
Guarding Against Collective Amnesia? Making Significance Problematic: An Exploration of Issues

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ABSTRACT

A nation's collective consciousness relies on the traces of memory collected by institutions such as libraries, archives, and museums. Such institutions have a responsibility to preserve documents and objects that reflect individual and collective endeavors and that have had an impact on culture and society at national, regional, and local levels. Institutions need to assess documents and objects against criteria that, in effect, "name" these items as significant. Most institutions claim that this process is objective, failing to acknowledge that it is underpinned by ideological, political, economic, cultural, and social influences. The position adopted in this paper is that the process of naming a document or object as significant will always reflect the directions and consciousness of a society's dominant groups, and that this will shape interpretations and narratives of the past. Thus the voices of a community's minority or special interest groups will be silenced. This paper suggests that neither the concept of significance nor the process of assessing significance is benign; both should be seen as areas of tension and contestation.

INTRODUCTION

As I was writing this paper, I read a review of a television documentary commemorating the fifth anniversary of 9/11. The documentary was about Richard Drew's *Falling Man* series of photographs of a person falling to his death from the World Trade Center. These photographs became the subject of media self-censorship and debate in the United States:

Several days after the photograph appeared, it vanished. . . . There was a deeply held belief the deaths of the jumpers weren't proper, indeed they were cowardly. The images that came to symbolize the day were of helmeted heroic rescuers working in the rubble and the jumpers disappeared. (Blundell, 2006, p. 24)

These images are representative of the significance debate. History is written by victors. It is the dominant paradigm and its culture and institutions that define what is to be remembered, and how it will be remembered.

Within collecting institutions, such as libraries, museums and archives, that seek to provide enduring access to the cultural memory, the concept of significance emphasizes importance and consequence to the community served by these institutions. Assigning significance creates an illusory "fiction" of collective understanding, so that an item of documentary heritage, once designated significant, is deemed worthy of remembering. The consequence of assigning significance is understood within the institutions as helping to shape the future consciousness, interpretations, and narratives of their communities. The act of assigning significance is a social action that is constituted through a symbolic need to establish or maintain a social thread or connection, to preserve a footprint that is deemed important, and to ensure the continuity of a community's memory. Piggott (2005, p. 311) describes memory as inherently "social." He suggests that in the process of assigning significance we commit to memory an intentional rendering, interpretation, and narrative that will have long-lasting implications. The reasons and consequences underpinning the assignation of significance should be carefully examined and considered by librarians, as their involvement in this process has an indirect impact on future interpretations and shared narratives of history. In this respect, the process of identifying material as significant has a symbolic function; it creates knowledge about an object's importance and about repositories of knowledge built and maintained by librarians, which helps shape future cultural memory.

The UNESCO-sponsored Memory of the World Programme exemplifies this process. The program identifies those document records of human endeavor that are designated as significant and may be digitized so that they remain accessible to future generations. In discussing the current institutional trend of digitizing collections, Dalbello (2004) recognizes the impact of this activity on the shaping and structure of cultural memory: "the shaping of cultural memory corresponds to the emergence of shared narratives from an array of possible historical interpretations. Loci of memory, key events, key texts or artefacts then become symbolic points of reference for group identities" (p. 267).

As Pymm (2006, p. 65) notes, the process of determining an item's significance and the impact of this process have received scant attention

from the library profession. In libraries, determining and assigning significance proceeds as a largely uncontested practice. While the concept of selection is well documented, the associated concept of significance and its implications and consequences for both library collections and society remain unexplored and uncontested.

In this paper I explore the concept of significance as it relates to collecting institutions such as libraries and archives. I argue that, while the concept is not identified as problematic in the literature, it is highly problematic in practice. This is primarily because the process of identifying an item as significant is a subjectively constituted practice that constructs a social reality and produces a collective consciousness. It is underpinned by the narratives, directions and values of dominant groups within a society, who influence institutional agency and practice in the designation of significance. Thus the construct of significance cannot guard against “collective amnesia,” because the voices of a community’s marginalized groups or disenfranchised interests, with different or contested stories to tell and, consequently, different memories to preserve, are silenced.

Three interrelated themes are used to explore the implications and consequences of significance:

- Assigning significance as a political act
- Significance as a social construct
- Significance as a contestable practice

The aims of the paper are to problematize the discursive practices of significance assessment by challenging aspects of the concept, and to pose questions to stimulate the exploration and consideration of significance in library contexts. Although the paper draws on Australian activities and approaches to identifying and describing items as significant, the questions posed will resonate for memory institutions worldwide.

THE POLITICS OF MEMORY: CONTESTING CONCEPTS OF “INSTITUTIONAL” SIGNIFICANCE

Designating items of documentary heritage as significant is a political act. It has implications for the preservation of knowledge and the shaping of cultural memory. Items are selected as significant because they are deemed to represent intellectual endeavor, because they may be unique, and because they reflect or report a particular activity at a particular point in time. Within this process a secondary process of knowledge creation and mediation occurs. Through this secondary process knowledge is created about an item’s importance in relation to its ability to contribute to and enrich the fabric of society. This knowledge is then used to mediate and advocate the worthiness of the documents for preservation purposes. The implications of this secondary process of knowledge creation remain largely unexplored in the library literature.

This secondary process not only determines an item's importance to the collective memory of society, but also creates a unitary fiction about what is valued and worth attending to through the costly processes of long-term preservation. This, in turn, can be used to suppress contestation of the value of memory by marginalized groups. The production and retention of knowledge through documentation and preservation of documentary heritage that is determined as significant constitutes, therefore, the exercise of power over others. Alvesson (2002), in discussing the connection between power and knowledge, suggests that "knowledge orders and structures the world; the world is formed by the knowledge institutionalized within it" (p. 56). This secondary knowledge creation aims to foster and maintain overarching narratives (the narrative of discourse), which, in turn, work toward rendering, securing, and maintaining the dominant group's position within society (Alvesson, 2002; Foucault, 1977, 1980). The discursive representations produced and maintained through discursively-constituted practices are sanctioned by the group and ultimately represent a particular interpretation of reality and construction of truth that regulate "what is said and written and passes for more or less orderly thought and exchange of ideas" (Cherryholmes, 1988, p. 2).

This exercise of power can have a negative and long-lasting influence on future generations and the resilience of collective memory. Zhang and Schwartz (1997) use the coercing of Yugoslavian libraries during the Milosevic regime as an illustration of attempts to alter collective memory through discursively sanctioned practices. These libraries were commandeered to validate ethnocentric myths that perpetuated an inflammatory collective memory by emphasizing selected historical events and by promoting social stereotypes as historical fact. Similarly, Knuth (2004) reports on the systematic destruction of Tibetan documentary heritage by the Chinese before and during the Cultural Revolution in an attempt to eradicate Buddhism and traditional cultural memory. Knuth uses this as an illustration of the application of discursive practices to acculturate an indigenous group into the discourses of an invasive and powerful culture.

Codified knowledge is viewed as ordering and structuring the world, and libraries, archives, and other memory institutions play a critical role in ensuring the recognition, survival, and preservation of documentary heritage in physical and, increasingly, in digital form (Cook, 2001). In this respect the discursive practices of memory institutions are critical in ensuring that knowledge is accessible to present and future generations. This places them in an often downplayed, yet powerful and influential, position as keepers of cultural truth, shapers of memory and guardians of sanctioned knowledge.

Concepts of power and knowledge affect any discussion about significance, because they underpin questions about the construction and

contestation of truth and about whose knowledge is worth preserving for future generations. Alvesson (2002) maintains that “power resides in the discursive formation itself—the combination of a set of linguistic distinctions, ways of reasoning and material practices that together organize social institutions and produce particular forms of subject” (p. 56). The relationship between knowledge and power is a key element in critiquing the concept of significance, because it illustrates that dominant ideologies maintain their dominance by simultaneously embracing the notion of transcendent truth and defining the rules that determine truth (Fletcher, 1999, p. 23).

Therefore, the retention and shaping of collective memory and determinations of significance will be underpinned by notions of truth held by the powerful in society and by the decisions of the powerful about which truth, or which versions of truth, are valid and worthy of preserving for the long term. These decisions will be inherent in any criteria for selection for significance and in the availability of funding for the long-term retention of items that contribute to shaping the collective memory of that society.

SIGNIFICANCE AND IDENTITY

The construct of significance is also central to understanding the way that discourse and discursive practices affect and influence the identification of items of significance by collecting institutions. The decision to designate an item as significant legitimizes the item in accordance with societal subjectivities, which are then enacted through institutional agency. Alvesson (2002) states that “Discourses produce subject positions—not that different from roles . . . that individuals are located in (locate themselves in). These subject positions then drive individuals’ perceptions, intentions and acts” (p. 50).

In Western collecting institutions the designation of an item as significant reflects and reinforces power relations. It does this by facilitating the shaping of societal identity and memory, thus ensuring that the dominant voices, narratives, and interpretations, constituted through documentary (physical and digital) statements, are preserved and, therefore, available to be incorporated into the collective consciousness, which is the fabric of national or unitary identity. In her discussion of the evolution and function of libraries, Knuth (2003) states that “as societies grow in complexity, they increasingly depend on systems of knowledge that serve to connect various types of behavior, apply lessons from the past to future enterprises, and organize the indispensable activities of modern living” (p. 19).

Critiquing significance leads us to consider and problematize the concept by acknowledging the nature of truth and the possibility of contested truth. What becomes important in any analysis of significance is what is considered and interpreted by stakeholders (e.g., funding bodies, librarians,

dominant interest groups) as truth (and therefore significant), and what is not (and therefore dismissed or disenfranchized). This begs the questions: how are determinations of significance made? And, how representative of a community are the committees that make these determinations?

CONTESTING MEMORY

While librarians have been silent about the implications of significance and about how to determine significance, another group—archivists—have been actively reappraising their professional activities to focus more on social memory and the contestation of memory. Piggott (2005, p. 320) calls this “remembering and forgetting.”

Examples drawn from archival studies literature illustrate the contested nature of social memory resulting from selection decisions. Piggott (2005) questions the nature of truth and interpretation and the impact of this activity on the retention of archival materials. He refers to the official enquiry into the National Museum of Australia’s policies that was triggered by the exhibitions in the First Australians gallery where display of items relating to such events as the Bells Falls massacre of indigenous people in New South Wales contested the sanctioned interpretations of written history. Piggott writes “there is clearly a visible clash of two kinds of memory, two ways of knowing and remembering. The presence and interpretation of archival documents was and is crucial to that clash” (p. 312).

ACKNOWLEDGING AND SILENCING IDENTITY: THE AUSTRALIAN MEMORY OF THE WORLD PROGRAM

There is little evidence in the literature of librarianship that the concept of significance and the impact of its designation have received much critical attention or thought. Discussion of methods for determining significance in libraries has drawn heavily on practice in the archaeological and built heritage sectors. This is remarkable, given that libraries assert a mandate as keepers of collective memory. In one rare exception, Lyall (1993) explored significance in the context of the collecting and preservation responsibilities of the National Library of Australia. Her criterion for identifying an item as of national significance was that it “constitutes an authoritative significant record of Australia as a country and of the people, events and influences which have affected it” (p. 71).

A reason for this apparent lack of interest in significance as a concept may be found in the dominant neoliberal reality that underpins the economics of preservation activities in libraries and other collecting communities. Decision makers tend to operate in management contexts with limited budgetary resources and finite storage space. Consequently, what is determined to be significant in terms of the dominant paradigm reflects the reality of these constraints and, therefore, constructs history in

a way that is influenced by and maintains the dominant identity and advantage of particular groups. Decision makers do not have the resources to preserve everything. Therefore, decisions have to be made about what is significant, and, consequently, whose interests are to be acknowledged, what documented history is to be privileged, and whose history is to be marginalized or silenced.

The UNESCO Memory of the World Programme was designed to ensure the preservation of endangered documentary heritage that was considered to be of importance to regions or groups and at risk of disappearing (Knuth, 2003). The objective of the program is to prevent “collective amnesia” (p. 295) by establishing a register that would be accessible worldwide. Established in 1992, the program recognizes the fragile nature of documentary heritage and the unstable nature of global affairs. It aims to ensure that access to significant documents, central to the fabric of a society, are preserved. The program’s guidelines encapsulate the intention: “The UNESCO Memory of the World Programme is aimed at safeguarding the world’s documentary heritage, democratizing access to it, and raising awareness of its significance and of the need to preserve it” (Foster, Russell, Lyall, & Marshall, 1995).

Many countries have their own national versions of this project. In the Australian Memory of the World Program items deemed of national significance must demonstrate “historic, aesthetic, spiritual, community or research significance” (Australian Memory of the World Committee, 2005). They are judged against criteria which require evidence that they:

- are authentic—the authority, identity, and provenance of the item must be established;
- are unique—recognized as iconic to a community;
- are irreplaceable—its loss would impact on collective societal memory;
- have an impact—over time and space;
- have influence—the influence may be positive or negative;
- are representative of type without direct equal; and,
- demonstrate comparative value—rarity, completeness, integrity relative to others of its kind.

In undertaking the “test” for significance each item must be measured in terms of one or more of the following:

- time—the temporality should be established, the item must demonstrate significant cultural or societal change;
- place—location of creation, or location of event of phenomenon represented in document;
- people—social or cultural context reflected in the document;
- subject and theme—historical or intellectual developments; and,

- form and style—aesthetic, stylistic or linguistic values, document should be an exemplar of its type (Howell, 2002, pp. 6–7).

Items can be nominated for the national register; if deemed “nationally significant,” they can also be nominated by the national committee for inclusion on the world register. To date the majority of items on the national register (http://www.amw.org.au/register/amw_reg06.htm) record Western accomplishments or benefactions to minorities (e.g., the *Endeavour* Journal of James Cook, the Mabo Case Manuscripts).

Applying a significance assessment methodology can, therefore, be viewed as a discursively constituted practice, influenced by the subjectivities of the assessors and of institutions which are, in turn, influenced by availability of funds and by the over-riding narratives of influential groups in their constituencies. In the act of nomination for the national register, the concept of significance imposes an overarching meaning upon a document or object (possibly extending or altering its internal meaning). This assigns unique qualities to an item and alludes to a notion of the document or object as having a unified meaning that is uncontested by the community.

OBJECTIVE SIGNIFICANCE? WHOSE MEMORIES ARE WORTH REMEMBERING?

As the example above demonstrates, assigning significance is a reductionist process; that is, the document or object is reduced to meeting a set of criteria, established by the collecting or assigning organization. The irony of this position is that the development of criteria, while it is claimed to be an objective process, in fact underlies the subjective positions and political interests of those charged with determining significance and thus privileges some memories over others. Cook (2001) asserts that there is “nothing neutral, objective, or ‘natural’ about this process of remembering and forgetting” (p. 9). In other words, significance relies on relational systems that are discursively produced (Alvesson, 2002). For an item to be designated as significant there must be a set of sanctioned practices legitimized through socially constructed definitions that reflect systems of thought (discourses) and produce particular forms of subjectivity (Foucault, 1977, 1980).

In Australia, for example, definitions of significance are recast from the cultural heritage definitions that are used to underpin criteria developed within the discourse of archaeological science and built heritage. The revised edition of the Australia International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) Burra Charter, adopted in 1999, is concerned with the conservation of natural, indigenous, and historic places. The charter defines cultural significance according to aesthetic, historical, scientific, or social value. According to the charter, cultural significance is “embod-

ied in the place, fabric and setting, use, associations, meanings, records and related places and related objects” (Australia ICOMOS, 1999, Article 1.2).

Definitions of significance in the contexts of documentary heritage adopt this characterization within Western collecting or assigning organizations. In general, for documentary and cultural heritage, significance refers not just to the physical fabric or appearance of an object. It incorporates all the elements that contribute to an object’s meaning, including context, history, uses, and social and spiritual values. Significance is not fixed; it can increase or diminish over time (Russell, 2001, p. 11). This seems to suggest that the fabric of collective memory can be woven and altered as perceptions of significance change over time. Thus it contradicts the Memory of the World’s charter to guard against “collective amnesia” and begs the question: at what point does an item’s significance diminish to the extent that it should be removed from the program’s registers?

Any determination of social or spiritual values requires a subjective understanding of these elements in time and space. Such a determination would be difficult to make outside of an item’s context. For example, the idea that non-indigenous communities might be able to interpret, let alone develop a deep subjective understanding of, the intrinsic importance of items of spiritual value to an indigenous group has been criticized as paternalistic and as failing to understand the complexities and systems of those indigenous communities that may even control the rights of their own members to identify and interpret materials of significance. Because of this, Sloggett (2005, p. 121) has posited: “cultural significance is after all a very relative construct. Could the members who make up the Memory of the World assessment panels recognize the real significance of a document proposed by a cultural minority?”

The same problem underlies criteria that are intended to be used in the assessment of social values. The unavoidable questions must be asked: Whose social values? Which voices would determine them? Which interpretations would be deemed valuable? Archivist Terry Cook (2001) recognizes the problem. He argues:

No text is a mere innocent by-product of action . . . but rather a consciously constructed product, although that consciousness may be so transformed into semi- or even unconscious patterns of social behaviour, organization process and information presentation that the link to external realities and power relationships is quite hidden. Texts (which include images) are all a form of narration more concerned with building consistency and harmony for the author, enhancing position and ego, conforming to organization norms and rhetorical discourse patterns, than they are evidence of acts or facts, or juridical or legal frameworks. And there is not one narrative in a series or collection of records but many narratives, many stories, serving many purposes for many audiences across time and space. (p. 7)

Significance methodology requires those who apply it to “tease out the unique characteristics and meanings of each object or collection” (Russell, 2001, p. 11). This is done against an established and agreed-upon set of objective and subjective criteria, encompassing historic, aesthetic, scientific, social, and spiritual attributes. Harvey (2003), in discussing the UNESCO Memory of the World Programme, points out that the process which results in inclusions on the register is “also the subject of much politicking, and the logic for inclusion or exclusion of nominations is not always clear to the outside observer” (p. 138).

LOST AND MISSING DOCUMENTARY HERITAGE

Recently, at the request of the Australian Memory of the World Program, Lloyd, Harvey, and Lodge (2005) attempted to establish a method of recording lost and missing documentary heritage. This attempt confirmed the elusiveness of the concept of significance. Review of an item’s significance may result in its removal from a register or from a collection, or it may fail the significance assessment altogether, because its importance, impact, or relationship to other events are either not recognized by national committees responsible for a register or are contested by those committees. The ambiguity of the concept of significance emerged as an important theme from responses to a pilot survey aimed at identifying lost and missing documentary heritage. In particular, reconciling local collective memory with national significance selection criteria was problematic. This research led Lloyd, Harvey, and Lodge to conclude that significance is a “relative” concept and that its meaning must be reconsidered and recast to include local and regional significance, to recognize that local and regional events ultimately shape national memory. Their study also found evidence of the importance to a community’s memory of the impact of accidental loss of documents and of their intentional removal from preservation schedules.

Yorke (2000) draws attention to the tensions experienced by archivists when a single community view—usually that of the dominant governing or funding body—is imposed on appraisal practices. In Australia such imposition has in the past led to the destruction of case file records, which documented the separation of indigenous children from their families—files whose “contents would embarrass the government” (Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, 1997, cited in Yorke, 2000, p. 27). The destruction of these records constitutes a loss of explicit and codified memory for these families, the community and the nation, and continues to hinder reconciliation among these groups. Community attitudes to past practices and to the need for reconciliation have altered considerably in the last seventy years. The case files contained evidence of contemporary social values—evidence of the consequences of intervention, which is now seen as important for future generations.

FURTHER CONSIDERATIONS

While the term *significance* can be easily defined, the concept of significance is slippery and elusive. It can be understood in different ways by different groups at different points in time; its interpretation is reliant on the agency of institutions. When asked to determine an item's significance, organizations can readily provide a definition and a methodology to be used in the assessment of significance. This process, overarched by the legitimizing narratives of dominant groups, indirectly influences what is selected and whether funding will be provided to ensure long-term preservation strategies. Significance is not "out there" as a unified or objective concept; it is something that has been created by various techniques, including methodologies that reflect vested interests and ways of knowing. This creates problems for programs such as the Memory of the World, which claims an interest in safeguarding against collective amnesia.

To assert that objectivity in the determination of significance can be demonstrated through application of significance methodologies is to deny questions about the centrality and power of discourses that act to inform material practices, which position an object with the collective consciousness of community, and designate it as significant. The position of assessing an item's value or worth to a community or a nation against a formulated set of criteria appears reductionist; it assumes that core values and beliefs about what is worth remembering are common to the diverse groups that constitute a society.

Significance is a social construct. Its meaning will always be a product of temporal, spatial and social considerations that are underpinned by social, political, historical, and economic acts. As a social action the designation of significance marginalizes minorities and effectively silences voices that may contest the dominant remembering of a community. In effect, designating items of documentary heritage as significant delimits a society's collective memory and leaves it vulnerable to decisions that may over time selectively deny other voices or strands of remembering, thus thinning the fabric of collective memory to mere threads.

In arguing for or against an item's significance, ethical implications need to be acknowledged: Whose voices are being silenced? Whose voices are being heard? What are the long-term implications of these actions?

ENCOURAGING DEBATE

As Raven (2004) so graphically illustrates in *Lost Libraries*, the loss of collective memory is a tangible reality, as libraries and their collections throughout the ages and around the world become symbolic targets for groups who wish to eradicate or alter collective memory through loss, alteration, removal, or intentional destruction of those collections. This reality makes it critical for librarians to engage in debate about significance. They must recognize the implications of assigning significance and the

long-lasting ramifications of this action on collective memory. It is in this context, and in the spirit of exploration adopted by this paper, that the following questions are posed to stimulate debate among members of the library profession:

- How do we reveal our reflective processes, biases, and subjectivities in the designation of significance? Determinations of significance are always subjective; a primary role for librarians involved in making these determinations is to place themselves in the context of the decision making. This may include revealing our own subjective positioning (e.g., social, economic, historic, and political influences).
- How do we demonstrate our ethical position and ensure that the influences on our decision making are visible?
- How do we bring into any consideration of significance the voices that propose and contest designation of significance, but which are critical to a holistic encapsulation of collective memory?
- How do we ensure that actions in designating significance are free from vested interests, political, or economic influences?
- Do we avoid significance designation altogether? Should we focus on representation, which can be framed within distinct historical, social, or economic periods, and which actively recognizes both dominant and marginalized or silenced voices?

The question posed in the title of this paper is rhetorical and, as Pymm (2006) has suggested, there probably is no single definitive answer. The reason for this rests in the problematic construct of significance, and in library scholars' and practitioners' unwillingness to engage in debate about the underlying themes that motivate and drive the designation of significance. Yet it is critical that librarians do think about these themes and debate them, both among themselves and with those in allied professional groups. It is critical that they collaborate with all groups who claim a role in society as keepers of collective memory to find answers to questions raised in this paper. The consequences of not doing so will be narrow and structured remembering, which will fail to reflect the rich diversity of cultural life and will heighten the threat of collective amnesia.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The author would like to thank Rachel Salmond and Ross Harvey for their advice and assistance during the writing and editing of this paper. The writing of this paper was supported by a Charles Sturt University Writing Up Award.

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Displaying Traditional Yorùbá Religious Objects in Museums: The Western Re-Making of a Cultural Heritage

ANNA CATALANI

ABSTRACT

This paper, based on doctoral research carried out from January 2003 through July 2005, addresses the interpretation and representation of non-Western religious material culture in Western museums and offers a comprehensive view of the way traditional religious Yorùbá objects are displayed in contemporary museums in Britain. Museum exhibitions can be conceived as a visual narrative, which absorbs the religious essence of traditional religious non-Western objects into broad categories. At the same time, these categories are still strongly affected by Western aesthetic appreciation, understanding, and classificatory systems. In museum displays, traditional Yorùbá religious material culture loses its distinctiveness and is absorbed into global pan-African representations. Therefore, in order to be able to reach more informed or “authentic” interpretations, museums should include the memories and voices of the people who are “closer” to the original meanings of traditional religious objects.

INTRODUCTION

When enthusiastic and erudite collectors created their first cabinets of curiosities, they could not foresee in which complex, public, and socially significant institutions their private and intriguing rooms would develop. Indeed, since their creations, the notion of the “museum as a room filled with curiosities” has changed and museums, as organizations, have accomplished different purposes. They have shaped their role according to the changeable needs of contemporary society and from elitist, academic institutions have become public, informal learning environments; from intimidating, dusty mausoleums they have transformed into open, intercultural forums.

Nowadays, the number of museums in the Western world is extremely high and, as Thomson has astutely pointed out, museums have been and are still created either from a big collection or from a big idea (Thomson, 2002). However, it is indisputable that since their birth, one of the primary purposes of museums has been the preservation of material culture and of the related documentation for the benefit of contemporary and future generations (Pearce, 1996). Museums, in fact, host the tangible traces of the past and because of this, they are very poetical environments: they are “magical places, repositories for the wonders of the world, dynamic participants in our interpretations of the past, and places for launching dreams of the future” (Thomson, 2002, ix).

This paper aims to give a comprehensive view of the way traditional religious Yorùbá objects are displayed in contemporary museums in the United Kingdom.¹ The paper has been organized in three main sections. The first section will be concerned with museum displays, the “visual” aspect of museum exhibitions, and the importance of the act of looking at objects in museums. The second section will present the issues related to religious objects in museums. The third section will be a review of the different museum approaches in relation to Yorùbá religious objects in museums in the United Kingdom.² The paper asserts that museum exhibitions can be seen as a visual discourse. The visual discourse absorbs the religious essence of traditional religious non-Western objects into broad categories, which are still strongly affected by Western aesthetic appreciation, understanding, and classificatory systems.

MUSEUM DISPLAYS AND VISUAL CULTURE

Museums are the official repositories of people’s tangible and intangible heritage, because, through their collections, they keep and exhibit past and present people’s histories and memories. Specifically, in relation to contemporary society, museums and their collections are used to build cultural bridges between the displayed items and communities and between different local communities. However, the relationship between communities, museums, and their collections is strongly determined by the self-definition and perceptions of the communities within the society (Parkin, 1999). Indeed, it is important to consider that contemporary British society is made by different cultural and ethnic groups, which have arisen through complex historical processes of migration and diaspora and which are characterized generally—although not universally—by a constant process of integration of different cultural characteristics. Museums, therefore, reflect this multicultural and multiethnic climate as well as the integration and often the renegotiation of broadly accepted cultural identities. Concerning this, Henrietta Lidchi (2006) has explained that museum “exhibitions cannot be taken as disinterested representations of what is ‘out there,’” since they are influenced by contemporary

social agendas and cultural needs (p. 94). Furthermore, museum exhibitions are definitely “one of the principle means by which the people access [first of all visually, different] culture[s]” and every aspect of them (p. 94).

As mentioned in the introduction, this paper focuses on a specific category of objects (traditional Yorùbá religious objects) and on a specific category of museum exhibitions (ethnographic exhibitions). However, before discussing the way traditional Yorùbá religious objects are presented in British museums, it is important to define the way the term *ethnography* is used in this context. The term ethnography has had a complex history. Among several others, one of its key uses has been in the traditional language of museums, where in “Curators of Ethnography,” “Ethnographic collection,” or “Ethnographic Gallery,” the word simply means “material not from Europe or (usually) the East and Far East.” It is in this sense that the word ethnography is used in this paper. In addition, ethnographic exhibitions are profoundly visual products (Lidchi, 2006, p. 95). And it is the visual aspect of museum exhibitions as well as their relation with the notions of visual culture and non-Western cultures in museums I would like to briefly discuss.

Visual culture is related to the way images and objects contribute to the visual and social construction of reality. Visual culture is, in fact, the interpretation of different forms of visual evidence and concentrates “on the cultural work that images do in constructing and maintaining . . . a sense of order in a particular place and time” (Morgan, 2005, p. 29). Museums and museum exhibitions fully fit into this process of “constructing and maintaining a sense of order.” Indeed, museum representations mirror the understanding of cultures and therefore contribute to the formation of social and historical views. In addition, if we consider religious images, objects, and symbols, they visually cement people’s religious beliefs and values; at the same time, they also help to order and classify the surrounding world and human experience. However, the encounter between two different cultures’ sets of images, objects, and symbols (such as, Western and non-Western) could lead to visual and ideological clashes (Morgan, 2005). This is because the two encountered different cultures would not necessarily share the same classificatory, visual system.

Furthermore, according to the visual culture perspective, the act of seeing is very important and it is considered in its whole complexity. The “act of looking at something”—and this includes also the act of looking at objects in the museum context—is complicated: it entails the entire human sensorium, from the biological sphere to the cultural one (Morgan, 2005). When viewers or visitors look at museum displays, they are emotionally, physically, and culturally absorbed into the exhibition displays. This is because of the nature of the images that are all polysemous: images, objects, and their related meanings are not fixed but “contingent, unstable

and pluralistic” (Morgan, 2005, p. 127; Evans & Hall, 1999). Therefore, every image (and image of objects) includes a floating chain of signifiers and, in the museum context, visitors are “occupied” in selecting some, refusing others, and assigning to the image/object the meaning closest to their understanding and background (Evans & Hall, 1999).

In a museum, the act of looking becomes “an active engagement” between visitors and collections (Mack, 2003). This is because people’s memories are stimulated and an emotional link is created between the objects and the public. This emotional link is based on a sense of common cause, common experience, common remembrance and even on a sense of identity reinforcement toward the items on display (Mack, 2003; Walsh, 2002). By looking at the displays, people might simply compare their own images, symbols, and notions with the set of nonfamiliar information presented to them in the exhibition. In addition, in museums, the mere act of looking at somebody else’s objects and material heritage is often accompanied “by a sense of nostalgia associated with a longing and/or desire for something that has faded or disappeared and perhaps not longer attainable” (Walsh, 2002, p. 40). This is due, first of all, to the poetic atmosphere of the museum itself as a historical environment. Moreover, by actively linking their inner worlds and memories to the objects and the cultures exhibited, visitors do not act as simple and passive witnesses, but they actively engage with the museum collections. Actually, as Mack (2003) explains, the act of looking at the objects and therefore of “stimulating memory [is a] means to breathing life into inanimate objects” and to bringing alive the represented cultures (p. 18).

However, in relation to the subject of this paper, that is to say non-Western religious objects, museum professionals have to face few challenges. If “cultural identity is acquired from the context where one was born and brought up” (Khemir, 2001, p. 44) and if the act of looking at objects in museums can stimulate memories and sense of a common experience, the situation concerning diasporic groups and their traditional objects displayed in Western museums can be quite problematical. Therefore, more complex considerations should be made in relation to traditional non-Western objects displayed in Western museums and diasporic groups to whom these objects belonged.

As Khemir (2001) explains “memories constitute a very important component in the life of a culturally displaced person” (p. 44). However, considering that the relationship between communities and objects (i.e., cultural, religious, and traditional) is strongly determined by the self-definition of these communities within societies and considering that non-Western objects have become the symbol of a deprived past, diasporic groups might find it difficult to relate their memories to the displayed heritage (Parkin, 1999). Furthermore, during the Age of High Colonialism (1850–1914), non-Western objects (including the traditional religious

ones) have arrived in the Western world as plunders of military and Christian campaigns and have been categorized as trophies, fetishes, or exotic pieces. Particularly, traditional non-Western religious objects have been given social and cultural labels that have neglected and, often denied, their spiritual and religious essence. This is because they have been interpreted according to Western social, religious, and artistic criteria. In fact, Western social constructions have determined a Western social understanding of non-Western religious objects, based on different understandings and definitions and in accordance with the political propaganda of the time.

MUSEUMS AND RELIGIOUS OBJECTS

As Svetlana Alpers has pointed out, in museums everything can be turned into something special, into a work of art; it depends on the way we decide to look at it and on the criteria we (museum professionals or visitors) use to define it (Alpers, 1991). Indeed, often contemporary museum displays, in order to present non-Western objects in an appealing way, end up displaying these objects as though they were part of a marketing campaign; museum exhibitions are visual statements, which mirror contemporary social understandings, as much as the “advertising discourse both reflects and creates social norms” (Schroeder & Zwick, 2004, p. 24). Therefore, the characteristics of religious objects may change according to the religious beliefs and to the society that has created and used them. Actually, as Susan Langer explains, religious and “sacred objects are not intrinsically precious [or religious], but derive their values from their religious use” (Langer, 1951, p. 136). The religious meaning of a religious object depends strongly, hence, on its ceremonial and social context, that is to say where the object is used and where it has become a symbol, a visual, material means of communication between human beings and their gods or even a materialization of the gods themselves, who need to be cherished by their worshippers through it. It is, therefore, evident that when religious objects are moved out from their original, secret, religious place, and are inserted in museum displays—which are public, common spaces—their sacred, spiritual aura is somehow lost. On the contrary, the same objects assume new characteristics because they are interpreted and labelled according to the Western social conventions, museum classifications and to the specific museum’s agendas. They have become, in other words, “museum objects,” which create a specific museum postcolonial discourse;³ objects and images become social understandings and visual statements.

The next section of the paper will present three different postcolonial museum discourses. All these museum representations exhibit traditional Yorùbá religious objects and they are all based in museums in the United Kingdom. The discussion of these three different typologies is use-

ful in defining contemporary museum cultural assumptions (Macdonald, 1996).

THREE DIFFERENT MUSEUM APPROACHES

Between January 2003 and July 2005, ten museum displays in the United Kingdom were analyzed. They all exhibited traditional religious Yorùbá objects. The displays were studied according to the morphology of the galleries, the arrangement of the objects, and the texts of the panels. The museum exhibitions and galleries selected were both temporary and permanent and they were chosen because they house major displays, which include traditional Yorùbá religious objects. Due to their different interpretative approaches, these displays offer a comprehensive scenario of different ways of exhibiting religious and ceremonial Yorùbá items in contemporary British museums.

The analysis suggested that the displays can be divided into three main, distinct groups: artistic displays; ethnographic displays, and religious displays.⁴

The Art of African Material Culture: The Case of the Artistic Displays

The category “artistic displays” indicates those exhibits that have prioritized the artistic nature of the items, while subordinating their religious nature. These displays do not appear to have a specific focus on any African ethnic group or cultural distinctiveness. On the contrary, they risk being “a denial of African cultural distinctiveness” rather than “a celebration of Pan-Africanism” (Pole, 2001, p. 48). Museums that focus on artistic displays include: the Sainsbury African Galleries (British Museum, London), the African Worlds Gallery (Horniman Museum, London), Gallery 36 (Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery, Birmingham), the World Cultures Gallery (Manchester Museum, Manchester), and the 125 Exhibition (Nottingham Castle Museum and Art Gallery, Nottingham). Apart from the 125 Exhibition (Nottingham), all the displays analyzed were permanent.

The arrangements strongly depended on the shape of the items and undoubtedly emphasized an impressive and artistic visual interpretation of the displays, as in the Sainsbury Galleries (British Museum) and in Gallery 36 (Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery). In most of the display cases, the viewing height was uncomfortable (Dean, 1994). Often the objects were placed at a level too low, and therefore arduous, to be properly valued. This was, for instance, the case of the Ibeji figures in the World Cultures Gallery (Manchester Museum); indeed the figures, exhibited in the same case with Gèlèdè masks and other non-Yorùbá religious figures, were displayed at such a very low level that the public was forced to lean down to be able to see them or to read the text accompanying them. Conversely, in other exhibitions, artifacts were displayed high up, making it

difficult for them to be seen or appreciated by visitors. An example of this can be seen in the display of *Gèlèdè* masks in the African Worlds Gallery (Horniman Museum). The concentration of the objects was high, and consequently some of the glass cases were too crowded for the items to be appreciated on an individual basis (Lord & Lord, 2002). This was especially the case in the World Cultures Gallery (Manchester Museum) and the Sainsbury Galleries (British Museum), where objects appeared to be presented predominantly for their impressive, visual impact. In order to emphasize this artistic presentation, the displays' use of light was very important. Most of the displays employed artificial lighting in order to illumine individual objects and this contributed to the artistic approach of the exhibits.

In all the displays, the exhibits did not follow a story line but were arranged according to typological criteria or themes: for example in the case of the African World Gallery (Horniman Museum), the displays were related to different typologies of African objects: from altars to Egypt sarcophagi; from Benin plaques to different kinds of masks and masquerades; from stools and headrests to ceremonial items. In contrast, the displays were organized in themes in the Sainsbury Galleries (British Museum), in the Living Cultures Gallery (Manchester Museum), and in Gallery 36 (Birmingham Museum). This typological arrangement offered static and sometimes puzzling representations (Pearce, 1996). In fact, the displays generally tended to freeze the items and the cultures they belonged to, without making a strong and evident link with the existing Yorùbá local communities. Indeed, the displays of the African World Gallery, for example, included views of African people in the object labels and panels, but these people were not necessarily Yorùbá and, for the main part, were artists.

The number of traditional religious Yorùbá objects displayed varied strongly and the majority of traditional Yorùbá religious objects on display were *Gèlèdè* masks, *Ibeji* figures, and *Shango* staffs, although they also included: crowns, beaded boots, *Epa* masks, carved doors; cutlasses; *Ifa* divination boards, *Ifa* oracles, *Otsro* mask, *Egungun* mask, amulets, and ceremonial bowls. In all cases, the objects have been presented as artistic pieces, displayed to be appreciated either as individual items or as part of a broader display. However, in all cases their religious essence and purpose had become a secondary attribute. Indeed, the displays analyzed are all appealing and impressive exhibits, which celebrate the beauty and exotic diversity of Africa, either as pieces of an African mosaic or as complex and artistic pan-African representations.

This artistic and pan-Africanist nature of the displays was also reflected in the labels that accompany the items and the displays. Only rarely was there reference to, or any link with, the local African or Yorùbá community. Apart from the aforementioned example of African Worlds Gallery

(Horniman Museum), it is worth citing the case of the Living Cultures Gallery (Manchester Museum). In Manchester, the museum made use of seven touch screens, which showed local people speaking about some of the objects in the collections.⁵ This was a part of a project organized to underline the existing connection between the cultures on display and the diverse cultural life of the people of northwest England. However, there are no Yorùbá people discussing the objects and there was no reference to Yorùbá religious objects or traditions.

These artistic representations confirm that museum depictions of African material culture are still affected by Western classifications and that traditional religious Yorùbá objects are absorbed into pan-Africanist impressive representations, a situation that might reinforce the stereotypes of exotic art and dislocation that museum professionals have struggled to destroy (Elliott, 2005; Vogel, 1991).

Keeping the Proofs of 'the Others': Ethnographic Displays and Static, Visual Classifications of Non-Western Cultures

The category of "ethnographic displays" has been determined by the strong ethnographic nature of the exhibits. Indeed, these displays are predominantly organized according to typologies and analogical criteria, which defines the objects on the basis of their similarities and differences (Catalani, 2005). Museums that focus on ethnographic displays include: the World Cultures Gallery (The World Museum, Liverpool), the Court (Pitt Rivers Museum, Oxford), the Maudslay Gallery (The Cambridge University Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, Cambridge), and the Ethnography Galleries (The Royal Albert Memorial Museum, Exeter). All these displays were permanent.

The horizontal and vertical arrangements were both predominant in the ethnographic exhibits. This seemed due to the shape of the objects but also to the space available for the displays as, for example, in the case of the Court, in the Pitt Rivers Museum. In any of the displays examined, the arrangements did not have a comfortable viewing height. Indeed, objects were placed either at a level too low for a standard adult view or too high. The arrangement of the objects also affected the display density and the vista distance, which was quite low; the cases were often too crowded (as in the case of the Court) or were combining too many different shapes and typologies of objects (as in the cases of Ethnography Gallery, in the Royal Albert Memorial Museum), which made the displays too confusing for museum visitors to understand.

None of the ethnographic displays presented a continuous story line. On the contrary, they were organized through themes and typology. In the cases of the Court (Pitt Rivers Museum, Oxford) the themes were related to "the successions of ideas by which the minds of men . . . have progressed" (General Pitt Rivers, as cited in Blackwood, 1970, p. 8);⁶ con-

versely in the Maudslay Gallery (Cambridge Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology) the exhibits were organized according to the geographical location of the items.⁷ This was also the case with the Ethnography Gallery (Royal Albert Memorial Museum), where the themes were predominantly concerned with the geographical provenance of the artifacts, but also with religion,⁸ the main local collectors and collections and with issues relating to conservation cleaning methods for ethnographic items.

All the displays were static representations: the different ethnic groups and material cultures were displayed, side-by-side, in a sort of continuous and puzzling presentation of colonial sets, with no distinctiveness for Yorùbá culture or traditional religion. Concerning the Ethnography Galleries (Exeter), there was an attempt to underline the link between the objects and the original living cultures and to frame them in a historical context. This was achieved by presenting the objects as “evidence of the life of people in different communities.”⁹ However, the presentations were still portraying the items as artifacts out of time and space.

The typology of traditional Yorùbá religious objects varied and included mostly masks, a robe, amulets, personal ornaments, wooden figures, crowns, Ifa trays, Ogun staffs, headdresses, Ibeji figures, stools, cloths, and shrine figures. In all cases, traditional religious Yorùbá objects were incorporated into very broad categories (e.g., “West Africa,” “Nigeria,” “Amulets and Charms”), while their sacredness was neglected in favor of their practical function (Catalani, 2005). The displays presented cases concerned with religious and ceremonial objects (as for examples the cases: “Masks and Carvings,” “Amulets and Charms,” and “Magic, Witchcraft and Shamanism” in the Court of the Pitt Rivers Museum).¹⁰ However, there was no mention of Yorùbá religion and religious beliefs.

In general, the object labels provided information related to the place of origin of the item, the iconography, and the function. All the displays were also provided with interpretative panels. However, the text on the panels was written in a formal and academic style, containing some technical words, which required a good knowledge of the cultures on display. The voices were, in fact, the ones of the curators and it was evident that the displays were aimed at an academic and highly educated public. This is demonstrated also by the fact that the collections of the Court (Pitt Rivers Museum, Oxford) and of the Maudslay Gallery (Cambridge Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, Cambridge) are used primarily as educational resource material for researchers and academics.

Ethnographic displays seem to reflect very broad aspects of African cultures, with limited reference and emphasis on the importance of traditional Yorùbá religion for the local contemporary Yorùbá communities. Traditional religious Yorùbá objects are therefore framed into static, often typological representations, as the “‘material culture’ of peoples who

have been considered . . . [an] appropriate target for anthropological research” (Lidchi, 1997, p. 161).

Religious Objects as Symbols of a Religious Experience: The Unique Case of a Religious Display

The category of religious displays consists of those displays that present different religious experiences through traditional religious ceremonial objects. In this category, it was possible to include only the Gallery of the Religious Life, St. Mungo Museum, in Glasgow.¹¹ The displays of this gallery are permanent and constitute a unique example in the United Kingdom of museum displays concerned with religious material. In them, the religious essence is regarded as central to all the items and religious objects (Western and non-Western). Further, the objects are interpreted as unique expressions of the universal religious experience, and as a material way to explore other faiths and beliefs. The displays follow a continuous story line, which contributes to the dynamic aspect of the exhibition. By presenting the human experience of religion, the exhibition actualizes crucial aspects of human life and emphasizes cultural distinctiveness.

The objects in this gallery were organized according to horizontal and vertical arrangements. Additionally, few of the cases have a comfortable viewing height because some of the objects are displayed too low. In terms of display density, the vista distance was acceptable; therefore, it was possible to appreciate the religious individuality and artistic distinctiveness of the objects. Four traditional religious Yorùbá objects were displayed in the gallery: a wooden statue of the spirit of smallpox, an *iroke* (an ivory tapper), beadwork regalia, and a flywhisk. The gallery was provided with interpretative panels, which explained the themes of the displays.¹² The texts of the panels and those of the caption labels associated with the Yorùbá objects were short, with a conversational yet academic style. In addition, both the panels and caption labels made use of cultural words, which often remained unexplained. The aim of the panels was to explain how people who belong to different faiths react and cope on similar occasions. The religious objects on display, therefore, were used as proof of this distinctiveness and their meaning and purpose was elucidated in light of a common religious experience. Indeed the distinctiveness of religious objects and different religions was acknowledged, and the meaning and purpose of different religious objects was put in the context of a common religious experience.

The exhibition also tried to present the view of the people whom those objects belonged to. In fact, a video and four headsets facilitated the interaction between the objects and the memories of local people. The headsets were playing sections of oral history interviews. The people interviewed belonged to different religious communities and were speaking

about their own experiences and memories related to some of the themes or objects.¹³ Additionally, the video entitled “Ways of Worship” illustrated how people from different religions communicated with the sacred.¹⁴ Although different religious views (Westerners and non-Westerners) were fairly represented, there was not specific reference to local Yorùbá people and their experiences.

The example of the Gallery of Religious Life in St. Mungo proves that, although the museum display of religion or religious objects is challenging, it is however, achievable to a certain extent. This confirms Arthur’s observation that “key areas of religion are elusive when it comes to museum display” (2000, p. 24). On the other hand, contemporary museums can successfully aim to illustrate “religious diversity” as well as “to foster respect for the different elements which constitute that diversity,” as in the case of the Gallery of Religious Life (Arthur, 2000, p. 24).

CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS

Museum displays are concerned with the representation and visual expressions of individuals, cultures, or societies. They are three-dimensional, tangible forms of human communication and as such they include all aspects of representation—including misrepresentation. The intention of this paper was to concentrate on the concepts of “interpretation” and “representation” and analyze them in relation to British contemporary, postcolonial museum displays and traditional Yorùbá religious objects in Britain. I have held that, in general, contemporary interpretation and museum representation of non-Western religious heritage are static. In addition, by presenting a variety of displays inclusive of Yorùbá traditional religious objects, it has questioned whether, notwithstanding all the purposes and idealized aims, the relationship between the Western self and the non-Western other, has really undergone profound transformations (Pieterse, 2005).

Additionally, I have aimed to demonstrate that museum displays are still very much affected by Western, artistic stereotypes. This stereotyping justifies, absorbs, and turns non-Western material culture into ethnographic specimens or art. At the same time, it considers the religious aspect only as an additional, supplementary feature of the items. Moreover, museums, a Western invention, seem to be looking at non-Western material culture through Western lenses and subordinate its religious essence and sanctity to the artistic value and ethnographic interest, which cannot “evoke the collective memory of devotees through sacred acts associated with them” (Mack, 2003, p. 120). In this way, the distinctive features of African cultures are incorporated and flattened within the general, wide-ranging label “Africa”: in the case of traditional Yorùbá religious material culture, such objects are considered, mainly as African artistic objects or as African ethnographic specimens. This duality of museum misinterpre-

tations and misrepresentations has been therefore highlighted by presenting both ethnographic and artistic displays. However, the existence of a unique museum display (the Gallery of Religious Life, St. Mungo Museum) has been acknowledged; this unique display aimed to define the religious essence of the exhibited items and their cultural individuality.

Ultimately, the contemporary displays of non-Western material culture offer visual discourses based on Western perceptions and understanding. As visual discourses, they are narratives of people's interpretations. However, "narratives talk in different ways about what is [partially] known. They are not knowledge itself" (Bloch, 1998, p. 110). Therefore, in relation to non-Western traditional religious objects, it is essential to remember how difficult it is to communicate the meanings and feelings related to these objects. Western museums may be able to reach more informed or "authentic" interpretations if they include the memories and voices of the people who are "closer" to the original meanings of traditional religious objects.

NOTES

1. The paper is based on the fieldwork carried out for my PhD research, between January 2003 and July 2005. The Ph.D. project was funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council between October 2003 and October 2005.
2. Yorùbá people probably originated from Sudan. Nowadays there are around twenty-five million Yorùbás in the world; most of them live in West Nigeria, Togo, the Benin Republic, Brazil, Cuba, Trinidad, the United States, and the United Kingdom.
3. The term '*postcolonialism*' does not indicate a distinct theory, but a set of complex and multifaceted ideas and problems, related to the interaction between the Western colonizers and the non-Westerner colonized. Therefore in the context of this paper, postcolonialism should be considered as "an intellectual effort at managing the aftermath of the colonial past in an era when official political relations of colonialism had all but ended" (During, 2000: 388).
4. The ten museums were: the British Museum, London (the Sainsbury Galleries); the Horniman Museum, London (the African Worlds Gallery); the World Museum Liverpool Merseyside, Liverpool (the World Cultures Gallery);⁵ the Pitt Rivers Museum, Oxford (the Court); the Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology of Cambridge, Cambridge (the Maudslay Gallery); the Manchester Museum, Manchester (the Living Cultures Gallery); the Nottingham Castle Museum and Art Gallery, Nottingham (the temporary Exhibition 125); Royal Albert Memorial Museum, Exeter (the Ethnography Galleries); the Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery, Birmingham (Gallery 36); and the St. Mungo Museum of Religious Life and Art, Glasgow (the Gallery of Religious Life).
5. The screens were part of the project called *Rethinking Voices* which was produced by the digital video artist Kuljit Kooj Chuhan. The people selected for the project all belonged to those local communities in Manchester. Each person had to select an item from the displays and had to give his/her own interpretation.
6. The themes were: "Basketry and String Work"; "Chinese Ceramics"; "Dwellings, Egypt and Peru"; "Firearms"; "Firemaking"; "Funerary Practices"; "Hawaiian Feather Cloaks"; "Head Hunting Trophies"; "Ivory Horn and Bone"; "Lacemaking and Embroidery"; "Lamps and Lanterns"; "Magic Ritual and Belief"; "Masks"; "Musical Instruments"; "North American and Siberian Clothing"; "Sculpture and Carving"; "Smoking, Narcotics and Stimulants"; "Styles and Forms in Art"; "Textiles"; "Transport and Writing Material."
7. "Early Collections," "Artic," "Amazonia," "Northwest Coast," "North America," "Papua New Guinea," "Fiji," "New Zealand," "Manchuria," "Africa," "Mongolia," "Asia," "Mexico," "Lapland," "Indonesia," and "South Sea."
8. Buddhism and Hinduism.

9. This is a direct quote from the exhibition text.
10. The Yorùbá objects visible on display were in a case, containing an amulet (in the amulet and charms display); a Yorùbá veranda post (in the West African sculpture display); a lidded bowl of storing equipment for divination; a carved wooden female figure with offering bowl; two Epa masks; and an ivory figure.
11. Due to conservation concerns, it was not possible to take photographs in the gallery, unless a digital camera was used.
12. The interpretive panels were inserted in the display cases and were: birthhood and childhood, coming of age, sex and marriage, religion as profession, divine ruler, spreading the word, persecuting war and peace, death, after life, go between, Islam, Buddhism, Christianity, Judaism, and Sikhism.
13. The objects were also accompanied by some quotations from the memories of the people from the local communities.
14. The video showed seven different religious worships: the recitation of the Koran in Cairo, the singing of the Christian 'Sanctus', a Jewish prayer, an Hindu ceremony, a Raven Mask dance (from Canada), a Buddhist meditation, and a procession in Benin for the Oba.

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