‘Us’ versus ‘Them’: Inclusivity of museum digital representation

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***Abstract*: Ever-changing technology has resulted in changes within museums and museum practices to accommodate visitors’ needs. Such changes, seek to include the people being represented in museum exhibitions and interpretations. With physical space constraint as a common dilemma, virtual spaces have the potential of becoming extensions of the physical so as to reach and include a broader audience. However, instead of becoming inclusive, the virtual space is becoming a replica of the physical space associated with the exclusiveness. As a result, inclusive participatory culture becomes a challenge. Utilising a multi-disciplinary framework, the paper draws from post-colonial studies, cultural studies, social and cultural history, art history and museum studies, The British Museum website is chosen as an example of the digital representation of artefacts representing other cultures and is analysed as a case study to highlight the importance of inclusive participation in the representation of the ‘other’– particularly Black ‘others’. The paper suggests that digital representation can bring about an all-embracing perspective and multiplicity of interpretations only when combined with a critical contextual approach through an inclusive participatory culture.**

***Keyword*: Digitisation, inclusion, other, representation**

I. INTRODUCTION

Museums are about representation, meaning-making and the interpretation of things that inform their audience about past cultures and peoples. objects are displayed to capture the imagination of the viewer and transport them to the period and/or place where these objects were utilised and valued as part of tradition. Such displays encapsulate not only the mind but allow the viewer to wonder in awe. Museum exhibits, depending on the perspective from which they are viewed, can also be seen as either a show of the wealth or paucity, dominance or subordination culture; or prominence of a people. What constitutes history of artefacts displayed is thus expressed as texts by the curators and museum officials for the education and enjoyment of audiences. Despite curators’ efforts to make museum displays educative, the audience also interpret the artefacts and make their own meaning. However, some curatorial meanings or interpretations do not portray how the artefacts are understood within their original communities. Such interpretation further widens the gap between museums and communities they exhibit and seek to serve. The gap is further widened with insufficient indigenous inclusion in the interpretation of museum objects.

The absence of indigenous perspectives in interpretation of artefacts representing their cultures within Western museums saddle curators with the task of meaning-making. Considering that a large number of African artefacts were collected during the pre-colonial and colonial eras, interpretations provided at the time were influenced by western ideology. Thus, resulting in primitive narrative African artefacts bear as identity till date. Also, curators are likely to be biased due to the prevailing societal ideology of Western supremacy and are prone to publish a one-sided story that depicts only part of the true history. Such one-sided perspective freezes the artefact in time without a past or a future. But to what extent can curators inform audiences about African culture and will indigenous accounts be published alongside that of curators? In this paper, I explore the challenges of defining Africa with a Western taxonomy. I argue that there is a need for a neutral space will ensure the inclusion of African voices and bring about capacious interpretation within museums (Hooper-Greenhill 2009).

Before virtual space, the process of representation and interpretation was done in the physical space where people visited, learned about and possibly interacted with the artefact. As museum collections increased, many African collections were stored away. For example, ethnographic artefacts that included a large number of African collections of the British Museum were moved to storage due to damage incurred during the Second World War. As a result, only few artefacts considered valuable, such as the Ife bronzes from Nigeria, were presented. Such spatial constraints implies that most African artefacts are not likely to be exhibited and their meanings and interpretations are probably unknown. Consequently, if specific artefacts are not included in an exhibition, the chances of conducting extensive research on them are highly unlikely. Curators on the other hand will lack proper understanding of many African artefacts. This highlights one ways in which physical museum space shaped and dictated what is exhibited. But, the advent of the internet brought about varying possibilities of representation, dissemination, engagement and inclusion. The digital space was as a result of the Internet and digitisation processes that allow material artefacts to be converted into visual data and presented on-line via ubiquitous devices. Today, digitisation process has encouraged the extension of the physical space beyond geographical boundaries, thus reaching broader audiences than ever before. This creates an avenue of engaging the communities being represented like never before.

Through digitisation, artefacts have the capability of being viewed by prospective and regular visitors from any location in the world. All that is required of the audience is connection to the web and the availability of a computer or mobile device (Giaccardi 2011). One would expect that the digital space would not only increase audience figures but also facilitate engagement and inclusion (Cameron & Kenderdine 2007; Simone 2010). Inclusion in this paper refers to addition of audience interpretations and meaning, especially those of African of cultures being represented. It is important to note that artefacts representing Africa were likely collected and interpreted from a Eurocentric perspective at the time of collection. Such interpretations are deeply entrenched and have influenced how curators make meanings and interpretations of other cultures. Therefore, curators tend to be recognised as the intellectual 'us' who are more knowledgeable about other people (in this case, African people) whose culture is being presented – 'them'. Since the digital brings about a possibility of inclusion, why are interpretations of indigenous African people still left out of museum representations? However, continuous exclusion of indigenous voices in post-colonial times only attests to disregard for African intellectual capabilities. and highlights the need for decolonisation within the museums

To highlight the need for inclusive perspectives, this paper considers the case of the bronzes from Ile-Ife Nigeria in West Africa, exhibited at the British Museum's African gallery and virtually on the museum's website. Despite their importance, the Ife bronzes were initially presented in the West as curios that evoked surprise and wonder in their colonial middle-class viewers (Bennett 1995). Colonial viewers allegedly believed that the Ife bronzes were not produced in Africa but might have been imported because Africa had no bronze age (Wrigley 1960). Such fixed perspective without considering other viewpoints endorses the west as intellectuals with the authority to legislate over the interpretation of other cultures, therefore validating the representation of racial difference (Bauman 2013). Such categories of difference – constructed through the colonising language of distinctions such as 'us' and 'them'; 'civilised' and 'savage'; 'Christian' and 'heathen'; 'self' and 'other'; 'subject' and 'object' and 'colonised' and 'coloniser' – are exposed and challenged through post-colonial philosophy (Edwards 2008). This was a classifying move associated with colonial dominance that saw to the silence of the colonised. As a result, the Ife bronzes assumed the position of objects that denote hierarchical differences based on nationality, religion, race, gender and ethnicity.

Considering Jenkins' (2006) ideology, that no single person can know everything about a people or a culture: each of us knows something, and can put information together as a pool of resources aids proper understanding. Jenkins emphasises that collective effort, inclusive of the people being represented, is required for a better understanding of the 'other'. Thus, input of the people whose culture is exhibited remains vital in the narrative of their history. Emphasising the need for a platform that will allow for such inclusion of thoughts, ideas and meanings. Furthermore, meaning-making and the interpretation of the 'other' will also be discussed considering the effect of colonial and post-colonial discourses, because the past has a large bearing on how the present is understood. Sadly, interpretation of the Ife bronzes in the post-colonial era is still rooted colonial understanding. Post-colonial agenda in this paper focuses on the shift within museum services from collection and conservation to being concerned with education, inclusion and engagement of both their audience and the communities being represented (Simpson 2001). This is a situation that will probably allow the histories of former colonies represented within museums to be revisited, revised and represented from new perspectives. Durran (2002) suggested that, in specific instances, curators need to find suitable versions to bring their different values into mutually beneficial alignment where interpretation will be to the benefit of everyone concerned. Thus, the understanding of material culture as suggested by Durran (2002) should involve respectful collaborations with those who make, use or otherwise know about things from their own special experiences. Durran's review of Moira Simpson's 1996 book *Making Representations: Museums in the Post-colonial Era* pointed out that where objects are physically located is probably less significant than how object-based interpretation can contribute to critical discourse (Durran 2002). Thus, emphasising the need for specialists in developed and less developed nations to collaborate across the divide of wealth and privileges. Collection of experiences and collaborations, however minimal, are most likely possible through the digitisation.

'Digitisation', as it is generally termed in museums, thus refers to the process of converting, creating and maintaining any type of original – be it paper, photographic prints or slides, three-dimensional objects or moving images – into a digital format that can be viewed via a computer and other devices (Astle & Muir 2002). According to Knell (2003), it is the electronic recording of descriptive data about the artefacts that includes the digital representation or image of the objects. Although digitisation has the potential to become a new instrument for access, inclusion and preservation, it also has the potential to become a tool for the correction of age-long understanding of the 'other'. By becoming a space where inclusion of people being presented is likely to encourage the emergence of new interpretations and meanings from varied perspective. Whether this potential is realised, rejected or used to reinstate Eurocentric paradigms is further explored in this paper.

The 'other' in this paper is in line with Frantz Fanon's philosophy as anything that is not European (Fanon 2008). He postulates the ideology of the 'other' from the perspective of self-definition as either White or Black, where 'White' denotes European civilisation and its representatives. Thus, anything non-West is referred to as 'Black' and by extension

the 'other'. Like Fanon, I seek answers to the possibility and ability of the 'other' (anything non-Western) to develop its own self-definition using the tools and instruments of Western civilisation (Fanon, 2008) whereby the digital space is utilised in a manner that aids definition, interpretation and meaning-making through inclusive participation. Analysing the British Museum website, where the Ife bronzes are exhibited as a case study, the need for the inclusion of Black voices in the meaning-making and interpretation of their artefacts is highlighted. The website was analysed from September 2013 to December 2014 to investigate the importance of inclusive participation in achieving the meaningful interpretation of artefacts that represent other cultures (specifically, the Ife bronzes). Although post-colonial writing reveals unresolved concerns about cultural imperialism, globalisation and iniquities in economics and political influence, (Edwards, 2008), this research is centred on the analysis of the representation of Ife bronzes grounded upon Fanon's ideology (2008).

II. MUSEUMS AND MEANING-MAKING

The issue of the relationship between museums and their audiences has been frequently discussed as a challenge in recent times. Such challenges arise for various reasons, ranging from marketing-oriented desires for visitor engagement to a new museological style investment in how meanings are constructed through the artefacts displayed. Artefacts have a complex presence in museums that is subject to multiple interpretations and meanings. Furthermore, individual objects possess a complex range of meanings and acquire greater complexity when grouped with other objects. However, in the right circumstances, objects are able to speak for themselves, as well as generating debate among those who encounter them (Black 1999)]. Thus, museums have to keep in consideration their audience type as well as their expectations as regards meaning-making. Black (1999) highlighted an on-going conflict in museums concerning history. He pointed out that museums are struggling to negotiate between the desire to present a single-voice, linear narrative of the past and an ambition to act as a place of pluralism and inclusion that recognises the contribution made by everyone. Smith (1989) also argued that the most insistent problem faced by museums is the notion that artefacts can and should be dissociated from their original context of meaning. As a result, museums regard themselves as having 'superior authority' (Smith 1989:9).

Initial responsibility of museums remains preserving the safety of artefacts within a neutral environment where the artefacts are transferred from the world of private ownership to that of the public realm. In these terms, it is not the responsibility of the museum to change the meaning of the artefacts but to make known all available information about the artefact, while considering that museum meanings are to be interwoven into the rich diversity that each visitor brings to the objects (Black 1999). Museum objects according to Black (1999) provoke responses in visitors by way of the feelings, thoughts, fantasies and memories that they enact in a human mind. Hence, the problem associated with meaning-making in museums can be further broken down to an epistemology of how artefacts are perceived and represented by museum curators and how they are perceived and understood by museum visitors (Smith 1989) Responses from both museum visitors and museum staff could also be considered as content and as a two-way process that contextualises objects and provokes new thoughts in contemporary times (Nakou 2005).

Smith (1989), foregrounds the idea that, due to the fluidity and complexity of the activity of meaning-making, there is no straightforward definition of the dynamic of how this process works in relation to artefacts. This problem, combined with populist democratic and marketing agendas, has created the imperative for museums to seek ways in which they can engage their visitors more closely. Meaning in museums is further constructed in relation to the collections that the museum holds (Hooper-Greenhill 2000). The meaning of the collection is not solely dependent on the systems of judgement of values peculiar to the institution itself, but is deeply rooted in the upbringing, prejudices and education of the curators (Vergo 1989). As Vogel (1981) argued, every artefact displayed in a museum exhibition involves placing a certain construction upon the history surrounding the object. Beyond the information panels, there is a subtext comprising innumerable diverse and often contradictory strands woven from the wishes and ambitions of the people involved in putting on the exhibition.

These contradictory strands are imprints that are influenced by the museum director, curator, designer, sponsor and scholar, and by the society and the political, social or educational system that nurtured them (Vogel 1981). Consequently, one of the key features of museums is that meanings attributed to artefacts are not arbitrary but rather formed and sustained by the prevailing culture of a society. The influence of the society where an artefact is exhibited thus goes a long way to influencing the meaning ascribed to that artefact. Meanings can also be constructed depending on the relationship an individual might have with an object. For example, someone identified as from the Yoruba ethnic group would probably have a particular relationship with the artefacts from Ile-Ife due to the prevalent belief that the Yoruba people hailed from Ile-Ife. Ile-Ife to Yoruba represents a collective identity, and the artefacts substantiate that connection. Therefore, like every other visitor, they bring a multiplicity of different attitudes, expectations and experiences to the interpretation of an artefact. This thus implies the specificity of knowledge (Smith 1989). For example, Yoruba who have adopted either Islam or Christianity, and have been taught to view the artefacts through the lens of idolisation, are likely to bring new meanings to the fore.

Furthermore, artefacts do not transmit meaning to the museum audience by existing in a space of their own, but are prone to several constructions of meaning (Smith 1989). The construction of meaning is dependent on many other aspects

of representation, such as the design, the context of other objects within the exhibition, the visual and historical representation, and the environment as a whole. This confirms that the meaning ascribed to artefacts can change at any given time depending on the angle from which they are viewed. These points of view are affected not only by the positions of the institutions in the transformation of their significance, but also by day-to-day observations, personal experiences and relationships that affect interpretation. Therefore, museums need to take into consideration the fact that their visitors are not passive recipients; the objects have the ability to provoke imagination and allow the visitor to add new content to their existing knowledge and understanding (Black 1999). As a result, visitors are able to construct their own meanings that go towards the democratisation of the object, as well as the democratisation of meaning-making.

Democratisation of objects, however, can only be attained if the information and context surrounding the objects are made readily accessible. Such information is often embedded within the system of knowledge that can only be evaluated from within and not outside the traditions to which the objects belong (Bauman 2013). In recent times, in the era of 'new museology', the need for museums to move away from their ideals of rigid taxonomy and classification to a much more conscious sense of the role of the spectator in interpretation has been emphasised (Smith 1989) I will argue that this can only be achieved if museum holdings are made accessible through a variety of display methods, including that of on-line digital representation. However, it is important to bear in mind that poor digitised representation might fail to achieve such an aim. This mode of representation also contributes significantly to meaning-making (Jordanova 1989). Smith (1989) emphasises that the technology of display needs to take into consideration conservation, the status of the artefacts to be displayed, and the nature and purpose of museum scholarship. These are the areas in which museums need to adjust their activities, bearing in mind that artefacts are not neutral but complex and subject to changing meaning. Finally, it is important to note that the way artefacts are presented can also lead to, but not fully determine, what visitors experience and learn.

III. MUSEUM REPRESENTATION

As Stuart Hall (1997) has elaborated, representation is an essential part of the process by which meaning is produced and exchanged between members of a culture. For Hall, representation involves the use of language, designs and images that stand for things being represented; it is the link between concepts and language that enables people to refer either to 'real' world objects, people or events or to imaginary worlds of fictional objects, people or events (Hall 1997, 17). Such processes of representation involve what he referred to as 'systems of representation' (Hall 1997, 17). These systems of representation consist not only of individual concepts but also of different ways of organising, clustering, arranging and classifying concepts and establishing complex relationships between them. The two main types of systems of representation are mental representation and language (Hall 1997). Mental representation involves the correlation of all sorts of objects, people and events with a set of concepts to form a meaning, while language is involved in the overall process of constructing meaning. These two key systems of representation, are thus needed for the interpretation of meaning. Hall's summary of how representation works is clearly relevant within the realms of museum practice to understand the way meaning is constructed.

Hall further summarises representation as involving three approaches – reflective, intentional and constructive – depending on the concept or context guiding the process. Representation is said to be 'reflective' when language, drawing and painting are used to reflect an existing meaning in the world of objects, people and events (Hall 1997, 24). In this paradigm, the meaning is said to be within the object, event or people and is dependent on a generally accepted language used either by a culture about themselves or about the 'other'. For instance, if we consider the name ascribed to the Ife heads, 'bronze' became an acceptable name for the artefacts by the West after their discovery (Willett 1967). This name negates the name given to the artefacts by the culture that produced them. The language reflects what was thought to be the likely material of production that now determines the identity of the artefacts. However, as Willett (1967) pointed out, the Ife heads are not made of bronze but of zinc and lead. The term 'bronze' therefore signifies A Western mode of identification and not that of Africa.

The use of language, drawings and painting to reflect or imitate a 'real' object is what Hall (1997) referred to as a 'mimetic' theory of representation. Following Saussure, Hall argued that, although drawings often bear resemblance to real objects, drawings are considered to be signs because they are in two dimensions. It is the use of language that creates the link to the 'real' object. Such semiotic theories of representation affirm the importance of language in the representation of the 'other'. Thus, museum text is a means by which curators communicate the meaning of their collections to their audience, a mode of communication traditionally often favouring the culture of the curator rather than the culture being represented (Vogel 1981). As a result, the language used can possibly ignore the language that best describes the collection. This raises the issue of the extent to which the representation of Ife bronzes at the British Museum reflects the ideas and culture of the West to which the curators belong.

'Intentional' representation, on the other hand, takes into consideration the intended meaning of the producer (Hall 1997). This meaning is based on the language system of the producer that is embedded in their culture. Given the importance of language to communication, the language of the producer needs to be understood for the effective communication of the intended meaning. Thus, language cannot be said to be private, as it has to be shared. Hall (1997) pointed out that the meaning of 'private thought' has to

negotiate with other meanings of the word and images. Hall (1997) therefore proposed that the combination of both these individually one-sided approaches is the constructionist approach.

The constructionist representation approach takes place when meaning is constructed using a representational system, concepts and signs (Hall 1997). This approach takes into cognisance the existence of the material world and how materials are interpreted through language (Culler 1986). Museums' works can be understood through a constructionist approach of representation, where objects such as the Ife bronzes are seen as signs and languages through which meaning is communicated (Barthes 1967). However, for culture, meaning depends on larger units of analysis such as narratives, statements, groups of images and 'whole discourses that operate across a variety of texts and areas of knowledge about a subject that have acquired widespread authority' (Hall 1997, 42). Hence, for representation to bear 'full' meaning, it will need to take into consideration every aspect of culture that affects the object directly or indirectly as indicated. In the same line, Foucault (1980, 114–5) argued that 'one's point of references should not be to the great model of language and signs, but to that of war and battle. The history, which bears and determines us, has the form of war rather than that of a language: relations of power not relations of meaning.' Foucault's (1982) ideology could in some ways be seen as different to semiotics; he proposed an open system of representation, unlike semiotics, which has a possibility of confining the process of representation to language, thus treating representation as a closed system.

As an open system, representation has the ability of connecting more intimately with social practices and concepts of power. Thus, representation can also be described as a source for the introduction of social knowledge. As Foucault (1982) pointed out, how human beings understand themselves in our culture aids our knowledge about the social, the embodied individual and shared meaning. Foucault (1982) was concerned with the context surrounding an event or an object, as this can bring about knowledge that in turn produces meaning. His idea was not just focused on meaning, as with Saussure and Barthes, but on the production of knowledge through what he called 'discourse'. Discourse, according to Foucault (1982), is a group of statements that provides language utilised in expressing or representing knowledge. Hall (1992, 291) concurs that 'all social practices have discursive aspects', thus emphasising that social practices involve meanings that in turn shape and influence what we do. As a result, meanings are expected to change as the contexts responsible for their creation changes, as it is most unlikely that the same phenomenon will occur across different historical phases.

In line with Foucault's (1982) and Hall's (1992) ideas, one can argue that the prevalent situation (historical or political) of a period has a tendency to affect the way events, objects or people are represented. For this reason, museum representation is expected to reflect various changes in meaning as affected by different eras. Therefore, language alone will not produce a true meaning, but discourse that is historicised will produce knowledge that will bring about a better meaning that informs understanding. Eventually, such discourses can facilitate better understanding of how Ife bronzes were viewed in the colonial era and in the post-colonial era.

IV. DIGITAL REPRESENTATION

The introduction of the World Wide Web in the 1990s and digital technology in the 21st century have altered the way artefacts are presented in museums. Digital representation, as pointed out by Pavlov and Paneva (2005), brings the ability to share and update information, encouraging relevant feedback due to access anywhere and anytime. As a result, representation within the physical museum space was extended from physical materiality to the virtual (including meaning and interpretation by way of accompanying text). However, it is important to note that it is the materiality of culture that makes it possible to talk of the multiplicity of interpretations that may be attached to any cultural artefact (Malpas, 2008). Hence, digital representation is not to exclude the multiplicity of interpretations but to facilitate its inclusion through virtual description for better understanding. Digital representation therefore involves the conversion of material to digital for accessibility, inclusion and preservation. However, the conversions of material artefacts to digital versions are dependent on written codes invented by the West. Rumsey (2016) rightly pointed out that the West created the 'digital code' that travels on the worldwide networks to create a global inscription. Such invention however likely have bias towards the other hence Fanon's concern for the other to develop its own self-definition tools and parameters.

Fanon further argued that if Western civilisation and culture are responsible for colonial racism, it should not be surprising to find discrimination reflected in the discourses of knowledge that emanate from such cultures, which work to ensure that structural dominance is maintained (Fanon 2008). Since digital data depends on pervasive tools such as computers, tablets and mobile phones, and internet connectivity is also a product of Western civilisation, how best can African artefacts with extensive histories, memories, interpretations and meanings be effectively presented digitally without bias? Irrespective of concerns, there is a need for owners of artefacts to be involved in the digital processes from inception to completion.

Since a large percentage of African artefacts being displayed within Western museums have already been removed from their origin and daily transactions, being digitised will not emanate into further removal but inclusion. Interestingly, they most likely start a new journey when inserted into museum spaces whereby new interpretations and meanings tend to emerge. However, there is a tendency for only these new interpretations to be published as all the history there is, thus

eliminating past histories. Such acts are likely to dissociate African artefacts from their past interpretations and cultures, thus truncating continuity of their social life. Sadly, it is this new social life that has little or no connection with the artefacts' origins that tends to be published by curators. As a result, the sacredness of the objects is relegated to the background while new interpretations are at the forefront. Therefore, the artefacts are viewed and understood through the accounts of the curator instead of from the accounts of people whose culture they represent.

In the case of the Ife bronzes, the accompanying text indicates that the artefacts were seen and understood from a Eurocentric perspective of the history they represent, rather than that of Ife people and by extension Yoruba culture. Thus, highlighting that culture and society to which the curator belongs inescapably influences how the Ife bronzes were viewed and interpreted. Such a superficial, unquestioning portrayal of the past, according to Kevin Walsh (2002), can be held responsible for the separation of people from understanding their political, economic and cultural present. Walsh implies that everything that the artefact stands for through its life journey is important for people to appreciate its present social life. However, being digitised and published further provides such artefacts the opportunity to be viewed beyond the curator's ideology, museum walls or geographical location. Such opportunities also provide a museum institution the chance to engage more people in their interpretation processes – a process the British Museum prides itself for by engaging varying representing individuals/communities. Nevertheless, such an opportunity presents itself only if the artefacts are fortunate to be selected for digitisation projects. That is the only way the past (artefacts) can become part of a collective history (Pickover 2009). Pickover argued that 'whatever is available on the Internet becomes all the history there is' (Pickover 2009,6). Therefore, whatever information is published on a museum website has the potential of being accepted without contest as all the history that there is about a culture or people being represented. Bearing this in mind, how contestable is the on-line representation of the Ife bronzes?

One of the potentials of digital representation is accessibility. With Africa as a developing continent, less connectivity and deplorable infrastructure result in little or no accessibility to African cultures' artefacts on-line. Consequently, such viewing challenge further hinders the inclusion of comments, experiences or memories in the digital representation of artefacts representing their culture. Such exclusion not only creates an interpretation gap to be filled by the curators but also discourages contestability. Curators in this case are thus seen as the intellectual 'us' versus those being represented – 'them'. The lens with which museum curators see and interpret the 'other', however, has become a subject of much debate (Simpson 2001; Kreps 2003; Golding 2016. Emphasis has been placed on the need for the 'other' to be included in narrating their story from a perspective of indigenous knowledge. However, including video recordings in museum representation is commendable but is simply not enough, as such narrative tends to be out of date with changing context and time. Despite scholars calling for revisiting, rewriting, and representation of the 'other', museums are yet to involve, include, or incorporate indigenous perspectives as part of their on-line representation. Moreover, the vast digital divides further make the proposition of inclusion talk very unlikely.

V. INCLUSIVE PARTICIPATION

Nina Simon explains what is understood as a paradigm for participation. In her book *The Participatory Museum*, published in 2010, she points out that people need to be engaged as active cultural participants and not passive consumers. According to her, the social web makes participation more accessible than ever before. She states that visitors not only expect access to a multiplicity of perspectives and vast information but also want to respond and to be taken seriously. However, the set rules for participants are yet to be fully understood due to the varied level of participation (Jenkins 2006). Jenkins argued that no individual knows everything; hence, a collective process of putting information together goes a long way in gathering a wealth of information about a culture. Therefore, cultural institutions such as museums and their curators need consumers/co-creators (including the people whose artefacts are being exhibited) and vice versa. Simon (2010) further argued that it is only when participation is upheld that the cultural institutions become 'central to culture and community life'. In the same line, I argue that in order for museums to be an integral part of culture and community life, the participation of the people being represented is essential. Considering the notion of the world as a global village through the Internet emphasises the blurriness of physical geographical boundaries. Therefore, there is no justifiable reason for indigenous people not to be included, virtually or otherwise. It is only when there is apparent inclusive participation that an institution can attest that they have respect for and interest in the experiences, stories and intellectual abilities of the people being represented (Simon 2010).

However, the meaning of participation and inclusive participation is fluid and dependent on each cultural organisation (Sandell 2003). Hence, the absence of a unified definition is due to the way participation is encouraged. The involvement of people is carried out to varying degrees; some organisations encourage equal participation (Jenkins 2006) that can be termed as social inclusion, whereas other organisations engage in limited engagement by way of social exclusion. In this case, people are excluded due to varying phenomena that hinder access to museum services. Participation therefore is not only about offering a voice to the voiceless but serves to enlighten, engage and create valuable experiences for the people being represented and for other visitors (Simon 2010). Hence, if participation is to be inclusive, it needs to be accessible to everyone, especially the target audience, irrespective of location. The institution acts as a platform or as the convergence medium that connects

different users engaging in varying capacities from collaborators to content distribution.

Presenting Ife bronzes on-line via the British Museum website

The number of Ife objects on the British Museum's website has increased since September 2012 to include four videos of the 2010 'Kingdom of Ife' exhibition. The four videos (as shown in Figure 1.1) are 'Ife remembered', 'Ife uncovered', 'Ife opening' and 'A night at the museum'. In addition to the videos, there are 86 objects on the British Museum's on-line database representing Ife, of which 20 objects are without photographic representation (British Museum on-line collection, n.d). Out of the 66 objects with photographic representation, there are 11 representations of bronze heads: 1 original head with crown brass casting, 1 black and white photographic representation of a crowned head, and 9 plaster casts of life-size heads. Complementing the content to enhance accessibility is a sign language session.

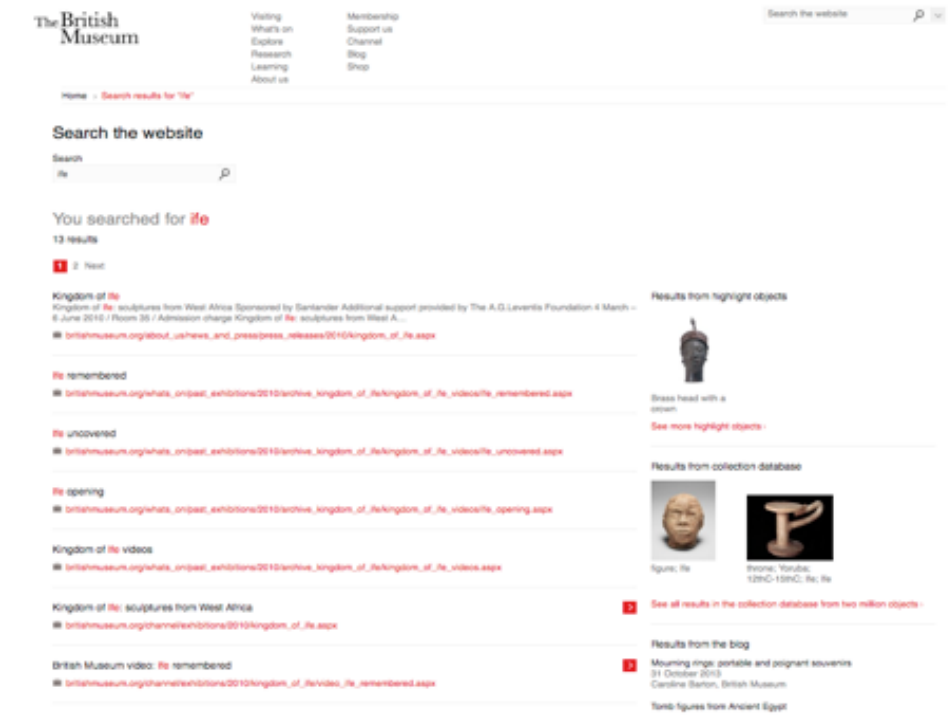

Figure 1.1. Screen shot 2013-11-04 at 22.22.47 showing various links to 'The Kingdom of Ife' exhibition

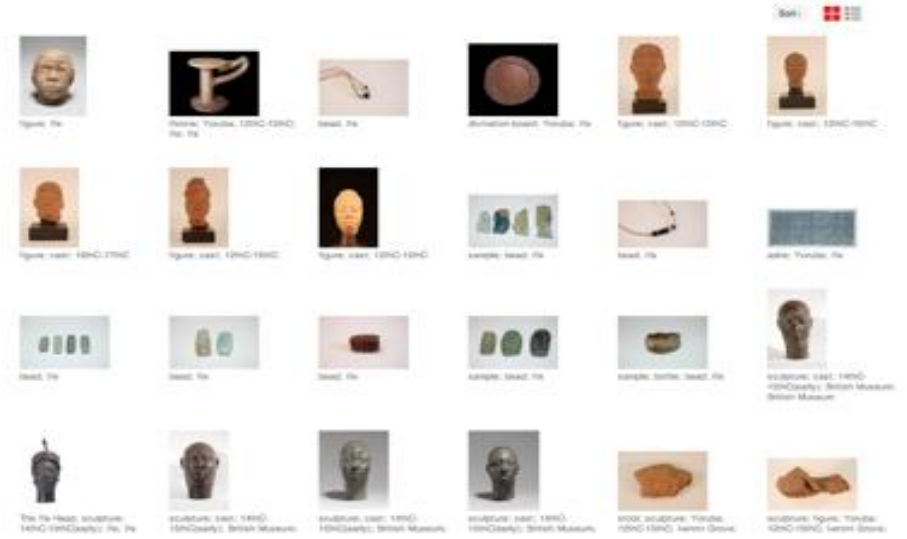

Figure 1.2. Screen shot 2013-10-17 at 15.41.58 showing objects with images from Ife

English is used to describe each object. According to Britz and Lor (2004), the use of English language on the website acknowledges digital technology to be perceived as 'a form of cultural imperialism'. Britz and Lor (2004, 216) further argue that the use of English displaces the 'orality' that allows the original owners to provide the intended meaning of each object. The absence of other languages has a tendency to portray Western culture on the Internet as having an overwhelming superiority (Fanon 2008). In the case of the Ife bronzes, the description on-line is largely taken from the perspective of Frank Willett (late doyen of Ife archaeology), whose interpretation and meanings are perhaps not those intended by the artists (Vogel 1981). Although the curator of the African Gallery of the British Museum pointed out categorically that people of African descent were consulted, neither the information panel of the physical nor the on-line space illustrates such consultation. Considering the fact that Willett's ideas were put together during the time of the British administration of Nigeria, and likely reflects a Eurocentric view, the inclusion of other perspectives would have provided a much-needed interpretation with wider implications and better understanding. According to Fanon (2008), such exclusion is a way by which Western civilisation continues to work to ensure that structural dominance is maintained at all cost.

VI. DIGITAL REPRESENTATION INCLUSION/EXCLUSION

Digital representation is associated with likely positive possibilities when considered in regards to access, distribution, collaboration, co-creation of content, preservation and inclusion. Inclusion and accessibility goes a long way in depicting the heritage institution as one that respects the intellectual capabilities of those being represented. With data archiving as another possibility of digital representation, history is not only made but also stored for posterity. As fascinating as digital representation may seem, it can also be perceived as a selective space that encourages exclusion, whereby the people being represented are more likely to be excluded. Further exclusion is also likely to occur not by design or implementation but also by way of the slow technological development in Africa.

Although digital representation has seemed like a buzzword for inclusion in recent times, it is important to point out that cultures and people being represented by museum artefacts have long been involved in some form or another in the interpretation and meaning-making of their culture. Their voices are thus included through the photographs, audio or video recordings that indicate their participation. However, what these mediums of involvement tend to lack is the inclusion of their perspective from diverse lenses in real time. Where inclusion is evident, it is difficult to verify that such participation was not borne out of pressure. Such inclusion, meanings and interpretations are thus bias-laden. On the other hand, even when inclusive participation was carried out genuinely, the meaning and interpretation are frozen in time and cease to include whatever changes have occurred or are likely to occur. One would expect that since meanings and interpretations evolve and are not static, inclusive participation needs to be controlled but dynamic. Thus, old interpretations can lie side by side with the new emerging ones. Varying contexts (political, economic and sociocultural) that affect meaning-making and the interpretation of artefacts are likely to be considered without overlooking one aspect for another. As a result, rich resources about cultural artefacts are collected, stored and published for better understanding of the 'other'.

It is important to mention that the British Museum's on-line presence is not limited to the museum's website alone. Hence, the potential for collaboration that digitisation offers has been utilised with other institutions. Such collaborations, among others, included a series with BBC Radio 4, A History of the World in 100 Objects, where one of the Ife bronze heads featured as one of the hundred objects. A History of the World is a narrative history of the world using 100 objects nominated from the British Museum, created from two million years ago to the present day, and telling their stories through a radio series first broadcast in 2010. Each programme in the series was 15 minutes long and focused on objects from the British Museum collections that represent various cultures and peoples. The script was written and narrated by Neil MacGregor, the former director of the British Museum. Both the script and voice recordings of the programmes can be accessed via the BBC Radio 4 website. The programme can be viewed and listened to either by individual object or by themes, including leadership and government; art; religion; money, trade and travel; war; sport and entertainment; death; communication, science and technology; food and farming (BBC Radio 4 website, n.d.). Inclusion by way of feedback or meaning from the people being represented, although absent from the British Museum website, was notably present in the BBC Radio 4 project website.

The British Museum website also linked from the BBC Radio 4 website, offering the audience access to more information directly from the museum where the objects are physically on display, thus allowing related artefacts or objects with a link to the Ife bronzes to be viewed. Unfortunately, the British Museum's website only described the bronze head based on the record and writings of British anthropologist, archaeologist and curator Frank Willett, whose perspective and understanding of the Ife bronzes, though likely most appropriate, are very likely shrouded by the prevailing Western culture (Vogel 1981). On the other hand, audience involvement and engagement through comments and feedback evident on the website of A History of the World highlights interaction between curators from the British Museum and the BBC Radio 4 audience. Although visitors are encouraged to leave feedback on the British Museum on-line representation, it is directed to a web liaison officer, who in turn uses the information only to acknowledge people's interest. With the absence of comment or feedback that indicates the likelihood

of inclusion in British Museum on-line representation, how can one argue that digital representation encourages inclusive participation? Such absence only indicates the authority of curators in informing/instructing the audience in the way of seeing 'others'. By and large, this information goes a long way to emphasise the issues of race and power in a subtle way and by extension affects the way other cultures are perceived.

Likewise, digital representation and the technologies involved can in itself institute exclusion. Consider Fanon's ideology on the effect of language on identification and understanding of oneself, where, language serves as a huge factor in how people are made to understand and describe themselves in relation to others. Fanon examined the effect of language from a racial perspective and seeks how to posit a 'black self in a language and discourse in which blackness itself is at best a figure of absence or worse a total reversion' (2008, xv). Fanon argued that both the language and civilisation of the white man determines how others (non-Western people) define self. In line with Fanon, I argue that English language used in designing representational technology can propagate thought processes different from that of the people being represented. In the same vein, Van der Velden (2008) argues that local intangible and tangible heritage preservation can be made possible only when a wide range of technologies are combined and categorised in the communities' own knowledge traditions. He emphasised that such classifications need to reflect the ways communities know and understand the world. Therefore, language plays a vital role in the way the world is understood, categorised and identified, which in turn affects how cultures are represented.

To explain further, the British Museum website, analysed from 2013 to 2014, highlighted the use of other languages on the website. The initial introductory pages were translated into languages other than English (German, Spanish, French, Italian, Russian, Chinese, Korean and Japanese). African languages are yet to be utilised in their representation, despite the fact that the museum holds so many African artefacts in its collection. Provisions to include African languages are likely negated since imperial ideology implicitly expects colonised African nations to be able to speak either English or French (Fanon 2008). Such representational practices further alienate formerly colonised people from their language and by extension their culture in a post-colonial era (Edward, 2008). As a result, the people being represented are further excluded from interacting with the museum's database. The introductory page of the British Museum website contains only basic information about the location, floor plans and facilities offered by the museum. When a language is selected to navigate the introductory page, it is interesting to note that other key information on the website, including the floor plans, is still in English. Visitors who only understand one of the translated languages are therefore able to access little or no information from the introductory page of the museum's website. This is somewhat validated by Van der Velden's (2008) notion that every design (and by extension every representation space, method or tool) facilitates some ways of exclusion.

Fanon posited that language is at the centre of the predicament of colonisation, marginalisation and servitude. This hypothesis tends to be the fundamental idea that guides the need for decolonisation and is a viewpoint that has guided post-colonial discourses. Therefore, language serves as a representational tool responsible for how the West has understood the 'other' in recent times. Fanon further argued that language could be used for classifying, imprisoning, primitivizing and de-civilising the other (Fanon 2008). The power of language in storytelling and representation is also emphasised by Ashcroft et al. (2003). Fanon (2008) argued that language becomes a tool used by the coloniser to foster universality as well as acting as an indicator of both cultural difference and power inequality. Fanon further expressed that such universality brings about the 'disalination' of the artefacts (Fanon 2008, 25). As such, the Ife bronzes remain colonised by the language of representation, which consists only of the English language. I argue that the absence of the language of the colonised thus further demonstrates the power and influence of the British Empire. Likewise, the language of representation would only be accurate in line with the host culture but fails to present the ideology of the colonised. Since language has the 'power to name' and constructs the lens through which understanding takes place, museum visitors are left with no other interpretation (Edwards, 2008, 30). It is sad to note that the absence of the indigenous language thus perpetuates the continuous colonisation of the Ife bronzes in the post-colonial era. Hence, there is an urgent need for the democratisation of the Ife bronzes.

Digital representation thus offers the space for democratisation with accessibility and inclusive participation to make a collective history. This is, however, not the case for Africa, where the challenge of Internet connectivity makes accessibility to museum artefacts a luxury. As a result, the owners and original custodians of artefacts representing other cultures become digitally excluded. Therefore, access cannot be achieved until the excluded are provided with the opportunity to be informed, included and involved in the creation of collective knowledge through digital representation of the artefacts that express their culture.

VII. CONCLUSION

The drive to attract new audiences as well as make collections accessible to a broader audience has made the new media technology such as the Internet and digitisation universal methods of engagement. It allows for engagement that fosters two-way communication, as opposed to the single line of communication utilised by museums in the past. As such, it permits curators to re-evaluate their position from authoritative voices on essential information about objects in their collections that represent other cultures. Therefore, acknowledging that there are diverse perspectives of viewing or interpreting an object encourages a rich contextual account

to emerge. Such multifaceted stories foster better understanding about the objects and communities being represented. However, this can only be made possible if the people represented are included and involved in how their cultures are interpreted and presented, but this is not always the case for reasons of non-connectivity and non-availability of funds. Consequently, interpretations continue to be recycled and reflect both a static culture and context tainted with perspectives influenced by the predominant or host culture.

The possibilities of allowing the 'other' to tell their story might be a step in the right direction in correcting past colonial narratives, thus promoting post-colonial paradigms that will foster better understanding. However, for post-colonial thinking to be grounded, capacious perspectives depicting changing contexts, circumstances, and ownership that affect how the artefacts are being interpreted need to be brought to bear. Hence, there is a need for a space that encourages an inclusive participatory culture, that allows for a multiplicity of voices, and where varying perspectives of multi-layered stories resonate without the possibility of placing one culture superior over another. The digital presents an opportunity for a space with such potential. However, such possibilities can only be deemed inclusive if the people being represented are not excluded from the representational process. It is only then that digital representation can be considered as a space for democratising the artefacts that represent other cultures. It is recommended, therefore, that the people being represented are involved in the interpretation process for better understanding of their culture.

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