INTRODUCTION

In early February 2005, the once-plundered Museum of Kabul reopened with an exhibit of animistic Nouristani statues. These wooden statues, representing idols, are the works of the Kafir tribe, which were forcibly converted to Islam at the turn of the 19th century. In a country divided by ethnic rivalries, imbedded in Islamic conservatism and perturbed by strong foreign involvement, such an exhibit may be read as a political message, to both an internal and external audience. This example leads us to reflect on the relation between cultural heritage, museums and the representation of national identities in Afghanistan, in the particular context of reconstruction, state and nation-building, and post-conflict management.

Afghanistan has suffered from 25 years of near constant warfare, which has left the country in a sad state of ruin. Nearly everything must be rebuilt in the country: reconstruction stretches from de-mining to rebuilding the irrigation system; from paving roads to putting in place an education system for all; from setting up efficient state institutions to providing running water and electricity to the capital city Kabul. In Afghanistan, religion and ethnicity are the pillars of both social and political life,
and must clearly be taken into account in order to achieve a viable reconstruction. Despite evident need for state-building measures, the nation-building process, which historically has never managed to create a clear sense of belonging or a national identity, is a key element in order to envisage a stable future for Afghanistan, where all members of the various ethnic groups and Muslim sects would participate equally. War and foreign involvement has deeply modified the ethnic makeup of the country and the power-balance between ethnic groups. Minority groups have gained in legitimacy and now have a political voice.

Across Afghan history, leaders have tried to promulgate an Afghan identity while in the same time strengthening the structure and power of the central state, but both measures have failed. Today, Afghanistan is once again facing a period of intense change and reforms, in which President Karzai seeks to implement state and nation-building measures. The wide mobilization around the Afghan cultural heritage and the reconstruction of the Kabul Museum illustrate the debate, conflict and projection around the idea of a national identity in contemporary Afghanistan. In its reconstruction of the Kabul Museum and more generally the reconstruction of the country, the Afghan state is faced with the necessity of a double legitimating effort. Indeed, the “rentier state” (Rubin, 1994:204) which Afghanistan has become, is faced with a need to accommodate both internal actors - local commanders with whom rests most of the power - and external actors - the international community, NGO’s, international organisations- whose cash and expertise contribute to the reconstruction of the country.

In this paper, I will explore the political use cultural heritage and its incidence on identity, using the Kabul Museum as an illustration. It is important to note that my focus will on the intentions of the actors, and not on their reception. I will begin by exposing the complexities of identity in Afghanistan. A brief discussion on key theoretical concepts relating to national identity, memory and museums will follow. I will then elaborate on the development of archaeology and museums in Afghanistan over the past century. A final section will address

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1 I wish to thank Alessandro Monsutti for bringing this point to my attention.
2 The state of Afghanistan has been heavily reliant on foreign money, as it has not been able to manage to extract enough resources from its own population through taxation.
the contemporary issue facing the National Museum of Kabul, taking into account perspectives from a number of different actors.

This paper should be read as a “work in progress”, reflecting on initial finding of my PhD research. Because of a lack of readily available official documents, further field research including interviews with key actors will be conducted to substantiate my working hypotheses.

**ISLAM, ETHNICITY AND TRIBALISM: A MULTILAYRED IDENTITY IN AFGHANISTAN**

The construction of Afghan identity follows a particular path. It is clear that today, in the wake of the creation of the new Karzai government a united national identity is absent in Afghanistan. Such absence has dominated the process of the state-and nation-building through the centuries. Despite efforts of the different rulers of Afghanistan, the country has kept important ethnic cleavages, and this has only been strengthened by the decades of war (Roy, in Maley, 1998:200). Worst, other cleavages have been superimposed.

Afghanistan is intersected by a number of social dimensions, which structure its society. Islam, ethnicity and tribalism play important roles in the process of collective identification. This process of identification is both a self-defining process and one of opposition to the other. It is based on the use of myths, physical traits, or genealogy (Centlivres, 1980: 30). It is also important to note that even though Afghanistan was never colonised, foreign presence has been an important contributor to the formation of identity, such as the British presence during the Great Game era, the Soviet occupation or the involvement of neighbouring countries during the Jihad.

In his analysis of identities in Afghanistan, Pierre Centlivres underlines the lack of a single national identity in Afghanistan, but distinguishes two levels of identity: the supra-national and infra-national level. The supra-national level refers to a belonging to the Muslim community, the *Umma*. Here, again, the phenomenon of opposition to the other is important.
In order to mark their opposition to the invaders, the Afghans have turned towards Islam as cement to national unity. The presence of British troops in the 19th century and later of the Soviet army has reinforced this identity (Centlivres, 1988: 35). This was particularly the case during the Soviet invasion, when the new communist regime attempted to modernize state infrastructures, and reformed the education curriculum by reducing the teaching of religion (Samady, 2001: 12). This created an immediate backlash, especially among the rural communities, who turned to organising education through religious schools (madrasas). Hence the consolidation of identity was formulated as the dichotomy: *we* - Muslims, *they* – infidels.

The Islamic tradition in Afghanistan is in its large majority (90%) one of the liberal Sunni Hanafi sect, which is the dominant Sunni sect also found in Turkey, Pakistan, and India. Islam has, however, adopted particular local characteristics. Despite the conversion to Islam in the 7th century already, pre-Islamic cults are still very present, especially in the form of the veneration of pre-Islamic or Islamic shrines (Dupree, 1976:4-10). Such venerations and beliefs in the magic healing power of such shrines are normally forbidden by Islam. These behaviours have given rise to what is generally considered as a moderate Islam. Furthermore, other religions such as Judaism have traditionally been present and well tolerated in Afghanistan.

The infra-national level described by Centlivres refers to the sense of belonging to an ethnic group. Ethnic identity is constructed through references such as genealogy (generally through the use of myths), territory or intra-Islamic differences such as the Sunni and Shiite divide.

This is further complicated by the complex nature of the ethnic make-up of Afghanistan, where the number of ethnic group is generally approximated at 50 different major ethnic groups (Glatzer, in Maley, 1998: 167 and Centlivres, 1988) and as many languages and dialects (Rasuly-Paleczek, 1998: 205). Furthermore, the ethnic diversity is characterised by the non-homogenous nature of the different ethnic groups. In some cases, members of an ethnic group consider themselves as being part of an ethnic group, but are not recognised as such by other members of the that group. This can be illustrated, for examples, by the case of
the Taymani group, which considers itself as Pashtun but is perceived as other (or non-Pashtun in this case) by the latter group (Glatzer, in Maley, 1998:168).

Today, both these levels, system of references have been strongly modified by war and foreign involvement. The supra-national level of identification (the sense of belonging to the Muslim community) has been both strengthened and modified. The nature of the resistance by the mujahidin to the Soviet invasion and later the fight of the Taliban against other mujahidin groups has taken the religious form of a *jihad*: the fight against the *infidels*. The Pashtun egalitarian system does not encourage leadership development, hence the use of Islam by the Taliban movement as a unifying factor for the movement itself. The conquest of the Afghan territory by the Taliban was defined in a religious rhetoric, using the discourse here formulated as a *jihad*, a fight against *bad Muslims*. This understanding has structured the legitimacy of violence and acts of war, thus strengthening and reinforcing the use of a particular radical form of Islam as a collective identity referential.

Furthermore, the involvement of countries such as Pakistan and Saudi Arabia has contributed to modify the traditionally moderate Afghan Islam\(^3\) (Rashid, 2000: 82). Extremist Islamist groups such as the Wahabbite movement or the Pakistani Jamiat-e-Ulema Islam group have imported their extreme interpretation of Islam in what was a very tolerant Muslim society through their work in non-governmental organisations or their technical and military advisers.

In a failing state, a perturbed tribal system and a non-existing civil society, these extremist groups managed easily to control key institutions, especially education, where Islam has traditionally been present (Samady, 2001: 9-18). The rise of the Taliban movement, for example, is a direct consequence of foreign involvement in the educational structures of the Pakistani refugee camps. Most of the movement’s members and fighters were young Afghan refugees recruited from rural madrasas in Pakistan and Afghanistan (Islamic schools). Until recently, such school had lost their social importance “as a result of years of state building by Afghanistan’s royal regime” (Rubin, 1999:80). But with the collapse of the educational system during the civil war, madrasas re-gained importance. Not only did they provide education

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\(^3\) The majority of Afghans belong to the Hanafi sect, branch of Sunni Islam.
and filled the role of orphanages, they were also used by foreign powers to implant their ideology and a culture of war (Samady, 2001: 19).

The infra-national level (the sense of ethnic belonging) has been greatly affected by recent history. First, the nature of the conflict had an important effect on the social structures. The war against the Soviet army was fought in the countryside and has forced a lot of people to abandon their livelihoods. The destruction of agricultural fields, the sedentarization of the nomadic population, coupled with the massive problem of internally displaced people and the great number of refugees\(^4\) has disrupted all levels in the structure of the traditional Afghan society, including family, ethnic and tribal groups: territorial identification, one of the pillars of identification closely related to ethnicity has thus been greatly modified. The civil war (as of 1992), for its part, was fought in towns, especially in Kabul. The moderate and already scares middle-class that had the means fled the country to neighbouring Pakistan, Iran, etc, leaving the cities to a mainly rural and out rooted population.

Second, the importation of extreme Islam has transformed the Sunni/Shiite divide into a conflictual one. The mujahidin resistance was structured both along Sunni/Shiite and ethnic lines, with Iran financing, for example, the Hezb-e Wahdat group, and Pakistan favouring the Pashtuns through Hekmatyar’s Hezb-e Islami group. This sectarian divide, became most evident when the Taliban movement turned against minorities such as the Hazara, as seen during the 1997 and 1998 massacre of thousands of Shiite Hazara.

Afghanistan has been profoundly changed through these years of war, which has disrupted power structures. The traditional elites in the country lost their power base either through their decapitation by the communist regime or by being sidelined during the Jihad, leading to a loss of legitimacy. Furthermore, minority ethnic groups, such as the Hazara have gained in political legitimacy, through their role during the Jihad. The political spectrum has thus changed: local and regional military commanders, who often benefit from popular support, are today key actors in Afghanistan; and minority ethnic groups now call for a share of power, and have a wider acceptation of their rights by the state.

\(^4\) In 2000, there were still 2.6 million refugees in Iran and Pakistan (Samady, 2001: 18)
NATIONS, MEMORY AND MUSEUMS

Walzer has described the state as “invisible; [which] must be personified before it can be seen, symbolized before it can be loved, imagined before it can be conceived” (Walzer in Sabet, 2003:187). This statement applies fully to Afghanistan. Since the leadership of Abdur Rahman (1880-1901) and the territorial consolidation of Afghanistan, successive leaders have sought to increase state power by curbing strong regional and ethnic powerbroker and tribal leaders. In order to achieve this, radical measures such as inner conquest, de-tribalisation, resettlement policies or forced modernisation have been put in place. These have however had little success and have contributed to creating a Pashtun nationalism and a “grading of ethnic groups within the newly emerging political system (Rasula, 2001: 153). Hence the absence of a collective identity today, rending state-building measures even more complicated.

As argued by Anderson, nations must be imagined, and in such a process, the art of remembering and forgetting is important (Renan). Mass public education, shared values, the use of symbols, ceremonies or monuments are employed to create social bonds, a collective identity thus linking the citizens to the state or to the nation. Hobsbawm highlights the importance of the past and thus the importance of the act of memory (Hobsbawm, 1983:1). Cultural heritage acts here on an emotional level. Smiths states that “[b]y the use of symbols, - flags, coinage, anthems, uniforms, monuments and ceremonies - members are reminded of their common heritage and cultural kinship and feel strengthened and exalted by their sense of common identity and belonging” (Smith, 1991:16-7). Furthermore, Lowenthal states that “[h]eritage distinguishes us from others, it gets passed only to descendants, to our flesh and blood; newcomers, outsiders, foreigners all erode or debase it” (Lowenthal, 1994:47).

Nora operates a distinction between history and memory. The former is a “reconstruction, always problematic and incomplete of what is no longer”, while the latter is linked to “living societies […] in permanent evolution [and] vulnerable to manipulation (Nora, 1989:8). Constructed history replaces true and spontaneous memory. The concept of lieu de mémoire as developed by the French historian Pierre Nora happens when everyday life memory vanishes. Constructed history replaces true memory, thus the lieu de mémoire are artificial and fabricated, in order to help us remember the past. It is indeed important to consider
under which circumstances and in which context memory is constructed. *Lieux de mémoire*, such as archives, festivals, calendars, monuments or museums, re-organise artificially the past, thus creating signifiers which are assimilated by the group in order to face the complexities of modernity (Nora, 1984). The *lieux de mémoire*, acts in order “to stop time, to block the work of forgetting” and they all share “a will to remember” (Nora, 1989:19). For Nora, the *lieux de mémoire* is a phenomenon linked to modernity and thus not present in all cultures. They are “the rituals of a society without rituals” (Nora, 1989:12).

An important *lieux de mémoire* is the museum, or what Anderson defines as an “institution of power” (Anderson, 1983). This institution is not simply a neutral cultural ground, where objects are displayed and history told. It acts on many levels, such as education, conservation of artistic treasures, constructing national history, preserving national memory, transmitting a certain system of values, or simply a leisure or tourist attraction. The International Council of Museums, an international organisation created in 1946, defines the museum as “a non-profit making, permanent institution in the service of society and of its development, and open to the public, which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits, for purposes of study, education and enjoyment, material evidence of people and their environment.” (ICOM Statutes, art. 2, para. 1).

The museum is a recent phenomenon, which coincides with the development of the nation-state and mass public education. The history of museums follows an interesting path, from the *cabinet de curiosités* of the prince to large public museum (Duncan, in Boswell & Evans, 1999: 305). This path links objects, artefacts, their accumulation and their display to power. At first, the Renaissance *studio*, was a sort of secret chamber in the Prince’s palace, which “recreate[s] the world in miniature around the central figure of the prince who thus claimed dominion over the world symbolically as he did in reality” (Hooper-Greenhill, cited in Bennett, 1995:95). Its walls hid various precious objects (gold, gems, sculptures, or paintings) and objects of the natural realm, such as fossils, animal horns with little or no connexion between them. They were what Hooper-Greenhill (1992: 78-105) names “irrational cabinets”. The Renaissance and its will to understand and classify reality coupled with the rupture of
the French Revolution gave birth to the modern and public museum\textsuperscript{5}. Royal palaces and collections were then opened to the public, the first important step to a democratisation of culture. In 1792, for example, the Louvre was transformed into a public museum and French citizens could admire freely the nationalized artefacts, thus demonstrating the end of the Monarchy and signalling the creation of a new state as a benefactor (Duncan, 1999:306).

The museum must be understood in the specific context of institutions and the development of rationalist thought after the French Revolution (Bennett, 1995: 89). Indeed, “[f]or the first time specialized institutions to promote specific fields could be also conceived. One such institution was the museum” (Diaz-Andreu, 2001: 431). After widening the access to the middle-class, there was, at the turn of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century, a greater pressure to open the doors of the museum to the working-class.

The museum in the 1970’s witnessed and took into account the social and cultural changes expressed at the time (Simpson, 1996: 72). Among the most notable changes was the creation of community museums following the demands and empowerment of various ethnic groups, such as the American Indian or the Maoris. These awoke to their cultural particularities and felt the need to preserve, present and control their cultural heritage. More recently developments in technologies and of society itself has transformed museum in a kind of leisure experience, where one consumes the knowledge of artefacts, “[a]nd intangible no less than material aspects of heritage have become international commodities” (Lowenthal, 1994 :44)

It is useful to note that the museum as a public institution developed in parallel to the creation of nation-states in 19\textsuperscript{th} century Europe. It was then exported to other parts of the world, very often by the colonial powers. The museum is an institution clearly linked to colonialism, both on its treatment of the native cultures exposed and by its representation of the colonial state, in Europe\textsuperscript{6}.

The museum plays many roles. Initially, public museums served to expose what was private to the public, but with the years, they have become complex organisations, which have had

\textsuperscript{5} For detailed studies on the history of museums see: Hooper-Greenhill, Museums and the shaping of knowledge, Crane (ed.) Museums and Memory or Bennett, The Birth of Museum. History, theory, politics

\textsuperscript{6} Detailed studies of colonialism and museums: see Barringer, Flynn (eds.), Colonialism and the Object; Karp, Lavine (eds.), Exhibiting Cultures; or Simpson, Making Representations. Museums in Post-Colonial Era.
to adapt to social, economic and political contexts. It has become an instrument in the shaping of knowledge (Hooper-Greenhill, 1992: 14-18). Furthermore, according to Hudson, museums, especially in developing countries, are used “as a means of spreading and reinforcing the national consciousness or, as they often express it, the national culture” (Hudson, in Boswell & Evans, 1999: 373).

As examined in a number of studies (Karp & Steven, 1991; Kaplan, 1994; Boswell & Jessica, 1999; Crane, 2000; Diaz-Andreu, 2001, Crampton, 2003) museums and various exhibits are closely linked to the formation of national identities. By representing a certain vision of history, displaying artefacts in a particular manner, or using emotional language, the museum puts in relation the members of the same culture displayed, creates differences between cultures, and entices visitors to question their personal and collective identity.

The museum is particular in its duality: on one hand, the message its curators wish to transmit and on the other hand that same message interpreted by the recipient (the public). The museum should be seen as “process and agency, as space of flow and discursive conflict” (Prior, 2002: 211). As described by Greenblatt, exhibits have a particular resonance: “the power of the displayed object to reach out beyond its formal boundaries to a larger world, to evoke in the viewer the complex, dynamic cultural forces from which it has emerged and for which it may be taken by a viewer to stand” (Greenblatt, 1991: 42). The museum theatrically shows and puts in context a collection’s artefacts, thus creating a particular discourse on the past, on the nation, and consequently on the projected identity of the visitor, as both an individual and group member.

The museum is generally organised along two key principals, which are historical temporality and cultural context. Through both these criteria, the visitor participates in a process, which demands from him introspection on where he stands towards the group represented through the artefacts. Objects also find their place in a particular discourse which is socially constructed (Howarth & Stavrakikis, 2000:3). It is a space where objects are put in context and given a meaning - “discourses [are] constructed out of them”. They become artefacts and then sometimes art objects (Hooper-Greenhill, 1999: 65). The museum

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7 Pomian, K. In a conference about on future Museum of Europe, Brussels, states the importance of using emotion to get the visitor involved in the museum, Château de Coppet, November 18th, 2004
thus becomes a narrative *machinery*, as it re-orders the past (Bennett, 1995: 179). It imposes itself as the keeper of the nation’s memory on both the collective level and on the understanding the individual has of the nation, and in the same time as a benchmark for the future.

In addition to museology, archaeology is also a central instrument in identity construction; archaeology is used to re-discover, understand and forge a nation’s history. Objects are replaced into a chronology of events and are thus transformed into *discoveries of the past*, gaining a particular meaning for the people. These objects link a nation to a territorial space, defining the latter through the archaeological discoveries, sometimes even serving as a legitimation for territorial expansion.

Archaeology, as a means on constituting collections, plays an important role in relation to the past. It is, on the theoretical level, used by nationalists in relation to a nation’s past or more specifically in relation to the discourse towards its past. Diaz-Andreu clearly links the development of archaeology in the specific “contemporary socio-political framework” (Diaz-Andreu, 2001: 429). It is useful on two counts: archaeological discoveries prove the uniqueness of a nation and they show its continuity. Indeed, as “the successive strata [are] uncovered by archaeologists [it is] a proof of national authenticity and continuity (Smith, 2001: 441). Through nationalist ideals, the science of archaeology takes form and goes as far as to defining its framework and objectives.

Artefacts, which are discovered and rationalised through archaeology and then displayed in museums, act as a transmitter for the “rediscovery and repossession” (Smith, 2001: 442) of the nation’s past and roots the nations to a distinctive homeland, highlighting the importance of territory. Furthermore, Smith underlines the symbolic and “emotive” importance of spectacular discoveries. These are used as a legitimisation of the nation in the “eyes of outsiders” or “co-national” (Smith, 2001:447).

Diaz-Andreu distinguishes two nationalist contexts, which will give rise to two types of archaeology or ways of dealing with one’s past. In civic nations archaeology is institutionalised through the use of museums, while in ethnic nations the discovery of object will contribute to the creation of myths of common descent (Diaz-Andreu, 2001:429-440).
ARCHEOLOGY AND MUSEUMS IN AFGHANISTAN

Cultural heritage in Afghanistan has had strong foreign involvement. Both archaeology and the Kabul Museum have taken a particular orientation due to non-Afghan priorities. Beginning with archaeology, it is worthwhile examining closer the presence in Afghanistan of the Délégation Archéologique Française en Afghanistan (DAFA), which highlights the connection between politics and archaeology. Archaeology in Afghanistan developed because of western’s interest and under the internal process of modernisation and nation-building, which was taking place in the early 20th century.

Foreign travellers and adventurer were the first to explore and document Afghanistan’s “cultural” remains and sites. People such as William Moorcroft or Charles Trebeck (1819-25) or Sir Alexander Burnes (1831-3) travelled through the country for trade or political matters and would at the same time visit and comment different artefacts and monuments such as the Bamyan Buddha’s (Centlivres, 2001: 47-8). The importance of such travellers’ stories is vital to the development of Afghan archaeology; indeed, these were used by the members of the Délégation Archéologique Française en Afghanistan in its exploratory work (Olivier-Utard, 1997: 52). Such work cannot be described as archaeology, since these travellers had no wider context to situate the objects of their findings, nor did they use any kind of methodology.

By the end of the 19th century, the Russian Empire gained control over the Central Asian territories and cities such as Taschkent (1865) or Samarcande (1868). Around Afghanistan, the spread of both the British and Russian empires accelerated the development of archaeology and the quest for a better understanding of native culture (Gorshenina & Rapin, 2001: 28).

The treaty of Rawalpindi (1919), at the end of the 3rd Anglo-Afghan war, permitted Afghanistan to gain control over its foreign policy, thus becoming one of the first Muslim countries to be independent (Magnus & Naby, 1998: 89). The arrival of the King Amanullah on the thrown of Afghanistan (1919-1928) signalled the start of a period of surveys of Afghan cultural sites and signals the real development of archaeology in Afghanistan. Amanullah
started an ambitious modernization program in order to change the Afghan state at different levels: a new constitution was promulgated in 1923, the build-up of social institutions, administration and education. Reforms went as far as to promote the un-veiling of women and co-education (Dupree, 1977: 14).

Furthering this aim of modernization, Amanullah turned to international cooperation, seeking the help of countries such as Turkey, Germany or France. The latter was asked by the Afghan monarch to set up a series of measures to promote western ideas through education. A lycée français was to be created in Kabul and the French would be given the right to prospect for archaeological remains around the country (Olivier-Utard, 1997:20).

The establishment of such cooperation between Afghanistan and France gave out a strong political and symbolic signal on both the external and internal levels. Afghanistan had just gained its independence, and such a decision symbolized real national independence from the Vice-Roy of India, to whom all decisions had to be referred previously (Olivier-Utard, 1997: 17). Internally, the King was determined to strengthen the central state authority in a fragmented country (Olsen, 1988: 158). The Franco-afghan cooperation paved the way to a defined cultural policy in order to “assembler l’autorité éclairée de l’état également dans le domaine culturel et de promouvoir, à l’instar des nations modernes, la connaissance du passé de l’Afghanistan” (Centlivres, 2001:59).

In the case of Afghanistan, however, and as Olivier-Utard argues, the search for a better understanding of the past cannot be seen as a solely a move to forge national unity: “l’archéologie, qui travaille sur les sources est destinée à servir l’histoire contemporaine et à cimentier l’unité nationale. En Afghanistan, la question n’est pas posé en ces termes” (Olivier-Utrad, 1997, 311). The development of archaeology and the prospect of archaeological findings were primarily understood as a way of geographically and physically taking control of the country’s territory, of the homeland. The Afghan monarchs also perceived archaeology as a way of making findings which could give the central state the necessary resources for modernization.

A specialist in Buddhist art, Alfred Foucher, was asked by the French government to negotiate the creation of the Délégation Archéologique Française d’Afghanistan. His mission
in Kabul soon took a diplomatic turn, as no official diplomat represented the French government to the new state of Afghanistan. The intrigues of the Great Game were still present, and France had to fight against the British, Italians or Russians in order to gain the right to prospect\textsuperscript{8}. The Afghans were particularly attracted to France for two key reasons: France was perceived as “un pays véritablement ami de l’Islam” due to their supportive policy towards the Turkish nationalist movement of Mustapha Kémal (Olivier-Utard, 1997:22); the French were also renowned for their educational system based on a strong civic conception of the nation. For Olivier-Utard (1997 : 23) “le caractère profondément patriotique, voire nationaliste, de l’école française (...) peut satisfaire un chef politique désireux de faire progresser l’idée de nation dans son pays”. A number of Lysée Français had been set up in Egypt or Turkey, and Amanullah thought appropriate to use such as system to counteract the mullahs, which were in control of education, especially in rural areas (Samady, 2001: 25).

After harsh negotiations, the Délégation Archéologique Française en Afghanistan was finally created in 1921, giving it the exclusive rights to prospect for the next 30 years. The French were granted the right to prospect in all parts of the country, with the exception of holy sites, mosques and cemeteries. They were free to determine which sites to prospect; to keep half of the artefacts with the exception of gold, silver objects and jewellery (Olivier-Utard, 1997: 37-40). It was agreed that France would finance all the archaeological work.

The expectations of the two parties couldn’t have been further apart. The Afghans were, in fact, hoping that the findings would enable them to get the much-needed money, while the French were anxious to make spectacular findings. As noted by Olivier-Utard (1997 : 42), “l’archéologie est une affaire de musée [...] [L]a France accepte de financer des fouilles à l’étranger à condition que ses musées obtiennent des avantages substantiels”. The French saw in this cooperation agreement a unique opportunity to penetrate Central Asian and South Asian archaeology where the British and the Russians were already well ahead. The French were in effect in control of all archaeological undertakings in the country. It is only in 1965, for example, that an archaeological dig (in Hadda) was for the first time directed by an

\textsuperscript{8} Afghanistan had been closed for years to foreigners and prospect of great archaeological findings attracted many.
Afghan (Dupree, 1998). And only a year later was the Afghan Archaeological Institute established.

Alfred Foucher, head of the newly created DAFA, gave a clear direction to the archaeological digs. These were concentrated on the Buddhist historical period, Gandhara art and its ties with the Ancient Greek world, leaving aside the pre-historical and Islamic periods (Centlivres, 2001: 61). Interestingly, the Afghan government never expressed a particular interest on the period or location of the archaeological prospects and important choices, such as where to prospect and on which historical period to concentrate, were made by the DAFA. As the science of archaeology was evolving, digs were done by stratification, prospecting layer after layer. This was not the case in early stages of the DAFA (there were no trained archaeologist, but academics), which meant that more recent archaeological findings were disregarded and damaged in order to prospect the older Hellenistic period. The archaeological map of Afghanistan was clearly a result of European interests, thus giving a clear European outlook to the reconstruction of the country’s history.

Mrs Olivier-Utard, specialist of the DAFA history, is very critical of the French missions in Afghanistan. She criticises, for example, the choice of digs in the country. Despite the great richness of their discoveries and the scientific methods used, the archaeological digs were mainly aimed at finding spectacular monuments, and that there was very little interest to map clearly Afghanistan’s history (Centlivres, 2001: 67). The different directors chosen to head the DAFA are a testimony to this approach: all were specialists in classical art, or Buddhist art. The DAFA was attracted by major artefacts, but found no interest in restoring monuments.

The DAFA finally lost its exclusive right to dig after the Second World War and different foreign archaeological missions conducted by Americans, Italians or Japanese were able to prospect in the country. These foreign-conducted digs included the Islamic and pre-historic periods of Afghan history.

Because of its rich collections, the Kabul museum attracted a lot of tourists and archaeologists but very few Afghans. The museum was not integrated to the educational curriculum and thus rarely visited by school classes. Pierre Centlivres, who was hired by the
Afghan government as a consultant to the Kabul Museum (1964-66) reveals the strangeness and foreignness of the museum to the Afghan population. The content of the museum was clearly not appropriate. Firstly, contemporary Afghan history was not related in the museum, thus “les collections du musée leur étaient étrangère: une étrangeté spirituelle tout d’abord, dans la mesure ou la religion, l’histoire et la période formative et présente de la nation et de l’Etat afghan n’étaient guère, ou pas du tout, évoquées…” (Centlivres, 2001: 73).

Secondly, many Gandharan, Greco-Buddhist or Indian artefacts shocked the Afghan Muslim eye.

THE MUSEUM OF KABUL AND THE CULTURAL HERITAGE LANDSCAPE IN AFGHANISTAN

Among the many cultural sites which are today the focus of international aid, I wish to concentrate here on the Museum of Kabul, because it is the most important cultural institution in Afghanistan and may be representative of the debate surrounding cultural heritage.

Created in 1919, the Kabul museum was situated in an old palace in Bagh-I Bala in Kabul. It was at first constituted of various objects, which had been housed in the Royal Palace. These objects had been collected by Amir Habibullah (1901-1919) and his brother Hasrullah, and included objects such as manuscripts, Islamic bronzes or Nuristani wood sculpture (Dupree, 1987:26 and Centlivres, 2001:70). A collection of manuscript was assembled to form the National Library, which was looted in 1929. At the time, the museum could be defined at first as what Hooper-Greenhill (1992: 78-105) names an “irrational cabinet”, made up of diverse, precious and everyday objects with little or no connexion between them. The successive digs done by the DAFA and later by other archaeological teams enriched the museum’s collection.

The Kabul Museum was unique in many ways. Due to its recent creation and because of the involvement of foreign archaeologists, all its artefacts were scientifically collected throughout the country, allowing all objects to be clearly linked to a distinctive historical period. Using pottery fragments, the archaeologists were able to date objects precisely and
thus retrace chronologically Afghanistan’s past. The Kabul Museum was considered as having exceptional rich collections: the Greco-Bactrian (3rd-2nd century B.C) coins collection, the Begram Ivory carved panels, the Gandhara Buddhas (1st-3rd century A.D), the Nuristani carved wood, Hindu marble statues, and many more. All of these artefacts illustrated the central role played by Afghanistan in commerce and trade between India, China, Central Asia, and Europe and portrayed Afghanistan has a crossroad of civilisations.

In 1933, the Museum was transferred to a new site, at the western edge of the city, Darulaman, where it remains to this day (Dupree, 1977: 92). Members of the DAFA and other foreign archaeologists contributed to classify and document the museum’s collection. Until 1958, the museum’s display was centred on Greco-Buddhist artefacts, which seemed very distant to Afghan’s understanding of their identity. In 1958, the museum was transformed and an Islamic section was added to the museum followed five years later by an ethnographic section, showing pre-Islamic statues and different ethничal artefacts (Centlivres, 2001: 75).9

Ever since its creation, the Kabul Museum and its treasures have been the victims of political unrest. As early as 1929, the museum suffered looting. It is only much later, however, that the museum suffered the most. Despite the political unrest and turmoil beginning with the communist regime in 1979 and throughout the Soviet occupation, the Kabul museum continued to function. It is during the civil war, which broke out between the different mujahidin commanders in 1992 and later in 1995, that Kabul became a battlefield and that the museum was the most affected - it was on the front line. Some of the collections were packed in boxes and transferred to the National Bank, where they have been found very recently. The rest of the museum’s collection was also packed and either stored in the cellar of the museum, or moved to the Kabul Hotel in the centre of the city. The museum doors were sealed. The different mujahidin groups nonetheless looted the museum, and parts of the museum were burnt down, loosing many objects as well as the precious museum

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9 Though all important findings were brought back to the Kabul Museum, regional museums had been set up in the 1930s, in the cities of Kunduz, Kandahar, Herat, Mazar-I-Sharif. They were poor in collections and not well looked after, and were all under the centralized structure controlled by the Kabul Museum, and ultimately by the Ministry of Information and Culture (Dupree, 1987:27). A specialised museum was created, the Museum of Islamic Art in Ghazni was created in 1935 and later shifted in a restored mausoleum, with the help of Italian archaeologists of the Istituto Italiano per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente. (Further field research needed).
archives in the fire (Dupree, 1998). By chance, the important collection of pottery so useful to date the artefacts is largely intact.

Many treasures of the Kabul Museum have reappeared on markets in Peshawar and Quetta, in Pakistan, following the drug routes (Harding, 2000), while others have even reached the international art market. Many have vanished in private collections, in Great Britain, America, Switzerland or Japan. Today many artefacts come from illegal prospects made by local commanders. These illegal digs have important consequences: they are done using bulldozers in order to more rapidly reach high market-value artefacts (many smaller pieces are destroyed in the process); and these finds are of course not recorded, meaning a great loss of knowledge on Afghanistan’s history. These finds, along with drugs, contribute to what is commonly called the war economy, financing the local and regional commanders. The most publicised destruction of artefacts in the Kabul Museum took place in February 2001, when the then leader of the Taliban movement, Mullah Omar passed a decree ordering to destroy all pre-Islamic statues.

Today’s cultural heritage landscape in Afghanistan is still characterised by strong foreign involvement: archaeology; the recording of monuments and archaeological sites; the creation of museums; and the protection, rehabilitation and promotion of their heritage involves international organisations and foreign actors. In order to better understand the intervention on cultural heritage in the country, I have classified these actors in four categories:

1. **Official Afghan political structure**, which comprises key ministries of the Karzai government, including the Ministry of Information and Culture, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Finance, and key political parties.

2. **International actors**, including organisations such as UNESCO, ICC (International Coordinating Committee for the Safeguarding of Afghanistan’s...
Cultural Heritage), ICOM (International Council of Museums), the DAFA (Délégation Française en Afghanistan), foreign museums (such as the British Museums, Musée Guimet, etc), and non-governmental organisations (NGO’s).

3. **Local actors**, which include various Afghan actors such as local NGO’s, key power brokers (local commanders and regional leaders), and Afghan intellectuals.

4. The **Diaspora community** should be taken into account given its size an importance, despite expected minor leverage power.

The preservation of cultural heritage has been set as a goal by the new Karzai government. They want to “create an environment where the cultural heritage is preserved, protected and handed on to young generations of Afghans as record of the rich experience and aspirations in their country, so as to foster cultural creativity in all its diversity” (National development strategy, in [www.af](http://www.af)). But the great mobilisation around the reconstruction of the Kabul Museum has mainly involved international actors, and reveals both the government’s lack of sensibility towards the nation-building project and the projected identity that these foreign actors envisage for Afghanistan, and hence for themselves.

The Afghan government is, according to UNESCO officials, in “the driving-seat of the reform”, working with various international organisations (Haxthausen & Williams, 2003:86). Overall reforms must urgently been put in place, and the Karzai government is preparing itself to ratify both the 1970 UNESCO Convention and 1995 UNIDROIT Convention in order to curb the ever-growing problem of illicit trafficking of artefacts. Despite these efforts, UNESCO has been requested by Afghanistan to coordinate the action to safe guard Afghan heritage.

Foreign institutions and countries have been greatly involved. The British Museum (London) and the Guimet Museum (Paris) have proposed to participate in staff training, enhancing chances of future collaboration between these institutions. The Guimet museum has been active across its history: apart from receiving ownership for half of the discoveries made by the DAFA, it has served, during the civil war, as a deposit for objects that had been taken out
of Afghanistan by SPACH\textsuperscript{12}, a non governmental organization. In 2002, Guimet’s Director was sent to Kabul by the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs in order to establish contact with Afghan authorities and later prepare the return of the new reformed DAFA. It must be reminded, that Afghan archaeologists have traditionally been formed in France through the influence of the DAFA\textsuperscript{13}. Today, DAFA has once again started excavations in Afghanistan.

The United States has participated financially to renovate the building. More interestingly, Greece has been another major donor to the Kabul Museum in particular. Here, one cannot ignore the will of the Greek government to protect the remains of the presence of Alexander the Great in Afghanistan, demonstrating the ability of conquest. By donating money and participating in the reconstruction of the museum Greece reassert this historic figure as a Greek national.

No particular demands seem to have been formulated by the Afghan government\textsuperscript{14} towards its cultural heritage, apart from urgent preservation measures. The Kabul Museum is more regularly used to host official reception cocktails rather than school day excursions. The Afghan government has understood the international sensitivity to Western notions of world heritage and the Kabul Museum acts more as a symbol of the plight of the Afghan people for the international community than an institution to educate its people on its historical heritage. Indeed, it is particularly interesting to note that no contemporary history is presented in the National Museum of Kabul.

This is still a very fragmented and lacunary account of Afghanistan’s cultural heritage landscape and its different actors, especially as they relate to the Kabul Museum. Further work and field research must be undertaken in order to understand the concerns and agendas of, for example, local leaders, political parties, ethnic minorities, international and local organizations, as well as the Diaspora surrounding the museum and its role.

\textsuperscript{12} The Society for the Preservation of Afghanistan’s Cultural Heritage has, among other activities, been active to try and locate and recover stolen artefacts.

\textsuperscript{13} In a recent visit to the Guimet Museum, I was compelled to see that the Afghanistan section of the museum only regroups artefacts from the Greco-Buddhist past, and nothing from the Islamic period.

\textsuperscript{14} Further investigation will be done by interviewing state officials in Kabul in the autumn.
CONCLUSION

Today, Afghanistan is intersected by a number of conflicting identities: ethnic, tribal, religious, or even a loss of identity. There is, as noted by Dorronsoro (1991), a conflict between educated people and clerics15. This difficulty seems likely to be reinforced by the ambivalent stance of both the Karzai government and the international community, as illustrated by the case of the Kabul Museum. The trajectory of archaeological discovery in Afghanistan and the development of its heritage through the Kabul Museum, which can largely be seen as a failure in terms of creating a sense of national belonging, seem to be repeating itself. Particular cultural policies such as the destruction of an old tomb in Herat, in order to be rebuilt anew, are decided in a breakaway fashion by regional warlords, with no control by the central government in Kabul. The international community, for its part, continues to privilege its archaeological agenda in the region, focusing on pre-Islamic artefacts and monuments, such as the search of the third Buddhas in Bamyan.

Key to any nation-building measure and post-conflict management is the process of national reconciliation. In the case of Afghanistan, no such process is being envisaged. The lack of any monument to commemorate the Jihad, an event that resonates deeply in all Afghan’s minds16, the absence of recent Afghan history, or even the absence of the contextualisation of the Taliban iconoclasm denotes unease with the past. One can draw here a parallel with the unwillingness of the Karzai government, of local power brokers and of the international community to reconsider the recent violent past of Afghanistan, turning a blind eye to the crimes committed by all parties during the Jihad, the civil war and the Taliban era. Indeed, the various war criminals are still in power in Afghanistan and are often the key interlocutors of the new Karzai government. A country which has witnessed such tragedy cannot envisage the future without reconsidering its painful past, without going through a real travail de mémoire.

15 The term educated refers here to a person which has had secondary education or university, hence has gone through a particular socializing.
16 I wish to thank Prof. Pierre Centlivres for bringing this to light.
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