of the famous Thami El Glaoui, pacha of Marrakech from 1912 to 1956[27], and ally of the French Protectorate in Morocco. Fascinated by Western culture, Thami El Glaoui was known for throwing extravagant parties in his luxurious Marrakech residence. He treated his European guests to lavish banquets and offered them expensive gifts. Somehow mimicking the status of her grand-father, Touria El Glaoui has also become a highly prominent figure. She is included on the lists of the most influential Africans in the financial business by *New African Review* in 2013 and was listed as one of the 100 most powerful women in Africa by Forbes in 2016. Besides being the main location of the fair, La Mamounia was also its sponsor. Of course, the 1:54 Africa Art Fair did not miss the opportunity to replicate the glamour of el-Glaoui's grand and extravagant parties. As Nadia Sesay tells us on Okayafrica, "the opening at the Museum of Contemporary Art Al Madden (MACAAL) was especially spectacular. That night, two lanes of taxis snaked outside of the museum compound's long, palm tree-lined driveway. At the entry door, red carpets, velvet ropes, and a strict guest list made this an out-of-ordinary art event" (2016). In this context, the *Always Decolonise!* Forum accompanying the fair can be

[25] Always decolonize! FORUM 1:54 African Art Fair [online] Available at: https://www.1-54.com/marrakech/always-decolonize/ [Accessed: 16, August 2020].
[26] La Mamounia [online] Available at: https://www.mamounia.com/en/ [Accessed: 16, August 2020].
[27] For some revealing insight into the pasha's ostentatious lifestyle, see Babas, L [online] Available at: https://en.yabiladi.com/articles/details/70238/thami-glaoui-pasha-ostentatious-lifestyle.html [Accessed: 16, August 2020].

seen as an example of the subtle ways in which the neoliberal economy and local elites appropriate the decolonial discourse by means of side events which, although raising urgent questions and making visible forgotten histories and stories, feed the need for otherness and exoticism so structural to the contemporary art world. Indeed, the privileged and self-congratulatory mobility of artists, curators and art critics in the pre- (and post?) pandemia context is made possible thanks to the organization of multiple art fairs, bienales, summer schools and lately also art residencies.

The questions that emerge from the forum's title and the setting of the art fair multiply when one reads the following in the forum's presentation text: 'Colonial powers may have left, but their past presence casts a long shadow, stubbornly occupying our mental, aesthetic and epistemic spaces. Everywhere, colonial wounds lie wide open'[28]. One of colonialism's many long shadows and open wounds is no doubt the globalisation of an essential episteme of modern European culture: the international fairs. As Nelson Sanjad (2017) argues, contemporary international fairs can be understood as the continuation of the multiple colonial exhibitions which took place in Europe and beyond from the 1870's onwards. If we think about the narratives, historiographic accounts and structures of visibility designed for the cultural representation of the multiple *others* within the art system's Western canon, it could be argued that, as Sanajad does, they have been sustained in the colonial epic. In the construction of this narrative, 'the universal exhibitions held in the 19th century and the ethnographic exhibitions of the 19th and 20th centuries became the ideological devices that have been in charge of the interested translation of images, objects, material evidences, documentary remains and fictions built on the colonized subjects, bodies and forms of life. In those contexts, the exhibition halls of these other realities were marked by colonial arguments and eugenic justifications of the violence exerted in the treatment and representation of the other' (2017), devoid of any type of agency and subjectivity these events were organized under the paternalistic prism of the exotic. As Joaquín Barriendos underlines in *Global Art and Politics Of Mobility: (Trans)Cultural Shifts in the international contemporary art-system* (2011): "Like in the old days of colonial expansionism, alterity, the exotic, the diverse, or in one word, *the other*, arises the interest of museums, galleries, macro-exhibitions, and commercial contemporary art fairs (…) which exemplify the deep imbrications of mobility of subjects in space with the economic, symbolic, and political elements that most define today's cognitive capitalism" (2011).

[28] 1:54 African Art Fair [online] Available at: URL https://www.1-54.com/marrakech/always-decolonise/ [Accessed: 16, August 2020].

The contemporary world's schizophrenic dysfunctions, the legacy of its colonial foundations, and colonialism's open wounds seem even more pernicious in the following *Always Decolonise!* Forum text quote: "The historical figures of African liberation struggles never separated theory from practice or thinking from action"[29]. In this case, "the long shadows of colonialism" takes a more complex form in which colonised elites and its de-colonised colleagues adopt facile and essentialist discourses. To say that "African liberation struggles never separated theory from practice" might sound quite revolutionary, but it is not. In fact, the complex relationship between theory and practice has been the subject of endless debates within Western academia, a sphere in which a significant number of anti-colonial African thinkers and activists were educated. The richness and the scope of the debates on the dichotomy between theory and practice are so overwhelming that excluding African liberation activists and their important contributions from these discussions seems patronising, to say the very least. In fact, such reductionism could be considered an example of epistemic neglect. The wealth of original and challenging ideas that intellectuals from the colonies brought to the metropolis became essential for the formulated critical strategies of resistance which contributed to the long tradition of exchange between anti-colonial struggle and the Western academy. Indeed, if we look at the intellectual trajectories of the leading representatives of anti- and decolonial movements, the vast majority have had study periods in Western universities. For example, Edward Said developed his intellectual career at Columbia, Stanford, Yale, and John Hopkins universities; Edouard Glissant was awarded his PhD at the Sorbonne; and Frantz Fanon obtained his from the Université de Lyon.

These critical strategies of resistance, formulated also from within and beyond the Western academy, are not a modern phenomenon, but have, at least since the Enlightenment, shaped the Western critical tradition. What is interesting to acknowledge though is that even though for much of the past two centuries Enlightenment thought was seen as central to the values of those challenging Western imperialism, as we have seen contemporary decolonial theory stresses the idea that the Enlightenment was integral to the colonial project, obliterating its many contributions to the anti-colonial cause. Through epistemic neglect, decolonial critics argue that Enlightenment universalism was racist because it imposed Western ideas of rationality and objectivity on other peoples and cultures. Decolonial theory fully engages with and promotes this approach, anchoring its arguments in a critique of its leading representatives. The work of several representatives of the group modernidad / colonialidad / decolonialidad are exemplary of that positioning. To support their claims, their anti-Enlightenment positioning necessarily needs to be partial.

[29] 1:54 African Art Fair [online] Available at: URL https://www.1-54.com/marrakech/always-decolonise/ [Accessed: 16, August 2020].

Because of its relevance for our critique of decolonial theory as proposed by Dussel, Grosfoguel and Mignolo, in the following pages I will expand on the logic behind anti-Enlightenment thought. The dialectics informing this debate focus on the somehow biased analysis of the main representatives of the Enlightenment, and goes as follows: While John Locke (1632 – 1704) is widely regarded as having provided the philosophical foundations of modern liberal conceptions of tolerance, he was at the same time a shareholder in a slaving company. Immanuel Kant (1724 – 1804), often seen as the greatest of Enlightenment philosophers, clung to belief in racial hierarchy, insisting on the idea that “the African and the Hindu appear to be incapable of moral maturity (and so) humanity is at its greatest perfection in the race of the whites” (Malik, 2017). Moreover, Hegel (1770 – 1831) referred to Africa as “the land of childhood, which lies beyond the day of self-conscious history, is enveloped in the dark mantle of Night”. He described 'the African’ as “the natural man in his completely wild and untamed state” (Murray, 2013). From these statements, some, as is the case of certain decolonial activists and scholars, state that Enlightenment was, in fact, a racist project (2013).

In contrast to these views, in Jonathan Israel’s extensive studies on European intellectual history (Israel, 2001; 2006; 2009), quoted in Kenan Malik’s critical text *The Enlightenment and the Death of God* (2014), the Enlightenment was “a transformative period when Europe shifted from being a culture based on a largely shared core of faith, tradition and authority to one in which everything, no matter how fundamental or deeply rooted, was questioned in the light of philosophical reason” (2014). For Malik and Israel, the idea that Enlightenment is racist comes from a one-eyed view, bolstered by selective picking and choosing of specific individuals and quotes. It's, in fact, an *ad hominem* argument based on highly selective evidence rather than a detailed survey and thoughtful research. At the heart of Malik and Israel’s argument is the insistence that “there were two Enlightenments. The mainstream Enlightenment of Locke, Voltaire, Kant, and Hume is the one of which we know, and of which most historians have written. However, it was the radical Enlightenment, shaped by lesser-known figures such as Holbach, Diderot, Condorcet, and, in particular, the Dutch philosopher Baruch Spinoza, that provided the Enlightenment's heart and soul” (2014). Indeed, as Israel states, “that today so many should so easily dismiss the Enlightenment in the name of decolonisation tells us more about the shaky foundations of contemporary radicalism than it does about the Enlightenment itself” (2014).

In line with Israel, in an essay titled *New Radical Enlightenment* the Catalan philosopher Marina Gracés makes a call not to simplify Enlightenment’s challenges. For Garcés, Enlightenment thinkers did not blindly believe in progress. In fact, “too many of the voices of

those that feel disappointed about the outcomes of the Enlightenment process have wanted to dress it with the credulity that its proponents confronted" (2017, p.43). In her understanding, the anti-Enlightenment crusade we are witnessing today is based on one of the Enlightenment's very principles: the power of critical thinking, which is manipulated nowadays in favour of constant criticism. Garcés proposes to recuperate the Enlightenment's radical demands through a process in which critical subjectivities can be empowered. For both Garcés and Israel, the resurrection of the radical Enlightenment is part of a project that promises to rescue the movement from political relativism, constructed under the guise of academic post-modernism and biased decolonial proposals. In short, the attack on the Enlightenment period neglects and obliterates the period's radical contributions, ones that in fact highly influenced the anti-colonial movements that contemporary decolonial thinkers claim to re-enact. To be sure, and going back to our argument, to place racism and colonisation at the core of the Enlightenment constructs a mono-dimensional caricature of so-called Western epistemology. From this anti-Enlightenment position springs the justification of the existence of something called *epistemologies of the South* as opposed to the racist and sexist *epistemologies of the North* (2013, p.9).

But what exactly is being proposed in the dichotomic division of epistemology between that of the *'Global North'* and those of the *'Global South'*? As Bonaventura de Sousa Santos asserts in his foundational text *Epistemologies of the South: Justice Against Epistemicide* (1996), the term 'South' signifies not a geographical location but the place of utterance of the oppressed. Consequently, as expressed by Luciana Ballestrin in *The 'Global South' as a political project* (2020), the 'Global South' "functions as more than a metaphor for underdevelopment" (Dados; Connell, 2012, p. 13). The twentieth-century anticolonial movement, the Bandung Conference (1955), the Non-Aligned Movement (1961), and Cuba's Tricontinentalism (1966) are some examples on which the 'Global South' has its origins and influences. For this, the concept can work as a symbolic designation meant to capture the semblance of cohesion that emerged when the former colonial entities engaged in political projects of decolonization and moved towards the realization of a postcolonial international (Grovogui, 2011, p. 176). Thus, the term alludes to the history of imperialism and colonialism, as well as to the violence perpetrated upon the colonized.

Following Sousa Santos and Ballestrin, the *'Global South'* is not a monolithic, cohesive, coherent, and homogenous entity characterized by the absence of conflicts and interests. For both analytical and political purposes, it is important to not simplify or romanticize the idea of the 'Global South'. The existence of a "South in the North" and a "North in the South" complexifies the (re)production of (neo)colonial and (neo)imperial power relations, especially

in the current context of increasing global inequalities. Thus, the rejection of everything regarding the ''Global North'' itself can be a dangerous position and its complexity needs to be taken into consideration in the same way as the complexity that characterizes the epistemologies of the ''Global South''. Even though stress on the complexity of such categories is made explicit, we are currently witnessing tendencies to simplification, reduction, and essentialization which elapse from the mobilization of binary categories such as center/periphery, West/East, or first/third worlds. Indeed as Said stressed more than 25 years ago, it is interesting to acknowledge that “far from encouraging a sense of primal innocence offended in countries that had repeatedly suffered the ravages of colonialism, all those mythical abstractions such as East and West, as well as the multiple rhetorics of censorship that gave place, were lies” (1996). In line with Said’s remarks, in *Political Philosophy and the Vestiges of Colonialism* (2016), Dan Wood writes “'the socio-political power of traditional regimes to repetitively summon a full mind-independent reality known as the 'West' can be described as mytho-liturgical as:

> (1) It synthesises simplistic meta-narratives that often pertain to idealised origins, grandiose conflicts and pleas for restoration;
> (2) Often remains hostile to and ignorant of debilitating, empirical counter-examples; and
> (3) requires the hypostatisation of a mysterious other or set of others” (2016, p.3).

Even though Sousa stressed nuances, there is currently a tendency within decolonial theory and activism in which Wood’s thesis becomes relevant. Indeed, when decolonization becomes a metaphor (1) it stresses on the existence of a 'Global North' and the 'Global South' through simplistic meta-narratives; (2) ignores, as I’ve shown here and will further demonstrate, several debilitating, empirical counter-examples; and (3) constructs a mysterious *other* through identity politics.

As is the case in the 1:54 African Art Fair, decolonial theory might be too often grounded on weak and contradictory assumptions championed by privileged scholarly elites. As stressed by several authors such as Tuck and Yang (2012), Haythem Guesmi (2018) or Leon Moosavi (2020), decolonisation has become a neoliberal concept, a radical chic term that has lost its original and revolutionary forms of thought and action. Shouting 'decolonise this' or 'decolonise that' in neoliberal spaces over advancing the fight for social justice only contributes to a new grammar of reified identity politics which adopts decolonisation without decolonising. A preliminary conclusion to be drawn from the calls to *Always decolonise!* within the 1:54 African Art Fair is that the meanings of radicalism and decolonisation have withered, and the terms

have come to mean something very different and much more tame than they did within and beyond decolonization movements half a century ago.

Linked to the above, the final case study from which to rethink decolonial contributions to academic thought and activism seeks to deconstruct binary thinking while stressing the importance of investigating the multiple synchronicities, influences and resonances that have been — and continue to be — fundamental on our journey between the same and the other, between 'the West and the rest'.

The Casablanca Group

On April 12, 2019, *New Waves: Mohamed Melehi and the Casablanca Art School*, a major show of post-avant garde Moroccan painting, was inaugurated at the Mosaic Rooms in London. Later that year, the exhibition traveled to the Museum of African Contemporary Art Al Maaden (MACAAL) in Marrakech. The post-avant-garde movement was also featured in an exhibition at the 2018 Art Dubai art fair, poetically titled *That Feverish Leap into the Fierceness of Life* and curated by Sam Bardaouil and Till Fellrath from the curatorial platform Art Reoriented. These shows can be seen as the culmination of the effort made by several curators, artists and critics to re-evaluate post-avant-garde art from the Arab world, as part of a broader push to diversify art history by recuperating neglected narratives from non-western geographies. Indeed as the British writer, literary critic Maya Jaggi states "the Casablanca Group has now been rediscovered and is gaining recognition as one of the great Modernist movements of the 'Global South' (...) the cultural decolonisation its artists strove to complete in the early years of independence, opened a path that continues to be liberating" (2019). Although these statements seem unproblematic, the self-congratulatory language framed within 'cultural decolonization' hides a more complex reality.

In the years following Moroccan independence in 1956, a group of artists gathered under the name Casablanca Group. While embracing different styles, all shared the aim of renewing national culture after colonialism, taking it back from its co-option by the cultured elites. The story of the Casablanca Group starts in 1962 when Farid Belkahia, a dynamic and talented painter, was appointed as the new director of the *École des Beaux-Arts of Casablanca*. Located in a small building surrounded by a garden, the school was created under the French protectorate and, until Morocco's independence, was attended by a small and select number of Europeans. After a period of work and study in Prague, where Belkahia had been exposed to the innovative pedagogies of the Bauhaus, he had just returned to Morocco. His first task as director of the institution was to change its exclusive nature by opening it up to Moroccan

students while challenging its activities, programs and pedagogy, which were still very much colonial in practice and spirit.

Belkahia did not take on the task alone, however. As part of his strategy, he opened up the management of the École des Beaux-Arts to a new team of like-minded artists. After 1966, the painters Mohamed Hamidi, who had just returned from France, and Mostafa Hafid, who had developed his artistic practice in Poland, joined the teaching team. Perhaps the most dynamic catalyst of innovation of the Casablanca École des Beaux-Arts was Mohamed Melehi, who taught at the school from 1964 to 1969. Melehi studied fine arts in Tétouan (then part of the Spanish Protectorate in northern Morocco), as well as in Madrid and Seville, before moving to Rome in the late 1950s, where he was highly influenced by Marxism and the work of several filmmakers such as Fellini, Visconti and Kurosawa. Thanks to a Rockefeller grant, between 1962 and 1964, he studied at Columbia University in New York, where he immersed himself in the jazz scene, seeing Miles Davis, Thelonious Monk and Charles Mingus play. The Rockefeller scholarship required the scholar to return home. Melehi did so at the end of the 1960s, with the first wave of Moroccans who had studied abroad.

Once at the school, Belkahia and Melehi took on the task of changing its pedagogy and program. Adding to the existing curriculum of sculpture, painting and ceramics, the two men introduced Arab calligraphy, graphic design, photography and the history of art and architecture. Furthermore, students were encouraged to engage in experimental practice using different techniques and materials, and to work collaboratively. On several occasions, the school organised field research projects, travelling throughout the country to gather information, take photographs and notes, study sources and document the works of local artisans and their skills, knowledge and organisation. Besides lessons on modern art, the art history course turned to non-European art, particularly to that of the African continent and the Maghreb, which up until then had hardly been included in the school's previous curriculum. Such novel methods also affected the way in which aesthetic artifacts were exhibited. Indeed, the members of the Casablanca Group became increasingly preoccupied with their invisibility beyond the elitist spheres. As it was the case for their colleagues in Paris and New York, they were concerned about the limits of modernist exhibit dynamics.

The first initiative to bring art into the public space occurred in 1969, when six painters from the Casablanca Group decided to take their paintings to the famous and popular Djemaa El-Fna square in Marrakech. To this day, Djemaa El-Fna is home to a lively oral tradition, with small crowds gathering in circles or *halaqahs* where the *meddah* and the *hakawātī* tell their stories. The Casablanca Group's event is described in Maya Jagg's article as follows: "The

self-styled 'living exhibition,' which opened on May 9, 1969, amid the dust and winds, lasted ten days and it crystallised the birth of Modern Art in the North African country" (2019). As Melehdi himself said "the Jemaa el-Fna was to let the authorities understand that art was for the people, not only for privileged society; that art is not only a precious object, it's also an idea, a philosophy, a signal for freedom" (2019). Indeed, judging from this account, the exhibition of the Casablanca Group's paintings at the Djemaa El-Fna square was a success. In contrast with these self-congratulatory accounts, Katarzyna Pierprzak, in *Imagined Museums: Art and Modernity in Postcolonial Morocco* (2010), gives us another, more complex perspective.

While Jaggi uncritically celebrates the achievements of the Casablanca Group, Pieprzak applies a more nuanced historical gaze. On her account, "[the fact] that painters had stripped themselves of the protection of a Western and bourgeois culture industry and dared to go down among the uneducated and untrained masses to search for legitimacy and authenticity was precisely the image that these painters wished to embrace" (2010, p. 133). Paying special attention to the documentation of the event, Pierprzak notes that "perhaps taking art to the streets was more a rhetorical representation than a reality, for the grammar of elite museum space remained in place and the heterogeneous pluralistic nature of the Jemaa El-Fna was erased from the images of the event" (2010, p.133). Indeed, the artists chose to paint the walls of the square in white, all the while placing the paintings out of the audience's reach. To be sure, the exhibit space was cordoned off with metal dividers that evoked protest barricades more than gallery walls. As Pieprzak underlines "the construction of the exhibit took certain elements from the type of disciplinary museum space and projected them into the public square" (2010, p.136). In fact, the public was given a lesson in social manners and taste. As such, when acknowledging the Casablanca Group's impressive progessive pedagogies, it is important to be cautious about defining their exhibition at Jemaa El-Fna and the movement they promoted as *cultural decolonisation,* as Jaggi suggests. Surely they were decolonial in post-independence Morocco, but, as we will see, their project would hardly have complied with certain requirements of contemporary decolonial theory.

To be sure, this research wants to promote the idea that cultural decolonisation is an urgent task that needs to be encouraged and enhanced, as the art world is not exempt from the many struggles and invisibilizations imposed on unprivileged communities. Indeed, museums, for example, are sites where knowledge is supposed to be created and shared, yet they often erase or aestheticize political struggles. The impulse to link decolonisation with the fight to make the art world less elitist and more inclusive, while at the same time 'rediscover' and save from oblivion other-than-Western art histories, makes one often times forget that activism and

the transgression of grand narratives has a long history within the artistic community. Without acknowledging this contestatarian approach we undermine the multiplicity of creative interactions and cross-fertilizations between collectives, practices and geographies which are essential to understand counter-hegemonic conceptions of aesthetics. The complexities and entanglements affecting the art world are exemplified by a seemingly contradictory reality in which artistic patronage, often linked to the neoliberal system, enhances artistic sustainability. In fact, as in the case of Melehi, the scholarships and grants offered by Western art institutions allowed for artists to travel abroad, while also giving them the necessary time and space to learn about and join the several avant-garde art movements which flourished around the globe. As we have seen, the pioneering generation of artists from Morocco were part of and found inspiration in the art and theories of Western avant-garde production, an influence that triggered the discovery of elements of their 'own cultures'. As Marani argues "where colonialism had tended to underestimate or deny spiritual and aesthetic values in the visual traditions of *the other*, the Western avant-garde had perceived things from a different perspective" (2013).

In short, although the Casablanca Group is now portrayed as one of the great examples of the post-avant-garde artistic movements from the *'Global South'*, its emergence in postcolonial Morocco would not have been possible without the vibrant interactions and innovations that were shaping artistic thought and practice in the so-called *'Global North',* or shall we say 'the South within the North'?. Without undermining the important contributions made by decolonial theorists and activists, it is important to acknowledge that oftentimes decolonial theory falls into high levels of conceptual abstraction, a lack of attention to the pragmatics and hybridism of knowledge production, and a tendency to essentialise *Western epistemology*. In so doing, it compounds its impulse to neglect the multiple influences and hybridizations happening amongst artists and activists, as well as the solid tradition of constant challenge and critique towards the reactionary spheres of the so-called West.

The example of the Casablanca Group allows us to further elaborate on the idea of hybridity. To be sure, *hybridity,* a concept that has been constantly debated since Homi Bhabha published his seminal work *The Location of Culture* in 1994, is of special relevance to understand the dis-encounter between decolonial theory and globalization studies. Indeed as Philipp W. Stockhammer, together with other thinkers, analyzes at length in *Conceptualizing Cultural Hybridization: A Transdisciplinary Approach* (2012), "cultural transformations are being increasingly analysed as hybridization processes. Hybridity itself, however, is often treated as a specifically postcolonial phenomenon and discussions have rarely overcome the narrow boundaries within this field of study. In most other disciplines, the terms hybridity and

hybridization are used to characterize phenomena which are easily detected as somehow ‘borderline’ but not so easily explained” (2012, p.4). For Stockhammer, it is important to acknowledge the existence of three dimensions in hybridization process: “Firstly, the construction and perception of hybridity – and purity as its opposite – by different individuals or groups who have built structures and ideologies upon those two notions in order to maintain or enforce asymmetric power relations; secondly, hybridity as a metaphor for a scientific approach that aims at analyzing and deconstructing asymmetric power relations that result from assumptions of cultural purity; and thirdly, hybridity as the basis of a methodological approach for the analysis of transcultural encounters.” (2012, p.4). This third dimension is one I wish to further investigate through a transculturalist approach. Transculturalism is defined by Donald Cuccioletta (2002) as "seeing oneself in the other" and as "extending through all human cultures" or "involving, encompassing, or combining elements of more than one culture". Coinciding with the global rise of neoliberalism, the 21st century has awakened a worrisome tendency towards simplification which is unambiguously adopted by both conservatives and progressive thinkers, amongst them certain decolonial theorists. Indeed, the idea that the world can be divided into two parts, one representing the ‘North’ and its oppressive epistemology, and the other made up of a solidarity network of ‘Southern knowledges’ is becoming not only popular, but is also proposed as a serious analysis and critique of the so-called West. As we have seen through the example of the Casablanca Group, the adoption of such a fundamentally handicapped dichotomy exemplifies decolonial theory’s tendency to engage in self-sabotage, or epistemological ignorance in reverse.

In short, with the example of the Casablanca School, what I have wanted to stress is that decolonising art history is a serious and complex task that goes far beyond ‘discovering’ other-than-Western art histories. In order not to reduce decolonization to a metaphor, I want to suggest that decolonizing art history might be a more complex and rich endeavour. An example of such a necessary positioning is the approach to the history of art developed for example by Shahab Ahmed in *What Is Islam? The Importance of Being Islamic* (2015), Jamal Elias in *Aisha’s Cushion: Religious Art, Perception, and Practice in Islam* (2012), or Wendy M.K. Shaw in *What Is 'Islamic' Art? Between Religion and Perception* (2019). It is not the aim of the present research to go deeper into this complicated topic. Nonetheless, due to its influence in the approach taken to develop this research’s speculative arab art residency proto-history, it is relevant for our argument here to underline the way in which Shaw adopts decolonial perspectives.

Working on the intersection between modernity, postcoloniality and philosophy of art, the Professor of Art History of Islamic Cultures at the Freie Universität in Berlin approaches the

decolonial task in a manner quite different from the positionings of decolonial thinkers such as Grosfoguel. For Shaw, decoloniality doesn't mean erasing the effects of modernity, returning somehow to a uniform, ideal past, as is often the case in the uncritical approach to the *inherent goodness* of indigenous knowledges or the *epistemologies of the South*. Rather, for her, the decolonial project is to rediscover traces of that which has been lost within a context that is inevitably permeated with modernity. As she states in a recent interview by Philip Geisler in TRAFO – Blog for Transregional Research (2020), "rather than being bound to reinscribing the colonial terms of modernity, (decolonial theory) allows for a multiplicity of that which was lost to coexist within us. It is a recovery, but not an erasure" (2020). Shaw stresses that approaching the position of the Islamic subject means considering creation and creativity in a way that blurs the boundaries between subject and object, matter and imagination, architecture and language, music and image, and even what has been created and the divine. Just as art history puts Islam in its blind spot, Islam puts art history in a challenging position too. The paradox, for Shaw, is that an Islamic art history would not be an 'art history' at all. In contrast with art, a noun, Islam is a verbal noun formed from the root *s - l - m* in Arabic, which refers to greeting (the divine). The experience, then, would be an action, a verb, meaning 'taking in' or 'perceiving the world', as informed by Islamic discourses. Shaw confronts us with the following question: "What is art history when the primary sensory organ is the heart?" (2020). For Shaw, art history, as it is currently understood, colonises the past as much as it colonises the elsewhere. Adopting a radically different perspective to that of Grosfoguel, Shaw proposes an alternative to mainstream art history, one from which "changing our own subjectivity to that of the other (by means of) a kind of travel of the mind that no physical interaction could begin to replicate. And just like with travel, we can come home again – hopefully refreshed and with broader horizons" (2020). Shaw's projects aim to "develop alternatives to the traditional overview that, despite all critiques, maintains order through geographic-temporal linearity" (2020). Building on the work of several other experts in the field, she provides a valid point of departure, an intellectual matrix, "a way of giving meaning to objects that isn't grounded in dynasties or periodisation, political interests or trade interactions" (2020).

In light of Shaw's proposal and in the context of a research that wants to propose other ways of understanding the history of art residencies by approaching Arab and Islamic intellectual legacies, the following questions arise: Would the adoption of a method that is Islamic be useful to unfold the objectives of this project? Is there a non-exclusive way to engage in Islamic research principles through Western eyes? This chapter's next section will reflect on these questions.

1.3. Islamic research principles vs. artistic research methods?

In line with the decolonial interest "to bring epistemic diversity to the canon of thought to create a pluri-verse of meanings" (2013) in the last decade, multiple symposiums and conferences have been organised[30] and a significant body of literature has been published as part of both artistic and academic institutions. These include Tuhiwai Smith's *Decolonising Methodologies, Research and Indigenous Peoples* (1999) and Rigney's *Internalisation of an Indigenous Anticolonialist Cultural Critique of Research Methodologies: A guide to Indigenist Research methodology and its principles* (1999), to name but two. Due to its focus on Islamic approximations to the production of knowledge, I have selected Fatah Ahmed's *Exploring Halaqah as Research Method: A Tentative Approach to Developing Islamic Research Principles within a Critical 'Indigenous' Framework* (2013) as a base from which to think about, and possibly apply, an Islamic methodology to my practice.

Even though the history of Islamic intellectual tradition is intimately linked to the development of modern European thought (see for example Alkhateeb 2017; Bachir Diagne, 2018; or Bevilacqua, 2018; to name just a few), Ahmed argues that it is normally regarded with suspicion by Western academia as "considers it to be invalid due to its rejection of the secular rationalist and empiricist model" (2013, p.2). Although Ahmed's statement might be valid, it is important to note how, by adopting certain decolonial approaches, she solidifies the understanding of both Western and Islamic epistemologies by framing the first solely within rationalist approximations to research, and the latter within dogmatic thinking. What this research wants to argue is that this polarisation neglects the critical stances that have historically confronted this type of essentialism within both traditions. As we will see in the following pages, a case in point is the emergence of new approximations to the study of Islam within the Western accademy.

In order to better understand the different methodological approaches proposed from contemporary Islamic thought, Ahmed introduces us to the Islamization of knowledge. Although this concept may appear to imply some form of Islamic political agenda, I believe it is important to follow its genealogy in order to understand the positive implications that it can bring when applied in combination with *Western* qualitative methods. The following pages are

[30] Some cases in point are: *Art and Decolonisation: Afterall MASP Symposium*in London; the recent open call of the Association of Social Anthropologists of the UK and the Commonwealth, organised under the title *'Perspectives on arts and decolonisation: enabling knowledge / multiplying epistemologies*,*Why the Indigenous Today? Conference* at MoMA, and the Art Globalisation Interculturality programme of the University of Barcelona International Conference '*Indigenous Epistemologies and Artistic Imagination International,* to name just a few.

dedicated to trace this genealogy to its contemporariness and the unfolding of Critical Muslim Studies, Decolonial Islam, and Islamic Decoloniality.

On the Islamization of knowledge

The Islamization of knowledge was initiated during the First World Conference of Islamic Education which took place in Makkah (Saudi Arabia) in 1977. The aim of the conference was to distance Islamic research from political and tendentious influences, and to underline the tradition of dialogue and exchange between Islamic research and other schools of thought. The Islamization of knowledge was part of a postcolonial repositioning within the social sciences, and thus naturally had a critical and political dimension. Its main figures are Ismail Al-Faruqi (d. 1986), Syed Ali Ashraf (d. 1998) and Syed Naquib Al-Attas (d. 2006). Interestingly enough, their legacy is now being developed by the American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences and the International Institute of Islamic Thought (USA), the Islamic Academy in Cambridge (UK) and the Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization in Malaysia. The aim of Islamization of knowledge has been to develop research and education on the basis of the Islamic paradigm, which is rooted in the idea of oneness or holism, a concept that contrary to what some decolonial theorists profess, is not alien to the Western scholarly tradition as exemplified by the work of the philosopher, anthropologist and sociologist Bruno Latour (1991), the professor of anthropology and Director at The Cultural Systems Analysis Group (CuSAG) Tony L. Whitehead (2012); communication studies researchers Christine S. Davis and Deborah Breede (2015) and the science and technology studies professor Donna Haraway (2016) to name just a few.

Before analyzing its methodological principles, first I will look at other schools of Islamic thought that, by opposition, have been fundamental for the unfolding of the Islamization of knowledge. These other schools are: the Traditionalists, which, influenced by the ideas of the French metaphysician René Guénon (1886-1951), expanded in 1980's in Iran and Pakistan, and the Ijmali Movement which arose also in the late 80's influenced by the work of the British-Pakistani scholar Ziauddin Sardar.

The first alternative to the positioning of the Islamization of knowledge within contemporary Islamic thought is the one proposed by the Traditionalists. Following the work of the professor of Islamic studies S.H Nasr in *Knowledge and the sacred* (1989), Traditionalists' perspective responds to Western cultural hegemony self-consciously locating itself in a wider renaissance of pre-enlightenment islamic thought. For the Traditionalist rationality, secularism and positivist science limit themselves to a narrow way of looking at reality, which is opposed to holism. In

their perspective, Western science is an anomaly and a deviation from a reality that is also formed by a spiritual and sacred dimension. The Traditionalists defend this position by underlining the multiplicity of beliefs that exists and emphasizing that, globally, those adopting secularism are comparatively a minority. For the Traditionalists, “the spiritual and the sacred are essential elements of human knowledge. It is only through a revival of indigenous knowledge(s) that humanity can recover its natural holistic epistemology” (1989, p.281). For them, the European Enlightenment was the breaking point in which the joint tradition shared by medieval Christianity and Islam was lost. Indeed, for Nasr the Traditionalist movement in Islam is an aid to the revival of the *sophia perrenis*, an awareness of the sacred, that exists in the Western intellectual tradition as well (1989, p.284). While the Islamization of knowledge and the Traditionalists share the idea that there is a need and a necessity to learn from modernity and postmodernity, they both agree on maintaining the classical Islamic tradition as their inspirational force.

A second alternative to the Islamization of knowledge is the one proposed by the Ijmali Movement. The Ijmali Movement is less of a structured and institutionalized school of thought than a heterogeneous group of intellectuals related to the British-Pakistani scholar Ziauddin Sardar and his work *How we know – Ilm and the revival of knowledge* (1991). For Sardar, “tradition is a key aspect of human activity, the one that provides meaning, identity, and agency” (2012, Chapter 4). In that respect, his stance on modernity and postmodernity is much more radical, directly rejecting their interference. In his perspective, they are both dependent on Western secularism. Interestingly enough, the Ijmali movement proposes a ‘transmodern’ approach, a term that has also been employed by Dussel and Grosfoguel. As we can read in Ahmed’s text, “in Ijmali’s transmodernism, traditional cultures draw on their own epistemologies and ontologies to transcend modernity and to generate a more just and authentic plural reality” (2013). In fact, this is the basis of Ijmali criticism of Islamization of knowledge; its subordination to Western epistemology which is understood as unrelated to and disengaged from indigenous knowledge(s). Sardar's view, however, is not blind to the uncritical and ossified stances characteristic of the *ulema*, the Islamic theological scholars. Instead, he proposes “to engage with Muslims that react to and interact with contemporary issues, while accusing the ulema of having little knowledge of the complexity and problems of the modern world” (2012, Chapter 4). In any case, the problem of an authentic methodology is not resolved. Sardar himself recognized that methodology was a constant point of discussion amongst classical scholars and that the interaction with *other* ways of knowing is essential and has a long tradition within Islamic scholarship.

Along these lines, the view of Islamization of knowledge - as proposed in the late 1980s by Al-Faruqi and his principles of methodology in *Islamization of knowledge: General principles and work plan* (1987) - can be seen as having some parallels with the Western interpretivist positions. To be clear, the Interpretivist paradigm is founded on the theoretical belief that reality is socially constructed and fluid. Thus, as the psychology researcher M.J. Angen (2000) argues, what we know is always negotiated within cultures, social settings, and relationships with other people. From this perspective, validity or truth cannot be grounded in an objective reality. What is taken to be valid or true is negotiated and there can be multiple, valid claims to knowledge. However, the two views - the one of the Islamization of knowledge and the one of the Interpretivist paradigm - differ on an essential issue: as opposed to the Western interpretivist paradigm, Islamization of knowledge is qualified with the existence of an ultimate objective truth in the metaphysical realm. As Ahmed notes, "the Islamic concept of human nature would accept the qualitative dimensions of Interpretivism. Islam requires the study of human societies to be approached from a human, not scientific perspective. Human beings differ from the material world and are not amenable to examination in the same manner" (2013, p.5). Thus, for the proponents of the Islamization of knowledge, positivist and post-positivist methodologies are inappropriate for social research. Quantitative methods may be useful in gathering data, but they should be used within a qualitative methodology centered on human beings. Following this line of thought, "the scientific notion of objectivity is not possible and values should be openly declared because no human exists without values" (2013, p.6). The Islamization of knowledge, then, takes into account Western approaches to scientific research based on a positivist ontology, but draws attention to its limits. Islamization of knowledge also respects objectivity, but only if its fallibility is taken into account. In fact, in this respect, Islam comes closer to relativism and the interpretative paradigm in the sense that it acknowledges the limits of a totalizing and objectifying research endeavour. The obvious difference between relativism or interpretivism and the Islamization of knowledge is that neither of the former would accept the principal mandate of Islam, i.e. the internal coherence and uniqueness of the Qur'an as the guiding text of Islamic research.

Critical Muslim Studies, Decolonial Islam, and Islamic Decoloniality

Heavily influenced by the contemporary decolonial turn, in recent years the dialogue between Islamic thought and decolonial theory has open up a space for committed explorations between decolonial thinking and Islamic studies. These necessarily includes the proposals made by Salman Sayyid through Critical Muslim Studies, Hatem Bazian's Decolonial Islam, and Syed Mustafa Ali's Islamic Decoloniality. Before moving on to do an overview of these three approximations to decolonial theory within Islamic studies, I'll point out

that the three cases described here have a particular scholarly framework as a common denominator, as is also the case of most decolonial theorists previously mentioned. This framework is that their Muslim counterparts are diasporic scholars from the Arab world which develop their work from the most prestigious universities of Western knowledge production in the U.S.A and the United Kingdom.

S. Sayyid is professor of Rhetoric and Decolonial Thought, and Head of the School of Sociology and Social Policy at the University of Leeds. He has authored numerous works on Islamism, Islamophobia, Critical Muslim studies, decolonial thought, and remains the founding editor of *ReOrient: The Journal of Critical Muslim Studies.* His most prominent publications are *Recalling the Caliphate* (2014) and *Islamism as Philosophy: De-colonial Horizons* (2017). His biography reads 'the series of questions that animate his research across various mediums revolve around the processes by which systems of societies are formed and developed through history'[31]. On one hand , Sayyid is interested in the relationship between post-structuralist discourse and de-colonial thought. On the other, he studies specific instances of the process of world-making, such as the part played by racism in the formation of modern societies, as well as investigations of alternative worlds signalled by the various Islamist projects and the constitutive role of rhetoric in the formations of collective identities. His work is an attempt to decentre Euro-centrism via a post-positivist, anti-foundationalist, post-Orientalist and decolonial approach through what lately has been named as Critical Muslim Studies. As claimed in its manifesto, Critical Muslim Studies "is characterized by a series of epistemological orientations, rather than by substantive properties, permanent categories, or persistent methodologies"[32]. The series of orientations and commitments which make possible the emergence of Critical Muslim Studies can be grouped into four broad currents within contemporary intellectual developments (2014, 11-14). Firstly, there is a critique of Eurocentrism understood in a variety of registers (epistemological, cultural, geopolitical) that express the way in which Europeanness is deployed as master referent. Secondly, Critical Muslim Studies is informed by an ongoing (but not necessarily consummated) suspicion of positivism. Positivism here is to be understood to include all investigations that implicitly or explicitly hold on to the dream of producing a neutral, transparent, and predictive knowledge, more or less discreetly packaged in disciplinary categories or thematics that are supposed to have an independent validity. Thirdly, there is recognition of the significance of the critique of Orientalism, not the unveiling of bias and

[31] From the profile of professor S. Sayyid at the School of Sociology and Social Policy at the University of Leeds website [online] Available at: https://essl.leeds.ac.uk/sociology/staff/48/professor-s-sayyid [Accessed Day 16 August 2020].
[32] The Critical Muslim Studies manifesto [online] Available at: https://www.criticalmuslimstudies.co.uk/manifesto/ [Accessed Day 16 August 2020].

prejudice to which the critique of Orientalism is so often reduced but those which open the possibility of enquiries that understand the complex constitutive interplay between power and knowledge, between the “Orient,” orientalizing, and the Occident. And fourthly, Critical Muslim Studies embraces postcolonial and decolonial thinking. For Sayyid, decolonial theory calls for an epistemic delinking as the means of delivering on the promise of critical theory in contexts where the dispossessed, the “wretched of the Earth”, are not represented by the “translation of the proletariat” (Mignolo, 2007: 449).

Another approach to the dialogue between Islamic thought and decolonial theory is the one proposed by Hatem Bazian. Bazian is a Palestinian academic and activist based in the U.S.A. He is the co-founder of departments of Islamic Law and Theology at Zaytuna College, the first accredited Muslim Liberal Arts College in the United States. Professor Bazian is also a lecturer in the Departments of Near Eastern and Asian American and Asian Diaspora Studies at the University of California where, between 2002 and 2007, he served as an adjunct professor. He teaches courses on Islamic law and society, Islam in America, de-constructing islamophobia and othering of Islam. In addition to Berkeley, Bazian served as a visiting Professor in Religious Studies at Saint Mary’s College of California. In Spring 2009, Professor Bazian founded the Islamophobia Research and Documentation Project at the Centre for Race and Gender, and in Spring 2012 launched the *Islamophobia Studies Journal*.
Bazian’s take on Islam is highly inspired by the concept of double consciousness. Double consciousness is a term coined by W.E.B. DuBois, a Black-American scholar writing on the internal conflict experienced by subordinated groups in an oppressive society[33]. The term originally referred to the psychological challenge of "always looking at one's self through the eyes of a racist white society" (1935). In Bazian’s perspective, Muslimness is a colonial construction, which internalizes racism and moves it away from the *‘*true Muslim*’*. Following his Latin-American colleagues, Bazian’s research focuses on the role played by the university in the colonial project through intellectual justification. In his perspective the role of the university has gone away from radical thinking towards the neo-liberalization and commoditization of knowledge. For him, the university finds itself at a crossroad in-between decolonial activism and gentrification. As a Muslim living in the West, he is aware of the privilege he embodies and the tendency of western liberal Muslims to regard themselves as a superior brand in contrast to Muslim thinkers based outside of the centres of power. From his understanding, this is a colonial attitude framed by privilege that has its origin on the creation of a Muslim elite through the establishment of French, English and American schools in the colonies and post-colonies to promote the idea of Islamic tradition as static and backwards, increasingly

[33] It is worth remembering that DuBois was a Black American writing about Black America at a very early time in Civil Rights history in the US, only fifty years after the Civil War which (officially althugh not in practice) ended slavery in the country.

disconnected from everyday life. In his understanding, this is the oposite to what Islam really is and an attempt to reform Islam through euro-centrism. For Bazian, the solution to that is Decolonial Islam. First inspired by Muslim Liberation Theology as proposed by Farid Esack (1997), Professor at the University of Johannesburg, Decolonial Islam proposes to move away from materiality towards Islamic metaphysics as a way to search for indigenous Islamic cosmologies exterior to the euro-centric frame.

While appreciating both the importance of Salman Sayyid's post-structuralist stand and Bazian, and Esack understanding of praxis-based liberation-theology, another academic-activist pushes this further. Through Islamic Decoloniality, the Milton Keynes Open University academic Syed Mustafa Ali proposes that such approaches need augmenting with ideas, methods and techniques drawn from the 'exteriority' of the Western episteme. He proposes to do so through a full engagement with the Islamicate intellectual tradition, particularly that of the medieval scholar Ibn 'Arabi. Islamic Decoloniality contributes to the academic-activist enterprise of decoloniality by proposing a return to classic Islamic scholars and a re-appropriation of the Qur'an. Islamic Decoloniality then is marked by a commitment to re-centring the Qur'an not as a *text* as such, but rather as a *living law* where emphasis is placed on its dynamic and regulatory aspects. Consequently, in order to construct, or perhaps extract, an alternative vocabulary to think through the decolonial project from an Islamic situatedness, the Qur'an becomes pivotal. Interestingly, the Islamic Decoloniality project Ali pioneers exposes various lacunae in leading decolonial projects the world over.
For Ali, Farid Esack's Islamic Theology of Liberation has too heavily drawn upon hermeneutics and praxis of Latin-American liberation theology. Likewise, through Critical Muslim Studies, Salman Sayyid argues that post-modernism is a useful tool for decolonization and proposes it as a precursor to forging Islamicate future(s). While Ali applauds such efforts, he remains somewhat concerned by what he perceives as "a tendency within contemporary Muslim intellectual circles to assume that the tools of critical thinking (post-modernism, postcolonial theory and hermeneutics) can be taken up and used to advance Muslim projects without incurring cost" (2016). He sees this instrumentalist outlook as problematic because tools, theoretical or otherwise, have a certain seductive power and are associated with fetishizing tendencies. He concludes by recommending awareness in front of the "power of tools emerging from the dark colonial underside of Modernity" (2016). In order to support his claim, he refers to the famous statement made in 1984 by the black feminist, Aude Lorde: "The master's tools will never dismantle the master's house. They may allow us to temporarily beat him at his own game, but they will never enable us to bring about genuine change" (1984). Drawing on the ideas of decolonial Latin-American thinkers (Dussel, 1998; Grosfoguel, 2011; and Mignolo, 2014), he also pays attention to the centrality of coloniality in naming or

classifying the construction of local manifestations of racial, racialized and/or racializing phenomena. Although decolonial theory continues to make moves in the direction of thinking differently through *border logics* and epistemologies, Ali is guarded about the extent to which colonial logics remain operative, despite the trail-blazing efforts of decolonial scholars. More precisely, he is wary that the terms within which the decolonial project tends to be articulated has not been subjected to a reflexive decolonial critique. In short, what he means by this is that decoloniality itself might need decolonizing.

Islamic research principles and artistic research methods

Following the several debates that inform decolonial theory and contemporary Islamic thought, my research was initially framed by this same dichotomy between the distinction of two epistemic traditions: Western and Islamic. Consequently, the questions that initially shaped my search for a suitable methodology were the following: What would be the potential of a research methodology developed according to worldviews and ideological imperatives rooted in a non-Western context? More particularly, how could epistemic violence be avoided through the application of culturally sensitive methods? In accordance with these questions and given that my goal was to propose an alternative history of the art residency phenomenon taking Arab and Islamic traditions as case studies, the adoption of Islamic Research Principles seemed a desirable option. Further research made me realize that to adopt these 'tools' might demonstrate to be more complex than initially expected.

In her text, Ahmed underlines that "for Muslims and non-Muslims alike, Islamic education has become a point of resistance, revival, and renewal, a shield against the onslaught of Western culture from colonialism and neo-liberalism and the consequent de-legitimation of Islamic and other ways of knowing" (2013, p.1). Moving away from non-dialogic approaches to decolonial dualism, Ahmed's practice-based research proposes a method that encompasses both Western qualitative methodologies and what she classifies as the Islamic research principles. Ahmed stresses that "Islamic worldviews share many of the concerns of indigenous knowledge and critical pedagogy, while at the same time challenging colonial concepts of progress that privilege knowledge constructed in the 'Global North'" (2013, p.2). Although engaging in decolonial terminology, Ahmed's proposal combines both Islamic and Western methodological traditions.

For Ahmed, the Islamic research principles can be summarised in the following postulates:

1. ‘The primacy of the Qur’an and the prophetic sayings. As the revealed texts, these are the ultimate guiding forces for Muslim researchers adopting the Islamic paradigm.

2. Combination of classical Islamic scholarship and sciences with a range of other methods: On the one hand, classical Islamic methodologies that naturally generate holistic meanings and moral guidance on the application of knowledge for human and environmental sustainability. On the other, research methodologies that become compatible with Islamic epistemology once the Islamic paradigm becomes the conceptual framework within which the methodology operates.

3. Use of all human faculties of understanding. That is the intellectual, the rational, the intuitive and the spiritual. Human understanding of the natural, social and human worlds cannot be reduced to the empirical/rational dimension alone. A more holistic approach needs to be accepted in order to recognise multiple forms of human meaning and knowledge. Research must be rigorous and peer-reviewed to ensure validity and authenticity.

4. The necessity of centering the human situation in research to meet the holistic needs of human beings as individuals and as a collective. In order to do so, the methodological approach should be holistic, qualitative and interdisciplinary.

5. Adoption of Islamic ethics and etiquette about interacting with one’s own and other communities.

6. Enforcing collaborative, participative, transformative and useful research: Research should serve the people researched, it should empower and offer practical and real solutions and improvements, and include the one being studied in all stages of the research process, including dissemination and application’ (2013, p.10).

Ahmed provides a practical example of the application of Islamic research principles, one I have cited previously: the *Halaqah*. Ahmed’s application of *Halaqah* in the context of critical pedagogy includes *Halaqah* as critical theory, reflective conversation, participant collaboration and interactive dialogical discourse. This conception proposes a form of narrative inquiry that is rooted in participative, collaborative and spiritual reflective conversation. It is a critical theory approach with an awareness of postcolonial knowledge perspectives, applying the interpretative paradigm within the context of Islamic epistemology and Islamic values. Interestingly, as I will try to demonstrate, by encouraging narrative enquiry as well as participant empowerment and spirituality, *Halaqah* may successfully bridge the gap between Islamic and Western methodological traditions.

One critical characteristic of the Islamic research principles proposed by Ahmed is the importance of emphasising context as essential to any research endeavour and the necessity to centre the human situation in research*:* "Research should meet the holistic needs of human beings as individuals and as a collective (and) serve the people researched. It should empower and offer practical and real solutions and improvements and include the ones being researched in all stages of the process" (2013, p.10)*.* This approach to context involves naturalistic, ethnographic, phenomenological and biographical study practices. It empowers the researcher to develop a method that goes beyond the positivist model, all the while confronting epistemic privilege. It is worth remembering, however, that innovative, critical and socially responsive approaches to knowledge production and dissemination within and beyond academia are not exclusive to an understanding of Islamic research principles as a decolonial methodology. As I will try to argue, the field of artistic research and the holistic methodologies it enhances are quite in line in what is proposed as novelty and uniqueness by both decolonial methods and Islamic research principles.

Indeed, the growing influence of artistic research within the Western academy should be understood as yet another attempt to upgrade the methods and practices of academic knowledge created within *Western epistemology*. This constant upgrading incorporates some of the proposals made from alternative methods practised outside of the academic field[34]. Artistic research requires flexibility and criticality, as it challenges the strict norms that academic knowledge relies upon. In short, as defined in a recent publication on the topic: 'the three conceptual spaces that fundamentally determine what we mean by artistic research are: creative practice (experimentality, art making, potential of the sensible); artistic thinking (open-ended, speculative, associative, non-linear, haunting, thinking differently); and curatorial strategies (topical modes of political imagination, transformational spaces for encounters,

[34] Although artistic research can be considered a novelty within academia, it has a long tradition outside of it. The incomplete chronology of experimental art schools proposed on *Taking the matter into common hands* edited by Johanna Billing, Maria Lind and Lars Nilsson is quite revealing. The chronology includes for example: The Drawing School (1751, Geneva), The Flying University (1883, Warsaw), the Bauhaus (1919-1933), the Black Mountain College (1933, USA), the Berlin Free Academy (1945, Berlin), the Experimental Art School (1961, Copenhagen), the Artist Placement Group (1966, London), Jack Kerouac School of Disembodied Poetics (Boulder, 1974), the Ultimate Akademie (1988, Cologne) or the Proto Academy (1998, Edinburgh) and since 2000, the Real Presence (Belgrade), Art School Palestine (London), Future Academy (London), Informal University Foundation (Berlin) and La Universidad Nómada, to name but a few. In most cases, these spaces reacted and confronted academicism proposing experimental and socially engaged ways of understanding artistic thought and practice. In this context, it is important to acknowledge that the line between academic and non-academic contexts is becoming increasingly blurry. A case at hand, and responding to our contemporary context, in the genealogy of experimental and innovative art schools, it is particularly relevant the work being done from the Edinburgh College of Art, and more specifically the research carried out by Mulholland, N. Watts, J. Garriock, N. and Brown; D as part of the Shift/Work initiative and the upcoming Contemporary Art & Open Learning Course.

reflection, and dissemination)' (Slager, H, 2021). Being aware of the multiple approaches and attempts to define the field, due to their clarity and still valid stances, I have chosen to adopt M. Hannula, J. Suoranta and T. Vadenin proposal published in *Artistic research. Theories, Methods and Practices* (2015).
For M. Hannula, J. Suoranta and T. Vadenin, the situation linking artistic research and academia is still contested and is best described as one of confusion: "The research methods in the different fields of art and artistic expression are still only in the process of evolving, and there are both risks and opportunities in the existing situation" (2015, p.11).

However, what exactly is being proposed by the field of artistic research? For Hannula, Suoranta and Vaden, in most of the work done within the field:

1. The artwork is the focal point. Artistic experimentation should be at the very core of the research.

2. The hermeneutic and interpretive quality of Artistic research is practised through a diversity of research approaches, presentation methods and communication tools, enhancing methodological abundance.

3. Artistic research must be self-reflective and self-critical. The aim is to rethink and question the role of the artist and the significant increase of collaborative artistic efforts while producing knowledge about the social, psychological as well as political and pedagogical meanings of art.

4. Artistic research produces information that serves practice from the ecological, psychological, social, cultural, economic, political, technical and functional points of view. It promotes understanding of the links between art and its social, cultural, pedagogical and political contexts, raising awareness towards social injustice.

5. Artistic research places itself in a particular historical and disciplinary context, continuously locating the study in relation with its actions and goals. In this way, Artistic research also has meaning beyond its own narrowly conceived discipline.

6. The democratisation of methods in Artistic research emphasises the fruitfulness and necessity of the dynamic group situation, which in a collective effort provides the closest critical environment, the protective realm for experimentation, and the ability to share thoughts and emotions (2005, p.20).

The parallels between the structuring characteristics of artistic research methods as defined by Hannula, Suoranta and Vaden and the ones proposed from Ahmed's Islamic research paradigm are striking, particularly as both methodologies engage holistic approaches. These approaches resonate not only with the ones of Latour (1991), Whitehead (2012), Davis &

Breede (2015), and Haraway (2016) but also with those proposed back in 1975 by Paul Feyerabend in *Against Method: Outline of an Anarchistic Theory of Knowledge.* In this enlightening work, Feyerabend argues that the diversity of the world and the multiplicity of human experience is inverse to the belief in one all-powerful and all-encompassing method. For Feyerabend, the aim of research should be to show and understand that methods have their limits, as the richness of the features of reality is not organised according to self-contained models but rather involves an anarchistic starting point. One of the main characteristics of Islamic research principles is that researchers should "use all human faculties of understanding, the rational, the intuitive, and the spiritual" (2013, p10). This is similar to artistic research methods that embrace the democracy of experiences by employing an anarchic approach to methodology. Furthermore, both Islamic research principles and artistic research methods emphasise activism and collaboration as necessary conditions of the research endeavour. For Ahmed, Islamic research principles "naturally generate holistic meanings and moral guidance on the application of knowledge for human and environmental sustainability (…) while enforcing collaborative, participative and transformative research" (2013, p10). Likewise, artistic research methods "increase understanding of the link between art and its cultural, pedagogical and political context raising awareness towards social justice". They "emphasise the fruitfulness and necessity of the dynamic group situation, which in a collective effort provides the closest critical environment, the protective realm for experimentation and the ability to share thoughts and emotions" (2005, p.20).

In this context, the statement made by Audre Lorde "The master's tools will never dismantle the master's house" (1984) becomes as puzzling as it is convenient. While affording due recognition to the importance of Lorde's text, decolonial scholar Lewis Gordon points out that her position is based on at least two assumptions: (1) that the master's tools are, in fact, *his* in the sense of originating with him rather than being appropriated by him from others, and (2) that *only* the master's tools will be used to effect the dismantling of the modernity/coloniality axes (2005). In short, the objective of critically comparing Islamic research principles and artistic research methods as 'tools' has been to show that, besides the current tendency to divorce Western and non-Western methodologies, the resonances between the two epistemes might prevail over their differences. Mastering the tools might be even more urgent than trying to dismantle the *master's house*.

Conclusion

While acknowledging the important task of the decolonial project in underlining and remediating the Modern/Colonial divide and the colonial wound, this chapter has started with a

critique of the easy adoption of decolonial theory within academic and artistic institutions alike. Through commodification, this adoption might undermine the emancipatory potential of radical decolonial demands. The aim of my research endeavour has been to highlight that besides decoloniality there is room in the extended tradition of criticality and experimentation to confront coloniality, racism and sexism as well as to investigate other than human-centered approaches to research. In short, within Western epistemology many research approaches exist that do not readily fit the description of Western-centric. In this chapter, I have argued that this non-Western-centric approach, which I see as a fundamental characteristic of Western epistemology, has been neglected through the worrisome tendency towards simplification and essentialism adopted by some decolonial theorists, particularly those that form the group modernidad / colonialidad / decolonialidad.

Through this analysis, my intention has been to develop a revision of decolonial approaches to methodology and epistemology, questioning some of their assumptions all the while enhancing their potentials. Following Tuck and Yang, “decolonisation, which we assert is a distinct project from other civil and human rights-based social justice projects, is far too often subsumed into the directives of these projects, with no regard for how decolonisation wants something different than those forms of justice. When metaphor invades decolonisation, it kills the very possibility of decolonisation” (2012, p.2). In line with this call to decolonise decolonial theory, I have tried to deconstruct the theory’s assumed dualisms to underline that the colonial experience was not homogeneous, but responded to complex and diverse systems of subjugation and murder that were contested and fought not only by those who suffered the atrocities perpetrated by Western colonialists, but also adopted and retooled by the colonised elites and others for their own ends. Forms of oppression and alienation were implemented in different grades and intensities, depending on the strategies of each colonial power. Multiple resistances were also developed, and continue to do so, not only in exteriority to the so-called *Global North*, but most importantly for the argument of this research, as an integral part of it.

Taking the above into account, can we consider *Moving Knowledges: Towards a speculative Arab art residency proto-history* a decolonial project? The answer to this question is not an easy one. Indeed, as I pointed out at the start of this chapter, this project starts from a double disjuncture. Insofar as its *ethos* is concerned, this project aligns with Grosfoguel's idea of decolonisation as: (1) it tries to *provincialise* the current Euro-centric history of art residencies, all the while acknowledging the structures of privilege the current discourse enhances; (2) it proposes to break with the idea of universality of Western-centric aesthetics and cultural practices; and (3) it fosters epistemic diversity by critically approaching the current art residency history discourse all the while proposing an alternative based on Arab and Islamic

epistemologies and practices. To define this project as decolonial would be an unproblematic conclusion to this project's research approach. In fact, *Moving Knowledges: Towards a speculative Arab art residency proto-history* also fits within the Western critical tradition instead of decolonisation, as what it proposes (1) does not neglect, nor does it go against the contributions made by the current art residency historiography; (2) it embraces pragmatism and underlines hybridism, emphasising complexity and dialogue within different epistemological traditions; and (3) it destabilises binary thinking while advocating for the mobility of knowledge(s) and the erosion of the division between the same and the other.

Consequently, in methodological terms, this project will not adopt decolonial postulates. However, like decolonial theory, it is consciously rooted in holistic and collaborative approaches to knowledge production. The reasons for not aligning this project with decolonial theory are that the principles and methodologies being proposed as a novel contribution to the production of knowledge are in fact integral to Western epistemologies and practices. Indeed, besides the persistent tendency to dismiss Western knowledge — as framed within the constraints of positivism, rationality and scientism — we cannot forget that, at least since the Enlightenment period, Western knowledges are rooted in a process of constant critique, challenge and doubt. This fact makes Western epistemology an ever-evolving system on the move as it integrates, discards and promotes the re-tooling of other epistemologies in its process of constant upgrading. Negating the liquid, adaptive and innovative ethos of Western epistemology while disregarding its contributions does not do any favours to the advancement of knowledge nor to the important project of decolonisation. On the contrary, decolonial theory might be in danger of practising self-sabotage as its critique of Western thought is too often grounded in conceptual naïveté.

If the aim is to confront and to give alternatives to Western epistemology, a more laborious effort needs to be made so that the sophisticated and critical knowledge produced within the academy may be appreciated and considered. In short, while there is indeed a need to highlight the urgency of decolonising our institutions, practices and methods, we always have to remember that it is only by unsettling the grounds on which established discourses currently stand that epistemic diversity emerges. In short, the emergence of a shared future needs to be achieved by way of a return to our shared pasts.

2. Towards a fragile method

'The impossibility of perception is a perception in itself'

In Kitab al-Isfār 'an natā'ij al-asfār by Ibn Arabi (Murcia, 1165 – Damascus, 1240)

Introduction

Following from the reflections made in Chapter 1, *Methodological Journeys: Coming back from the South,* the second part of this dissertation seeks to describe and critically analyse the different methods that were mobilised to develop the speculative Arab art residency proto-history proposed in the portfolio. Titled *An event without its poem is an event that never happened* in the portfolio I have chosen to narrate this alternative history using five different narrative voices. These are (1) description of several contemporary art residencies projects operating in North Africa and the Middle East. The projects described have been chosen due to their resonance with practices that historically link mobility and knowledge within Arab epistemologies and practices. (2) These projects are then put in relation to these practices by defining their conceptual frameworks and (3) the historical context in which these practices evolve. Although these three voices would be enough in giving shape to my argumentation, the portfolio aims at challenging historical narrative by including not only several (4) semi-fictional micro-stories describing certain moments of the lives of scholars mystics and men of letters that practices the journey in search for knowledge but also includes several (5) creative auto-ethnographic diaries in which I document my own experience as a mobile researcher. In each of the subsections structuring this chapter, I will describe the several methods from which the articulation of this polyvocal narrative has unfolded.

In this chapter's first section (*2.1. participatory action research? Beyond NACMM and Platform HARAKAT*), I critically analyse the projects from which this dissertation originates, NACMM - North Africa Cultural Mobility Map and its evolution into Platform HARAKAT in order to problematize the adoption of participatory action research as structuring research method. Following the argument made in the first section, in the second section of this chapter (2.2 *Inventive methods*), I will highlight fragility as a key condition of my research endeavour. Through a description of two projects co-curated by Platform HARAKAT - *The Art of Getting*

Lost and *Beyond Qafila Thania* - I will further elaborate on the application of several inventive methods: al-Khaban cartography (and auto-ethnography); curatorial al-Barzaj (and anechdotization); and experimental genealogy. In this chapter's third and final section (2.3. On fragility and methodology), what I will argue is that, in lieu of predetermination, robustness and self-assurance, this research has embraced fragility as a way to enhance the 'what if' in research methodology. To support this positioning, I will describe three fragile conditions I encountered when developing my project. These fragile conditions establish the grounds for further investigation and stresses the open-endedness of this project.

2.1. Action Research: Beyond NACMM and Platform HARAKAT

Mapping art residencies in North Africa: NACMM

As the initiator and curator of CeRCCa - Center for Research and Creativity Casamarles - an art residency program in Llorenç del Penedes, a village outside Barcelona (Catalonia), one of the objectives of the organization has been to develop collaborations with art residencies in North Africa and the Middle East. This interest springs from the belief that a better understanding of our neighbours from the southern Mediterranean would be enriching and help to break up the multiple stereotypes historically imposed on Muslim cultures. In order to start working towards this objective, in 2015, CeRCCa started to conceptualize a project that would map out the different residency spaces operating in the region; a year later, NACMM was born. The creation of this map aimed to redress the invisibility of spaces and programmes operating in the Maghreb region within global art residency networks, to shed light on their models, influences and challenges, while at the same time establishing the ground for future collaborations. In the context of CeRCCa's curatorial strategy and subsequently as part of my PhD research thesis, this mapping has become the starting point to critically investigate the art residency phenomenon and its histories from an Arab perspective.

In the initial stages of NACMM's development, it became clear that this novel cartography would have to be built through collaborations with cultural organisations and art residencies working in the region. Furthermore, the initial mapping would have to be complemented by enriching mapping as a method through collaborative inquiry to enhance bottom-up participatory approaches to research and practice. After an initial research trip to Morocco, in which I started to contact and map out several art residencies, CeRCCa was selected to be part of the Euro-Mediterranean exchange programme funded by the Anna Lindh Foundation

(ALF) [35] DAWRAK - Citizens for Dialogue[36]. To be part of DAWRAK gave me the opportunity to travel to Egypt in order to present the project and search for partners. The idea to create a map of art residencies in North Africa was met with great interest, particularly by the Alexandria-based organisation El Madina for Performing and Digital Arts[37].

Through this first meeting, NACMM's collaborative strategy was set up in two stages: First, a two-month residency in Egypt hosted by El Madina, and secondly, through El Madina coordinators' residency at CeRCCa. A year later, the idea of further expanding the partnership and including other organisations working on the ground had become an imperative. In fact, ALF's further support was geared towards establishing networks of three or more partners in the region[38]. On the basis of personal and professional alignments, the organisations approached to be part of the network were: Le 18[39] in Marrakech, l'Atelier de l'Observatoire[40] in Casablanca and JISER Reflexions Mediterrànies,[41] operating in Barcelona, Tunis and Algiers.

Complementing the quantitative and data-gathering methods adopted in the map-making process, from late 2016 a series of video interviews was developed to document the cultural landscape of the region. Featuring more than forty artists, curators, researchers and art residency coordinators from across North Africa, these interviews are heterogeneous in nature. They document the reflections, hopes and concerns of the coordinators of the different art residency programmes mapped, and engage in current debates on research and creative practices in the region. As a whole, the video interview archive, which can be accessed through NACMM's online database, aims to provide deeper insight into urgent questions relating to the relationship between art and activism within the evolving socio-political context of the region; the impact of censorship on the art residency scene[42]; and the possibility of

[35] Anna Lindh Foundation (ALF) is a network of civil society organisations dedicated to promoting intercultural dialogue in the Mediterranean region. ALF was founded in 2005 by the governments of the Euro-Mediterranean (Euromed) Partnership. a political agreement made in 1995 between the European Union and the governments of Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine, Israel, Syria and Turkey. The foundation is named in honour of Anna Lindh, the Swedish Foreign Minister who was murdered in 2003. The Foundation, which is mainly funded by the European Union, has its headquarters in the Swedish consulate in Alexandria.Anna Lindh Foundation [online] Available at: https://www.annalindhfoundation.org/ [Accessed Day 16 August 2020].
[36] "DAWRAK - Citizens for Dialogue " target is to build the capacities of Civil Society Organizations and the most dynamic actors of change in Arab southern Mediterranean countries while providing the necessary tools and skills to promote dialogue, advocacy and networking. Its aim is to contribute in developing the culture of citizenship and democratic participation. DAWRAK was a broader initiative implemented by Anna Lindh Foundation:ALF through 2012-2014 both at the national and regional levels in collaboration with local and national institutions in Arab countries.
[37] El Madina [online] Available at: http://www.elmadinaarts.com [Accessed Day 16 August 2020].
[38] Besides the main funder (the ALF) NACMM's activities were made possible thanks to the support of several funding organisations including SouthMed CV#, the Organisme de Suport a les Iniciatives Culturals (OSIC) and the Scottish Graduate School for Arts and Humanities (SGSAH).
[39] Le 18 [online] Available at: https://Le 18marrakech.com [Accessed Day 16 August 2020].
[40] Atelier l'observatoire [online] Available at: https://www.atelierobservatoire.com [Accessed Day 16 August 2020].
[41] JISER Reflexions Mediterrànies [online] Available at: https://www.jiser.org [Accessed Day 16 August 2020].
[42] Examples of that are the cases of Lara El Gibaly, at the time Cultural Journalist at Mada Masr, Cairo (Egypt), Abdelrehim Youssef, Initiator of Taralbahr. Alexandria (Egypt) and Abdalla Daif, from Gudran for Arts and Development, Alexandria (Egypt). During the last years these three cultural spaces/platforms have been victims of

tracing a genealogy of the history of art residencies that would place Arab epistemologies and practices at its centre[43].

That same year, NACMM was further developed to include a database of resources on the arts and the humanities in the region, with a variety of info-platforms, think-tanks, research initiatives and online archives as well as a section dedicated to funding opportunities. The impetus to build and facilitate this database came from the recognition of the lack of structural and project funding which most art residency spaces, as well as artists, writers, and researchers in North African are faced with. Indeed, compared with Europe, where public bodies — local, national and supranational — do offer resources to cultural institutions, however scarce, in the form of grants and other types of funding, in North Africa there are very few consistent or accessible funds available to artists and cultural institutions[44]. Furthermore, the interviews showed that in most cases the organisations and individuals interviewed were not aware of the few resources available. NACMM's funding section was created to solve this handicap of accessibility to resources.

In an effort to enhance collaboration amongst NACMM partners - and in line with the ALF grant guidelines - a series of networking, skill-sharing and know-how meetings were organised in 2016 and 2017. These five-day networking meetings took place in several of the cities where the different partners operate[45], and featured semi-public roundtables, field visits, public presentations, and exhibitions[46]. The meetings aimed to create a space of critical reflection for, and managed by, regional art residency coordinators, curators and artists. They also aimed to

censorship by the current egyptian government. The case of Gudran is particularly relevant due external pressures finally it has had to close its doors. Their interviews can be found at NACMM's Interviews section [online] Available at: http://www.nacmm.org/en/interviews.html [Accessed Day 16 August 2020].

[43] See for example the interview with Mohamed Ikouban, director of Moussem Nomadic Art Centre. [online] Available at: http://www.nacmm.org/en/interviews.html [Accessed Day 16 August 2020].

[44] In fact, EU funds (such as Creative Europe, Neighbouring Euromed cultural policies or SouthMed CV) and EU-funded bodies (Such as Anna Lindh Foundation, AFAC, al Mawred-Cultural Resource, Roberto Cimetta Fund, Mophradat, Prince Claus Fund, Hivos, Stichting Doen, or the many grants offered by the Goethe Institut, the Institut français, or the British Council, to name but a few) are often the only sources of funding available to cultural organisations in the Southern Mediterranean region. It is relevant to stress that funding coming from European countries or from the EU, through its neighbourhood policy, is often seen with suspicion by national authorities. The case of Egypt is particularly telling. Under the Abdel Fattah el-Sisi regime, several measures have been imposed to impede cultural NGOs' access to EU funding. In addition, the crackdown on multiple cultural organisations, under the accusation that they are agents promoting Western values such as freedom of speech, freedom of assembly, defence of human rights and democracy, has made the once-vibrant Egyptian scene into a cultural desert and has forced many art practitioners to relocate to Europe, particularly to Berlin, where a new diaspora community of Arab artists is flourishing.

[45] Barcelona (September 2016), Algiers (February 2017) and Tunis (May 2017), and Barcelona (June 2017)

[46] As part of its development and outreach strategy, NACMM has been presented as part of the following conferences and meetings: TransCultural Exchange's 2018 International Conference on Opportunities in the Arts: Exploring New Horizons. Quebec (Canada, 2018); Barcelona International Art Fair SWAB 2016 Focus Mediterrania: KIBRIT and Platform HARAKAT (Catalonia, 2017); NACMM Round table 'Performing Mobilities,' with invited speakers Le 18, Space Darja and Hammana Artist House as part of Fira B in Palma de Mallorca invited by IRLL – Institut Ramon Llull; Fronteras y movilidad. Artistas en el Mediterráneo at Mostra Viva in Valencia (Spain, 2017); Kawkaw fil-kawkawa talks at Le 18, Marrakech, Morocco, 2016); TransCultural Exchange's 2016 International Conference on Opportunities in the Arts: Expanding Worlds. Boston University (U.S.A., 2016); Barcelona International Art Fair, SWAB 2016, Focus Maghreb: NACMM (Catalonia, 2016) and ALF Interredes Meeting in Tadourant (Morocco, 2015).

set up the framework to promote the interconnection and hybridisation of specific knowledge(s) on art residencies and their expanded fields.

In short, since 2016, NACMM has evolved into a unique online platform that currently includes a map of seventy art residency programmes operating in the region; forty-five video interviews with artists, curators, researchers, and art residency coordinators in North Africa; information about funding opportunities with twenty organisations listed; and a database of resources with more than ninety entries[47].

Un-mapping art residencies in North Africa: Platform HARAKAT

In a context of growing mis-representation and prejudice towards Arab cultures within European societies, NACMM responded through networking and collaboration to a deep-set desire for better understanding of North Africa's cultural landscape. The support the project received from funding organisations and the number of invitations to participate in conferences, expert gatherings and publications are certainly testaments to the importance of NACMM's mission and vision within the landscape of art residencies in and beyond North Africa. Moreover, with its breadth of scope, novel approach, and extensive final results, NACMM can be considered a successful project. A closer look into its implementation, however, will highlight several gaps that have made NACMM a contentious and fragile endeavour.

At the project's outset, NACMM partners made two explicit demands. The first was the necessity of further strengthening collaboration between partners as a means of guaranteeing NACMM's capacity to have a direct and real impact on the ground. The second demand pertained to the provision of structural funding for each partner organisation, in view of covering local project development costs, instead of allocating too much funding to networking events. Furthermore as NACMM's coordinator I faced important challenges, both methodological and conceptual in nature. Some of the coordinators of the different art residency programmes that formed NACMM's partnership reported feeling a lack of shared ownership of the project and advocated for a more community-oriented approach, including community-based analysis of social problems and a focus on local action in the project's interventions. In short, mapping *per se* was not enough.

[47] Complete documentation of NACMM can be found in Annex 1 as well as on the network's website NACMM [online] Available at: http://www.nacmm.org/en/ [Accessed Day 16 August 2020].

In conceptual terms, the issues stated in the inaugural NACMM meeting, which took place in Barcelona[48] in September 2016 pointed out to the processes of exclusion and inclusion embedded in (1) choosing North Africa as the geographical *loci*, (2) how to approach cultural mobility from an activist perspective; and (3) the limits of mapping when responding to both local issues and the need for accessibility to creative expression. In other words, in spite of the founding partners' intention to open up NACMM through a collaborative approach, there was a push to rethink the project's format and objectives in response to impressions that management remained centralised and that it failed to deliver sustainable improvement within the researched communities. Furthermore, the negotiation, on-going problem-solving and constant re-adaptation that were at the heart of the project's approach made its implementation a long and complicated endeavour. Indeed, this approach at times conflicted with the partners' agendas and most importantly with the funding institutions' requirements. ALF in particular was inflexible to the project's needs and evolving strategy. Indeed, the request for structural changes to the initial project proposal in order to tackle partners' feedback was met by the ALF with distrust and a notable lack of empathy. All the more problematic was the fact that, for several reasons, the arduous process of negotiation with the main project funder was not conducted in collaboration by all project partners. Due to poor engagement, bureaucratic overload and lack of empathy from the funding body, these negotiations were, in the end, led by myself only. In other words, while the project partners demanded decentralised management, their involvement in the complicated negotiations with ALF was almost non-existent.

In response to the above-mentioned issues, the push to develop NACMM into a much more socially-engaged endeavour materialised during the second partners' meeting, which took place in Algiers in February 2017. Although it was agreed that NACMM's activities would continue, the extra funding received, thanks to the support of SouthMed CV,[49] was reallocated towards the development of another interrelated project: KIBRIT in which, as previously requested, funding was allocated to each partner. As an evolution of NACMM, KIBRIT, meaning 'match' in Arabic, was conceptualized as a collaborative research and production programme dedicated to contemporary artistic and curatorial practices engaged in processes

[48] The reason to host the first meeting in Barcelona was made after consultation with NACMM Partners. CeRCCa, an organisation based in Barcelona was the main applicant to the ALF grant. The fact that the first NACMM meeting took place there was due to the interest of the other partners to have a better understanding of the cultural sector in the city and the presentation of NACMM as part of SWAB Barcelona International Art Fair. In fact, to be part of a network including EU partners allows for curators and artists from the Arab world to ease the process of getting a visa to the EU, something that can be quite difficult if not impossible if done by individuals working outside of the cultural field. From the four meetings planned, two took place in Europe (Barcelona) and two in the Arab region (Algiers and Tunis).

[49] SouthMed CV is a project co-funded by the European Union within the framework of the regional programme Med Culture. The project emerged from the observation and analysis of the diversity of cultural contexts and practices, linked to multiple imaginaries in the Southern Mediterranean, and the need to enhance the professional capacities of cultural operators, practitioners and organisations active in this field through several funding schemes. SouthMed Cv [online] Available http://www.smedcv.net/presentation-3/ [Accessed Day 16 August 2020]

of reactivation of cultural heritage and collective memory. The project, developed through a constellation of activities organised by each partner, proposed collaborative and interregional research projects, cartographies, tandem residencies, artistic interventions, exhibitions, public programmes, screenings and a web platform. Expanding NACMM's network to include other partners from Palestine and Tunisia, the programme ultimately aimed to foster sustainable synergies through the exchange of practices and knowledge between partners, while generating critical reflection, research and action within the partners local communities. Within this new strategy, and in line with NACMM's rearticulation, CeRCCa proposed to develop Platform HARAKAT.

As such, Platform HARAKAT has to be understood as both a sub-project that branched out from KIBRIT and an evolution of NACMM which aimed at addressing the several issues expressed from within NACMM's network. In this framework, Platform HARAKAT (harakat meaning movement in Arabic) was designed to transgress mapping by reactivating alternative ways of narrating histories and stories related to artistic mobility and taking the Euro-Mediterranean region as its *loci*.

Evolving as a collaborative effort, the platform unfolds as a critical archive reflecting upon the past and contemporary mobility of knowledge, bodies, and practices. In order to do so, its website gathers a selection of online resources that branch into three different categories: *Knowledges*, *Tools*, and *Actions*. *Knowledges* is an interdisciplinary constellation of resources that reflect upon the platform's ethos. It comprises a selection of interviews, texts and interventions drawn from research, curatorial and artistic projects from and/or focusing on the region. The *Tools* section features a repertoire of resources focusing on different modes of knowledge production and dissemination. These include networks, platforms, archives and different info-sites focusing on memory and activism. To connect these resources, and to go a step beyond data gathering and to move towards relational and collaborative practices, Platform HARAKAT's *Actions* section documents different projects curated by its team in collaboration with other organisations and individuals operating in the region. From critically reactivating cultural heritage, to co-creating nomadic residences and reviewing alternative ways to rethink and interact with public space, the platform has engaged in projects that enhance the meaningful mobility of knowledge(s) and practices across the Mediterranean. The *Actions* section in Platform HARAKAT can be understood as the way in which the critical analysis of the art residency phenomenon has evolved from an initial conventional mapping

exercise developed by NACMM into critical cartography: that is, understanding mapping as a self-reflexive experience and collaborative creative act[50].

As I will show in the next section, the two Platform HARAKAT initiatives that have been fundamental for the development of *Moving knowledge(s): Towards a speculative Arab art residency proto-history* are: *The Art of Getting Lost* and *Beyond Qafila Thania*.

A methodological reflection on NACMM and Platform HARAKAT

Taking the evolution of NACMM into Platform HARAKAT as a case study, in the next section, I will try to give an answer to the following question: In what sense and in what forms has *fragility* been a tool and a companion in this research journey?

The evolution of NACMM into Platform HARAKAT can be seen as an example of self-reflexive collaborative praxis. Implemented through a process of constant problem-solving and readaptation the methodology adopted could be understood as an approximation to participatory action research. Although I am aware that the process this research has evolved from differs from this methodology, due to its relevance to this project in the following I will try to put some light on the interconnections between both.

As described by Hannula, Suoranta and Vaden in *Artistic research. Theories, Methods, Practices* (2005): 'Action research is not a uniform tradition. In a collaborative case study, the interaction between the researcher and the community studied is not clearly defined as temporally or thematically but is permanent or at least long term. Essential in the permanence is the active researcher-researched interaction, as well as a commitment to specific commonly agreed goals. The researcher acts not alone but with others searching for solutions' (2005, p. 90). Hannula, Suoranta and Vaden's definition of Action Research is inspired by Paulo Freire's groundbreaking proposals in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1972). As Freire explains, participatory action research is a reflective process of progressive problem-solving led by individuals, working with others in teams or as part of a community of practice to improve the way they address issues. Participatory action research challenges traditional research

[50] Platform HARAKAT is made up of a core team of four curators, activists and designers based in Barcelona, who establish collaborations with cultural spaces and creative individuals from the Arab region through commissions and exchange projects. Examples of collaborations include the ones established by Platform HARAKAT team with Blitz (Malta) and Central Saint Martins School of Art and Design (UK) through *Tranformer#*; Gudran and Nassim el Raqs Festival (Alexandria) through *The Art of Getting Lost*; and Marsad Drâa and Le 18 (Morocco) through *Beyond Qafila Thania*. For each of the platform's projects, the team works on a particular funding strategy. The main organisations that have supported Platform HARAKAT's projects are South Med CV, SGSAH and the Organisme de Suport de les Iniciatives Culturals de la Generalitat de Catalunya (OSIC). Complete documentation of KIBRIT and Platform HARAKAT can be found in Annex 2 and 3 as well as on the platform's website. Platform HARAKAT [online] Available at: https://www.platformharakat.com/ [Accessed Day 16 August 2020].

approaches by moving beyond reflective knowledge created by outside experts and towards an active moment-to-moment process of theorisation, data collection and inquiry.
Central to the development of reflective theory is an interest in the integration of theory and practice and the conscious application of lessons learned from experience. Participatory action research stresses the fact that the process of constant readaptation through problem-solving does not have to come from the outside, but above all, it is made through the activation of the participants. In collaborative case studies, research and change are linked to each other. The goal is to respond to the project's participants' needs by means of self-reflection, self-evaluation, and practical deduction. In short, in line with Freire's proposal, Hannula, Suoranta and Vaden stress that 'research is understood as an open activity, where the person being researched is openly told the intention of the study, she is asked to cooperate, and there is veritably a striving to influence people's lives positively. One does not maintain a distance from the research object. On the contrary, one meddles with it' (2005, p.90).

Before paying attention to how reflexive ethnography and participatory action research have influenced NACMM's development, and in line with the argument made in the previous chapter, it is interesting to note how participatory action research, a method that is taken as a genuine decolonial approach to research practice, has been appropriated by Western academia and is now ingrained and promoted from within its domain. Indeed, in a recent interview for the publication *From globalizing towards decolonizing: art history and the politics of time*, Rolando Vazquez states that "while there is a lot of sensitive and productive critique, it seems that academia itself needs to reflect on its systems of knowledge production, to which, for one thing, acknowledgement of positionality and inherent biases or privileges, is not common practice. This is what seems to define the gap between globalizing and decolonizing" (2018, p.110). In other words, Vazquez understands positionality as a decolonial practice. However, what he fails to acknowledge is that Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* is one of the most widely cited books in social sciences academic papers worldwide (Green, 2016). As such, it is important to note how, even as Paulo Freire's participatory action research has come to be seen as fundamental to the decolonial theory corpus, his approach and propositions have become also fundamental to Western epistemology. Indeed, participatory action research — a method initially created to empower underrepresented or excluded communities, towards collaborative and creative positive change — is now widely accepted and applied as a methodology within the arts and humanities departments of Western academic institutions.

As a methodological framework, participatory action research was influential to NACMM's objective: to offer practical solutions and improvements within both the art residency as experience and as a research field by means of a dialogue with the network partners. Notice here that the values framing participatory action research — collaboration, transformation and

the usefulness of the research endeavour — are shared also by both the Islamic research principles and artistic research methods.

Participatory action research in the context of this project needs to be understood as part of the broader field of ethnographic methodologies. The extensive study carried out by Tony L. Whitehead in 2004 describes ethnography as the process in which the researcher studies a particular society. Contemporary ethnography is based almost entirely on fieldwork and requires the immersion of the researcher in the culture and everyday life of the people who are the subject of his or her study. Whitehead understands ethnography "as both a qualitative and quantitative methodology which adopts both classical and non-classical methods (...) As an ontological and epistemological approach to research, ethnography is dedicated to the study of cultural systems through holistic, flexible and creative process" (2004, p.7). In line with Whitehead's account, the collaborative development of NACMM has included field work, quantitative mapping, in depth interviews and data gathering. The holistic, flexible and creative process Whitehead talks about were applied in the context of the several projects developed as part of Platform HARAKAT. Indeed, through this platform, I had the opportunity to curate several residency programmes - in the case of *Beyond Qafila Thania*, a nomadic art residency in the southern Moroccan desert; and in *The Art of Getting Lost*, a residency as part of the Nassim el Raqs Festival in Alexandria. In addition, fieldwork was practiced by means of the several artist- and researcher-in-residence I participated in - namely, at Le18 (Marrakech), Les Glycines (Algiers) and ArtRue (Tunis). I have also completed several solitary sojourns at El Miracle Monastery (in inland Catalonia), at the CCDS_Centre Culturel et de Documentation Saharienne in Ghardaïa (South Algeria) and as part of the five months fellowship program awarded by Darat al Funun in Amman (Jordan).

These journeys are part of a key approach in the development of this project: to investigate the art residency phenomenon in North Africa and the Middle East by experiencing and testing the art residency model in different forms and from different perspectives. Through these journeys, narrative, intuitive and intimate renderings emerged as key methods for my project. In line with the Islamic research principles as proposed by Fatah Ahmed (2013) and the artistic research methods as described by Hannula, Suoranta and Vaden (2005), these experiences have allowed me to understand the value of embodied and collaborative research. Indeed, it has been by the application of these methods that I've acquired a better understanding of the contemporary landscape of the art residency in North Africa and the Middle East. Most importantly, the extensive field work and in depth interviews carried out through NACMM and Platform HARAKAT have been fundamental to make a selection of contemporary art residencies models operating in the region. This selection has been made

as a way to establish resonances between contemporary artistic and curatorial practices in the region and those that shape the heritage of journeying within Islamic traditions. This research aims at demonstrating that since the 9th century and until today art residencies, this heritage of journeying has shaped the relationship between mobility and knowledge within Arab and Islamic epistemologies and practices.

Due to their relevance and resonance with this journeying tradition, the contemporary art residency initiatives chosen to be part of *An event without its poem is an event that never happened* have been: The several journeys organised by Apartment 22 through the program Expeditions (2000) in the Moroccan Rif mountains, Spring Sessions and the nomadic residency program Wander and wonder (2017) throughout Jordan, l'Atelier de l'Observatoire Madrassa. (2017) and Le Cube's Travelling Narratives (2017-2018) taking place in various locations in the south Mediterranean, Ke'ch Collective's Laboratoire de la Mondialité (2016) in Marrakech, Darat al Funun Khalid Shoman Foundation Dissertation Fellowship in Amman, Le18's Kawkaw residency (2016) which brought together several artists from the Maghreb region, and Hammam Radio which took place in Berlin in 2020. As rendered in this research's portfolio, these initiatives are important for the Arab art residency proto-history proposed, because :

(1) They form the first narrative voice of our story, and
(2) They establish cross-temporal parallels with the key concepts and practices that have historically intertwined mobility and knowledge within Arab and Islamic epistemologies and practices.

The second voice is formed by several concepts and practices that link mobility and knowledge within Arab and Islamic epistemologies. The concepts selected are: The Rihla, the Siyaha, the Zawaya, the Majāli, the Hafalāts & Mirbads, the al-Rihla sifariya, the Hajj and the Harraga. I have arrived at selecting these specific spaces and practices as the outcome of field work and literature research. Fundamental resources for my investigations have been, for example, the Ottoman History podcasts[51] and Bint Battuta's online archives,[52] as well as in the books *Islam and Travel in the Middle Ages* by Houari Touati (2010); *Arab Art Histories. The Khalid Shoman Collection*, edited by Sarah Rogers, Eline van der Vlist, published in 2013 by The Khalid Shoman Foundation, Jessica Winegar's *Creative Reckonings. The politics of*

[51] Ottoman History podcast [online] Available at: http://www.ottomanhistorypodcast.com [Accessed: August 16, 2020].
[52] Bint Battuta [online] Available at: https://www.facebook.com/Bint-Battuta-626214237428186/?__tn__=%2Cd%2CP-R&eid=ARDSPPgrCXatWu2NRmZqP043lTGfDNfBOuozhmvUg8wmVnqpgXDEEjUSrbz3_Bc7t9OeEw5pmPds-LZn [Accessed Day 16 August 2020].

*Art and Culture in Contemporary Egypt (*2006); Katarzyna Pieprzak, *Imagined Museums: Art and Modernity in Postcolonial Morocco* (2010) and Mary Louise Pratt's *Imperial Eyes. Travel Writing and Transculturation* (1992). By digging in, dissecting and further investigating the anecdotes found within these studies, a chronographic account representing several practices linking knowledge and the journey throughout medieval Islam and modern Arab and Ottoman history has been created. The historic contextualization of these concepts and practices can be understood as forming the third voice of the speculative Arab art residency proto-history.

2.2. Inventive methods

In line with Whitehead's study on ethnography, the British anthropologist Marilyn Strathern underlines that "ethnography leads one to write against the way old conceptual apparatuses are forever discarded in favor of new ones" (2020). This section is dedicated to describe how through ethnographic work several inventive methods have been applied into my research. I am fully aware that as Celia Lury and Nina Wakeford state in *Inventive Methods: The Happening of the Social* (2014), this inventiveness "raises a number of concerns for academic and other researchers, including the problem of how to defend the value of the always relative existence of epistemic things and the special legitimacy ('rigour') and distinctiveness or not of disciplinary knowledge". However, as they also emphasis, such methods "enable us to acknowledge that we are in *media res*, in the middle of things, always already embedded in a situation, one both settled and unsettled" (2014 p.6). As we will see, the fragility embedded in being in the middle of things will become fundamental to understanding the experimental approach adopted in my research methodology.

As previously stated, in my methodological journey, two projects I've developed in the framework of Platform HARAKAT have been fundamental to elaborate these inventive methods: *The Art of Getting Lost* and *Beyond Qafila Thania.* Their contributions to my research are twofold. On the one hand, each inspires particular research methods, on the other, as part of these projects' creative outputs, several semi-fictional micro-stories and creative auto-ethnographic diaries have been created. These constitute the two other narrative voices that structure the proposed Arab art residency proto-history.

al-Khaban cartography and autoethnography

By means of NACMM's evolution into Platform HARAKAT, a critical approach to the cartographic endeavour and its visual representations has become fundamental for my research path. In the following section, I further explore this journey's significance by reflecting

upon critical cartography through what Sebastian Caquard and William Cartwright describe as post-representational cartography.

Caquard and Cartwright's text *Narrative Cartography: From Mapping Stories to the Narrative of Maps and Mapping* (2014) has been an essential guide in my exploration of post-representational cartography as a research method. For Caquard and Cartwright, this method is based on the idea that "maps are never finished, but are rather in a constant process of becoming. They come to life throughout the map-making process, as well as through their use in a specific context with a specific purpose. This processual positioning emphasises the importance of maps' production and consumption instead of focusing on the map as representation" (2014, p.9). Caquard and Cartwright see cartography as a medium that not only communicates spatial information but also empowers emotional journeys: "At a personal level, maps can serve as a therapeutic and healing process. While at a collective level, maps can contribute to leaving cartographic traces, making these experiences more visible and more tangible. The cartography of these stories can take the form of sketch maps of itineraries, of artistic representations of more personal and emotional dimensions, and online collaborative maps" (2014, p.3). In line with this conception of cartography, the act of mapping has to be understood not only as a tool for self-reflection but also as a political process of meaning-making. Indeed, since the 1990s, critical cartographers such as John Brian Harley (1992), Denis Wood (1992) and Jeremy Crampton (2005), to name just a few, have revealed the hidden stories of power and control embedded in historical and contemporary maps. Their deconstructionist endeavours enhance alternative mapping forms. Loaded with political messages, these alternative forms provide different ways of thinking about landscapes, territories and planning. This vigilant stance towards cartography and its impulse to represent is at the root of post-representational cartography. The evolution of NACMM, and particularly its development into KIBRIT and Platform HARAKAT, is an example of a journey that has challenged conventional mapping through the development of collaborative online maps[53]. To be sure, following Caquard and Cartwright perspectives, this research moved from mapping as data-gathering to cartography as a qualitative, creative, and intimate exercise.

The adoption of post-representational cartography, as presented by Caquard and Cartwright, can be seen as a logical conclusion to our journey into methodological analysis. However, the objective of this thesis is not to arrive at facile outcomes. *Moving Knowledges: Towards a*

[53] For further exploration on this matter please see: Catà Marlès, P. (2018) "Towards the post-Digital in the Humanities? NACMM and Platform HARAKAT as case studies". In: Nuria Rodríguez-Ortega (coord.). "Digital Humanities: societies, politicies and knowledge". Published at the peer-reviewed journal Artnodes. No. 22: 25-35. UOC. [online] Available at: http://dx.doi.org/10.7238/a.v0i22.3219 [Accessed: 16 August 2020]

speculative Arab art residency proto-history is rather driven by the impulse to move and displace the knowledge in which we find temporary comfort, by calling into question taken-for-granted assumptions. Indeed, Caquard and Cartwright's proposal describes the evolution of NACMM into Platform HARAKAT quite nicely. However, as I will argue, the novelty of post-representational cartography remains open to scrutiny. In fact, the early medieval Islamic practice of *al-Khaban* resonates strongly in post-representational cartography's propositions. One important difference between the two traditions is that Islamic scholars practiced the transgression of mapping as a qualitative endeavour one thousand years earlier. In the following pages, I will outline the epistemic resonances between *al-Khaban* and post-representational cartographies in order to position *al-Khaban cartography* as one of the fundamental methods that has nourished this Dissertation and the portfolio.

If we look back to the emergence of cartography within Islamic cultures, *al-Khaban* is an essential reference. The term *al-Khaban* describes the form in which travel narratives came into the biographical genre in early medieval Islam. As argued by Travis Zadeh in *Mapping frontiers across Medieval Islam: Geography, translation and the Abbasid Empire* (2011), "as a crafted, generic form within the broader sphere of belletristic discourse, there are several common techniques which Khabar-narratives deploy to convey the impression of factuality. These forms are direct speech, dialogue, and attention to detail" (2011, p. 180). Such travel narratives often included factual descriptions (*Akhbar*) of the journey and the sights seen, as well as an account of the conversations (*Kitab*) with people met along the way. The dramatic character of the report, with its focus on both description and dialogue, speaks to a discrete set of discursive expectations. The framework of the *Khabar*-narrative, with its attention to detail and emphasis on eyewitness authority, offers a window onto the past; it is designed to maintain an intrinsic truth-value. However, as a discursive form bound to an established body of literary strategies and conventions, the *Khabar*-narrative affirms its authenticity, while continually flirting with the tension it produces between the factual and the fictional. Complementing Zadeh's insights, in *Islam and Travel in the Middle Ages* (2010), H. Touati argues that the *al-Khaban* can be seen as practices that challenge scientific geography. A case in point is the work of 9th Century polymath Jãhiz, author of *The Book of Capital Cities.* Touati summarises Jãhiz's approach to cartography as follows: "firstly, the voyage had to be inserted within an anthropology of the gaze. Secondly, he sketched out a framework of interpretation of relationships between men, society and the ecological milieu, and thirdly, he proposed literary motifs for the new field of geography through creative narration" (2010, p.114). Taking the above into consideration, the resonances between *al-Khaban narratives* and Caquard and Cartwright's post-representational cartography become striking.

Consequently, this affirms that, all the way back in the 9th Century, *al-Khaban* anticipated some of the methodological concerns of post-representational cartography.

An example of the practical implementation of *al-Khaban* cartography can be found in *The Art of Getting Lost*[54]*,* one of the projects developed by Platform HARAKAT. Taking Alexandria and Barcelona as research sites, the aim of *The Art of Getting Lost* was to reflect upon the experiences of the city from a historical and a contemporary perspective. Through artistic, research and curatorial practices, the project engaged in several debates in which dominant narratives of the urban landscape could be challenged by mining the potential of disorientation, and practising the art of getting lost. Curated by Platform HARAKAT, the project took the form of a collaboration between CeRCCa, based in Barcelona, and Gudran, a cultural space based in Alexandria. It proposed an interdisciplinary research-based approach, to challenge the mainstream narratives of both cities — namely branding and gentrification in the case of Barcelona; and the rhetoric of nostalgia in Alexandria's postcolonial and contemporary discourses — through the development of alternative histories and stories — namely, Situationist approaches and conceptual detourings to reflect on the transgression of touristification and decay. In Alexandria, the collaboration developed through experimental field research, art residencies, a seminar and a final exhibition, which was organised as part of the Nassim el Raqs Festival. Together with the works of the participants of the seminar, the exhibition included the projects created by Ro Caminal and Marta Vallejo as well as my own: five experimental short videos gathered under the title *Nostalgia Shorts*[55]. As previously mentioned, a selection of these audio-visual exercises are included in the portfolio. In Barcelona, the project was articulated through critical *dérives* and film screenings curated by the Egyptian film critic Ali al Adawi. These activities culminated in *Detours*, the project's final publication, which contained commissioned texts as well as documentation of the artistic projects created through the year-long project. My contribution to the final publication was *The Lonely Flaneur,* three texts presented along with photo documentation[56].

Next, I'll show how in the speculative Arab art residency proto-history proposed as part of this research, the adoption of alternative cartographic exercises empowered artistic representations of personal and emotional dimensions. Indeed, while moving from

[54] The project was made possible thanks to the support in terms of funding, networking and capacity building provided by Tandem Shaml#. Co-funded by the EU, Tandem Shaml supports experimental and lasting collaborations between artists and curators from the Arab region and Europe. For one year the selected cultural actors work in tandem and as a group: being part of a larger network and sharing good practice through a series of networking events and workshops.

[55] Taking as starting point the idea of the impossibility of knowing, through video, photo and sound, 'Nostalgia shorts' proposed a collage of experiences of Alexandria with the aim to reflect upon nostalgia and memory. *Nostalgia Shorts* is composed be the following five audio-visual poems*: Missing Alexandria* (03:45, 2017), *Arcades* (02:38, 2017), *Unpacking History* (03:10, 2017)*, Seven Girls (02:15, 2017)* and *They are Clueless* (04:09, 2017).

[56] Complete documentation of *The Art of Getting Lost* can be found in Annex 4.

collaborative to more intimate practices, in the development of *The Art of Getting Lost* and also *Beyond Qafila Thania*, I felt the need to leave, recollect and document the traces of my journey. These traces have taken the form of creative prose, video essays, poems and drawings. This constellation of artefacts forms an experimental and personal cartography of the research process which, in methodological terms, can be defined as creative auto-ethnography.

In parallel to the ethnographic study of art residencies in North Africa and the Middle East, the adoption of reflexive ethnography and auto-ethnography as methods respond to the interest of this project in placing not only others but also myself as subject of the research endeavour. In *Reflexive Ethnography: A Guide to Researching Selves and Others*, Charlotte Aull Davies affirms that reflexive ethnography similarly to auto-ethnography is "a turning back on oneself, a process of self-reference" (1999, p. 4). As noted by Smith-Shank and Keifer-Boyd in their paper *Auto-ethnography and Arts-based Research* “rather than a portrait of the other (person, group, culture), the difference is that the researcher is constructing a portrait of the self’ (2007). Likewise for Deborah Reed-Danahay “auto-ethnography’s main contribution to understandings of human experience is that it troubles the persistent dichotomies of insider versus outsider, distance and familiarity, objective observer versus participant, and individual versus culture” (1997). For Reed-Danahay, the rise of auto-ethnography as a research method is representative of a specific zeitgeist, one inaugurated by post-modernity and the deconstruction of grand narratives including the self. Interestingly enough, following Reed-Danahay analysis, the link between certain aspects of post-modernity and non-dualistic approaches to decoloniality can be drawn here if we stress on the political agency of auto-ethnography as referring to “instances in which colonized subjects undertake to represent themselves in ways that engage with the colonizer’s own terms. If ethnographic texts are a means by which Europeans represent to themselves their (usually subjugated) others, auto-ethnographic texts are those the others construct in response to or in dialogue with those metropolitan representations” (2000). The central tenet of auto-ethnography makes explicit a commitment to a self-reflexive way of knowing. While its etymological connection to ethnography might lead us to suspect that this approach is grounded in the field of anthropology, this is not the case. Auto-ethnography straddles a wide range of cultural disciplines and interests and encompasses a variety of theoretical and methodological approaches including direct observation of daily behaviour, unearthing of local beliefs, perception and recording of life history and in-depth interviewing. While being aware about the dangers of self-indulgence, over-descriptiveness, and over-dependence on memories, for educational anthropologist Heewon Chang, ‘auto-ethnography differs from more performance-oriented or descriptive accounts, such as autobiographies and memoirs,

because the interpretation of self is situated within broader sociocultural dynamics' (2014). As such, it enables researchers to examine their relationship to a range of others.

Taking auto-ethnography as a conceptual framework in my project, I adopt arts-based research as a vehicle to acknowledge the power of creative practices to interrogate, inform and challenge more traditional systems of linear text-based investigation. In doing so, this research aim is to advocate for the artistic process as a legitimate source of data gathering. Following Smith-Shank and Keifer-Boyd "arts-based research places art at the base of the study. This type of inquiry often involves interpretation of literature, interviews, journals, poetic writings and diaries and is perceived as seamless relationships between knowing, doing and making. In many scholarly circles, this is a controversial methodology, called to task for its unreliability and often idiosyncratic and vague processes" (2007). While the controversy is accepted, the central tenet of auto-ethnography makes explicit the delight in the challenges and potentials of this methodology and continue to develop processes that broaden traditional research paradigms by placing the relationship between knower and known at the centre of the knowledge created moving beyond positivist assumptions. Creativity then is taken as the embodiment of arts-based research through direct experience where creative practices illuminate ideas or concepts while reporting about people, artworks, or places.

It is within this methodological framework that both accessibility to portable technology in order to capture and edit visual material and an impulse to document everydayness in a low-tech and amateur fashion have been essential in the making of most of the visual essays presented in the Arab art residency proto-history presented in this research's portfolio. The decision to give a central role to the creative auto-ethnographic diaries seeks to destabilise the very meaning of the written account by emphasising the importance of artistic practice within research. Establishing an ambiguous but fruitful dialogue with the *Khabar*-narratives, the adoption of creative auto-ethnography responds to the desire to intuitively investigate into the realities and atmospheres I have encountered in my journeys as a mobile researcher. As such, this research became a journey towards understanding what is exterior to the researcher, but also a path of self-discovery.

Curatorial al-Barzaj and anecdotization

In methodological terms, Curatorial al-Barzaj is grounded in the following concepts: the idea of the curatorial as the curious encounter with fragility, as described in Raqs Media Collective's *Curating from the Trapeze* (2019) and the *Barzaj*, or the in-between state, as experienced by the 12th century Islamic scholar and mystic Ibn Arabî in *The Secrets of*

Voyaging (Kitab al-Isfār 'an natā'ij al-asfār). Although these are the two main grounding texts, in the practice of Curatorial al-Barzaj, I also fundamentally employ anecdotization, as described by Mike Michael in *Inventive Methods: The Happening of the Social* (2014).

In this section, I will first describe the curatorial and *Barzaj* in order to articulate their interconnection and propose an approximate definition of Curatorial al-Barzaj. Secondly, I will describe the practical experience from which the Curatorial al-Barzaj sprang: the voyage and reflections conducted as part of Platform HARAKAT's project *Beyond Qafila Thania.* And thirdly, I will propose anecdotization as the methodological tool from which the several semi-fictional micro-stories included in this research's portfolio were created.

Raqs Media Collective's experimental essay *On the Curatorial from the Trapeze* (2013), offers one of the most exciting and at the same time diffuse definitions of 'the Curatorial.' Their definition is articulated in the form of twenty-six concepts. For its originality and highly poetic quality, I will quote from their text in what follows. While I am aware of the dangers that arise when taking apart such an elaborate proposal, due to the relevance to my argument I have selected five of the twenty-six concepts for further exploration. These concepts are: Advantage, boundary, collision, xeriscape and umbra.

> 'Advantage: a position or condition of benefit.
> The curatorial has an advantage, an edge over other sensibilities. Its ability to privilege a precarious balance of forces and to deploy a soaring chorus of terms, images and ideas in the interests of combating any effort at aesthetic or epistemic stability gives it the advantage.
>
> Boundary: limit, frontier, perimeter.
> To be conscious of a limit, or frontier, is to be reminded at the same time of a horizon. Curatorial stasis produces an imprisoning boundary of frames and references. However, the extension of curatorial curiosity into 'dead zones' may yet awaken new forms of artistic life.
>
> Collision: an instance of two or more entities striking against each other.
> We come face to face with the 'curatorial' whenever we witness within ourselves or around us the collision of artistic forms. (…) Contact and confrontation, in art, as in life, are an occasion for the multiplication of misunderstandings, for epidemics of meaning.
>
> Xeriscape: a dry garden, using little or no irrigation.
> How to irrigate a mine-field? First, make do with pebbles, driftwood and shrapnel. Second, appreciate the tenacity of weeds and other rude forms of life. Wait for rain. Third, learn to sustain life without life-support systems.
>
> Umbra: a shadow.

> Whenever a curatorial undertaking seeks to scrutinise the crimes of the world, it automatically creates its own shadow by coming between the light of truth and the surface it seeks to illuminate. The higher the urge to produce a forensic demonstration, the thicker is the parabola of uncertainty. Occasionally, one could try the opposite procedure. Curating for the shadows, the light source can be inferred, forensically, in absentia' (2013, p.15)

Advantage, boundary, collision, xeriscape and umbra: these are some of the guiding forces and approaches that, for Raqs Media Collective, define 'the Curatorial'. They are the same ones that I have adapted to my purposes.

From these definitions, one can start comprehending what the curatorial might be, but what about the concept of Barzaj? To define this complex Islamic concept, I will not search in speculative futures but in mystic pasts. Many of the founding tenets of Barzaj stem from an understanding of the word ambivalence. According to Pablo Beneito, an expert on the medieval Sufi Ibn Arabî and professor at the University of Murcia, ambivalence might be generally considered predominantly negative, as lacking clarity. Ambivalence is often associated with error and anomaly. However, such beliefs do not take into account their enabling and clarifying aspects. 'In contrast, the Islamic practice of Sufism recovered the positive sense of ambivalence while restoring its metaphysical dimension. In the mystical discourse of the Sufis of the spiritual lineage of Ibn Arabî, ambivalence is not presented as a deficiency or an obstacle to understanding. On the contrary, to know something thoroughly, it is necessary to perceive it in all its ambivalence' (Beneito, 2019). Thus, ambivalence is, in turn, the foundation of the balance between interiority and exteriority, between difference and identity, proximity and remoteness, absolute knowledge and its dynamics. It is a condition in which knowledge is updated continuously. This synthesis of dialectical opposites, or *coincidentia oppositorum*, is called *Barzaj*. Imagination, from any perspective, is by definition *Barzaj*. From the perspective of Sufism, ambivalence is presented as a paradox in the face of dualistic reductive perceptions. This ambivalence is confusing to the extent that discursive reason operates in a binary way. Discursive reason accompanies the contemplative in this experience, but is subject to direct testimony and intuition. As stressed by Ibn Arabî, *The Quran,* the holy book of Islam, incessantly invites us to interpret the portentous signs, which in Arabic are known as the *âyât,* through the transition from the perceptible appearance of the sign to its meaning. In the relentless hermeneutical journey of the cognitive process, the corporeal joins the spiritual, the sensible links to the intelligible.

In light of the above definitions, what exactly is being proposed by Curatorial al-Barzaj*?* To answer this question, I first go back to the idea of the journey. There are several ways to

approach a journey; one is to plan it as a lonely pilgrimage, another is to organise it with others as a nomadic trip, and a third is to be open to companionship by adopting a flaneuristic attitude to the research path. In all of them, consciously or unconsciously, the study of that which appears should be taken into consideration. To consider something is to care for it. As is well known but too often forgotten, in Ancient Greek, the meanings of the verbs 'to care' and 'to cure' are intimately related. Curatorial al-Barzaj takes this etymological encounter as a starting point: its proposal is precisely to go back to the concept's root and original meaning. The 'curatorial' in the Curatorial al-Barzaj equation is expressed as a disruption of received knowledge, a necessary task if one is to evade linear paths. The journey is a path from which epistemological assertion is put on stand-by while empowering the liminal spaces within the boundary of what is known and what is not known. In this collision of contexts, misunderstandings and alternative readings of what surrounds us become an opportunity to embrace that which is discarded or seen as unfertile within the xeriscape of knowledge production.

When one comes back from a journey, an account of the experience is often demanded, being that of your friends or family or as part of field-work or research funding requirements. It is because of this demand that the traveller may need to structure and build a coherent discourse: that is, to *take care of* the discourse, to curate it. The use of the word 'coherence' here is of particular relevance, as it arguably connects with the idea of disciplining. Indeed, coherence-making and disciplining are deeply related, as the construction of rigorous knowledge demands a disciplining of the methods and outcomes of our journey. This brings us to the defining dichotomy of Curatorial al-Barzaj: disciplining (the light) versus concealing (the umbra). What is it that we want to show, and what we will leave in the shadows? To whom and for what purpose is a coherent discourse structured and built? Curatorial al-Barzaj is about negotiating the thin line between disciplining and concealing; the line that brings specific knowledge to light and leaves other forms in secret.

As Feyerabend argues in *Against Method: Outline of an Anarchistic Theory of Knowledge* (1975), 'Our surroundings, the entire physical universe included, are not simply given. They respond to our actions and ideas. Theories and principles must, therefore, be used with care as most of them exclude specifics and personal matters; speaking bluntly, we can say that they are superficial and inhumane' (1975, p.103). In line with Feyerabend's approach, the concepts Curatorial al-Barzaj and anecdotization aim to stress the contentious nature of classifying research actions into methods. In that sense, Curatorial al-Barzaj moves freely within the realm of interpretation and anecdotal inventiveness. Curatorial al-Barzaj can also be understood as an attitude, a way of relating differently to what surrounds us and to what we

do. Because of its particularity, it can be said that Curatorial al-Barzaj does not exist as a method — or, better said, it has not yet been validated as such. Like al-Kabhan cartography, Curatorial al-Barzaj can be situated within the theory and practice of the mobility of knowledge(s), while further stressing the importance of epistemological resonance. Following Lury and Wakeford's definition of inventiveness in the Introduction of *Inventive Methods: The Happening of the Social* (2014), the inventiveness in Curatorial al-Barzaj can be also understood as a "configuration that is both fixed and fluid: fixity is an effect of reiterative enactments and fluidity articulates the inherent multiplicity of objects in ways that facilitate their travel" (2014 p.7). In this sense, Curatorial al-Barzaj relates to knowledge, to movement and to moving knowledge(s). However, instead of doing so through a consistent, linear, chronological trajectory, it focuses on the step, the slow consciousness of that which appears, that which is anecdotal.
Furthermore, as in the case of the third methodological approach described in the next section, Curatorial al-Barzaj engages also with the evolving field of the post- and non-human research, aligning with Lynn Margulis's (1988) Donna Haraway's (2016) work and their proposal to abandon the myth of human supremacy and reconnect with our many earthly companions. As shown in the following pages, one of the anecdotes that has inspired the articulation of Curatorial *al-Barzaj* is Ayat or the impossibility of perception which is included in *An event without its poem is an event that never happened*.

An example of Curatorial al-Barzaj in practice is *Beyond Qafila Thania,* a project that resulted from the collaboration between CeRCCa and the Moroccan organisations Marsad Drâa and Le 18. *Beyond Qafila Thania* responded to both the ethos of Platform HARAKAT — that is, research on the mobility of bodies, knowledge(s) and practices in the Euro-Mediterranean region — as well as to the speculative art residency history presented in my portfolio. Bringing together researchers in architecture, sociology and the visual arts who are actively engaged in exploring the cultural, social and geopolitical space of the Sahara desert, the project traced the stories of the old caravans, searching to understand their influence in current day cultures and societies. *Beyond Qafila Thania* was designed to provide an inspiring framework for participants to exchange and enhance their ongoing research projects, which focused on topics such as contemporary nomad culture and architecture, current immigration routes, the history of the slave trade, race issues and trans-Saharan book trade. The participating artists and researchers acting as coordinators of *Beyond Qafila Thania* were: Amado Alfadni from Sudan, M'barek Bouhchichi from Morocco and Heidi Vogels from the Netherlands, with Carlos Perez, director of Marsad Drâa, and myself.
The first part of the project was the gathering of textual, visual and audio materials related to trans-Saharan trade. This archival exercise was followed by a field trip in the Draa Valley in

Southern Morocco, a crucial location in the trans-Saharan trade routes. In tandem with site visits with local experts, recording of interviews and group readings, the participants shared research notes on water politics and caravan routes during the field trip, critically exploring issues connected to the slave trade, Draawa social contracts, the valley's political ecology, indigenous and Islamic knowledge, colonial legacies and black radicalism. After the field trip, one of the most challenging stages of *Beyond Qafila Thania* was the 200km, ten-day-long walking residency between Akka and Tiznit, approximately 200 km through the southern Moroccan desert along a segment of the old trans-Saharan caravan trade route linking Marrakech with Timbuktu. The nomadic residency, which took place from the 30th October to 10th November 2017, brought together *Beyond Qafila Thania*'s team and our four guides: Said, Mohammed, Sjeigh and
Abdul[57].
Although several artefacts were produced, *Beyond Qafila Thania* was not intended to be a production-based residency — nor was it housed in a building or organised in an institutional framework. The project was, in fact, a way to de-centre artistic production as well as the methodologies that are usually located in the realm of contemporary art, to bring them into a space of in-betweenness away from conceptual and methodological comfort zones. This characteristic of *Beyond Qafila Thania* became, in itself, a catalyst for new ways of understanding our surroundings, our group dynamics and ourselves. As we experienced scarcity and exhaustion, *Beyond Qafila Thania* brought us to question our position in what we were doing. Furthermore, the in-between space we inhabited opened the door to understand knowledge production differently, all the while embracing the limitations of perception as a way of perceiving in itself. The desert showed us its traces, its shadows and its remains, as the tools from where to start understanding that these subtle signs, the desert's *âyâts,* were at the root of its very nature. As such, peripheries, fragments and remains evolved into forms that effectively enhanced knowledge. As Cecilia Lury and Nina Wakeford describe, 'the inventiveness of a method is to do with its ability to generate its own boundary conditions, to organize itself in a changing relation to a changing context. Put very simply, this is a matter of exclusion and inclusion, closedness and openness to context, to act as a semi-permeable boundary, to operate unspeakable frontiers' (2014 p.7).

How does Curatorial al-Barzaj relate to the proposal of a speculative proto-history of Arab art residencies? The relationship between Curatorial al-Barzaj*,* its practical implementation through *Beyond Qafila Thania*, and the proposed new approach to the history of art

[57] The creative auto-ethnographic diaries and semi-fictional micro-stories inspired by *Beyond Qafila Thania* were presented in the *In between wells — Reloaded* exhibition at Le 18 and as part of the conference *Trading Places? Empathy in Material Culture and Critical Methodologies,* organised by the Centre for Cultural, Literary and Postcolonial Studies at SOAS, London.# Complete documentation of *Beyond Qafila Thania* can be found in Annex 5.

residencies is multifaceted and complex. In short, Curatorial al-Barzaj, as a method, permeates this research in terms of its content but also as a particular posture and attitude. Content-wise, several of the creations developed as a personal account of my experience during *Beyond Qafila Thania* are dialogically inserted in the proposed alternative history. Spanning poetry, photography, video and drawing*,* these creations are compiled under the title *Ayat or the impossibility of perception*. Likewise, the conceptual framework proposed through Curatorial al-Barzaj has given the necessary ground from which to propose a speculative Arab proto-history. This ground is not only theoretical — that is, based on archival and literature research — but also practical, in that *Beyond Qafila Thania* was based on two of the practices that interlinks knowledge and the journey and which is specific to Islamic epistemology. I am talking about the *Rihla* - which refers to both a journey and the written account of that journey, or travelogue within the islamic tradition - and the *Siayah* practiced by early medieval mystics seeking fundamental alterity in solitude.

In tight dialogue with the written account of my journey through auto-ethnographic diaries, the semi-fictional micro-narratives included in *An event without its poem is an event that never happened* aim to retrace historical accounts inspired by real events and personages, thus enhancing alternative genealogies through anecdotization. The starting point on the development of these anecdotes was not other than different micro-histories of real characters that did practice both the *Rihla* and the *Siayah.* The use of semi-fictional micro-narratives as a method and voice is inspired by how in the second chapter of *Inventive Methods. The Happening of the Social* (2014), Mike Michael defends the use of anecdotes as a method in the doing of social scientific research. As Michael states “unlike the auto-ethnographic approach, the anecdote is useful for explicitly incorporating the performativity of research – i.e. the way that research is not a mere reflection of something (e.g. one’s experiences in relation to social or cultural process) out there, but is instrumental in, and a feature of, the ‘making of out theres’. Thus the anecdote is part of the ‘historical record’ and as it circulates and shapes the ways in which particular incidents come to be understood” (2014 p. 27). In that sense, it could be said that differing from auto-ethnographic accounts, the anecdote and the semi-fictional micro-narratives presented in my portfolio serve as a means for tracing the co-emergence of research, researcher and researched. As Michael claims, “given that anecdotes entail stories about incidents or events or persons, they can be placed within a lineage of social scientific methods that is broadly ethnographic. The personal dimension of the anecdote suggests that its closest methodological relative is probably auto-ethnography” (2014 p. 28). Michael’s argument becomes of particular relevance as it further supports the stance from which to enhance fragility as a method. The author states that to propose anecdote as a method of inquiry implies the questioning of the very categories of doing social

science. For him “auto-ethnography seems to operate within the confines of standard categories of social and cultural analysis. Thus, the self is seen to emerge through tacit processes of differentiation from, and/or identification with, groups indexed in terms of class, ethnicity or gender. By comparison, anecdotalization can be thought of as a methodological tactic that, in keeping with de Certeau’s (1984) version of tactic, at once occupies and overflows, reacts to and momentarily escapes, upholds and undermines, the confines and particular productivities of (the) discipline. Thus, the analytic categories typical for a particular area of social scientific research can come to be interrogated” (2014, p. 28). It is particularly this interrogation, this state in-between which links anecdotization and what is proposed from Curatorial al-Barzaj.

The semi-fictional micro-narratives included in *An event without its poem is an event that never happened* can hardly be seen as anecdotes though, as they are constructed not from personal experiences but from the semi-fictionalization of the experience of others. In doing so, I am challenging the clear line too often traced between sameness and otherness. Moving from anecdote to anecdotization, Michael states that “anecdotization has both a topological and a nomadic flavour. In terms of the topological, it brings together what might once have seemed distant and disconnected: past episodes that are marginal and trivial illuminate contemporary moments of critical reflection and reorientation, and contemporary concerns render what had long been uninteresting past moments full of relevance” (2014, p. 33). The nomadic, in Michael’s understanding, serves to emphasize what is processual, iterative, emergent and, crucially changeable in anecdotalization. It is by endorsing Michael’s idea of anecdotalization that *An event without its poem is an event that never happened* pushes the idea of anecdote further while exploring how it might play a more interesting role in relation to methodology[58].

Experimental genealogy and relationality

In line with Curatorial al-Barzaj, experimental genealogy as a method of inquiry is understood here as a playful approach to the restrictions imposed by linear approaches of time and space. In adopting it as a method, I am inspired by the conceptual proposals developed by the French philosopher Michel Foucault in *The Order of Discourse* (1971) and the comparative analysis articulated by the Moroccan intellectual Abdallah Laroui in *Islam et*

[58] The micro-stories presented in the portfolio adopt semi-fictional approaches drawn by own experiences. Of the many stories that I created and the many others I sketched out but had to leave aside, I have selected 11 to be part of the alternative history proposed in the portfolio.

modernité (1988). Although proposed decades ago, Foucault's and Laroui's genealogical inventiveness are still relevant for the purpose of this research. Alongside that, contemporary actor-network theories as proposed by Bruno Latour and Marilyn Strathern's relationality are also essential references for this study. Before moving on to describe Foucault's and Laroui's approach, I'll first introduce what Latour and Strathern mean by relationality.

Although Latour's actor-network theory might seem somehow obscure or difficult to grasp, Christian Papilloud offers a clarifying definition of his proposal in *Bruno Latour and Relational Sociology* (2018). As Papilloud summarizes, Latour's concept of association refers to the symmetry principle from which he defends the idea of a relativistic and pluralist sociological conception of society. This understanding of society is based on the idea that the social realm is formed by networked actors composed by a mixture of heterogeneous humans and non-humans, the associations of which lead to a collectivity. Referencing Latour, Papilloud affirms that "The unpredictability of associations is directly connected with the heterogeneity of the associated elements and the associations themselves" (2018). Because associations are unforeseeable, new combinations of associations can occur at any time, unexpectedly, and consequently, they lead to inequality between constituted associations, in other words, to asymmetries. "Associations are at the heart of the networks that represent society as a relational and movable reality" (2018). In line with Latour's theory, although approached through a more accessible and creative language, Marilyn Strathern's *Relations: An Anthropological Account* (2020) brings the reader to more accessible lands. For Strathern, relational means indicating relation(s) or relationship which concern the way in which two or more people or things are connected. It would follow, therefore, that relationality means 'being related to', 'in a relationship', in short, 'connectedness'. What intrigues Strathern is "the consistent parallel, the repeated echo, between intellectual propagation and procreative acts, between knowledge and kinship" (1995). Strathern's words strongly resonate with the theories put forward by Lynn Margulis (1988) and Donna Haraway (2016) as well as to the intent of this project. Consequently, further investigation of these lineages is one of the many directions in which my research will further unfold.

For now, I'd like to focus here on Abdallah Laroui's cross-cultural and trans-historical intellectual legacies between Arab and European traditions, and Foucault's active challenge to hegemony in established historical accounts. Their work will be the one informing my experimental genealogy as a method of inquiry.

In the concluding pages of his essay, *The Order of Discourse* (1971), Foucault's view on discursive praxis is based on two main areas of inquiry: critical analysis and genealogy.

Foucault's proposed analysis is organised in two methodological sets: the critical section and the genealogical. He states, 'On the one hand, the 'critical' section puts into practice the principle of reversal: trying to grasp the forms of exclusion, of limitation, and of appropriation showing how they are formed, in response to what needs, how they have been modified and displaced, what constraint have effectively exerted and to what extent they have been evaded (…). As for the genealogical aspect, it will concern the active formation of discourse and the limits of its control' (1981, p.71). In short, according to Foucault, 'the critical task will be to analyse the processes of rarefaction, but also of regrouping and unification of discourses; genealogy will study their formation, as once dispersed, discontinuous, and regular' (1981, p.71). In fact, for Foucault these two tasks are never wholly separable: 'the difference between the critical and the genealogical enterprise is not so much a difference of object or domain, but of point of attack, perspective and delimitation' (1981, p.70). In this research, the critical approach proposed by Foucault is adopted in the form of a speculative genealogy, a perspective that transgresses the current chronological delimitation of the art residency history. This project should be understood as enhancing the Foucauldian conception of apparatus, "a thoroughly heterogeneous ensemble consisting of discourses, institutions, architectural forms, scientific statements, philosophical, moral, philanthropic propositions – in short the said as much as the unsaid" (1980, p.194) as a system of relations that can be established between these elements. Furthermore, through the speculative Arab art residency I've presented in Chapter three and the portfolio aims at challenging historical perspective by establishing multiple dialogues between the semi-fictional and the real, embedding at the same time the emotional and the experiential in cross-temporal and cross-geographical landscapes. The several inventive methods adopted to do so "recognize specificity by addressing and including 'heres' and 'nows', but only as they are constituted in relation to 'theres' and 'thens'" (Lury and Wakeford, 2014 p.7).

Following a similar trajectory to Foucault's, the Moroccan intellectual Abdallah Laroui elaborates an inspiring approach to research based on comparative genealogical analysis. Laroui is a Moroccan philosopher and historian of international influence who has devoted his work to questioning modernity in its different facets from a Marxist orientation. It is, however, necessary to relativise Laroui's adherence to Marxism, since it is not the ideology that interests him but rather its method of analysis. Abdallah Laroui belongs to a group of writers who navigate easily between the disciplines of history and anthropology. He is not an intellectual locked into theoretical abstraction. Rather, he has approached research on literature and art as a field of experimentation. For Laroui, 'the contemporary historian's work is above all critical; it presupposes a given to criticise; this given is the story. History, in the strict sense, begins with the criticism of the story' (Abdallah Laroui, *Esquisses historiques*, Centre Culturel

Arabe, p.7.). In *Islam et modernité,* Laroui presents criticism as the most appropriate weapon with which to fight historical stereotypes. Indeed, in *Islam et modernité* Laroui establishes critical dialogues between the 12th- century traveller and thinker Ibn Khaldun and the 16th - century Italian diplomat and philosopher Niccolò Machiavelli. He also traces the influences and convergences between fundamental Salafist Islam and Enlightenment humanism. In doing so, Laroui focuses his efforts on constructing epistemological resonances between intellectual traditions, using anachronic encounters that obliterate time and space in favour of dialogue. In short, Laroui's project focuses on the philosophy of history; that is to say, a philosophy that proposes to criticise history to make the individual an active actor of change, and not a consumer of the ideas of the past. In other words, what Laroui proposes is to go from commentary to experience, indeed, to be inventive.

The methodological proposals of experimental genealogy translate into the foregoing speculative Arab art residency proto-history in at least two ways. On the one hand, the proactive questioning of the assumptions cemented by the current art residency historiography [59] is seen as the starting point for the process of unfolding the mechanisms by which a particular discourse has been constructed and promoted. On the other hand, as proposed by Foucault, experimental genealogy as an area of research is seen as consequential to critical study. The genealogical mood Foucault describes with the term 'happy positivism' (1981, p.71) is expressed in the context of this research as an opportunity to create spaces of enunciation that transgress normative historical structures, towards the broader goal of investigating cross-temporal and cross-geographical Islamic and Arab intellectual legacies. In that sense, the privileging of the instant and the subject (through autoethnographic diaries, semi-fictional micro-stories and visual essays) are key to this research endeavour.

Although this project is profoundly influenced by Foucault's and Laroui's insights, as well as the ones of Latour, Margulis, Haraway and Strathern, it does not purport to develop the monumental task they propose. Rather, it aims to trace possible resonances through an experimental genealogy of the art residency model through relationality. To do so, our journey creatively documents modes of thinking and practicing that are related to knowledge and mobility, but that forsake the clear division between the European and Arab cultural landscapes.

[59] See *Art Artist-in-Residence history* in Transartists [online] Available at: https://www.transartists.org/residency-history [Accessed Day 15 May 2021] and the Policy handbook on artists' residencies' Annex 1. *Artists' residencies – a short essay on their origins and development*. European Commission (2014) [online] Available at: https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/e6febc40-05f1-11e6-b713-01aa75ed71a1 [Accessed Day 15 May 2021].

As a means to better understand the interrelatedness of the multiple materials and proposals made above, in Annex 6, I provide a graphic representation of the interconnection between the outputs resulting from fieldwork and literature research and the conceptual frameworks that structure this proto-history of the Arab art residency. The graphic representation is divided into six categories, namely: *Collaborative networks* (red), *projects* (orange), *auto-ethnographic diaries* (brown), video essays (blue), *concepts* (black), *residencies* (gray) and *texts* (green). *Collaborative networks* (NACMM and Platform HARAKAT) work as umbrellas of the practice-led *projects* developed between 2016 and 2019, namely *The Art of Getting Lost* and *Beyond Qafila Thania*. These are then linked to their formats (*residencies)* and their outcomes (*auto-ethnographic diaries* and *audio-visual essays)*. I've included other creative texts and audio-visual material created during my fieldwork in Morocco, Algeria, Egypt and Catalonia to these outputs. The last association is between the *auto-ethnographic diaries* and *audio-visual essays* and the conceptual framework. The *auto-ethnographic diaries* and *audio-visual essays* resulting from my practice-based research are structured and linked to the main concepts that emerged through my research into the literature on Arab and Islamic epistemologies concerning mobility and knowledge. These concepts are then used in the portfolio to ground an experimental genealogy that confronts the limits of the current art residency discourse. Complementing Annex 6, Annex 7 provides a chronology expanding from the 8th to the 20th centuries and linking the auto-ethnographic diaries, the semi-fictional micro-stories and the conceptual frameworks.

2.3. On fragility and methodology

Taking the different methodological proposals made above, how does this research advocate for fragility as a constituent part of methodology? To better understand fragility as a fundamental aspect of research methods, I propose to look not so much at what fragility means but at what it does not mean. In other words, to define fragility I will make use not of its synonyms but of its antonyms. In methodological terms, I understand fragility as a way of doing research that is not firm, hard or rigid, but that is delicate, easily breakable and always ready to adapt in order to address the manifold contingencies that arise from the research process. In other words, fragility refers to methods that are not ready-made, fixed and hegemonic but responsive to the context, the emotions and the particular circumstances of each situation. As argued by Weaver and Snaza 'nowadays we are witnessing and participating in the resurgence of critical approaches addressing the relationship between knowledge and power. A new science is nowadays unfolding, one that begins with a refusal of the neat subject/object division and its directly imperialist politics. In different and not necessarily compatible ways, theoretical developments in science studies, posthumanism, and

object-oriented ontology are eroding the conceptual and practical ability to differentiate subjects from objects" (2017, p.12). In line with Latour, Margulis, Haraway and Strathern's proposals, what is emerging today, Weaver and Snaza argue, "is a science of embeddedness, of risky attunement to the more-than-human world, where research cannot rely on prefabricated methods to guarantee its validity but must, instead, wrestle with how to best listen to the world" (2017, p.12). This unreliability on prefabricated methods is precisely the starting point to define the several fragilities I have encountered and endorsed through my research journey.

Fragility 1: Retrospectivity

Following the proposal made by Weaver and Snaza in *Against Methodocentrism in Educational Research,* "the belief that methods must be selected from existing options and assembled before approaching the objects of study is not only a form of bad science but is also deeply implicated in anthropocentric and colonialist politics" (2017, p.1). Weaver and Snaza are arguing that we don't always have to have our methods in place before we start but that we might find them as we conduct research. In line with Weaver and Snaza, I want to argue that this retrospective quality places, in certain research contexts, the practice of a determined method in an unstable position, one that is not assertive and pre-determined, but fragile.

That was certainly the case of NACMM's development into Platform HARAKAT. The synergies that took place between the project implementation and the conceptualization of the methods adopted as requested in research practices was done in retrospect. NACMM's development into Platform HARAKAT responded not so much to the pre-methodological need to gather data in the field but most importantly to dialogical ethics. Due to academic requirements, this process was then conceptualized as participatory action research, making the methodological impulse a fragile endeavour.

Fragility 2: Methodological heritages

Even though, as suggested by Weaver and Snaza, the debates on the fragility of the research endeavour is seen as a novel contribution to the research practice, I want to argue that there is nothing new in these approximations. Indeed, an example to support my claim is how fragility as a methodological mood was also recognized by medieval Islamic scholars. As the mystic and thinker Ibn Arabi (1165-1240) enigmatically put forward in *The Secrets of*

Voyaging / Kitab Al-Isfar 'an Nata 'Ij Al-Asfar back in the 12th - century, “the impossibility of perception is a perception in itself” (2008, p. 33). Following Ibn Arabi, I argue that a fragile method requires a process of humbling in which the researcher lowers his/her voice so as to be able to hear, learn and develop the research process in a dialogical manner[60]. A fragile method, then, is one in which knowing itself is fragile, a process in which the impossibility of perception becomes a perception in itself. As such, fragility centers the idea that the outcomes of the research endeavour is never finished, stable or fixed, but is rather in constant motion, always evolving and ready to be questioned. While providing several study cases, this project’s objective has been to advocate for epistemic resonances while temptatively proposing intellectual heritage hybridizations through methodology.

To be clear one of the persistent questions that has conditioned my project relates to context-specificity in methodology. If the aim of my research is to propose an alternative history of the art residency by investigating the practices developed by Arab scholars in medieval Islam, how can those practices inform also my research methdology? To answer this question, we will turn back to Curatorial al-Barzaj. In terms of research attitude, Curatorial al-Barzaj has been fundamental inasmuch as it has inspired the transgression of taken-for-granted assumptions while awakening new forms of artistic life, pushing against aesthetic or epistemic stability and the multiplication of misunderstandings they occasion, in favour of an *epidemic of meaning*, that is a crisis of representation that require new approaches and speculations from which the hegemonic discourse is made fragile. This tentative condition is at the core of my proposal. By tracing geneological correlations between contemporary research methods and those practiced by Islamic men of letters in Medieval Islam, I have wanted to stress on the fragility of method’s historiography, one that in my understanding is still grounded on euro-centric prespectives. As Lury and Wakeford underline “there is much to be gained from putting histories of social scientific methods in relation to those of other traditions' (2014 p.7).

Fragility 3: Speculative thinking

Continuing with the argument made above, *Moving Knowledges: Towards a speculative Arab art residency proto-history* is a fragile project, as what it tries to do is to blur the boundaries between sameness and otherness. In other words, this project proposes to *provincialise sameness* while at the same time advocating for the articulation of *other* art residency histories. In order to do so, I propose that thinking about art residencies and their

[60] As previously seen, what is today NACMM is the outcome of a dialogical encounter from which, by lowering my voice and adapting my initial objectives to the needs expressed by NACMM partners, two new projects have unfolded: KIBRIT and Platform HARAKAT.

histories through the prism of speculation can open new ways of imagining alternative pasts. Indeed, being open to discontinuity and the '*what ifs*' means asking ourselves if it is possible to retool the value embedded in the stories of our truths. As Foucault stresses, "discourses have to be understood as discontinuous practices which criss-cross, and sometimes juxtapose, but that can also ignore and exclude" (1981, p 53). By speculating on the history of the art residency, this research seeks to contradict traditional modes of conceiving the history of art and its institutions. Consequently, this project's objective is to speculatively propose models for understanding the relationship between mobility and knowledge from within excluded geopolitical zones, all the while challenging repeated and commonly accepted stories. To do so, the paths we have chosen to follow require us to retire a certain lexicon, or at least put it on stand-by. In short, in the alternative history proposed, the traditional understanding of art — as it appears in the art residency nomenclature — will be called into question.

In *Abandoning Art in the Name of Art: Transpositional Logic in artistic research* (2018), Esa Kirkkopelto states that, since the emergence of neoliberal economies, "artworks have been controlled, marketed, and evaluated as cultural products' while 'artists are subjected to the same as the producers of artworks" (2018, p.32). She goes on to state that, "instead of works serving as the means for people to reach the freedom the works attest by their existence, they become instruments for an opposing purpose" (2018, p.33) . In her understanding, "art has become an integral part of people's everyday lives in present-day bourgeois societies in the form of commodity culture, entertainment, social media, and subcultures, but not in the emancipatory sense meant by the avant-gardists" (2018, p.34). In line with Kirkkopelto's remarks, in *The Invention of Art: A Cultural History,* Larry Shiner proposes that "the modern system of art is not an essence or a fate but something we have made. Art, as we have generally understood it, is a European invention barely two hundred years old" (2003, p. 3). Shiner presents fine art as a social construction; it has not always existed, and it could just as well disappear. Indeed, in keeping with the avant-gardist legacies of anti-representation and anti-art, the field of artistic research proposes new ways of considering the creative act. These approaches see the artistic practices as a path, or a method, and not as an object that needs to be made and marketed.[61] Following Shiner's original proposal, Kirkkopelto asserts that "liberating art from art may sound paradoxical to some ears but it has always been a fundamental ethical and personal option among artists". Whereas the avant-garde "failed in its attempt to overcome the difference between art and life" he believes "it nevertheless managed worldwide to revolutionise ways of art-making" (2018, p. 35). To conclude this argumentation, Kirkkopelto asks: "'Would it be possible to conceive artistic research as a

[61] For a further insight on the topic, see Martin Herbert's latest book, *Tell Them I Said No* (Sternberg Press, 2016), a collection of essays about 'various artists who have withdrawn from the art world or adopted an antagonistic position toward its mechanisms.'

logical continuation of avant-gardist tendencies of the past century?" (2018, p.36). Can we consider artistic research a way of liberating the avant-garde from its deadlock? That is, of bringing its appropriation to a halt and pursuing its agenda through new means? By 'liberating' the art residency context from art as object, and instead focusing on the broader field of art as research, this project proposes new modes of understanding the possible pasts of the art residency by creatively narrating one of the phenomenon's possible proto-histories. In fact, many other genealogies linking knowledge and the journey need to be researched if we are to open the historiography of art residencies as framed by Transartists[62] and the European Commission[63]. As shown in this research, the notion of fragility opens new paths to expand the definition of art in the context of the art residency, and to explore its possible histories in generous and adventurous ways. Seen from the perspective of the expert in Islamic and/or Arab studies, the Arab art residency proto-history presented here might look sketchy, sometimes even misleading. As previously pointed out, however, this project intends to transgress assertive conclusions. To that aim, it is deliberately personal, quite off the page, purely speculative, a first attempt in need of further investigation.

Conclusion

Much like Chapter 1, *Towards a fragile method* has unfolded in the form of a journey. In this case, however, more than moving through conceptual analysis, this journey has initially been chronological to move then to the lands of fragile and inventive methods.

In the first part of *Towards a fragile method*, I've demonstrated how the act of mapping, even if it is done in a collaborative manner, often becomes fragile. This is because it is conducted in the spirit of *fixing* knowledge, that is, without taking into consideration the realities and issues affecting the territories mapped nor the emotion and knowledge ingrained in particular geographical contexts. Through the process in which NACMM evolved into Platform HARAKAT, I have wanted to center the relevance of holistic ethnography and participatory action research as fundamental methods that have allowed for the transgression of mapping. It has been through these positions that three of the narrative voices that shape my portfolio, *An event without its poem is an event that never happened,* have been created.

[62] See Artist-in-Residence history in Transartists [online] Available at: https://www.transartists.org/residency-history [Accessed Day 15 May 2021].
[63] See the Policy handbook on artists' residencies' Annex 1. *Artists' residencies – a short essay on their origins and development*. European Commission (2014) [online] Available at: https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/e6febc40-05f1-11e6-b713-01aa75ed71a1 [Accessed Day 15 May 2021].

In the second part of this chapter, *Towards a fragile method*, I have sought to stress the importance of endorsing epistemic resonances in methodological terms. With this positioning, three inventive methods have been proposed. These are *al-Khaban* cartography and auto-ethnography, Curatorial al-Barzaj and anechdotization and the conceptual dialogues existing between experimental genealogy and relationality. These three inventive methods share the dialogical encounter between methodological traditions. This exercise has not been exempt from complexity and risk-taking. As such, it has to be understood as a first attempt at challenging conventional methodological narratives. Besides proposing novel approximations to methodology, the application of these methods have been fundamental when formulating the two other voices included in the portfolio: semi-fictional micro-narratives and creative auto-ethnographic diaries.

In the last section of this chapter, I then further illustrated fragility as an important part of the research endeavour. Adopting my own research as a study case, I have tried to explain three cases in which I consider that fragility has shaped my experience. In short, these several fragilities translate into the issue of retrospectivity in methods conceptualization, the importance to acknowledge and enhance not-knowing, the proposal to address methodological western-centrism, and the potentials of speculative thinking.

3. A speculative Arab art residency proto-history

‘An event without its poem is an event that never happened’

Amazigh proverb

Introduction

The speculative Arab art residency proto-history proposed as part of this research is presented in two formats. One follows a conventional textual structure (Chapter 3.2: Towards a new historiography) and the other is presented as digital space (Portfolio: *An event without its poem is an event that never happened*).

In the first section of this chapter (*3.1. Deconstructing the current discourse*) I propose to deconstruct the genealogy that currently structures the history of art residencies, in view of revealing the processes of exclusion and appropriation that have shaped it. In doing so, I will seek to demonstrate that the prevailing discourse is not only Euro-centric but conceptually limiting. It is precisely the question of *who* is being excluded from this discourse that has guided me in developing what I have called a speculative Arab art residency proto-history.

The second and third sections of this chapter *(3.2. Towards a new historiography* and *3.3 Epilogue)* presents the transcription of *Exhaustion and exhuberance* and the *Epilogue,* the first and last sections of *An event without its poem is an event that never happened*. By transcribing only the text and stripping it from the multiple creative outputs that enhance it in the portfolio, the aim is to make evident the limits of standardized textual formats while stressing the importance of artistic research and practice when narrating events. Nonetheless, the transcription becomes useful to start understanding the use of the five narrative voices: (1) Contemporary study cases; (2) Key concepts and (3) their historical context; (4) semi-fictional micro-narratives; and (5) creative auto-ethnographic diaries. As it will become clear through the reading of this subchapter, the term *proto-history* is adopted to underline the fact that this alternative history of the art residency phenomenon ends where the established historical narrative currently starts. In short, the *proto-* in the context of this research refers to a time when art residencies did not yet exist but where spaces that articulated the relationship between knowledge, creativity and mobility nonetheless flourished.

3.1. Deconstructing the current discourse

Transartists, the most popular and influential international art residency network today, presents the following historical account on its website: “The first wave of artist-in-residence programmes as we still know them, arose around 1900. In the United Kingdom and the United States, art-loving benefactors regarded the offering of guest studios to individual artists as a new kind of romantic patronage. In the same period, artists themselves settled in the countryside and collectively tried to realise their artistic ideas”[64]. The conviction that art residencies evolve from the history of artistic patronage and from the art colony of the turn of the 20th century is further legitimised by the *Policy handbook on artists' residencies*, published in 2004 by a working group of experts on artists’ residencies from EU member states. In Annex 1 of this handbook, titled *Artists’ residencies — a short essay on their origins and development,* it states: *'*artists’ residencies in Europe arose in the late 19th and early 20th century. Grassroots artists’ colonies came into existence, where artists came together in the summertime to work outdoors and research, develop and realise their artistic ideas. Top-down initiatives came from art-loving benefactors. They offered secluded residencies, where artists, according to romantic patronage, were able to stay and work.*'*[65] Although this history is being revisited in contemporary debates on the topic, I want to argue that this revision has not yet been articulated in such a way as to disrupt the mainstream account. In order to support this claim, I will review the scarce literature that exists on the history of art residencies.

We have already seen how Transartists consider 1900s artistic patronage and art colonies as the origin of the art residency genealogy. Judging from the few texts included in Transartists’ otherwise impressive database, it becomes clear that the genealogy proposed is just one of the several attempts to narrate the history of art residencies. In one of the texts included in the database, Marta Gracia’s *Artist in Residence Programmes in Spain: a short introduction* (2009),[66] the established history is challenged. Instead of grounding its history in the 19th century, Gracia points out that the French Academy in Rome, created in 1666, already functioned as an art residency. Similarly, in the introduction to the latest publication on art residencies, titled *Contemporary Artist Residencies: Reclaiming Time and Space,* edited by

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[64] *Art residency history* in Transartis [online] Available at: https://www.transartists.org/residency-history [Accessed Day 16 August 2020].

[65] *Policy handbook on artists' residencies*' Annex 1. *Artists’ residencies – a short essay on their origins and development.* European Commission (2014)

[66] Gracia, M. *Artist residence programmes in Spain. A short introduction* in Transartis [online] Available at: https://www.transartists.org/article/artist-residence-programmes-spain-short-introduction [Accessed Day 16 August 2020].

Taru Elfving and Irmeli Kokko (2019), Jean-Baptiste Joly (Director of Akademie Schloss Solitude) further supports this expanded genealogy by stressing that “artist residency centres as gathering locations for artists are similar to the 16th - century academies in Italy. The original mission and spirit of the academies was liberal — their task was to give artists freedom from professional guilds and the restrictions of craftsmanship” (2019, p. 15). In the same vein, the aforementioned study by the EU commission of experts on art residencies also proposes that 'artists have always been travelling to search for new assignments, to learn new skills and techniques from other ‘master’ artists, to be informed about the latest developments in the arts. The numerous artists that travelled to Italy during the Renaissance clearly support this claim.'[67] Based on these accounts, we can affirm that, although it is generally accepted that a direct affiliation exists between 1900s art patronage and art colonies and contemporary art residencies, it is also agreed that residencies’ origin can be traced back to the art academies in the 16th century. That being said, it is important to notice that the existing material on the history of art residencies is limited to these commentaries. Their titles speak to their summary nature: Marta Gracia’s text is ‘a short introduction;’ Jean-Baptiste Joly’s contribution is ‘a brief history’ and the *Policy handbook on artists' residencies* features a ‘brief essay’. Consequently, the existing literature is not intended to build a consistent narrative on the history of art residencies. These accounts are just what they claim to be: brief histories, short essays or introductions to the topic. Indeed, as Taru Elfving and Irmeli Kokko state, ”'there is no consistent report available on the background and history of artist residencies” (2019, p.14).

Beyond highlighting the scarcity of the literature on the history of art residencies, this research aims to suggest that the few accounts that do exist pose conceptual problems. These problems arise both in the accounts previously mentioned and also in a set of texts that, although less visible, are quite more challenging.

The first of these challenges relates to genealogy. A key characteristic of genealogies is that the objects or lifes they link have characteristics in common. In *Feminist sweepstakes: Materialist thoughts on (hyper)mobility and the work of ethics,* S. Larose defines the 21st - century art residency as a provider of “time and space given to thinking and (net) working, often process or research-oriented, with or without the pressure of a material outcome” (2018). This definition contrasts sharply with the mainstream genealogy, that is the one developed by Transartists and the EU expert group on art residencies, insofar as the production of an art piece was mandatory or desirable. In *Setting the Record Straight:*

[67] *Policy handbook on artists' residencies*' Annex 1. *Artists’ residencies – a short essay on their origins and development.* (2014) European Commission.

Towards a More Nuanced Conversation on Residencies and Capital, M. Kocache defines patronage as commissions in which “the artist was a mere executor in a hierarchical class-based commodity exchange arrangement” (2012). In the case of the bottom-up model, the art colony, most artists who escaped to the countryside in search of inspiration held attitudes that could be likened to nostalgia. As defined by Elfving and Kokko, “through rural nostalgia, art colonies evolved as a counter-reaction to urbanisation and industrialisation and constituted the ideological framework for artist villages in the countryside” (2019, p.16). In short, the mainstream genealogy presents the commission and production of aesthetic objects mediated by a privileged elite and artists’ nostalgia towards pre-industrial landscapes as the foundations of the art residency.

In light of the above considerations, the question I want to pose is the following: What is the link between artistic production enhanced by patronage and nostalgia, on the one hand, and the contemporary model of the art residency on the other? Why are we presuming a genealogical dialogue between them? An answer to this question would be that they both offer time and space for an artist to create. But, is this actually the case? What if, by obliterating the production of artistic objects, we placed the attention on the journey in search of knowledge instead? This is, after all, another fundamental aspect of the art residency.

In the process of thinking differently, articulating the ‘*what ifs*’ and speculatively imagining other possible pasts, the second challenge to the current narrative is stressed in Annika Waenerberg’s *Glimpses from the history of travel among artists* (2005). This short but inspiring proposition remains fundamental for this research proposal. In the opening lines of Waenerberg’s text we can read the following statement: “From today**’**s perspective, travel among artists appears poles apart from the period when the artist**’**s profession was still a novelty (...) The fact that artists travel for the sake of their art has been ingrained so deeply that it is now taken for granted. However, artistic research aims to uncover that which lays behind self-evident truths, and continues to pose the question: why have artists travelled?” (2005. p.5). For Waenerberg, the historical motives behind artistic traveling are to be found in the practice of the religious pilgrimage, the Grand Tour, the *Bildungsreise* (i.e., the journey for educational purposes), and what she names as ‘*the escape to Arcadia.’* The relevance of Waenerberg’s proposal resides in the way in which she unambiguously links the journey with the interests of artists and non-artists alike. Pilgrims, Grand Tourists and ‘escapists’ are all put side by side with art practitioners. Aware of this tricky positioning, Waenerberg states that, although 'I will not be concentrating on the travel or residency periods of today**’**s artists, my proposal may provide some background for reviewing the present situation' (2005. p.6). As

will become clear, Waenerberg's approach resonates strongly with the speculative Arab art residency proto-history developed here.

In line with Waenerberg, the arts activist and curator Moukhtar Kocache has stressed that contemporary art residencies are essentially about experimentation, research and learning — regardless of their mission, purpose or nature. Indeed, in the time elapsed since the emergence of 19th - century patronage and art colonies, art residencies have in many ways evolved. Nowadays, art residencies take multiple forms. They can be retreats, or rather focus on exchange; they can be site-specific, studio or community-based; they can adopt formats that focus on production and training; they can be regionally specific or international in scope; they can be organised by formal and informal artist-run spaces, by official state-run bodies or be part of initiatives with a diplomatic scope. The heterogeneity of the art residency phenomenon is paramount.[68] In any case, and in each of these formats and historical moments, "developments in artist residencies from, say, patron-initiated painting studios to artist-run colonies or science and commerce based research programmes, did not take place in a vacuum but rather happened in tandem with specific ideological, political and historical moments in Europe and North America where these residencies flourished" (Kocache, 2012). Indeed, contemporarily with the days of colonial expansionism, alterity, the exotic, the diverse — or, in one word, the *other* — was and still is a key factor in the art residency's global expansion. This expansion exemplifies the deep imbrications between the mobility of subjects in space and the economic, symbolic and political elements that define today's cognitive capitalism, one centered around the accumulation of immaterial assets.

Even as heterogeneity continues to mark the art residency model, several efforts have been made to complement and critically articulate a common ground. The text by Pascal Gielen titled *Time and Space to Create and to Be Human: A Brief Chronotope of Residencies* (2019) is an attempt to do so, and one that becomes quite enlightening for our purpose. Challenging, or better said complementing, the current genealogy, Pascal Gielen classifies the huge

[68] Some examples of this heterogeneity are: the Brisbane Airport Artist Residency, where the artists spend a certain time documenting their experience at an airport; the National Science Foundation's residency in the Antarctic where artists propose projects to increase awareness and appreciation of the scientific research and education happening in the region; The Container Artist Residency which takes place in commercial cargo ships traveling across the world; the San Francisco Solid Waste Transfer and Recycling Center, a residency programme that gives artists access to discarded materials from the community to work on; Outlandia's residency, which takes place in a tiny, idyllic tree house, just three meters wide in the isolated Scottish Highlands; Rabbit Island residency, happening in an untouched ecosystem in Lake Superior (Michigan, U.S.A) with no studios or production facilities *per se*; the Horse and Art residency in Barnag (Hungary) where artists interested in riding or riders interested in art develop connections between equine studies and visual arts; the National Parks Art Foundation (NPAF) which places over 50 artists in residencies each year within national parks across the U.S.A; the residencies at the SETI (Search for Extraterrestrial Intelligence) Institute in Northern California; Religious Beliefs, a residency where the project Faber in Catalonia hosts for a month professionals, researchers and artists whose work builds on religion and believes, either at the scientific, historical or artistic level; The Rijksakademie which offers one year residencies with the goal of providing space for research, experiment and production; or the digital, spatial, textual, social, natural and economic long term residencies offered by Schloß Solitude.

spectrum of art residency models in four categories, namely *My chronotope*, *Network chronotope*, *Alter-Chronotope* and *Embedded Chronotope*. In the *My chronotope* model, residencies attempt to simulate the time and space conditions of the artist's studio. Like the hermit, the artist looks for inspiration through ascesis and introspection. This type of residency is grounded in the belief that creation has to come from our deepest self and that talent is something one is born with. In the *Network chronotope* model, the situation is not characterised by introspection but rather by exhibitionism. Being an artist is, after all, not just about seeing but just as much about being seen. In short, whereas the *My Chronotope* model stresses results from the fear of not finding enough creativity in one's innermost self within the allotted time, in the *Network Chronotope* stress comes from the fear that others may not discover this creativity in the artist in time. In the third model proposed by Gielen, the *Alter-chronotope,* time and space are primarily defined by content: "Here the residents literally look for inspiration outside themselves. Time is swallowed up by an interest in and fascination for a thing, a skill, a natural or cultural phenomenon" (2019, p.46). In other words, space is defined by the proximity of something else, and time by the relation to that thing: for example, the time one needs to master a certain skill, gain a scientific insight, or build a contact with a certain social group. The artist "does not expect to find this inspiration within themselves,' as in the *My Chronotope* model, 'but notably outside themselves, in scientific knowledge, in a social issue, or in a convenient skill" (2019, p.47). Finally, in the last category, the *Embedded Chronotope*, the inspiration found is permanently invested in the space provided by the residency and goes way beyond the artistic domain. The residency, in this case, hardly serves to build an artistic career, but it does provide a way to be fully immersed in a society and its natural surroundings. Here, art coincides with life itself. Gielen concludes that: 'roughly speaking, we can say that the nineteenth-century art world focused on the painting or sculpture, on the artistic product. In the twentieth century, this artistic product was defined by (self-)reflection and the discursive framing of the work. Perhaps the twenty-first century is open to the permanently practising artist. The artist as the lifelong resident of the whole wide world.' (2019, p. 48). Gielen's classification successfully gives order to the overwhelming eclecticism of contemporary art residencies, all the while providing a sketch of their history. His taxonomy is instructional and edifying. The only inaccuracy, in my view, is that his approach falls into historical positivism while undermining the potential of speculating on other possible pasts. Indeed, the argument in this dissertation is that the innovative formats art residencies have been adopting since the start of the 21st century might not be as novel as we might think.

By focusing our gaze on the relationship between knowledge and the journey in Arab intellectual genealogies predating the 19th century, this project sheds light on overlooked

actors, places and moments, while at the same time collapsing linear understandings of time and static pre-conceptions of space. In short, this research argues that the innovative art residency model developed by Schloß Solitude under the directorship of Jean-Baptiste Joly, to name just one example, and Gielen's art residency classification have much to do with the practices of early medieval Arab and Islamic scholars than with the models typically proposed as a historical point of departure, that is 19th century Western art patronage and art colonies. In the following pages and the portfolio, I will propose that contemporary models' far-reaching resonances with Arab and Islamic epistemologies provide a rich and fruitful point of departure to articulate other-than euro-centric art residency histories.

3.2. Towards a new historiography

'This slow man may turn out to be a guardian of the social equilibrium, protecting peace and sanity by preventing restless performers like you from changing things for the worse'

Verwoert, J (2008) *Exhaustion et exhuberance. A pamphlet for the exhibition Sheffield 08: Yes No and Other Options*

The Great Forgetfulness (Semi-fictional micro-narrative)

Damascus,
May 20, 677

Abd-Allah[69] arrives in Damascus from Basra on a clear and sunny day at the end of spring 677.

Although traditionally inhabited by Eastern Orthodox and Monophysites, over the last decades the city of Damascus has become home to a community of Muslims from Mecca, Medina, and the Syrian desert. They have in turn made the new capital of the Umayyad caliphate an important centre of Islamic, Christian and Aramaic thought. In the different *halaqahs* that are hosted throughout the city, long and intense debates on theology, epistemology and the nature of the 'ilm[70] are daily held.

Sitting in one of the *halaqahs*, together with his followers, Abd-Allah proclaims with a grave voice:

"A time will come in which every passing year will be more miserable than the one before it".

[69] Abd-Allah Ibn Abbas (d.687) was the cousin of Prophet Mohamed and one of the early Qur'an scholars.
[70] Arabic term for knowledge

The atmosphere has become tense. Abd-Allah raises his head, looks at each of the scholars in turn, and affirms:

“And I am not speaking of a year less fertile than another or of a sovereign worse than another, but of your scholars, your pious men, and your doctors, who will depart, one after the other, and who you will not be able to replace”. (Touati, 2010, p.26)

The imminent disappearance of the ‘ilm produces an anxiety that grips the city like a truth of life-or-death importance — afflicting not only the circle of disciples, but scholars as well as at the highest level of the state. For its impending death recalls the irremediable eclipse of knowledge after the departure of the Prophet Mohammed, peace be upon him. How to avoid the danger of loss that hovers over the ilm? What can be done to preserve this knowledge from corruption? How to transmit it in its original purity? These are the urgent questions the Islamic men of letters are faced with. In the midst of this confusion, Abd-Allah states:

“He who does not memorise any part from the Qur'an, he is like the ruined house”. (2010, p.26)

It is this lone statement that, in the coming centuries, will shape a new tradition. Indeed, from that moment on, memorisation and genealogy will become the fundamental groundings of knowledge, justifying its transmission through direct affiliation.

Indeed, because the entire Muslim Middle Ages succumbed to the ghost of the great forgetfulness, the scholars of the time cultivated a veritable cult of memory. In this widespread mobilisation, the institution of the voyage came to be seen as a shield against forgetfulness and as a guide for genealogical structures: candidates for learning who hoped to become inscribed within a prestigious genealogy of scholarship were advised to connect with the most renowned masters of their time. Those found in the great urban centers or in lonesome landscapes.

Furthermore knowledge of language came to hold utmost importance. The common belief was that the language that remained closest to the revelation was that of the Bedouins: spoken in remote lands, it hadn't yet been corrupted. The mission of gathering the language from the mouth of the Bedouins became an obsession amongst men of letters of the time. It is in this context that hearing and direct observation came to be recognised in medieval Islam as the

ultimate sources of sense-based knowledge. And so, the pursuit of such knowledge justified the practice of the journey into the desert.

The adoption of the journey as a method for rigorous study and as a guarantee of genealogical prestige evolved in parallel with the appearance of the book as a repository of knowledge. The coexistence of the journey and the book preoccupied some, however. In the heated discussions that grew within scholarly circles, there was a strong tension between literacy and orality. The debate focused on whether the book could replace the master and function as the depository of his authority. Opponents of the book as a didactic and scientific tool also feared that its broad socialisation could actually threaten the principle of the voyage: with books available, scholars could learn from the written word and would not have to travel to the original oral source. The book and the desert thus became masters of uncertainty. Of the two, it was paradoxically the desert that turned out to be the better guide. This is why, in several scholars' writings, the desert is much more than a mere background for the travelling experience: indeed, it takes on the status of a highly important character.

Faced with this dilemma, Abd-Allah stated:

"The journey and the master is the one that should continue to reign supreme, as the books do not speak for themselves but always require an authority to enable them to speak" (2010, p.26)

Although all those reunited affirmed in approval, Abd-Allah's arguments were demonstrated to be irrelevant. Soon after his death, the book emerged from its marginality, supported by a growing state-supported bibliophilia. And so, contrary to what was feared, the cycle of travelling was, in fact, further enlarged as the international market for books grew. Before departing to his permanent retreat in the Saudi city of at-Ta'ifon, on the slopes of the Sarawat Mountains, Abd-Allah turns his head and looks upon his beloved city for the last time. Damascus seems busy and lively, unaware of his affliction and of the great forgetfulness he sees approaching.

The *rihla* (Concept definition)

Our story starts at the threshold of the existence of Islam, the late 7th century in the Christian calendar, when the *rihla,* or travelling as a method of acquiring and documenting knowledge, expands as a Medieval Islamic practice. Over the course of the 8th and 9th centuries, the *rihla* further developed around the *halaqahs*, the first study circles that were

constituted in the larger urban centres. Such circles brought together several generations of scholars whose sole preoccupation was to search out, collect and compare traditions by travelling from one region to another in the Muslim world.

The *rihla* differs from other travelling traditions in one fundamental aspect. In Islam, travel and the discourse that travel produced did not draw their meaning from a historical or anthropological relationship with the other. Rather than deriving from a hermeneutics of otherness, meaning emerged from an exegetic construction of the same. The scholars' obsession with travelling had little to do with superstition, nostalgia or tradition. Instead, it became a matter of method, helping to define a geographically and emotionally delimited space: *dar al-Islam*, the house of Islam. In Muslim culture, the *rihla* is often valued for its integrating effects. While the pilgrimage or *hajj* led the pilgrim to Mecca and Medina, the search for knowledge brought men of letters not only to the esteemed places of Islamic teaching, such as Cairo or Fez, but also to faraway desert lands and isolated mountain communities. These men of letters often spent weeks in close contact with remote societies, uniting them with the wider association of the faithful (*the umma*). The fact that Arabic as a common language rapidly spread throughout *dar al-Islam* greatly facilitated the exchange of knowledge and tradition.

Through the *rihla,* the *raḥḥālas,* the globetrotters of the age, embraced at least two distinct paradigms: the paradigm of exile and return, and the paradigm of the voyage as text or '*Ajā'ib*, whose primary purpose was to entertain the reader regardless of factual truth. Linked to both the narratives of exile and return and the *Ajā'ib* literary genre, an alternative way to acquire and transmit knowledge arose. This was the *wijada.* The root of the word *wijada*, formed by the consonants w, j, and d, is resonant of the Arabic words for discovery and invention. And, although they were seen with suspicion by traditional scholars, discovery and invention became central concepts in the descriptions of the Bedouins made by younger Islamic travellers from the urban cultural hotspots. For these scholars, 'the Bedouin — as remote bearers of pure language — had a natural 'authenticity', exactitude of thought, and a subtle intelligence' (2010, p.61). In the 9th century, these were the characteristics that were attributed to the ideal portrait of the nomadic Arab which, framed through exoticism, was widely shared and promoted amongst urban men of letters. This ideal was short-lived, though: a century later, it had already been dismissed. Indeed, by the 10th century, 'the sojourn in the desert lost consistency and became less appealing to the aesthetic tastes of the men of letters of the big cities. As time went by, the desert no longer seemed the conservatory of the Arabic language, nor were the Bedouins seen as its depository.' (2010, p.61). And so, the sojourn in the desert metamorphosed from the desired expedition into a lazy and nostalgic gesture that was no

longer possible because of the Bedouins themselves*:* 'Corrupted by mixing with peasants, city dwellers, and non-Arabs, the inhabitants of the desert eventually brought on the irremediable loss of their linguistic paradise.' (2010, p.61). There was no point in travelling to document a language that had lost its authenticity*.* What had once been admired as the *gharib al-lugha,* the rare and obscure words used by Bedouins, had been lost forever. Hence, after being used for decades as informants, through an intense activity of enquiry and documentation, the Bedouin communities that had previously been portrayed as exotic transmitters, found themselves neglected. After a short-lived fascination, soon the urban scholarly idealisation of the rural and the remote came to be replaced by nostalgia for an imagined Arcadian past.

L'appartement 22 Expeditions and Rif Residencies (Contemporary study case)

As for the *raḥḥālas,* the expedition as a method to achieve knowledge is at the core of L'appartement 22 and its long term programs *Expeditions* and *Rif Residencies.* The first such space in Morocco, L'appartement 22 has since inspired a number of artist-run spaces and collectives. From its first exhibition in October 2002, L'appartement 22 has consistently featured challenging and exciting contemporary arts programming, to international acclaim. Its artist residencies, workshops, lectures, symposia, film and video screenings, and exhibitions resonate in Rabat, throughout the country, and abroad. Through tactical curatorial practice, Abdellah Karroum, its founder, has created a dynamic art space that engages the cityscape, blurring the boundaries between public and private space, creating new discursive approaches.

L'appartement 22 was designed by Abdellah Karroum back in the 2000 as a response to one of his central preoccupations: the exhibition, as concept and praxis. For him, the concept of the exhibition fundamentally rests on the idea of an outward movement, geared toward encounter and discovery. As Karroum states: 'The movement from exhibition to expedition is in my mind the path to take to understand the function of art, and its possible autonomy, within Maghrabian societies.' (Pieprzak 2010, p.196).

Resonating with the journey of 9th - century *raḥḥālas,* L'appartment 22's first expedition took place in a remote community, an Amazigh village in the Rif region. Between June and July of 2000, Abdellah Karroum, Younès Rahmoun, and Jean-Paul Thibeau rented two rooms in a local family's house and used the flat area over a water tank for their creative projects and

discussions. As Karroum explains, the point was not to educate villagers about art nor was it to turn them into spectators. Rather, the aim of the temporary residency in the Amazigh community was to invite locals and artists to engage in exchange and discussions about life and the meaning of the creative act. The project was repeated in 2001. This time, however, the expedition took place in various marketplaces in the Atlas Mountains. The artists set up a little white tent in each community in which they resided for several days or weeks and held open discussions with market-goers. What are new media in art? Is oral contact a new medium? These were the main questions that fuelled the discussions between the 'explorers' and the local communities they encountered. As Karroum notes: 'In Morocco, many art practices abandon materiality. These practices do not really leave any traces or objects.' (Pieprzak 2010, p.196). Similarly, talking about artistic production in Egypt, Jessica Winegar states that 'the work of making art is often less about the physical construction of the art object (...) [than it is about] discourse.' (2006, p.10)

You know of the how, I know of the how-less (Semi-fictional micro-narrative)

Basra,
March 8, 731

Rabi'a[71] was the daughter of an extremely poor family from Basra, in present Iraq. The family was so poor that her parents decided not to waste too much energy thinking about her name. As she was their fourth child, the couple called her Rabi'a: a word that literally means 'fourth' in Arabic. When her parents died, Rabi'a was sold into slavery.It is believed that one night, her master saw a light surrounding her while she was praying. The image left the man captivated and in the morning he freed her. From then on, she paved her own way, pushing her body and soul onto the dusty roads of knowledge.

Asceticism is not encouraged in Islam, as its principles and practices run contrary to the religion's emphasis on being part of the community. Nevertheless, Rabi'a shirked the idea of a regular life. Like many others at the turn of the 9th century, she slowly disappeared towards the desert, carrying but a few belongings, to practice the 'ilm al-batin, the knowledge of that which lies within.

[71] Rabi'a al-Adawiyya al-Qaysiyya, or simply Rabi'a al Basri (717-801 C.E) was a female Muslim Sufi saint, considered by some to be the first true saint in the Sufi tradition. Her reputation exceeddedthose of many Muslim men in the early days of Sufism

“I want to put out the fires of Hell, and burn down the rewards of Paradise, as they block the way to God. I do not want to worship from fear of punishment or for the promise of reward, but simply for the love of God”[72].

In the desert, Rabi’a led a life of humility and even poverty, showing in this way that having a personal bond to the divine was something that both men and women were capable of striving for. Indeed, in her lifetime she never called a man her master. Rabi’a thus consciously pursued an independent lifestyle as a woman-poet, wandering through the desert in solitude. In so doing, she was following a path that many female Sufi mystics had charted before her as a means of ensuring personal salvation.

"I should be ashamed to ask for the things of this world from him to whom the world belongs, and how should I ask for them from those to whom it does not belong?"[73]

It is said that Rabi’a’s ascetic practices brought her closer to the Adbal: the society of hidden saints whose great cosmic powers allegedly allowed them to alter their psychic states and withdraw their bodies from physical laws. The legend suggests that she was even able to perform divine miracles because of the intimacy she was able to achieve with God through introspection. When she was asked how she discovered the secret, she responded:

”You know of the how. I know of the how-less.”[74]

The stories detailing the life and practices of Rabi'a of Basra show a countercultural understanding of the role of gender in society. Indeed, she was the one who first set forth the doctrine of Divine Love known as Ishq-e-Haqeeqi and she is widely considered to be the most important of the early renunciants. Hers was a model of piety that would eventually come to be known as Sufism.

When Rabi’a died at the age of eighty, her only possessions were an old, patched, dress-like mantle, a pottery jug and a reed mat that doubled as her prayer rug. Some say she was buried near Jerusalem, in the Kidron Valley, her tomb becoming a cult destination throughout the Middle Ages.

Siyaha (Concept definition)

[72] *New World Encyclopedia* [online] Available at: https://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Rabia_Basri [Accessed Day 16 June 2020].
[73] Ibid.
[74] *New World Encyclopedia* [online] Available at: https://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Rabia_Basri [Accessed Day 16 June 2020].

Even as specialists in philology, poetry and genealogy were taking great pains to learn from the Bedouins through the practice of *rihla*, at the turn of the 9th century another emerging class of learned men and women in Islam also began to focus on the desert. They were mystics seeking fundamental alterity in solitude. Like the other learned men, the mystics used *rihla* to get closer to their master thinkers. Unlike the scholars, however, the mystics soon felt *rihla*‘s limitations. For them, the *rihla* tended to lead to only one aspect of knowledge: the *dhahir,* or knowledge as appearance. In contrast to the *raḥḥālas,* 'the mystics considered themselves to be the bearers of a sort of knowledge that reached beyond obvious causes to decipher the hidden, the *batin'* (Touati 2010, p.159). This is how the *siyaha,* a new form of travel in search of knowledge, emerged.

The term *siyaha*, or wandering, refers to the lifestyle of the hermit, 'a person who does not know how to take pleasure in the savons of food and drink, who rejects the warmth of the hearth, and who is not fixed in any one place.' (2010, p.159). Unlike the hermits though, the *sa’ihun,* or vagabond saints, travelled continually in search of *I’tibar*, or teaching, and *istibsar,* intuition. By teaching, they learned and practised the exemplary observation of the world while, through *istibsar,* they cultivated the intuitive faculty of penetrating the essence of beings and things.

Islamic mysticism follows the traditions of early Christianity hermeticism and Hindu asceticism. Both traditions are essential to understanding the rise of Sufism in medieval Islam, and especially the cult of *siyaha*. Indeed, in addition to the monistic and pantheistic tendencies of a number of Sufi masters, such as al-Hallaj (d. 922), Ibn ‘Arabi (d. 1240), Ibn Sab‘in (d. 1269) and Ibn al-Faridh (d. 1353), other Sufi mystics chose to wander in the desert, often for years and in some cases for life, without carrying provisions, in search of enlightenment and inner truth.

Like the scholars who practiced the *rihla*, the *sa’ihun* also adopted the *aja’ib* as a way to write about their travels and tribulations. These creative travelogues were a mix of personal narrative, description, opinion and anecdote. The *Aja’ib* brought together the mystic and the scholarly creative literary genres through the principle of autopsia. Although it is not certain that the events they described were real, 'it was even less certain that they were false. They were, above all, difficult to confirm.' (2010, p.167) The fact that the marvellous operated on the terrain of ambiguity and metamorphosis created a singular connection between the human and the divine, the visible and the invisible, the natural and the supernatural, the ordinary and

the extraordinary, and the believable and the unbelievable. 'Whereas, by adopting the *rihla* as a travel genre, traditional cosmographers, geographers and historians attempted to give enigma an objective interpretation and the moralists tried to give it a subjective content, in the *aja'ib* the mystics aimed to experience enigma by imagining nature as a reservoir of symbols' (2010, p.163), the so called *ayats*.

Ayat, or the impossibility of perception (Auto-ethnographic diary)

The Impossibility of Perception is a personal account created during the last stage of the project *Beyond Qafila Thania*, a 20-day nomadic residency through the Draa valley, from M'Hamid to Tizint in the Southern Moroccan Desert in November 2017. *Beyond Qafila Thania* brought together researchers from Sudan, Morocco, Spain, Catalonia, Italy and the Netherlands, working in the fields of architecture, sociology and the visual arts. Together they sought to engage with the cultural, social and geopolitical space of the Sahara desert.

Southern moroccan desert,
November 1, 2017

Man is also fragile here. One more element of a landscape that covers everything and to which we all have to adapt, temporarily or perpetually. However diverse they may be, strategies of adaptation share a common aspect of submission and respect towards that which is visible - but also to the invisible. These strategies are based on resilient and ancestral patience; they eschew both progress and hurry.

Sand is made into mud, mud into a house, the house into a carpet, the carpet into a starry sky, the starry sky into a sea of black rocks, the black rock into a camel, the camel into a haima, and the haima into golden dunes, sand, the desert.

Southern moroccan desert,
November 3, 2017

Are we walking too much? How can suffering become fruit? Is this state a path? We indeed taste the limits, live them in each step, traversing arid lands, killing the snake to welcome the crow. Alone, without words, too exhausted to talk. Are we walking too much?

How can suffering become fruit? Is exhaustion the path? Deep within the branches, the wind gives its silent answer: A constant warm whispering, quiet and persistent, following our walking together apart.

Southern moroccan desert,
November 4, 2017

The impossibility of perception is already a perception. The impossibility of perceiving the desert, this landscape, its components and functionings, is already a perception. The signs are to be found in its traces: the remaining fragments, the fragmented remains, its bones. The dried branches, big and small, growing from nowhere, everywhere, impossible to perceive, remain invisible beside their shadows: Thin black lines traced on the hot sand or the cracking land, forming new lives and phantasmagorias, move almost impossibly with the giant orbit of the sun, tracing daily circles, no one witnessing the lonely halaqahs.

Movement is perceived through its traces. Cockroaches, snakes, little birds and reptiles leave their testimony: an intricate, subtle, repetitive algorithm of life, impossible to perceive, erased every day through the persistent action of the Saharan winds that slowly displace the particles of sand, moving the vast dunes silently. And the skeletons, the fossils, the bones of millions of years of history and yesterday, half-buried or totally exposed, tell us about the fragility of life, of meteors, ancestors, and peoples, impossible to perceive.

Spring Sessions. Wonder, wander (Contemporary study case)

Although the practice of the *siyaha* may seem to belong to a by-gone era, the tradition of vagabond hermits is still alive in the eastern Egyptian desert as well as in the Sinai peninsula. An example of the contemporary surge of interest in these practices can be found in *The Heritage of the Desert Fathers*[75], a project to map, photograph, and research hermitages and the tradition of wandering currently being led by the new Institute for the Study of Christian Tradition in Ljubljana, Slovenia. More relevant to this text, however, is the interest that has been shown in artistic and curatorial practices investigating the space of the desert. Examples include Project Qafila,[76] developed by architect and curator Carlos Perez; Cafe

[75] More information about this project can be found at Meier, A (2015) *Documenting the Vanishing Hermitages of the Egyptian Deser*t in Hyperallergic [online] Available at: https://hyperallergic.com/251243/documenting-the-vanishing-hermitages-of-the-egyptian-desert/#:~:text=The%20Heritage%20of%20the%20Desert%20Fathers%20is%20part%20of%20the,wrecked%20in%20misguided%20antiquities%20looting. [Accessed Day 16 August 2020].

[76] One of the experiences on which this project is based is *Beyond Qafila Thania*, a project developed in collaboration with Project Qafila [online] Available at: http://projectqafila.weebly.com/. [Accessed Day 16 August 2020]. The documentation of this project can be found at Platform HARAKAT [online] Available at: https://platformharakat.com/actions/beyond-qafila-thania and in the poster accompanying this distertation. [Accessed Day 16 August 2020].

Tissardmine,[77] founded by cultural facilitator Karen Hadfield; and the project UNSCALE Sahara,[78] by AA Visiting School (AAVS) in London. Besides these many interesting approximations, with its focus on experiential immersion into the desert through the practice of walking, the project *Wonder, wander* curated by Spring Sessions in Amman is an interesting case in point.

Spring Sessions is an experiential learning program and arts residency based in Amman, Jordan. The program creates a collaborative environment for artistic exchange between cultural practitioners. Conceived every spring as a program of workshops, mentoring sessions, research excursions, and other activities, their purpose is to question existing paradigms by experimenting outside of traditional modes of learning, while consciously engaging with several communities. Spring Sessions also has a permanent physical space, which includes: the *makan makan makan*, housing a darkroom; the 'Lesser Amman Library;' and a guest house for artists-in-residence. For its 2018 edition, Spring Sessions curated a nomadic residency program titled *Wonder, wander*[79]*.* The project was loosely structured through a collective pilgrimage, starting from the northern tip of Jordan and ending in Sinai desert lands. Spanning a distance of more than 400 kilometres over the course of 6 weeks, resonating with the *siyaha*, the experience engaged with the act of walking over a changing terrain. The aim was to contribute to the participants' individual research and artistic practices while engaging with the transversal themes of journeying, premonition, foresight and pilgrimage.

Anna and the hypermobile Icarus[80] (Auto-ethnographic diary)

Barcelona,
February 24, 2016

Comings and goings to and from the airport are almost always annoying: the sun always shines too much, the coat is always too thick, you always have the feeling of forgetting something, you are unable to remember what it is… And everything else: those close to you are left behind, farther away at each stop of bus 46, which goes too slow and stops without remedy during endless bouts of end of February, mid-week traffic.

[77] Cafe Tissardmine [online] Available at: http://www.cafetissardmine.com/ [Accessed Day 16 August 2020].
[78] AA School [online] Available at: https://www.aaschool.ac.uk/STUDY/VISITING/unscalesahara [Accessed Day 16 August 2020].
[79] Madamasr on Spring Sessions Wonder and Wander [online] Available at: https://www.madamasr.com/en/2018/06/17/feature/culture/wonder-wander-no-1-grazing-the-animals-within-us/ [Accessed Day 16 August 2020].
[80] This text was written on my way to Barcelona airport, from where I was flying to Boston to present NACMM_North Africa Cultural Mobility Map as part of the TransCultural Exchange's 2016 International Conference on Opportunities in the Arts: Expanding Worlds.

“Although the amount of time people have spent in motion has remained constant since 1950, the shift from walking and riding bicycles to using cars and planes has increased the speed of travel fivefold. This results in the twin effect of creating both a wider and shallower environment of social activity around each person, intensified polarisation between rich and poor, more anonymous and less convivial communities and the degradation of our physical environment brought about by high-speed traffic” (Adams, 2011, p.3).

The first image that comes to my mind is the view of the vast, silent wheat fields, infinite yellows under the sun on a hot windy day. I feel almost like Anna Christina Olson in the meadows, in the middle of that hot summer of 1948, looking with terror and envy at the black mansion far away. Inside, she is paralysed.

Anna’s exhaustion in the middle of such an exuberant field, and her unfulfilled desire to enter the black mansion, remind us of Icarus, the son of the master craftsman Daedalus, falling. At the heart of Icarus’ story is his attempt to escape from Crete, using wings that his father constructed from feathers and wax. As the myth would famously have it, he ignored instructions not to fly too close to the sun, and the melting of the wax caused him to fall to his death. The legend of Icarus suggests that the very idea of mere mortals using such means of travel is impious.

”As we spread ourselves ever wider, we must spread ourselves thinner. If we spend more time interacting with people at a distance, we must spend less time with those closest to home, and if we have contact with more people, we must devote less time and attention to each one. In small-scale pedestrian societies, everyone knows everyone. In hyper-mobile societies old-fashioned geographical communities are replaced by aspatial communities of interest: we spend more of our time, physically, in the midst of strangers” (2011, p.4).

The myth of Icarus is usually interpreted as a tragic example of hubris, or failed ambition, an unnecessary moral lesson, or maybe the symbolic vengeance of the countryman. Icarus drowns but the world goes on, unaware of his life’s brevity. Not even a single trace of the myth catches the attention of those who work with their hands. As myself, Anna Christina Olson feels invisible too.

Landscape with the Fall of Icarus[81]

According to Brueghel

[81] William C W. (1962) *Collected Poems: 1939-1962*, Volume II by William Carlos Williams, published by New Directions Publishing Corp. © 1962 by William Carlos Williams. Reprinted by permission of New Directions Publishing Corp.

when Icarus fell
it was spring
a farmer was ploughing
his field

the whole pageantry
of the year was
awake tingling

near
the edge of the sea
concerned
with itself
sweating in the sun
that melted
the wings' wax

insignificantly
off the coast
there was
a splash quite unnoticed

this was
Icarus drowning

Exhaustion and exuberance

Although he does not say so explicitly in his seminal text, Jan Verwoert was probably on the verge of a breakdown when he wrote *Exhaustion et Exuberance* (2008). Tired of performing, affected by hyper-mobility and self-sabotage, he documented a condition that most of us, in and beyond the creative and scholarly circles, have at one time or another found ourselves in. Indeed, until recently for certain contemporary artists and curators, the urge to travel has been often driven by the belief that professional advancement and recognition are proportional to the frequency with which we are away. Verwoert's discourse makes sense in today's neo-liberal societies, as much as it did one thousand years ago in the lives of the *raḥḥālas* and the *sa'ihun* in search of the *Ilm*.

Indeed, far from what is commonly understood, high-performativity and hyper-mobility, or exhaustion and exuberance, as Verwoert would say, were also predominant in the practices of the *rihla* and the *siyaha*. As Houari Touati (2010) has argued, 'considering their quest for 'ilm as an apostolate, at times religious men of letters lost their sense of reality. Dazzled by their desire to collect the greatest number of bits of knowledge, they hardly set foot in one place when they were already thinking of another that they had not yet visited, crowding their daily agendas to excess. As they travelled, men of letters were often out of touch with the world

around them.' (2010, p.87). After spending endless hours listening to the exuberant discourses of the masters, attending *halaqah* after *halaqah,* at night most men of letters and scholars had to write their learnings by the flickering of an oil lamp, often stopping only when they were exhausted. Several accounts suggest that 'men of letters remembered their nighttime studies as a traumatic experience. With lack of sleep compounding lack of proper nutrition, these travellers in search of knowledge often suffered from stress and desperation' (2010, p.88). Indeed, personal sacrifice was an integral part of the *rihla*, and even more so of the *siyaha.* These practices responded to the human ideal of the time, the principal components of which were endurance, abstinence, voluntary privation and a spirit of sacrifice. Ahmad ibn Hanbal, a well-known Iraqi traditionalist from the 9th century, affirmed: 'We have acquired knowledge in humiliation. There is in this message an affirmation of the self, within a Stoic morality of effort, challenge and exhaustion' (2010, p.93). The statement can be also understood as a magnification of Science and its exuberant knowledge, accessible only to a self-referential elite of legitimate holders. A huge price had to be paid, however. Abu Yusuf al-Fasawi (d. 890) knew what he was talking about when he said: 'I began to weep over the distance that separated me from my family and over what was going to escape me in the way of knowledge.' (2010, p.93).

As for many contemporary artists and curators, hopping from one residency to another, from one conference or workshop to the next, we are (at least for the moment) freed from the unusual constraints of family and societal obligations but, like religious men of letters, we often live in the unbearable lands of social solitude. These cross-temporal resonances can also be sensed in the way *raḥḥālas* and *sa'ihuns* of the 9th century, and artists and curators at the turn of the 20th, perceive and interact with the local communities they encounter through endless travel.

Indeed, the exotic and nostalgic gaze of the *raḥḥālas* and *sa'ihuns* upon the Bedouins' alleged 'lost purity' resonates a thousand years later, in the exotic and rural idyll-seeking impulses that drive artists and writers to seek out art colonies and contemporary rural art residencies not only throughout the 19th century, but also in our contemporary times. The expectations that motivated, and continues to do so, these artists, researchers and curators much like those that drove the *raḥḥālas* and the *sa'ihun,* were often met with disappointment. As Vytautas Michelkevičius states in *Rooted and Slow Institutions Reside in Remote Places* (2019), 'while artists saw themselves as escaping from modernity into a more organic, innocent world, they were at the same time responsible for much of the place-mythology and cult of the 'undiscovered' that opened up one of the most compelling forms of twentieth-century modernity: the world of modern tourism.' (2019, p.155). As Michelkevičius underlines, some

small village communities have started to close their doors in response to the increasing flow of incoming artists. Oftentimes, locals are left with the impression that 'they do not need another passer-by-researcher who wants to help the secluded community to overcome their isolation and capitalise on their knowledge to present the artwork later on the art market.' (2019, p.155). Michelkevičius goes a step further when he states that there is a danger that art residencies may be turned into promoters of 'local exoticism and not-yet-discovered culture and localness.' (2019, p155). Indeed, as Jan Verwoert rightly points out, 'uncooperativeness may well be the revenge that uncreative people take on creative society by wilfully stopping it in its tracks.' (2008, p.10).

At this juncture, it is worth highlighting one of the questions that is currently shaping contemporary debates on art residencies, much as it preoccupied scholars back in the 9th century: What exactly is a local community? Does such a thing really exist, or is the term just another way of framing ‘otherness’?

As we have seen and as we will further stress, the fictionalisation of the other is not a modern phenomenon: it was a key aspect in the *raḥḥālas*’ and *sa'ihuns*’ obsession for the search for *gharib al-lugha,* the rare and obscure words, in the early Medieval Islamic era. However, a number of key distinctions do separate the *raḥḥāla* travellers and the *sa'ihun* from the 19th - and 20th - century European artists who left their homes in search of stereotypical localness. In their vast expeditions, the *raḥḥāla* and the *sa'ihun* were not indulging escapist impulses, nor searching for time and space away from their everyday preoccupations. Practised as a way of life and as an institutional requirement, their expeditions in search of knowledge were geared towards metamorphosis. And, in that quest, it was not enjoyment they endorse; it was pain.

3.3. Epilogue

As I write these lines, I find myself in my grandmother's old house. This house has become a refuge, a voluntary exile, a quiet place to write about a journey between the same and the other.

While this place is now quiet, for the past ten years it has been a temporary residency for artists of all kinds. The space within its walls has been used as a living and working space and its surroundings as an inspirational context from which to develop, collaboratively or not, a multitude of creative practices. This building, which long ago was the household where my mother and her sisters grew up, later became an art residency, and is now empty and silent, hosting me to write, alone.

As I write these lines, I find myself in my grandmother's house.This house has also become also a space of seclusion after a long research journey, my own *rihla*, which has brought me towards my geographical North — to Edinburgh, London, Montreal and New York — but most importantly, towards the South — to Marrakech, Algiers, Tunis, Alexandria, Cairo, and Amman. This has been a trip in search for knowledge in which I turned myself into an (hyper)mobile guest, cultivating the art of getting lost, becoming in equal parts exhausted and exuberant, feeling the paradigmatic condition of the postcolonial traveller: "the great melancholy of he who wished to understand and only half-understood." (Pratt, 2007, p.228)

While I was trying to give an answer to the multiple questions informing my research, something unexpected happened. A novel condition arose, one that made us confront our vulnerability and acknowledge the limits of our practices as artists, curators, researchers or otherwise. Indeed, the global pandemic has forced us to be immobile, to live in lockdown, to inhabit a forced hibernation in which not even the simplest of embraces has been allowed. All of a sudden, we, self-proclaimed privileged (hyper)mobile cultural workers have found ourselves unable to move and confined to a life in isolation. In this shifting and unpredictable context, how do we reconnect with one another, with our surroundings and unknown others, from a place of isolation? How do we extend solidarity when we can't physically meet? How do we create and inhabit spaces of dissonance, where different voices can be heard? And how do we develop artistic practices when one of the core premises — that of humans gathering to experience something unknown — is no longer possible? In short, in such limiting circumstances, where does the value of traveling and the journey reside?

As Touati enigmatically stated, long before this pandemic arose: "we are living the death of something that is essential: the voyage" (2010, p.257). For Touati, in our contemporary context, "there are no more travelers; their race has disappeared. All there is left is tourists, those who never take on a destination without turning it into an industrial formula for a sojourn" (2010, p.257).

The commercialisation and commodification of the journey are also chief concerns in the debates currently affecting the mobility of artists, curators and researchers alike. Indeed, much of the (pre-pandemic) mobility in the arts was economically driven. In line with Touati's preoccupations, the Finnish curator Taru Elfving asks us to overcome the "age of innocence" in which international mobility within the creative sector has been uncritically enhanced. As Elfving stresses, "We need to reflect more closely on the terms of our travel today: Who has access to global circulation? How and what processes of value production does it take part in?

Who and what do travel and networking actually serve? What is the cost of being on the move — ecologically, socially, personally, intellectually? When and how can travel be considered sustainable?" (2017, p.22). Elfving goes a step further in affirming that "all modes of cultural exchange and artistic explorations are entangled in the complex mesh of geopolitical and economic power relations. They always have been, yet today it is just not naive but frankly irresponsible to ignore that. What does it mean to be mobile at a time of enforced migrations, reinforced borders, growing xenophobia, escalating climate crisis, and mass extinctions?" (2017, p.22)

Indeed, within the journey, within constant change, those that practice the creative act — artists, curators and researchers — inhabit ambiguous lands. On the one hand, they have become privileged carriers of new knowledge(s), making visible overlooked realities, breaking down grand narratives, and constantly eroding otherness. On the other, the urge to travel, to be mobile, has become at the same time an unsustainable practice. This unsustainability affects not only us and the relationships with those close to us, but most importantly the multiple ecologies that allow life to be. Indeed, hypermobility, the lure for the other, artistic monoculture, exclusion and ecological neglect increasingly condition the practice of artists, curators and researchers around the globe, overlooking our precious blue sphere, the space we live in.

As these lines are being written, many countries have restricted international travel for their citizens and non-citizens alike. As in the present context, Touati's words ring true: 'there are no more travelers.' (2010, p.257). What he is referring to though is not to the forced immobility that we, privileged tourists, are experiencing, but to the realization that "the 'identical' has spread over the planet under the alienating form of the market and the fetishism of merchandising. What is to be learned from different conceptions of the journey? How, by retooling the history of art residencies with new trans-cultural approaches, can we unfold alternative futures?

As Virgil enigmatically stated more than 2000 years ago, "the goddess can be recognised by her steps". This research can be understood as one of the steps in a path that we will hopefully continue to walk together, as we keep walking towards the ethics of the encounter, the journey between the same and the other.

Conclusion: Introducing *An event without its poem …*

The point of departure of this speculative Arab art residency proto-history is the

deconstruction of the narrow paths traced by art residencies current history; the compass that has guided this journey is at the intersection between Arab epistemologies and the experimental formats that shape the contemporary art residency scene in North Africa and the Middle East. Through an understanding of knowledge production as a fragile and fragmentary endeavour, this project has proposed to retrace the mobility of knowledge(s), bodies and practices through a cross-cultural analysis taking art residencies as a study case. This speculative Arab art residency proto-history has set in motion concepts and practices derived from mobility and its shadows, documenting practices and microstories to critically reflect upon different approximations to the journey, the heritage of its traditions and the erasures embedded therein. Its objective being to provide a fertile ground to further enhance critical reflection and action.

In addition to their cross-temporal synchrony, the links between the stories included in *An event without its poem is an event that never happened* is the journey, and so the mobility of bodies, knowledge(s) and practices. What might it mean to think about art residencies from a cross-cultural perspective? Which are the epistemological resonances between different traditions of the journey? And what is to be learned from speculation and the '*what ifs*'?

Through a cross-cultural and trans-temporal comparative approach, this project articulates through five different voices:

The first one (1) is the description and critical analysis of several concepts and practices that have historically articulated the relationship between knowledge and the journey within Arab and Islamic epistemologies. These are the *rihla*, the *siyaha*, the *zawaya*, the *majāli,* the *halafat* and the *al-rihla siffariya*. The historical contextualization of these practices forms the second voice (2).
The third (3) voice takes the form of several creative auto-ethnographic exercises. These include:: *Ayat or the impossibility of perception (2017)* created during the nomadic residency of *Beyond Qafila Thania* in the southern Morocco desert; *The Lonely Flaneur* and *Nostalgia Shorts,* conceived as the outcome of the project *The Art of Getting Lost* in Alexandria; Perturbed by Quietism (2016), created during a monastic retreat at El Miracle in Catalonia; and One Single Eye (2017), written on a research visit to the CCDS_Centre Culturel et de Documentation Saharienne in Ghardaia. These writing exercises are complemented with a selection of seven video pieces created as part of my trips to several conferences and meetings in Glasgow, Edinburgh, London, Fez, Alexandria and Istanbul.The forth voice (4) is a a selection of several semi-fictional micro narratives including The Great Forgetfulness (677), You know of the how. I know of the how-less (747),The Sappho of the Ottomans (1492),

al-Maqqarī reclaims time and space (1617),Jan, Ismāʿīl and the Amazigh women (1686), Melchior at the Sublime Porte (1555),We have never been modern (1825),The Overcomers (1900) and The hidden sanctuary (1920). And the last voice (5) is the one bridging the gap between past and present, establishing a relationship between the four other voices and projects that, through the model of the art residency, bring new insights to the art residency sector in the Arab world. A selection of these projects included Apartment 22's *Expeditions,* Spring Sessions' *Wonder & Wander,* Atelier de l'Observatoire's *Madrassa,* Le Cube's *Travelling Narratives,* Le18's *Kaw kaw,* Darat al Funun's *Dissertation Fellowship program* and *Hammam Radio.*

The speculative Arab art residency proto-history presented in *An event without its poem is an event that never happened* is structured through three sections. In the first, *Exhaustion and exhuberance*, I deconstruct the assumption in which hyper-mobility and community parasitization are seen as a consequence of our contemporary networked creative class, while providing evidence that such issues existed far back in time, more precisely within 9th century *raḥḥālas* and the *sa'ihuns.* In the second section, *Reclaiming time and space*, I stress on the importance of the creative spaces that flourished in the Maghreb and the Ottoman Empire at the turn of the 13th and 14th centuries. The *majālis* and the *halafāts* became essential loci from where, through collaborative practice and networking strategies, trans-Arab encounters flourished. The collaborative nature of these encounters, often mediated through relational intellectual and aesthetic practices contrast with the development, one hundred years later, of the individualized *studio,* which arose in European lands. In the third and last section, *About what lies east of the dividing line*, I illustrate that, besides the multiple trans-mediterranean interactions, from the turn of the 19th century, specifically between 1798 and 1801's Napoleon's invasion of Egypt, the obsession of artists, archaeologists, cartographers and diplomats from the lands expanding to the North of the Mediterranean basin, destabilized, through essentialism, the balance between sameness and otherness. Besides the many efforts to counter-balance stereotypes within our contemporary context, the process of radical otherness which affects the field of art residencies remains present.

In the unexpected context in which we find ourselves, that of forced confinement where mobility is forbidden to avoid the contagion of C-19, the debate that affected the Muslim men of letters back in the 9th century could still be relevant. The conclusion then was that those who stayed in one place came to be considered as superior to those who journeyed between many. And so, although the circumstances were diverse in various centuries, *stasis* was then desirable while it is now imposed. How are art residencies reacting to this situation? Can these

spaces of encounter continue enhancing nomadic environments through a dynamic and networked approach while facilitating honest reciprocity?

Conclusion

"The goddess can be recognised by her steps"

Virgil, Aeneid (I, 405) in de Certeau (1988, p.97)

The primary aim of *Moving Knowledges: Towards a speculative Arab art residency proto-history* has been to explore whether, by looking at the extensive tradition that links knowledge and the journey within Arab and Islamic epistemologies and practices, we can start thinking differently about the history of art residencies. At the same time, this dissertation is meant to be understood also as the documentation and critical analysis of a research process that diverts from its initial topic. In this process, the different detours and alternative routes taken - namely, my encounter with epistemology, methodology and genealogy - have been as challenging as they have been enriching.

A key question in my research process has been the following: How can research on the other without falling again into simplification and essentialism?
As Edward Said underlines:

> "it is impossible for a culture to grasp much about the reality of another one without resorting to categorisation, classification, schematisation and reduction, with the necessarily accompanying distortions and misrepresentations (…). Cultures have always been inclined to impose complete transformations on other cultures, receiving these other cultures not as they are but as, for the benefit of the receiver, they ought to be" (1997, p.67).

According to Said: "the real issue is whether, indeed, there can be a true representation of anything, or whether any and all representations, because they are representations, are embedded first in the language and then in the culture, institutions, and political ambience of the representer" (1997, p.68). In the process of thinking through these entanglements, research on epistemology, methodology and genealogy has unfolded in the three chapters in which this project is structured: (1) *Methodological Journeys: Coming back from the South*, (2) *Towards a fragile method* and (3) *A speculative proto-history of the Arab art residency.*

Methodological Journeys: Coming back from the South, this dissertation's first chapter, has been focused on articulating how I've approached otherness. Indeed, through an investigation of epistemology, the point of departure of this dissertation has precisely been to reflect upon the issue of representation and the tendency to enforce identity politics. Reflecting on my own position as being supposedly exogenous to Arab and Islamic cultures, I have argued that, while acknowledging its positive contributions when re-signifying hegemonic means and symbolisms, the current commodification of decolonial theory translates in a tendency to essentialization in academic and artistic institutions alike. To counterbalance what I understand as a re-construction of grand narratives, I propose a more complex approach, as the current dualistic and confrontative understanding of epistemology fails to acknowledge ontological sophistication such as intellectual cross-fertilisation. Through the resonance between Islamic research principles and artistic research methods, the focus I've developed in Chapter 1 investigates the relationship between critique and activism within both progressive and reactionary alignments.

In *Towards a fragile method*, the second chapter of this Dissertation, I've further stressed the importance of cross-cultural exchange and epistemic resonance by proposing three methodological tools that critically reflect on different approaches to the journey, the heritage of its traditions and the erasures embedded therein. Here, I've illustrated that knowledge production is a fragile and fragmentary endeavour. While looking for other voices and speculating on conceptual transgression, I have proposed *al-Kaban cartography, curatorial al-Barzaj* and experimental genealogy as ways in which to dislocate abstract dichotomies and empower speculative thinking. Furthermore, the importance to re-evaluate fragility is an unavoidable condition of my research methods. This approach to methodology is the outcome of both my own research practice and the contemporary development of inventive methods which comprehends holism, relationality and the non-human. By experimenting with approaches proposed from artistic research, *my dissertation* wants to be a contribution to these voices.

Chapter 3, *A speculative proto-history of the Arab art residency,* problematizes the way in which current historiography approaches the genealogy of art residencies. In order to give an alternative to what a is a Euro-centric and conceptually limiting historical discourse, I've contextualised a set of concepts and practices that have linked the search for knowledge and the journey within Arab and Islamic intellectual heritages, while at the same time bringing them into dialogue with contemporary case studies. The proposed history developed in this chapter unfolds into a much more complex polyphony in the portfolio. Entitled *An event without its poem is an event that never happened,* the portfolio seeks to transgress the limits of the

current art residencies' chronological account by expanding time and space, and embracing speculation and the encounter between micro-stories. In short, the portfolio proposes to mobilise artistic research as a way of challenging linear paths and taken-for-granted assumptions with regard to the positivistic understanding of history. To that aim, *An event without its poem is an event that never happened* complements the account given in Chapter 3 by including several narrative voices. Crucially, key figures, events and examples have been excluded from this experimental narrative. This exclusion is not the fruit of neglect or carelessness, but rather aims to create the space necessary for further dialogue. This is why, in formal terms, the design of the portfolio adopts paratext as a tool, stressing that texts, like maps, are never finished. On the contrary, they are continually enriched by further commentary. Indeed, although it is certain that discourses can be understood as a type of violence in relation to what they narrate, it might be also true that by stressing the condition of possibility, by constantly advocating for and promoting the mobility of knowledge(s), a given discourse can also enhance dialogical encounters.

In short, this research offers new epistemic and genealogical landscapes from which to continue investigating the history of art residencies. It does so by decentring artistic production, one of the three structuring aspects of the art residency model, and focuses instead on the other two fundamental practices, namely, the search for knowledge and the journey. In that sense, this research has put aside investigations into Islamic art and modern Arab creative practices and focused instead on intellectual heritage in order to challenge the hegemony of art history within the history of art residencies. Furthermore, the findings of this project challenges the conventional and widely expressed view that the phenomenon of the art residency has its origins in 19th century art colonies and artistic patronage in Europe and the USA. My proposal demands that future research into the history of the art residency focus on the need to gather and exchange beyond Euro-centric and artistic frameworks.

The portfolio presented here is a prototype and work-in-progress towards the future development of the project itself in collaboration with artists, scholars and activists from the region and beyond. Through the implementation of this research, the seed to enhance further collaborative practices has already been planted. Indeed, besides the many collaborations that have unfolded through NACMM and Platform HARAKAT, the portfolio presented here has been developed in conjunction with several translators, editors and designers based in Europe, the U.S.A and the Arab region[82]. By further enhancing these collaborations, this ongoing project is not an ending but a continuation. The journey proposed in *An event*

[82] These are the Syrian translator Emad Ahmad and Amy Elshaarawy from Egypt, the editors Lara Bourdin, researcher and collaborator with Art Moves Africa# and fellow PhD researcher and Patty Healy Mcmean, and the curatorial and design collective Untitled# from Morocco as well as the designer Balbina Sardà.

without its poem is an event that never happened is not one that will be walked alone, but an experience that will only unfold with the company of others.

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- *Sonata* (2016) [Video, 5'38] Various locations: Catà, P.
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- *Coming back from the North _ London* (2018) [Video, 3'28] London (U.K.): Catà, P.
- *The impossibility of perception* series (2017) [7 JPEG files] Catà, P.
- *Perturbed by quietism* series (2017) [7 JPEG files] Catà, P.
- *One single eye series* (2018) [7 JPEG files] Catà, P.

Annexes

Annexe 1 NACMM_North Africa Cultural Mobility Map
Annexe 2 KIBRIT
Annexe 3 Platform HARAKAT
Annexe 4 The Art of Getting Lost
Annexe 5 Beyond Qafila Thania
Annexe 6 Outputs practice and conceptual schema
Annexe 7 Portfolio stories chronology
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Portfolio

An event without its poem is an event that never happened