
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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Anna Catalani is a Research Associate in the Department of Politics and History, Northumbria University. She earned her PhD in Museum Studies, at University of Leicester, United Kingdom (2006). While at Leicester she worked as Research Assistant with Professor Susan Pearce. Her research interests are in material culture, the practice of collecting, and the meanings of the objects, particularly in relation to colonial/post-colonial issues, both inside and outside the United Kingdom, with respect to contemporary society and its historical context.