

A HANDMADE FUTURE:

the impact of design on the production
and consumption of contemporary
West African craft as a tool for
sustainable development

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ABSTRACT

This research presents a critique of a craft development project carried out over a period of four years, where the nature of designer interventions in African craft projects is analysed and questions are raised that challenge the desirability and efficacy of such projects. This study is developed from the perspective of a professional designer rather than that of a professional development worker. Following this particular project over a continuous time period offers a specific and unique context in which to examine key and central issues: the design of such products by western designers for global markets, the consumption of 'ethnic' products in global markets, (including historical perspectives,) issues of authenticity, post-colonialism, and euro-centric connoisseurship.

The research looks at the relationships between traditional West African weavers in both rural and urban Burkina Faso and Western designers, in addition to the consumption of textile products from this region. SOS-Save Our Skills has been set up by Karin Phillips, the director of an organisation that channels UK government funding for designers to exhibit in international design fairs: the British European Design Group (BEDG). Her aim is to resuscitate artisanal skills in Africa, beginning with a pilot project in Burkina Faso. Phillips believes that the BEDG's expertise in design marketing and promotion will transform the way Burkina's textiles are consumed in the western world, by presenting them as a form of 'deeper luxury.'

The research uses a material culture approach to assess local design, production and consumption of textiles and clothing, and cross-analyses the ethnography of weaving cultures in the region with an understanding of the processes whereby craft products reach various Euro-American markets. The research asks whether African craft is intrinsically associated with notions of dependency and aid, and whether western designers knowingly, or not, collude in these notions. The resulting creative practice reflects the theoretical framework.

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Author's declaration

I declare that the research contained in this thesis, unless otherwise formally indicated within the text, is the original work of the author. The thesis has not been previously submitted to this or any other university for a degree, and does not incorporate any material already submitted for a degree.

Signed.....

Date.....

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

methodologies, sources, chapter outlines

All of us, at some point in our lives, have purchased distinctly ‘ethnic’ objects that have been hand-made in distant countries that can be described as ‘developing’ or ‘southern’; a piece of craft, whether it be a textile, wood carving, pottery, jewellery, leather or basketry. These objects might have been acquired on holiday: in a foreign airport, a back alley or a bustling market. Some may have been bought at a local charity shop or a fashion outlet on the high street. Others sit in hushed, white-painted spaces and command high prices as works of art. Over the last one hundred years or so the objects of the ‘Other’ have, according to Ruth Phillips and Christopher Steiner, been designated as having two definitions: the Artefact (or ethnographic specimen) and the Work of Art.¹ But Phillips and Steiner note that although this definition accommodates the scholarly fashions of the late nineteenth century, when anthropology and art history were being established as formal disciplines, the binary assumption inherent in such classification is unstable:

¹ Phillips, Ruth B. and Christopher B. Steiner. “Art, Authenticity, and the Baggage of Cultural Encounter.” in *Unpacking Culture: Art and Commodity in Colonial and Postcolonial Worlds*. Berkeley; Los Angeles: University of California Press. 1999. 3.

...for both classifications masked what had, by the late eighteenth century, become one of the most important features of objects: their operation as commodities circulating in the discursive space of an emergent capitalist economy.²

The contemporary, western, capitalist economy is where crafts from Africa are now consumed in large quantities, and scholarly analyses of the histories of these arts-crafts-commodities as they negotiate global markets are well established.³ In West Africa, the focus of this study, textile histories (strip weaving, bogolan, tie-dyeing, die stamp and wax print) have also been the subject of detailed scrutiny.⁴

With such an abundance of scholarly interest in this area there can be little question that African craft objects are commoditised and consumed globally, and that the subtleties of their adoption and subsequent hybridisation in world has been much analysed. Light has also been cast on the effects of globalisation as in, for example, David Howes' *Cross Cultural Consumption*⁵ which brings together several authors to comment on the global production and consumption of objects from various countries. Timothy Scrase's 2003 review of literature and studies in this area⁶ highlights the precarious nature of craft production in developing countries. Scrase reminds us that artisanal

² Phillips and Steiner, 3.

³ For example, see Weiner and Schneider (1989): Hendrickson (1996): Perani and Wolff (1999): Phillips and Steiner (1999): Rabine (2002): Allman (2004): Maynard (2004): Rovine (2008)

⁴ For example, see Lamb (1975): Picton and Mack (1979): Steiner (1985): Stoltz Gilfoy (1992): Picton (1994): Rovine (2001): Kriger (2006)

⁵ Howes, David. *Cross Cultural Consumption: Global markets, Local Realities*. London: Routledge, 1994.

⁶ Scrase, Timothy J. "Precarious production: globalisation and artisan labour in the Third World." *Third World Quarterly* 24:3 (2003): 449-461.

labour is primarily a commercial venture and, like Anitra Nettleton in her 2010 article on craft and modernity in South Africa,⁷ attests to the ingenuity and adaptability of craftsmen and women as they negotiate markets that are increasingly diverse.

However, one area that still appears to lack a certain rigour of examination is the relationship between the makers of these objects and the western designers who are employed by aid facilitating institutions, such as development Non Governmental Organisations (NGOs,) which have targeted craft as a suitable vehicle for aid. The exceptions are few. Poonam Bir Kasturi's article *Designing Freedom*⁸ is a chastening read for any designer contemplating working on a craft project, as the assumptions made by western designers about third world artisans are picked apart, one by one, in a dry and acutely observed account of such projects in India. More recently, Kevin Murray has written about outsourcing handmade processes to artisans in poorer countries, although beyond identifying some problematic issues such as the absence of the artisans' voice in the debate, there is, as he himself admits, little critical framework to situate the debate more evenly.⁹ Accounts of designer/artisan interactions in Africa, such as those of Moroso, the Italian furniture manufacturer, or Vivienne Westwood, the British fashion designer, are straightforward narratives that rarely question the deeper motives and

⁷ Nettleton, Anitra. "Life in a Zulu Village: Craft and Modernity in South Africa." *Journal of Modern Craft* 3.1 (2010): 55-78. JSTOR. Web. 24 Feb. 2011.

⁸ Kasturi, Poonam Bir. "Designing Freedom." *Design Issues* 21.4 (2004): 68-77.

⁹ Murray, Kevin. "Outsourcing the hand: an analysis of craft-design collaboration across the global divide." *Craft + Design Enquiry* 2 (2010): 1-24. Craft Australia Research Centre. craftaustralia.org. Web. 23 Feb. 2011.

drivers that accompany the creation, production and marketing of a commercial collection. They speak instead of being “handmade with love.”¹⁰

THE SOS-Save Our Skills Project

Since 2007 I have been involved with an NGO called SOS-Save Our Skills as it attempts to “save” the indigenous skills of weavers in rural Burkina Faso in West Africa. As a professional designer with over twenty five years experience in product design and manufacture and operating on a global stage with some success, my contribution to the project was to create a new collection of objects inspired by what SOS director (London-based Karin Phillips) described as the “indigenous creativity” of West African strip weavers. These artisans produce bands of narrow cloth that is sewn into larger cloths and then subjected to various dyeing processes. It is an ancient way of weaving that is found all over West Africa, and is described in more detail in Chapter Two. Having identified an appreciation in Europe and North America for ethically and sustainably produced, hand made craft, SOS decided to encourage the growing of organic cotton growing within the weaving communities, and to reward the skills of the weavers by paying above-average per metre prices. Phillips has been adamant that all production methods should be entirely by hand, without even the aid of spinning wheels or metal needles, in order to produce ‘authentic’ African textiles that would reflect the cultural heritage of an entire nation. The SOS manifesto is ambitious and uncompromising in its aims:

¹⁰ *Vivienne Westwood Ethical Africa Collection Spring/Summer 2012* press release.

- The survival of the last traditional craft skills in the world, especially in more remote areas
- The safeguarding of these skills and the functional objects made by them
- The safeguarding of the natural environment that sustained these objects
- The safeguarding of the non-renewable energy resources of this world
- The safeguarding of the cultural identity that created these objects¹¹

Observing the SOS organisation at close quarters, from its inception in 2007, through its funding applications (successful and otherwise,) its operations within Burkina Faso and its philosophy of practice in relation to my own, resulted in the identification of a number of issues that were crucial to formulating both the theoretical research questions and the practical responses to them.

Aims of the research

An analysis of what Appadurai calls an *ethnoscape* or the “multiple worlds that are constituted by the historically situated imaginations of persons and groups spread around the globe”¹² is at the heart of this practice-based enquiry, moving from remote rural villages in Burkina Faso to the glittering design exhibitions of Europe and North America. The main aim was to test, through the creation and exhibition of a collection of textile products inspired by my

¹¹ SOS Manifesto. See Appendix I.

¹² Appadurai, Arjun. *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996. 33.

field work, a series of assumptions that might exist about craft from West Africa, filtered through the issues that had arisen during my association with the project: authenticity, taste, gender relations in development, consumption and ethnographic analyses. The questions are relatively straightforward:

- How much does the ‘African-ness’ or perceived ‘authenticity’ of ‘traditional’ craft products represent a trope of Africa that is outdated?
- Is African craft generally classified as being the product of ‘aid,’ ‘charity,’ or ‘development’ in the minds of Euro-American buyers?
- Do western designers working in African craft projects to ‘improve’ local skills collude, consciously or not, in the idea of Africa as dependent?

In Chapter Five the testing of the collection I created, named *Bamako*, is described. Shown at the International Contemporary Furniture Fair in New York in May 2011, the collection was subject to scrutiny by international buyers and interior designers. During the show a survey was conducted of visitors to the stand, chosen at random, who were asked a variety of questions about the products (which included a small display of traditional Burkinabé weaving.) The *Bamako* collection was my direct response to the limited brief that SOS itself imposed on their artisan’s work; that it had to be both ‘authentic’ and ‘traditional,’ using only laborious, hand-made methods of spinning and weaving that maintained gendered roles and hierarchies, while still fulfilling the SOS desire for a pared-back western aesthetic that was unfamiliar to the artisans themselves.

Burkina Faso: a brief overview

A small, landlocked sub-Saharan country (fig. 1.1) with roughly 15 million inhabitants, Burkina Faso has limited natural resources and rainfall, and an

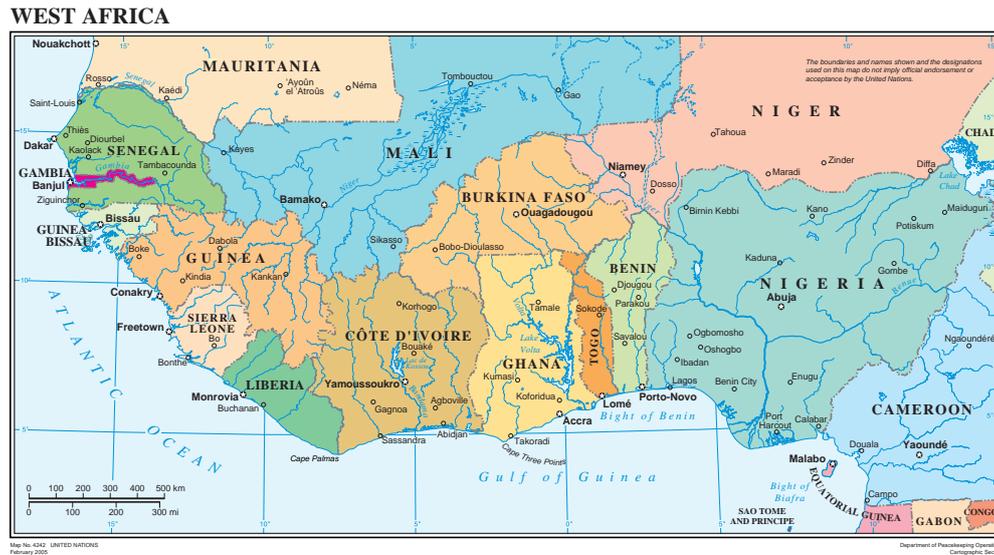


Fig. 1.1.
Map of Burkina Faso in relation to West Africa. United Nations Cartographic Archive.
Original in colour.

economy that is highly dependent on cotton exports. Burkina Faso has enjoyed a relatively stable government since 1987, although there were five coups up to that point after independence from France in 1960. The dominant people of the region are the Voltaic Mossi, who comprise about one half of the population, and are led by their emperor, the Moro Naaba, whose palace still exists in Ouagadougou, the country's capital. The country is ethnically integrated and run on secular lines, although there are several different religions. The US Embassy in Ouagadougou cites the Burkinabé government's most recent census in 1996 to estimate religious affiliations. Around 60% of the population is Muslim (the majority of whom are Sunni). 24% maintain

indigenous animist beliefs and 17% are Roman Catholics, with just 3% being members of various Protestant denominations.¹³ The figures reflect the respective activity of religious missionaries and aid organisations both past and present.

The life of a woman in Burkina Faso is as hard and as unforgiving as it is for men, but with the extra burdens of an assumed responsibility for all domestic arrangements such as food growing, food gathering and child care. Any opportunity for paid employment that might present itself must be incorporated into this responsibility. Female literacy rates are approximately 33% in the 15-24 years age bracket, compared to 47% for men. However, the population as a whole has a literacy rate of just 29%, women in rural areas being the least likely to be able to read and write. Around 73% of all women in Burkina Faso have been subjected to circumcision, or female genital mutilation (FGM)¹⁴ The Social Institutions and Gender Index (SIGI)¹⁵ lists the difficulties and discrimination faced by Burkinabe women as integral to the society. For example, 35% of girls between 15 and 19 years are married, divorced or widowed, and although it is becoming more common for women to refuse marriages arranged for them, forced marriage is frequently accepted due to a fear of remaining single in a country that has high esteem for women with large families.¹⁶ Polygamy is common, particularly amongst the Mossi people

¹³ Burkina Faso Factsheet. *US Embassy, Ouagadougou*. Web. 29 July 2009.

¹⁴ UNICEF Burkina Faso basic indicator statistics for years 2002 to 2006. *UNICEF*. Web. 10 Aug. 2009.

¹⁵ Database of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) founded in 1960 and funded to by member governments worldwide.

¹⁶ 'Gender Equality and Social Institutions in Burkina Faso.' *SIGI*. N.p. Web. 10 Aug. 2009.

and Levirate marriage¹⁷, although officially illegal, is practised widely. A divorced woman will not retain custody of her children if they are over the age of 7 years and life for marginalised women is particularly difficult in rural areas where there is little opportunity to supplement income through work of any kind.

Weaving traditions of Burkina Faso

Peggy Stoltz Gilfoy, writing in 1988, notes that weaving in West Africa is segregated on gender lines; narrow strip weaving on the narrow double-heddle loom is done exclusively by men (fig. 1.2) and women who weave only do so on a broader vertical loom (fig 1.3) that produces cloth of a limited length.¹⁸ The male method of weaving is at least a thousand years old and appears to have changed little in all that time. According to Rita Bolland's research on textiles discovered in the Tellem caves in Mali, the Peul were producing cotton and strip weaving by the 11th century, if not earlier.¹⁹ Venice Lamb points out that this style of weaving is peculiar to West Africa, as although there are similar looms to be found in the Afghan-Pakistan border zone there is nothing exactly like it, and, as Lamb further states, "...neither in Europe nor the Middle East do we find this unvarying emphasis on the narrow strip as the basic element from which a cloth is made."²⁰

¹⁷ Where a widow is obliged to marry her brother-in-law in order to retain custody of her children.

¹⁸ Gilfoy, Peggy Stoltz. *Patterns of Life: West African Strip-Weaving Traditions*. New York: Smithsonian Institution, 1987. 11.

¹⁹ Bolland, Rita. "Clothing from Burial Caves in Mali, 11th – 18th Century." *History, Design and Craft in West African Strip-Woven Cloth*. Papers presented at a Symposium organised by the National Museum of African Art, Smithsonian Institution, February 18-19, 1988. New York: Smithsonian Institution, 1992. 54.

²⁰ Lamb, Venice. *West African Weaving*. London: Duckworth & Co, 1975. 20.



Fig. 1.2.
Mossi weaver, Burkina Faso, c. 1900. Gilfoy, Peggy Stoltz. *Patterns of Life: West African Strip-Weaving Traditions*. New York: Smithsonian Institution, 1987. 13.



Fig. 1.3.
Igbarra weaver, Okene, Nigeria. Picton, John and John Mack. *African Textiles*. London: British Museum Publications, 1979. 72.

John Gillow writes that the narrow strip weaving of Burkina Faso is between 8 – 10cm wide and that it is stitched together, selvedge to selvedge, to create a cloth (fig. 1.4) that is usually between 8 and 10 strips wide.²¹ The basic technique seems essentially unchanged over centuries of tradition, the yarn being laboriously hand-spun by the women (fig. 1.5) Lamb offers four main reasons why this technique has remained such a constant. First, it reflects the natural conservatism of West Africans. Second, it is a good way to produce firm, strong cloth under difficult circumstances. Third, the technique permits the easy production of very small quantities without large capital outlay. Finally, the loom itself is easy to dismantle and store securely within the house, an important consideration for poor farmers.²² Gillow adds that the portability of looms aids the work of itinerant weavers, who sit in family courtyards and “drag out the task in hand, for they receive food and a present every day, and a parting gift such as a goat when the work is complete.”²³

The other type of textile woven in Burkina Faso is the *faso dan fani*, the distinctive striped cloth that is unique to the region (fig. 1.6) and which is woven on slightly broader looms by both men and women. As a fashion fabric it is sometimes woven with lurex.

Today, female weavers use the upright metal loom (fig. 1.7) that was introduced into Burkina Faso by Thomas Sankara, the country’s charismatic socialist president who was assassinated in 1987. Sankara identified women’s

²¹ Gillow, John. *Printed and Dyed Textiles from Africa*. London: British Museum Press, 2001. 14.

²² Lamb, 69.

²³ Gillow, 15.



Fig. 1.4.

“Le tissage à motifs d’animaux.” Traditional strip weaving cloth from Bondoukuy, Burkina Faso. Reinders, Margriet and Sidi Traoré. *La Tenue Traditionnelle au Burkina Faso*. Ouagadougou: Imprimerie du Progres, N.d. 28. Original in colour.

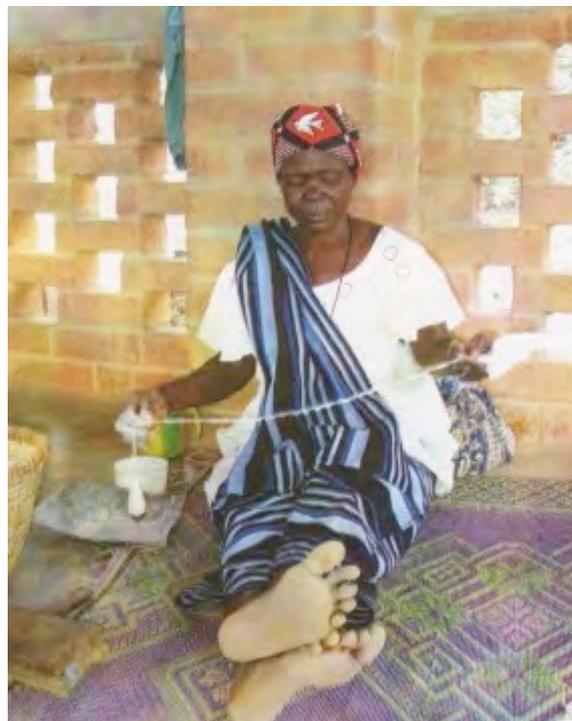


Fig. 1.5.

“Femme en train de filer le coton, à gauche les cardes.” Woman spinning cotton yarn, carding combs on the left. Reinders, Margriet and Sidi Traoré. *La Tenue Traditionnelle au Burkina Faso*. Ouagadougou: Imprimerie du Progres, N.d. 23. Original in colour.

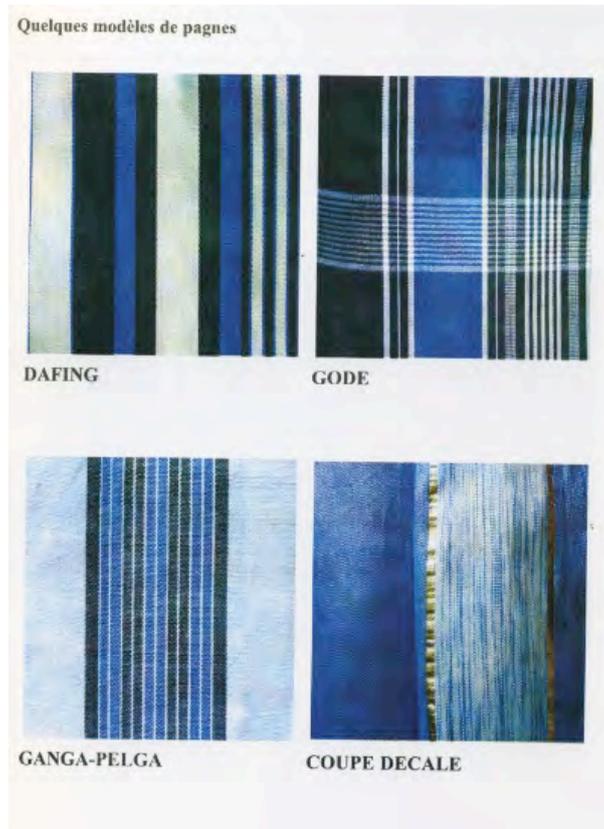


Fig. 1.6
 Different types of traditional striped *dan fani* cloth. Reinders, Margriet and Sidi Traoré. *La Tenue Traditionnelle au Burkina Faso*. Ouagadougou: Imprimerie du Progres, N.d. 33. Original in colour.

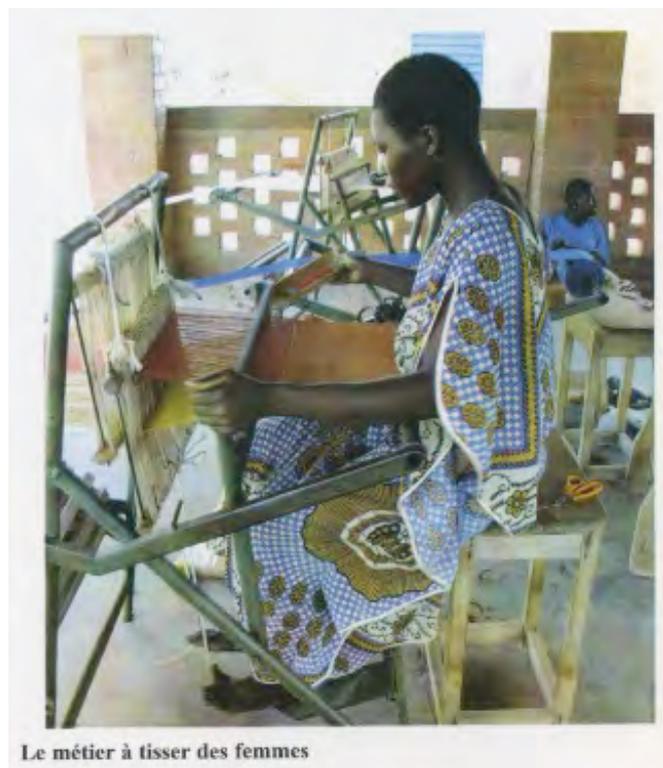


Fig. 1.7
 Women's weaving loom. Reinders, Margriet and Sidi Traoré. *La Tenue Traditionnelle au Burkina Faso*. Ouagadougou: Imprimerie du Progres, 2006? Original in colour.

emancipation as being crucial to economic prosperity, and, challenging the male-dominated weaving culture, imported many thousands of these simple metal looms into the country during his office.²⁴

Perani and Woolf stress the importance of woven cloth in West Africa as a mediator that serves many functions, its users manipulating meanings in social contexts that are mystifying to the uninitiated.²⁵ Cloth, they say, "...plays a vital role in social reproduction through recurring acts of exchange that encourage both cultural continuity and transformation."²⁶

Craft and tourism within Burkina Faso

Tourism to Burkina Faso has increased somewhat in the last ten years, and there are a number of cultural events within the country that attract visitors. UNESCO lists several such events. Every two years since the late 1960s Burkina Faso has been host to a film festival, the *Festival PanAfricain du Cinema de Ouagadougou*. (FESPACO) and, since the early 1980s, the *Salon International de l'Artisanat de Ouagadougou* (SIAO), the continent's most important pan-African crafts fair. In addition, *La Foire Internationale du Livre de Ouagadougou* (FILO,) a major book fair, has been an annual event since 2005.²⁷ Table 1 shows the tourist arrivals of Burkina Faso compared to various other West African countries. The numbers of tourists to Burkina is relatively

²⁴ Skinner, Elliott P. "Sankara and the Burkinabe Revolution: Charisma and Power, Local and External Dimensions." *Journal of Modern African Studies*. 26.3 (1988): 444.

²⁵ Perani, Judith and Naomi Woolf. *Cloth, Dress and Art Patronage in Africa*. Oxford: Berg, 1999. 29.

²⁶ Perani and Woolf, 31.

²⁷ UNESCO report. *Tourism, Culture and Development in West Africa: strategic options and project proposals*. Sept 2004. 17. UNESCO.org. Web. 2 Nov 2011.

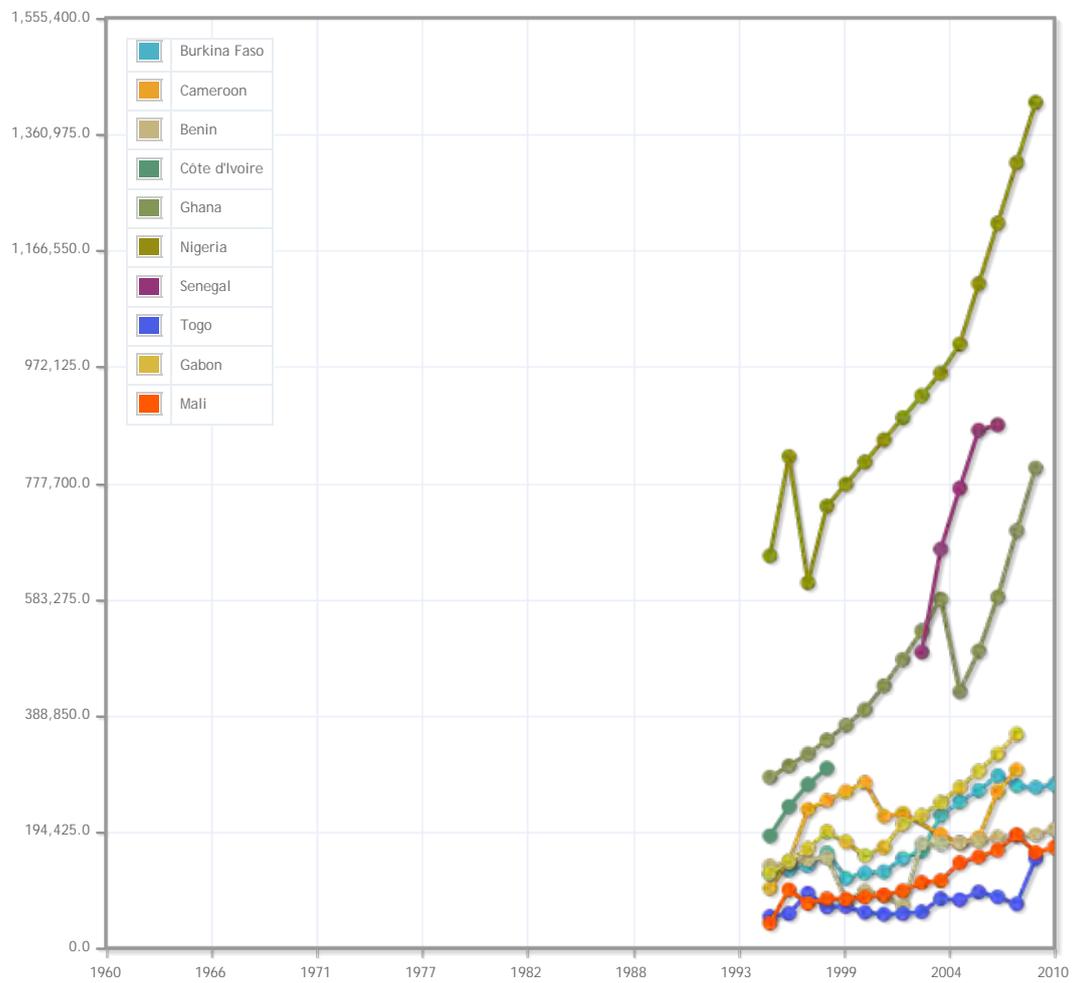


Table 1
 Tourist arrivals in selected West African countries 1995-2010. World Bank Development Indicators Data. *World Bank*.

small, at around 300,000, compared to Nigeria, Senegal and Ghana, but show a marked increase since 2000.

With support from the Burkinabe government's Craft Bureaux set up in 1991 in Bobo Dioulasso, Burkina's second city, and Ouagadougou, the capital, the craft sector is large. According to the UNESCO report on culture and tourism, the number of artisans is estimated at close to 900,000, of whom 500,000 are women. In terms of generating income the sector is led only by farming and animal-raising and represents almost 30% of the GDP. The field includes textiles (weaving, dyeing, embroidery and sewing), wood (carpentry, cabinetmaking), agribusiness (soap making, catering, dried fruit and vegetables, cereals), leather goods, basketry and metalworking.²⁸

The approach to the design and execution of the SOS products in Burkina Faso was characterised by a series of methodologies that informed the theoretical background to the practical work.

Field research

A major part of the research has been fieldwork in Burkina Faso itself. In November 2007 I made my first trip, together with Shell Foundation business manager, Rosanne Gray, to meet the rural weaving communities of Sulgo and Napalgué, and the urban ateliers of both male and female weavers in Ouagadougou, the capital, and Kadougou, a city about 100km from the capital. These were the main sites of production that SOS had identified as

²⁸ UNESCO report, 16.

being viable for promotion and development as centres of excellence in weaving and spinning. Sulgo was selected as the site for the building of a large visitors centre, where tourists could watch the villagers spinning, weaving and sewing their traditional textiles. During my first visit I also attended a conference that had been convened to discuss the future for textile producers in the region, with speakers from all over Burkina Faso and also from USAID, the US government international development body. A fashion show was held during this conference, featuring various local designers from Ouagadougou. As part of the SOS team I met the director of the Musée Nationale de Burkina, Mdme Alimata Sawadogo, who also kindly entertained us with a lavish dinner at her home, and observed the negotiations regarding the granting of a licence for SOS to occupy a pavilion in the Museum's grounds. I accompanied the SOS team as they inspected a state-funded women's artisanal college in Ouagadougou and various private female weaving ateliers in the capital. In November 2008 I travelled to Burkina Faso to attend a fashion show at the Hotel Mercure in Ouagadougou, designed and produced by SOS Creative Director, Florence Edmond, as an example of how Burkinabe textiles could be interpreted in a euro-american context. In January 2009 I again visited Burkina accompanied by Goldsmiths University of London design student, Ester Kneen, to work on the production of my collection of appliqué animal cushions and toys. I toured a women's weaving project to the south of Ouagadougou which had been established by a Dutch resident, Margriet Reinders, and visited the government-funded *Village Artisanale* in central Ouagadougou. I attended the grand opening of the SOS pavilion at the Musée Nationale, attended by the Mossi emperor, the Moro Naaba, where a

section contained a display of textile panels that I had designed and brought with me from the UK. Other field work included visiting the *International Contemporary Furniture Fair* (ICFF) in New York in 2007, where SOS had decided to launch their project, and also *Maison et Objet* in Paris in 2008 to inspect the *Ethnic Chic* halls of one of Europe's largest design fairs. This assessment of the design exhibition environment for craft culminated in my own exhibition at the ICFF in May 2011 with the *Bamako* collection and the visitor questionnaire.

Ethnographic analysis

Assessing the operations of SOS on the ground was a difficult task. In a classical model of survey work, or qualitative interviews with subjects, the assessment is focused on how accurately they reflect a supposed 'real world.' In contrast to this realist model is the idealist model, where the interview is perceived as representing just one of any number of possible worlds. In practice, however, most qualitative researchers will combine the two as they are not mutually exclusive.²⁹ As Sarah Pink clarifies, "What this means is that an interview becomes a representation of an experienced reality rather than a realist or authentic account of an objective reality."³⁰ In this sense I had arrived with many preconceptions that were the result of my background research prior to the field trip, and of my enthusiasm for a design project that would be involved in a scenario that already pre-existed in my imagination. The reality of learning about life for the artisans was, at first, filtered through these

²⁹ Pink, Sarah. *Doing Sensory Ethnography*. London: Sage Publications Ltd, 2009. 81.

³⁰ Pink 81.

preconceptions and it was almost as though I interpreted answers that fitted these ideals as being more 'authentic.'

The idea that, like life, qualitative research findings can be fiction in the sense that they constructed from a real experience rather than entirely fabricated, is one that has been proposed by ethnographers for some time.³¹ Susan Talburt cites Harry Wolcott's difficulty in negotiating academic obsession with the verification of fieldwork. "More compelling than discovering a verifiably "found world," he argued, is a question of what one does with what one "finds" there."³² Talburt acknowledges that inconsistencies and misinterpretations of data do need some sort of formalised assessment, though what anthropologist Clifford Geertz describes as "winks upon winks upon winks"³³ are never fully representable "in language or verifiable as faithful copies of the 'real.' We gesture to them as best we can."³⁴ Echoing Pink's definition of realist and idealist ethnographic methodologies, Joachim Lyon uses the terms *emic* and *etic* to define and delineate the two approaches. He asserts that the epistemology of ethnography involves the building of an emic ontology, a perspective that attempts an objective evaluation of internal elements and functions; the informant's vision of their world. Put simply, we wish to know how informants make sense of their world and with as few preconceptions as possible. But, as Lyon points out, researchers have to start somewhere, and the etic, or the external organisation of the informant's world, plays its part.

³¹ For example, see Geertz (1973): Belsey (1980): Wolcott (1990): Lather (1991)

³² Talburt, Susan. "Ethnographic Responsibility without the 'Real.'" *Journal of Higher Education*. 75.1 (2004): 80.

³³ Geertz describes ethnographers as constructing others' constructions of the constructions of the world. (Geertz 9)

³⁴ Talburt 81.

Ethnographers must at least minimally bound their study within some guiding analytical perspective of their own—a minimal *etic* view. If not for any other reasons, this is true because they must select field sites and secure access, they must decide which informants to talk to and which activities to watch more closely, they must work within the available project time frames, and they often have to justify all these choices to authorities, stakeholders and funding sources.³⁵

Lyon deftly pinpoints the same argument that both Pink and Talburt have made; that the need for verification of a fictionalised experience is a delicate operation. He writes: “The ethnographer has almost always had to uncomfortably balance an emic truth with an etic gloss - the open-ended inductive discovery packaged as a rational account of the very same discovery.”³⁶

The problem that ethnographic research faces in establishing an accurate description of objective reality appears to be that people tell interviewers what they believe to be their own motivations, but subsequently those people's actions then often seem to contradict their statements to the researcher. This could perhaps be due to a number of reasons: the problems that people have in verbally articulating certain aspects of their life that are taken for granted,

³⁵ Lyon, Joachim B. “Balancing the Emic and the Etic: an Ethnographer of Design Reflects on Design Ethnography.” *Innovation*. 30.2 (2011): 26.

³⁶ Lyon 27.

how researchers approach their questioning, and the inherent complexity of the culture under scrutiny. There is also another dimension. In as far as I was able to conduct interviews with weavers and spinners in rural locations in West Africa, the responses were always filtered through the motivations of the interpreters, who were employed by the NGO, and through the various languages. I asked a question that was translated by the interpreter. The weavers and spinners then told the NGO interpreter what he wanted to hear; the NGO interpreter told me what he thought I wanted to hear, tempered with the need to portray the NGO in the best possible light. Through the “chinese whispers” of our conversations, from English to French to Mooré and from Mooré to French and finally back to English, everyone is ‘winking’ at different things, to paraphrase Geertz.

Authenticity

‘Authentic’ as a word is loaded with meanings that imply a transcendent value, especially if the artefact in question has been in some way authenticated as regards its provenance, condition and how it is displayed.³⁷ But, as David Phillips proposes, this guarantee begins to seem less assured when the word ‘authentic’ is scrutinised, rather than the artefact itself. “It is an odd-ball, hovering on the edges of a group whose established members would include ‘real,’ ‘ideal,’ ‘perfect,’ ‘essential,’ ‘true,’ ‘natural,’...”³⁸ and he goes on to list many words with similar meanings. “Authentic,” Phillips says, “very much

³⁷ Phillips, David. *Exhibiting Authenticity*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997. 5.

³⁸ Phillips, 5.

wants to join this club, but does not quite qualify for membership.”³⁹ For example, we would not use the word ‘authentically’ to replace the words ‘honestly’ or ‘perfectly’ in everyday language. Yet like the other words, ‘authentic,’ when used to describe a particular attribute, appears to allude to something not merely descriptive or visual, but that which is somehow indicative of an abstract, absolute and universal truth, and therein lies its deceptive nature.⁴⁰

The classification of African craft as ‘authentic’ or otherwise is a seemingly western preoccupation that has created lucrative markets that operate globally. Anitra Nettleton comments on the ‘concoction’ of authenticity in African craft products as being a result of a western association with non-industrialisation and a lack of commercial interests.⁴¹ This is a theme that runs through the work of several commentators, such as Erik Cohen, who points out that this preconception was especially true in the 1970s and 1980s.⁴² Larry Shiner’s acerbic article on the “ideology of authenticity”⁴³ attacks this kind of obsession with an ‘unspoiled’ or ‘traditional’ Africa, while Achille Mbembe identifies communalism and ethnicity as being entirely false signifiers of African cultural authenticity.⁴⁴ Of particular interest has been John and Jean Comaroff’s exploration of the ‘branding’ of ethnicities and the resulting perceived ‘authenticities’ that indigenous communities subsequently assume

³⁹ Phillips, 5.

⁴⁰ Phillips, 5.

⁴¹ Nettleton, 56.

⁴² Cohen, Erik. *Contemporary Tourism: Diversity and Change*. Amsterdam; San Diego: Elsevier, 2004. 105.

⁴³ Shiner, Larry “Primitive Fakes, Tourist Art and the Ideology of Authenticity.” *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 52.2 (1994): 225-234.

⁴⁴ Mbembe, Achille. “Art and Development.” *Art South Africa*. 8.3 (2010): 70-74.

through their dealings with tourists and global markets.⁴⁵ Authenticity, say the Comaroffs, is the “specter that haunts the commodification of culture everywhere.”⁴⁶ The effects of western taste on the design and production of artisanal products have been chronicled by various authors in a wide variety of geographic locations and artistic disciplines, and the effect that tourism in particular wields in relation to the aesthetic properties incorporated into indigenous craft by the makers.⁴⁷ An appreciation of these debates in various established theoretical works⁴⁸ has helped to underpin the analysis of the SOS policy surrounding the cultural ‘authenticity’ of what could and could not be made under their *aegis*.

The authenticity of the tourist experience is equally pertinent to this research. SOS is attempting to create a visitor centre in one of the weaving villages so that tourists may watch ‘authentic’ weavers at work, and buy ‘authentic’ products from them. Erik Cohen describes this as a “false back” where, he says, a location may be staged as being remote and “non-touristic” in order to convince tourists that they have in some way “discovered” an authentic experience.⁴⁹ Similarly, in 2009 SOS mounted a large exhibition about the weaving heritage of Burkina Faso within the Musée Nationale de Burkina, with SOS director Karin Phillips having sole authority in the choice of what was on display to a Burkinabé audience. The overall objective, however, was that the

⁴⁵ Comaroff, John L. and Jean Comaroff. *Ethnicity Inc.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009.

⁴⁶ Comaroff and Comaroff, 10.

⁴⁷ For example, see Graburn (1979); Cohen (1989); Vincentelli (1989) (2000); Thompson and Cutler (1997)

⁴⁸ For example, see Errington (1998); Kasfir (1992); MacClancey (1997); Phillips and Steiner (1999); Boyle (2004)

⁴⁹ Cohen, Erik. *Contemporary Tourism: diversity and change.* Oxford: Elsevier, 2004. 102.

SOS pavilion was to become a commercial retail outlet for western tourists visiting the country, leading to an analysis, with the aid of various authors,⁵⁰ in Chapter Four of the authenticity of the museum experience and its relation to commercial enterprise.

Craft consumption

That craft has a special place in consumption practices has been widely analysed and commented upon.⁵¹ The analysis of the relationships between material cultures and consumption is also well established, with a series of texts now assuming their places within the canon.⁵² The distinction between elite craft and quotidian craft finds its expression in the starkly different markets for such products. It is the everyday, quotidian crafts that are most threatened by cheap imports, at a local level, and research shows that artisans are highly adaptive in their responses to global markets as they tend to mass-produce objects that are an inferior version of the specialised, ritual-associated crafts that are the reserve of a local connoisseurship.⁵³ Timothy Scrase points out that, following Bourdieu, ...”we can delineate a class distinction in the types of crafts produced and consumed.”⁵⁴ The highly specialized, elite craft consumer in the west, says Scrase, is more likely to be able to relate the biography, or history, of the object and to be knowledgeable about the specific community from whence it came.⁵⁵ Gloria Hickey notes, however, that buyers

⁵⁰ For example, see Macdonald and Silverstone (1990): Phillips (1997): Macdonald (2011)

⁵¹ For example, see Dormer (1997): Sennett (2008): Adamson (2010)

⁵² For example, see Appadurai (1986): Baudrillard (1996) [1968]: Douglas and Isherwood (1996) [1979]: Miller (1998)

⁵³ Scrase, 454.

⁵⁴ Scrase, 453.

⁵⁵ Scrase, 453.

of craft are less concerned about the biography of an artisan, which, she says, is consulted *after* a purchase to confirm rather than motivate, but more excited by the properties inherent in the physical object which they consider they themselves lack; creativity, inspiration and skill.⁵⁶ Hickey also describes the qualities of craft as a gift, where the gift-givers are “hoping to create personal meaning with a distinctive object.”⁵⁷ This personal, human element that appears to be present in craft objects has been described by Esther Leslie, talking of potters, as the relation of a “wisdom based on praxis.”⁵⁸ The Crafts Council Report of 2010, *Consuming Craft*, suggests that the word “craft” is most closely associated with the terms “personal” and “for everyone,” and that “as craft is perceived as more ‘personal’ and ‘individual’ than design, art or luxury goods, craft businesses can fulfil consumers’ need to demonstrate individualism...”⁵⁹

Perhaps a useful way to approach the understanding of how African craft is consumed in the first world is to focus on the deep motivations, the drivers and desires of the consumer rather than the effects and outcomes of consumer behaviours. Consumption theorist Ian Woodward analyses the British psychoanalyst Donald Winnecott’s work on “transitional objects”⁶⁰ which he proposed were crucial to human development, and not just in childhood but

⁵⁶ Hickey, Gloria. “Craft within a consuming society.” *The Culture of Craft*. Ed. Peter Dörner. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997. 86.

⁵⁷ Hickey, 87.

⁵⁸ Leslie, Esther. “Walter Benjamin: Traces of Craft.” *The Craft Reader*. Ed. Glenn Adamson. Oxford: Berg, 2010. 388.

⁵⁹ *Consuming Craft: the contemporary craft market in a changing economy*. Executive Summary of Report. *Crafts Council*. Web 25 Jan. 2012.

⁶⁰ Better known to parents as ‘security blankets.’ The theory of ‘transitional’ objects’ argues that people are born without a sense of identity and use objects to construct the self.

throughout adult life. Winnicott, says Woodward, understood that all engagements with objects are creative. They may not necessarily be judged as positive, ethical or valuable by all people, but they are always constructive in one way or another.

With his emphasis on engagements with objects which are both pragmatically and imaginatively realized, Winnicott starts with the individual but opens up the idea of the cultural space generated from such engagements; person–object interaction always bridges inner and outer worlds, self and culture.⁶¹

Woodward concludes that where Winnicott’s model does seem most apposite is in linking the consumerist desire for new, novel, special or rare goods with their capacity to transform the self. Winnicott suggests that such goods have the capacity to unite subject and object in a transitional space that constitutes materially grounded social action. Thus it could be argued that crafted objects fulfil this function admirably, and that fair trade, ethics and social justice provide another conduit for self-expression, or rather the *promise* of self expression and transformation.⁶² Assessing the attractiveness of ethnic crafts in a development context has been informed by such debates.

Gender and development

⁶¹ Woodward, Ian. “Towards an object-relations theory of consumerism: The aesthetics of desire and the unfolding materiality of social life.” *Journal of Consumer Culture* 11.3 (2011): 380.

⁶² Woodward, 376.

Authors who comment on gender politics within the development field are plentiful.⁶³ Their voices, together with those that address general issues around Africa and poverty,⁶⁴ have been crucial in assessing the cultural relativism that SOS has decided is appropriate in their operations within Burkina Faso. Emma Crewe and Elizabeth Harrison suggest that while ideas about pre-modern societies requiring western aid to 'develop' have gained hegemony, populist traditionalists believe that such societies are remote from the corrupting influences, that they are ... "living in harmony with each other and their environment...holding great stores of practical wisdom."⁶⁵ Crewe and Harrison believe that such constructs (including that of local cultures as acting as a barrier to modernisation) are used by development institutions to plan the future and to make sense of the past.⁶⁶ Charles Piot points out that it is simplistic to judge West African domestic economies, kinship structures, gender relations and ritual practices as being local; that they are village-bound and place-bound rather than influenced by the national, global or postcolonial.⁶⁷ These western perceptions of Other cultures also lead to some sweeping generalisations about racial characteristics, even today, with whole regions of Africa being homogenised while Asians are stereotyped by ethnic group:

⁶³ For example, see Roitman (1990): Fahy Bryceson (2002): Madhaven (2001): Sharp, Briggs, Yacoub and Hamed (2003)

⁶⁴ See, for example Collier (2007): Harrison (2010)

⁶⁵ Crewe, Emma and Elizabeth Harrison. *Whose Development? An Ethnography of Aid*. London: Zed Books Ltd, 2002, 29.

⁶⁶ Crewe and Harrison, 25.

⁶⁷ Piot, Charles. *Remotely Global: village modernity in West Africa*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999. 17.

The irresponsibility and corruption of African men is often highlighted. African women, in contrast, are often assumed to be honest, hard-working and altruistic, even if they are relatively out of touch with the modern world...We have heard development workers describe Indian men as devious and hopeless with finance, Sinhalese people as impossible to get close to or trust, Pathan men as fierce and women as conservative, and Nepali men as friendly but lazy.⁶⁸

But culture as a barrier is not always viewed as an impediment. Some development workers explicitly state that they should not interfere with 'traditional' customs within a particular society, most often in the case of gender relations, in case social upheaval should follow.⁶⁹ What is certainly implicit in this view is that male dominance is somehow seen as a 'natural' law while other social transformations of 'traditional' cultural structures, such as class rearrangements within caste societies, are a 'necessary' result of economic development. However, those development workers who advocate empowerment should also be aware that conflict is always accompanied by resistance and that the process of empowerment itself is not without difficulties. Portraying the exploited as passive victims who accept their own subordination means that "...the ignorance and acquiescence of women is often overemphasised."⁷⁰

⁶⁸ Crewe and Harrison, 30.

⁶⁹ Crewe and Harrison, 46.

⁷⁰ Crewe and Harrison, 53.

Sangeetha Madhavan reminds us that complicated networks of co-residential familial constructs in sub-Saharan Africa mean that women negotiate power in their own spheres⁷¹, and Sharp, Briggs, Yacoub and Hamed argue that some women prefer “to collude in patriarchal bargains which appear to offer greater advantages than women perceive can be achieved by challenging the prevailing order.”⁷² Such women, they say, are reluctant to engage with empowering activities that might challenge their gendered bargain. What is certain is that the SOS policies, in comparison to other development NGOs working in the weaving sector in Burkina Faso, can be examined and assessed in a number of ways within the theoretical framework, particularly with regard to the SOS designations of ‘appropriate’ gendered roles in their projects.

Outline of Chapters

Chapter Two presents a more general history of the west’s relationship with Africa, beginning with an brief overview of the origins of racism, paternalism, colonialism and post-colonialism. The history of West Africa and its relationship with colonial France (being of particular interest in this study of a Francophone former colony) and the gradual procession of African objects into the markets of Europe during late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries are described. Western perceptions of ‘authenticity’ and ‘tradition’ within the field of African art and design are analyzed in both a historical and contemporary

⁷¹ Madhavan, Sangeetha. “Female Relationships and Demographic Outcomes in Sub-Saharan Africa.” *Sociological Forum* 16.3 (2001): 503-527.

⁷² Sharp, Joanne, John Briggs, Hoda Yacoub and Nabila Hamed. “Doing gender and development: understanding empowerment and local gender relations.” *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 28.3 (2003): 281.

context, together with the West's attitudes to *modernity-tradition* binary assumptions. An assessment is made of vernacular arts, how tourists have affected what is made by artisans in West Africa, current thinking in development with regard to pro-poor commercial development, and the increasing merging of social enterprise with craft production in Africa. Finally, an assessment is made of the current West African craft presence in global markets, and the increasing involvement of western designers in creating high-end craft products in the region using two examples: Italian furniture manufacturer Moroso, and British designer Vivienne Westwood. Chapter Three introduces the SOS charity: its funders and sponsors, its manifesto and the reasons for its choice of West African strip weaving as a suitable vehicle for development. The first SOS exhibition at the ICFF in New York in 2007 and events leading to the initial Shell Foundation meetings are described. The structure of SOS within Burkina Faso, its team members and backgrounds, are also fully examined. Then a chronicle of the three field trips to Burkina Faso is presented. This includes visits to the more remote rural weaving communities, urban weaving ateliers and craft retail outlets. A local fashion show in the capital Ougadougou reviews issues of local taste and local consumption of textiles. An important point to consider is the extent to which Burkina Faso is represented in global craft markets and how large aid organisations, such as Aid to Artisans, already have a presence within the country. Chapter Four examines the SOS brief for developing the various products and questions an emerging preoccupation with 'authenticity' and 'tradition' exhibited by the SOS management team, which is imposed as a condition of participation in the development programme. The three SOS

brands, *Afrique Authentique*, *Tissus Villages* and *L'Esprit de Burkina*, are analysed, with an account of my attempts to prototype samples for a “contemporary” collection that reflected the SOS brief. The SOS fashion collection and *defilé de mode* at the Hotel Mercure in central Ougadougou, the opening of a special SOS exhibition of local weaving artefacts at the Musée Nationale de Burkina and the subsequent display by SOS, once again at the ICFF New York in 2009, is described. The chapter concludes with a final assessment of how the ambitions of SOS in 2007 have been achieved in 2011. Chapter Five describes the creation of my own children’s animal collection, and my attempts to have it entirely made in Burkina. My response to the SOS inability to meet supply was to re-design an entirely new collection of products that could test the research questions in a commercial setting at the ICFF New York in 2011. The visitor questionnaire asked open-ended questions that elicited some interesting replies from buyers and specifiers about their perceptions of high-end craft from Africa. There follows a description of a fellow exhibitor at the ICFF, textile designer Aissa Dione from Senegal, and her method of production in Dakar. This chapter specifically addresses the issues around design interventions and adoption of technologies by artisan communities. Chapter Six contains my conclusions and suggestions for future research directions.

CHAPTER TWO: CONSUMING AFRICA

the wider context

Introduction

The history of the migration of craft objects from Africa to Europe and North America is one that encompasses a number of issues. To understand this history and its effects on modern Africa there has to be an appreciation of the subtler factors at work: trade and political interests of foreign agents, classical notions of progress, religious evangelism, spurious applications of Darwinian theories of evolution, as well as a series of misunderstandings and misreadings of complex societies. Gustav Jahoda describes the intricacies of the history of relationships between European and 'other' cultures to in no uncertain terms:

'Attributing the way Europeans perceived savages to 'misunderstanding' is a little like calling a miscarriage of justice a 'clerical error' – failing to appreciate the great complexity of the processes involved.'¹

¹ Jahoda, Gustav. *Images of Savages: Ancient Roots of Modern Prejudice in Western Culture*. 1999. New York: Routledge, 2008. xii.

Within these complex historical facets lie the biographies of crafted objects from Africa. From a purely visual perspective, cultures in general have always, as one such commentator, Peggy Stoltz Gilfoy, states, "...integrated foreign elements into their traditions."² She gives as an example "pomegranate-patterned" velvets made in sixteenth century Italy and Ottoman Turkey which were directly influenced by sixth to eighth century Chinese silks.³ Today, cross-cultural influences and global trading are facilitated by different factors: the ease of travel and tourism to Africa, the internet as a marketplace, the diverse markets for crafts that have turned symbolic artefacts into commoditised products.

This chapter begins with a brief summary of the West's apparently contradictory fascination for "dark" Africa, and the inspiration for the West's arts gained from African artists and craftsmen and women. The collecting habits of European travellers, the display of African artefacts (including colonial expositions and missionary 'africa rooms' with the corresponding reinvention of African-ness) is briefly described in order to establish a historical perspective for attitudes that may persist today. The implications of the west's obsession with 'authenticity' in African art and craft, mirrored by a similar obsession with the preservation of 'traditional' societies is debated, and further contextualised by an assessment of the effects of tourism and development policy in the cultural sector. An assessment of how African craft is marketed in Europe and North America follows. Finally, two short case studies of European

² Gilfoy, Peggy Stoltz. "The Eye, the Hand and the Stripe." *History, Design and Craft in West African Strip-Woven Cloth*. New York : Smithsonian Institution, 1992. 83

³ Gilfoy 83.

designer collaborations with African artisans are presented: Italian manufacturer Moroso and Senegalese furniture-makers, British fashion designer Vivienne Westwood's bag collection made by Nairobi slum-dwellers. Each study highlights a different approach to such collaboration. The chapter concludes with a critique of the trend for celebrity charity projects in Africa.

Africa – the ‘dark’ continent

Africa holds an iconic status in western imaginations, formed largely through European classical foundations and cultural history, as being one of the last places on earth to be ‘discovered’ and ‘civilised.’ Gustav Jahoda writes a fascinating account of the history of European attitudes to Africa in *Images of Savages*, describing the period of early Christianity as being one that began the change to a more unfavourable view of Africans, especially after the rise of Islam as the implacable enemy of Christendom.⁴ This European historical perception of the primitive and savage nature of Africans goes some way to explain the ease with which the slavery of black peoples from West Africa by European merchants was initially justified.

The transition of European governments from benevolent abolishers of slavery to cynical, exploitative empire-builders in the latter half of the nineteenth century has been explained by Patrick Brantlinger as a psychology of blaming the victim through a projection of one’s own dark fantasies. He writes that: “Africa grew “dark” as Victorian explorers, missionaries, and scientists flooded it with light because the light was refracted through an imperialist ideology that urged the abolition of “savage customs” in the name of civilization.”⁵

Lucy Jarosz writes that the first reference to Africa as being ‘dark’ is accredited to Henry M. Stanley in two books: *In Darkest Africa* and *Through the Dark*

⁴ Jahoda, Gustav. *Images of Savages*. Hove: Routledge, 1999. 27.

⁵ Bratlinger, Patrick. “Victorians and Africans: the Genealogy of the Myth of the Dark Continent.” *Critical Inquiry*. Vol 12.1 (1985): 166.

Continent.⁶ These books were translated and published throughout Europe and North America in 1890. The lurid accounts of explorers and missionaries in Africa, laced with detailed accounts of 'savage' practices, were supplemented by a rash of fictional adventure books⁷ that reveal a justification for colonial imperialism through simplistic binary opposites of good/evil, black/white and civilization/savagery. From the archives of the Royal Geographical Society of 1874 a certain A. Hamilton baldly asserts that from his observations of the African natives, '...there was not a more degraded and worthless class of beings on the face of the earth...'⁸

The savage child needs a firm hand

Gustav Jahoda describes the shifting perceptions of what it means to be a child, from the 17th century's harsh evaluation to the 18th century's more lenient attitudes, and back to the 19th century's assumptions of the inherent moral 'badness' of children in general.⁹ Jahoda traces the legacy of Rousseau's *Emile ou de l'Education* in 1762, from which stems the patronising label of savages as 'nature's children' and cites Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* of 1853 as a well-meaning but paternalistic view of black people as simple, docile and childlike.¹⁰ Jahoda appears to suggest that 19th century western perceptions of black Africans as having a *mélange* of child-like and simultaneously savage characteristics were as much rooted in western cultural

⁶ Jarosz, Lucy. "Constructing the Dark Continent: Metaphor as Geographic Representation of Africa." *Geografiska Annaler. Series B, Human Geography*. 74.2 (1992): 106. JSTOR. Web. 27 April 2011.

⁷ For example, see Rider Haggard's *She* (1887) and *King Solomon's Mines* (1887.)

⁸ Hamilton, A. Discussion on *Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society of London*. 18.2 (1874): 193. JSTOR. Web. 27 Apr. 2011.

⁹ Jahoda 141.

¹⁰ Jahoda 142.

philosophies about childhood *per se* as in any direct experience of colonial rule.

Harry Johnson, an English missionary writing around 1900 is a voice from the period that bears out this attitude. In Johnston's account of his mission in Tanganyika, *Night and Morning in Dark Africa*, he writes that the local people are "in some senses big children that ought at times to be treated as little children"¹¹ and that "Like children, they do not take thought for the morrow, and so they are guilty of thriftlessness and waste."¹²

It seems that missionaries no longer believed in their racial superiority, but rather that, writes Olúfémi Táiwò, their culture and civilisation was more advanced and thus they cast themselves in the role of benevolent teachers ... "whose success was to be measured by how quickly and well they educated their wards to assume control of their own business and render its tutors superfluous to the running of the lives of the tutored."¹³

Amadou-Mahtar M'Bow, who was Director General of UNESCO in 1984, writes that Africa was viewed as being cut off from the 'civilization' of the West both geographically and culturally, and that the prevailing ideology supported this notion of the isolation and impenetrability of the African continent.¹⁴ This view is also strongly articulated by Sidney Kasfir, who writes that West's

¹¹ Johnson, Harry. *Night and Morning in Dark Africa*. London: London Missionary Society, N.d.: 111.

¹² Johnston 112.

¹³ Táiwò, Olúfémi. *How Colonialism Preempted Modernity in Africa*. Bloomington IN: Indiana University Press, 2010.10.

¹⁴ M,Bow, Amadou-Mahtar. *General History of Africa IV: Africa from the Twelfth to the Sixteenth Century*. London: Heinemann, 1984. 13.

fascination for Africa has perhaps a large part to do with an impression that is hard to shake:

‘The idea that before colonialism most African societies were relatively isolated, internally coherent, and highly integrated has been such a powerful paradigm and so fundamental to the West’s understanding of Africa that we are obliged to retain it even when we now know that much of it is an oversimplified fiction.’¹⁵

This perceived lack of integration with the ‘civilised’ world, and the widely held belief that Africans were unable to control their wild and child-like natures gave the colonial occupiers a rationale for assimilating African territories into their empirical land grab.

Empire is a business

The “rush for Africa” turned into a frantic scramble for possession of territories that owed more to European politics than to local power plays, and trade was in both directions. The belief that ignorant African chiefs would sell vast tracts of resource-rich land for a few beads was, as Frederick Pedlar comments, a stereotypical fiction created in Europe.¹⁶ Pedlar presents a rather more prosaic picture of an Africa populated by canny businessmen who were well aware that

¹⁵ Kasfir, Sidney Littlefield. “African Art and authenticity: A Text with a Shadow.” *African Arts*. 25.2 (1992): 40.

¹⁶ Pedler, Frederick. “British Planning and Private Enterprise in Colonial Africa.” *Colonialism in Africa, 1870-1960: the Economics of Colonialism*. Ed. Peter Duignan and Lewis H. Gann. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975. 97.

they represented a lucrative market to European merchants.¹⁷ In the production and consumption of cloth this is especially true. Christopher Steiner's detailed account of the relationships between the West African consumers of European printed cotton¹⁸ (figs. 1 and 2) and the imagined African aesthetic that was promoted by its manufacturers is one that describes systems of cultural interactions far more deep and complex than stereotypes of colonialism and exploitation can convey.¹⁹ Steiner suggests that although not so different from the marketing of textiles in other parts of the world, Africa presented a special set of issues that were entirely to do with a cultural and spatial distance from the Eurocentric context.²⁰

As mentioned in Chapter One, the history of cloth in Africa is already well chronicled in various sources that elaborate on the complexity and hybridity of design and manufacture, as well as the finer nuances of its consumption in Africa and in trans-national African networks.²¹ The more recent 'reinvention' of printed West African fabrics used in contemporary furniture and fashion by Western designers, as an 'idea' of Africa, is briefly discussed later in this chapter.

¹⁷ Pedler 97.

¹⁸ Two main types of cloth were produced for the African market: Wax prints (wax batik or imitation wax, or Hollandaise) and non-wax prints (fancy prints.)

¹⁹ Steiner, Christopher B. "Another Image of Africa: Toward an Ethnohistory of European Cloth Marketed in West Africa, 1873-1960." *Ethnohistory* 32.2 (1985): 91

²⁰ Steiner 92.

²¹ For example, see Lamb, 1975; Nielson, 1979; Picton and Mack, 1979; Steiner, 1985; Stoltz Gilfoy, 1992; Picton, 1994; Rovine, 2001; Perani and Wolff, 1999; Phillips and Steiner, 1999; Rabine, 2002; Allman, 2004; Maynard, 2004; Sylvanus, 2007; Rovine, 2008.



Fig. 2.1
Typical cotton wax resist-dyed cloth made in Manchester c.2000. British Museum. Original in colour.

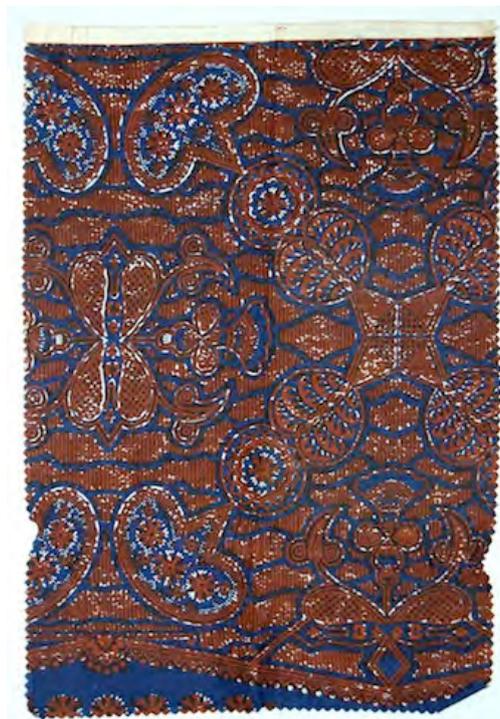


Fig. 2.2
Cotton wax resist-dyed cloth made in Manchester, early 20th Century. Sample from Charles Beving Collection (1934) British Museum. Original in colour.

Collecting from the colonies

As explorers, missionaries, colonial administrators, merchants and other travellers began collecting artefacts from all over Africa to send home to Europe from as early as the 17th century, the result was an influx of anonymous objects whose provenance was largely unimportant to the collectors. For example, in the late 19th century missionaries in the Belgian Congo shipped huge quantities home for display in special 'Africa rooms' or mission museums and the objects on display were used as examples of 'savagery'.²² There was also an appreciation of their worth as curios. The mission or church holding the collections would often hold fund-raising sales, where friends and associates could buy small objects carved in ebony and ivory from the exotic regions where the missionaries were based.²³ In the late 19th century the French colonial trophies from West Africa began to find a wider circulation.

The Colonial Exhibitions of France

In late 19th century France there was a duality of attitude towards Africa which has been analyzed by Victoria Rovine as attesting to "...two simultaneous impulses: the desire to civilize (Westernize) colonial subjects, and draw on their 'primitive' practices in order to enrich French culture."²⁴ This sentiment found expression in the era of spectacular colonial exhibitions (fig. 3) between 1850 and 1935, and was instrumental in shaping a world view of Africa and the Far East that crystallised two important ideologies: the dangerous glamour

²² Van Damme-Linseele, Annemieke. "From mission 'Africa rooms': Frans M. Olbrechts's rediscovered African collection." *African Arts* 41.2 (2008): 38.

²³ Van Damme-Linseele 38.

²⁴ Rovine, Victoria. "Colonialism's Clothing: Africa, France and the Deployment of Fashion." *Design Issues* 25.3 (2009): 45.



Fig. 2.3
Original poster of Exposition Nationale Coloniale in Marseille, 1922. Chisholm Gallery, New York. Original in colour.

of barbarism and the civilising mission of Europe.²⁵ Paris was host to a series of enormous exhibitions that celebrated the French colonial empire: countries of the Maghreb,²⁶ West Africa and the Far East. The first world fair to exhibit peoples from non-Western cultures in native villages (*villages indigènes*) was held in Paris in 1878, and set the fashion for this type of display in Europe from then onwards.²⁷ The fate of the exhibited people was often tragic, having been forcibly coerced into 'performing' in an alien environment, stared at by tens of thousands of Europeans a day, and where, as Raymond Corbey wryly comments, "The gaze of the visitors is not returned."²⁸ Corbey describes how the exhibited individuals "...battled with homesickness, emotional confusion, difficulties of adjusting to the European climate and food, and vicious infections."²⁹ Many of them died during their time at the expositions.

Promoting the French métropole

France in particular viewed their relationship with their colonised peoples as being representative of a greater meta-narrative; that of the French Revolution and its lofty ideals of liberty, fraternity and equality. The policy of assimilation of the colonies into the *métropole*, or mother country, was replaced by a policy of association in the late nineteenth century, a shift that encouraged the retention of local customs, although, as Patricia Morton points out, association policy was "informed by racial theories of evolution, which dictated fixed

²⁵ Apter, Andrew. "Africa, Empire, Anthropology: Philological Exploration of Anthropology's Heart of Darkness." *Annual Review of Anthropology*. 28 (1999): 587.

²⁶ Arabic term meaning literally "place of sunset" or "the west" refers to five North African countries: Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya and Mauritania. The first three were French colonial possessions.

²⁷ Corbey, Raymond. "Ethnographic Showcases." *Cultural Anthropology*. 8.3 (1993):341.

²⁸ Corbey 344.

²⁹ Corbey 348.

relations between the *métropole* and the colonies, especially in the realm of culture, where indigenous civilization was held inferior.”³⁰ Virginia Thompson and Richard Adloff write of the conviction that many French people felt:

... that their institutions and their civilization was superior and universally valid and, specifically, that implanting them in their colonies would benefit the native populations. ‘*Mission civilisatrice*’ was the euphemistic term devised to gloss over the incompatibility between their materialistic and their humanitarian objectives, as well as the contradictions inherent in France’s own legacy of authoritarianism and liberalism.³¹

The colonial expositions cemented this metanarrative of a kind of governing ‘ideal’ into the French collective sense of identity. Apter cites Herman Lebovics’ remark that this also constituted

“...the wrapping of cultures around a French core as a kind of mutual apprenticeship in citizenship: on the one side natives learning to be French while of course retaining their local customs; on the other the European French, recalling their own

³⁰ Morton, Patricia A. “National and Colonial: The Musée des Colonies at the Colonial Exposition, Paris, 1931.” *Art Bulletin* 80.2 (1998): 359.

³¹ Thompson, Virginia and Richard Adloff. “French Economic Policy in Tropical Africa.” *Colonialism in Africa, 1870-1960: the Economics of Colonialism*. Ed. Peter Duignan and Lewis H. Gann. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975. 127.

apprenticeships as Gascons or Bretons, learning to welcome the new French.”³²

That this ideal was a half-truth of the governing discourse did not diminish in any way the power it held. As Apter concludes, “...the simulcrum surpasses the original within the political ontology of imperial spectacle.”³³

The savage tamed and absorbed

Africa, reinvented, packaged and commoditised in the late 19th and early 20th centuries for a European audience that was eager to justify its sometimes unappetising role in world affairs, had also been ‘discovered’ as having a cultural heritage that was worthy of admiration and appropriation. African objects had been displayed in the homes of the wealthy for centuries but during the nineteenth century many different specialist locales of display had been created for non-Western objects: missionary museums, ethnographic museums, natural history and ‘mankind’ museums.³⁴ This coincided with the emerging disciplines of ethnology and anthropology, together with a reification of the ‘primitive,’³⁵ But by the beginning of the twentieth century they began to be displayed in the great public museums³⁶ producing a new interpretation of African artefacts; as works of art and creating an *impression* of African

³² Apter 588.

³³ Apter 588.

³⁴ Shelton, Anthony. “Museums and Anthropologies: Practices and Narratives.” *A Companion to Museum Studies*. Ed. Sharon MacDonald. Malden, Mass.; Oxford: Blackwell, 2006. 65.

³⁵ Schildkrout, Enid and Curtis A. Keim. “Objects and agendas: re-collecting the Congo.” *The Scramble for Art in Central Africa*. Ed. Enid Schildkrout and Curtis A. Keim. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.10.

³⁶ Schildkrout and Keim 3.

tribalism rather than a realistic portrayal. As Chris Gosden and Chantal Knowles explain,

The distinction between Africans and Europeans puts an emphasis on recontextualization as objects move from a black to a white milieu, rather than seeing the flow of objects as the means by which colonial culture was held together. Europeans are seen as external to African cultures, able to invent and imagine them in ways fundamentally influenced only by white philosophies of thought.³⁷

Simon Gikandi refers to Picasso as being less interested in African culture and more in the pure forms of its aesthetic, stating that “When he talked about the “Negro,” he was talking about the object rather than the person.”³⁸ Scholars have long debated the contentious issues around the collecting and display of tribal artefacts as affecting the ‘primitivist’³⁹ art movement through the context of European ‘recognition’ and interpretation.⁴⁰ In this context ‘primitivism’ is not a description of the nature of the peoples and cultures it refers to, “but is an idea in western culture by which others are defined in various periods of recent history.”⁴¹ It is a function of colonial discourse, as Rasheed Araeen⁴² argues:

³⁷ Gosden, Chris and Chantal Knowles. *Collecting Colonialism: Material Culture and Colonial Change*. Oxford: Berg, 2001. 49.

³⁸ Gikandi, Simon. “Picasso, Africa, and the schemata of difference.” *Beautiful Ugly: African and Diaspora Aesthetics*. London: Duke University Press, 2006. 33.

³⁹ Art movement influenced by so-called ‘primitive societies and their artefacts. Artists included Gauguin, the Fauves, Picasso, Brancusi, the German Expressionists, Lipchitz, Modigliani, Klee, Giacometti, Moore, the Surrealists and the Abstract Expressionists.

⁴⁰ For example, see McEvelley (1984): Araeen (1991): Jones (1993): Grossman and Bonell (2009.)

⁴¹ Araeen, Rasheed. “From Primitivism to Ethnic Arts.” *The Myth of Primitivism: perspectives on art*. Ed. Susan Hiller. London: Routledge, 1991. 160.

⁴² London-based artist, painter and sculptor. Founder of Third Text, a theoretical art journal that aims to challenge eurocentric domination of the artistic world.

It is commonly believed that African peoples themselves were not aware of the aesthetic qualities of what they were producing and that it was the west which 'discovered' these qualities and gave the African 'objects' the status of art.⁴³

The 'authentic' African object

Erik Cohen, as mentioned in Chapter One, points out that in the 1970s and 1980s many writers emphasized the absence of commercial interests as the primary consideration in judgements about an artefact's 'authenticity.'⁴⁴ Larry Shiner writes convincingly in 1994 of what he calls the "ideology of authenticity"⁴⁵ surrounding African art and design. He describes three common myths that he believes must be challenged. First, the myth of tradition as authenticity. This is the idea that 'primitive' societies are static and unchanging; 'without history,' to use Hegel's phrase.⁴⁶ Second, the myth of the 'unspoiled' or 'traditional' society that is untouched by modernity. Shiner argues that in Sub-Saharan Africa, an area of immense cultural diversity, this is plainly a ridiculous notion which denies millennia of global trade and commerce.⁴⁷ Third, the myth of the art/craft distinction. This suggests that making of 'authentic' and 'traditional' artefacts is, as Mbembe commented above, the preserve of 'real' artisans whose motives are far more culturally

⁴³ Arareen 165.

⁴⁴ Cohen, Erik. *Contemporary Tourism: Diversity and Change*. Amsterdam; San Diego: Elsevier, 2004.105.

⁴⁵ Shiner, Larry. 'Primitive Fakes, Tourist Art and the Ideology of Authenticity.' *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 52.2 (1994): 225. JSTOR. Web. 2 Oct. 2009.

⁴⁶ Shiner 228.

⁴⁷ Shiner 229.

significant, and therefore more worthy, than mere commercial interests. It is challenges to this myth that permeate academic debate around issues of authenticity in African art and design. Doran Ross, writing in *African Arts* in 2010, appears to be lamenting the mass market appreciation of *asofo* flags, the appliquéd and embroidered flags (fig. 2.4) of traditional military groups (*asofo*) of the *Fante* people of southern Ghana. The flags are sold in large quantities on the internet (fig. 2.5) Ross describes their journey into the commoditised zone of tourist-led artefacts:

Perhaps less compelling is the fact they are often admired for their “cartoon-like character” that inevitably appeals to “children of all ages.” After having worked with at least one *Fante* flag maker, the British textile artist Seiwa Cunningham writes of *asofo* flags for sale on her website redallover.co.uk, “so cute,” further advancing the annals of African art appreciation.⁴⁸

Ross is, of course, presenting a provocative argument that questions the role of internet trading in encouraging the commoditized production of ‘fakes’ and thus preserving the ‘real’ artefacts from exploitative trading. His article supports the challenges to the ‘ideology of authenticity’ but brings the debate into a more contemporary arena by suggesting that with the growing attention within the field of African art criticism on contemporary African artists’ names, dates and places, debates around “...”real” and “fake and the various permutations of the “authentic” seem to be increasingly irrelevant if not

⁴⁸ Ross, Doran H. “True Colours, Faux Flags and Tattered Sales.” *African Arts* 43.2 (2010): 3.

anachronistic.”⁴⁹ In African art and craft, the ‘authentic’ can also appear to be conflated with the ‘traditional’ or rather, the *imagined* traditional.



Fig. 2.4
Asafo flag c. 1863. Ghana, Akan, Fante. Cloth. Michigan State University archive. Original in colour.

www.hamilltribaltextiles.com

For additional Asafo Flags please go to: [FANTE ASAFO FLAGS 3](#)



Fig. 2.5
Asafo flags for sale on the internet, Hamill Tribal Textiles, Boston, MA, USA. Original in colour.

⁴⁹ Ross 7.

		
<p>FANTE Asafo Flag 67 38" h x 59" w</p>	<p>FANTE Asafo Flag 68 40" h x 58" w</p>	<p>FANTE Asafo Flag 69 37" h x 62" w</p>

The 'traditional' African object

Implicit in the view that 'traditional' societies need to be cherished and protected as creators of 'authentic' art and craft, is the assumption that contact with western society will morally corrupt and degrade the 'pure' or 'undeveloped' community, and hence its creative practice. Any visible sign that the West has been not only encountered by these 'timeless' societies but also absorbed in some way will be seen as evidence of this corruption. This is especially true of fashion, according to Victoria Rovine, which for the West carries connotations of modernity; fast-paced, responsive and eternally changing. Rovine comments that 'Africa, and other non-Western sites, has no place in this conception of fashion, except as an occasional source of inspiration.'⁵⁰

Coffee table books proliferate as supposed ethnographic records of the dress and traditions of 'vanishing' peoples from every continent, such as the 1984 work by Angela Fisher, *Africa Adorned* (figs. 2.6 and 2.7) and *Natural Fashion* by Hans Silvester in 2009 (fig. 2.8) Most recently, an article in the Times Magazine (fig. 2.9) revealed one photographer's album of 'traditional' dress in Ethiopia, recorded before it disappeared under the weight of western contact. Ben Machell describes western artefacts being incorporated into the traditional clothing, of nails and other 'cheap' materials being worn with pride. This encroaching modernity is then decried by the author as being undesirable, that "the tribesfolk here seem to be perfectly preserved examples of ancient

⁵⁰ Rovine, Victoria. "Viewing Africa through Fashion." *Fashion Theory* 13.2 (2009):134.

humanity.”⁵¹ Gustav Jahoda compares these stereotypic, western ‘ethnocentric’ images as akin to television documentaries recording endangered animal species and asks why these perceptions continue to exist when most peoples are integrated into a global cultural dialogue.⁵²



Fig. 2.6
Front cover of *Africa Adorned*, by Angela Fisher, 1984. Amazon Books. Original in colour

Fig. 2.7
illustration from *Africa Adorned*, by Angela Fisher, 1984. Vandello Books. Original in colour.

⁵¹ Machell, Ben. “Africa’s Lost Tribes.” *The Times Magazine*. 23 Oct 2010. 33.

⁵² Jahoda 246.



Fig. 2.8
Natural Fashion by Hans Silvester, 2009. Amazon Books. Original in colour.



Fig. 2.9
Photographs of Ethiopian dress. "Africa's Lost Tribes." *Times Magazine*. October 2010. Original in colour.

The 'modern' African object

A crucial point to consider, and particularly relevant to this study, is that the West's acceptance and encouragement of ethnic-inspired design by its own designers is generally viewed as a positive act of creativity, but a similar attempt by African artists and designers to blend western aesthetics into their work is judged as undermining their cultural credibility, requiring an almost moral censorship. Achille Mbembe, a well-known commentator on African culture, has debated the factors that he feels are adversely affecting the development of contemporary African culture, and he identifies the association of African art, culture and aesthetics with ethnicity and communalism as being a key issue.

The dominant but false idea – shared by many Africans and many [aid] donors – is that the act of creativity is necessarily a collective act; that African artistic forms are not aesthetic objects *per se* but ciphers of a deeper level of the 'real' that is fundamentally ethnographic and expressive of Africa's ontological cultural difference of 'authenticity'. It is this African 'difference' and this African 'authenticity' donors are keen to find, support and, if necessary, invent.⁵³

In truth, modernity and tradition are, as Jean Allman points out, "constructed simultaneously; they are mutually constitutive."⁵⁴ Allman suggests that, like

⁵³ Mbembe, Achille (2010) "Art and Development." *Art South Africa* 8.3 (2010): 70.

⁵⁴ Allman, Jean "Introduction" in *Fashioning Africa: Power and the politics of Dress*. Ed. Jean Allman. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004. 5.

bogolan mudcloth from Mali or *kente* weaving from Ghana, which have entered the 'modern' world of global fashion as representative of 'tradition,' it is impossible to apply Western paradigms of modernity/tradition binaries with any authority.⁵⁵ It is the association with 'tradition' that marks the Euro-centric idea of the 'real' Africa, a concept that has given prominence in African studies to what Guyer describes as the "...*longue durée*"⁵⁶ with respect to [the] social and cultural creativity."⁵⁷ Issues of authenticity, tradition and modernity in African craft are further complicated by the changing nature of these objects as their classification moves from curio to collectible, and from quotidian craft to 'art.'

African craft becomes art

Garth Clark somewhat gloomily describes the relationship between art and craft as a "strange and unhappy danse-macabre"⁵⁸ that has its roots in the appropriation of craft (and the word 'arts' to signify something more worthy) in the Arts and Crafts Movement in England. Essentially class-driven, Clark argues that the movement created an obsession with craft that resulted in an explosion of the marketplace in the 1970s, and describes its form:

Over the next decade a strong three-tier structure emerged: at the lowest populist level; in the middle there was a hybrid – the craft shop and gallery – a bridge to the top end; and at the top of the

⁵⁵ Allman 5.

⁵⁶ The "long term" is an expression used by the French Annales School of historical writing to designate their approach to the study of history, which gives priority to long-term historical structures over events.

⁵⁷ Guyer, Jane. "Africa has never been "traditional": So Can We Make a General Case? A Response to Articles." *African Studies Review* 50.2 (2007): 196.

⁵⁸ Clark, Garth. "How Envy Killed the Crafts." in *The Craft Reader*. Ed. Glenn Adamson. London: Berg, 2010. 446.

pyramid, true galleries that were modelled on the fine arts. Prices quickly soared after 1980 from hundreds of dollars to tens of thousands and eventually even hundreds of thousands. The collector base, once tiny, grew in leaps and bounds and the new collectors were affluent.⁵⁹

The distinction between the terms 'art' and 'craft' in Africa seems blurred by a historical reluctance to ascribe the epithet 'art' to artefacts such as textiles, wood carving and metalwork, and by the more recent interests of connoisseurs and collectors who have placed their own value system onto artefacts. There is also the issue of the transformation of vernacular crafts into fully-fledged 'art'. The transition from curio to precious cultural artefact is marked by shifts within western society rather than by the makers' new integration with the world system that has created the markets for these objects. As Christopher B. Steiner points out, African art has never existed in total cultural isolation.⁶⁰ Rather than being in what Jeremy MacClancey describes as "...homeostatic systems coasting in a timeless ethnographic present"⁶¹ art and craft from Africa is a reflection of societies that are permeable, in touch with each other. The increasing commodification of vernacular crafts from Africa MacClancey explains as a greater awareness by artisans and traders of their value in the west:

⁵⁹ Clark, 446.

⁶⁰ Steiner, Christopher B. *African Art in Transit*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994. 8.

⁶¹ MacClancey, Jeremy. *Contesting Art: Art, Politics and Identity in the Modern World*. Oxford: Berg, 1997. 2.

!Kung San now have their paintings sold in London and Paris. Muslim middle-men of the Ivory Coast peruse the latest copy of *African Arts* to see how the market is moving. The land-diving islanders of Pentecost, Vanuatu, seek royalties from bungee jumping entrepreneurs around the world for breaching their 'cultural copyright'.⁶²

Vernacular arts of Africa

Vernacular art has its roots in practical considerations. In most parts of Africa people have to make their own objects, such as street signs or flags, and these objects possess, as David Stairs points out, "...all the spontaneity and candor of this primarily oral culture."⁶³ Writing about Uganda, Stairs notes that hair salon signs in particular are highly illustrated, proving that Ugandans take enormous pride in their appearance, and comments that "...even a formally trained eye...must admit that they have a certain charm."⁶⁴ The Jack Bell gallery in London was host to an exhibition of highly decorated Ghanaian coffins in 2010, displaying the artefacts in a modern European art gallery (fig. 2.10) whose cool, white space served to highlight the designation of 'art' that the objects enjoyed.

The Jack Bell Gallery also displayed what was described as 'art and sculpture' from West Africa in an exhibition between January and March 2011. What was striking about this exhibition was the inclusion of street signs, labelled 'trptychs' (fig. 2.11) together with a detailed account of their provenance:

⁶² MacClancey, 2.

⁶³ Stairs, David. "Okuwangaala: The Persistent Vitality of the Vernacular." *Design Issues* 18.3 (2002): 74.

⁶⁴ Stairs 74.



Fig. 2.10.
Paa Joe: taking it with you. Exhibition of Ghanaian sculpted coffins. Jack Bell Gallery, London. 25 November - 15 January, 2010. Original in colour.



Fig. 2.11
Voodoo/Magic/Juju: contemporary art from West Africa. Exhibition of street signs, paintings and sculpture. Jack Bell Gallery, London. 26 January – 12 March, 2011. Original in colour.

The two triptychs in the exhibition are from a Voudou fetish market just outside of Porto-Novo, capital city of Benin. The paintings are by a local artist, commissioned by a village dealer in concoctions advertising healing and rejuvenating properties. The market hums with traders of carved wooden statues and dried animal parts used

for sorcery and animal sacrifice that call upon the spirit world. As urban art, these distinctive images are fast moving and pragmatic.⁶⁵

The local artist is anonymous; the placing of the triptychs within an 'authentic' African context that stresses the 'other'-ness of local religious practice seems to be more important. The 'language' of the presentation is that of art object placed in a reverent, museum-like environment, but the actual description is ethnographic. Murray Satov suggests that there has been a shift towards more academic catalogues that have become significant in their own right, and this in turn indicates that the process of "...reifying the object's value (monetary, cultural, artistic, or other) has shifted away from players within the commercial network, towards academics and curators."⁶⁶

The importance of this is discussed in Chapter Four in the description of the SOS exhibition at the Musée Nationale de Burkina, which was designed to present the objects as being of historical significance, while also acting as a retail outlet.

Tourism and traditions

As a tourist destination Africa is not as popular as other parts of the world. It is perhaps still viewed as a 'difficult' place to negotiate. In 2004 UNESCO commissioned a report on tourism as a viable industry in West Africa and noted that in 2002 the African continent attracted only 4.1% of all international

⁶⁵ "Vodou/Magic/Juju: Contemporary Art from West Africa." Past Exhibitions. *Jack Bell Gallery*. Web. 20 July 2011.

⁶⁶ Satov, Murray. "Catalogues, Collectors, Curators: the Tribal Art Market and Anthropology." *Contesting Art: Art, Politics and Identity in the Modern World*. Ed. Jeremy MacClancy. Oxford: Berg, 1997. 226.

visitors, with the main concentration of tourists being in North Africa and South Africa. However, the report also pointed to a 6.4% increase in visitors to West Africa from 2000 to 2004.⁶⁷

In a study on the effect of tourists' nationality on craft products in The Gambia in West Africa, Craig Thompson and Elizabeth Cutler concentrated on the purchasing behaviours of Scandinavian, British and German visitors to the country. In 1966 The Gambia recorded just 300 visitors, but by 1993/4 this figure had risen to 130,000.⁶⁸ The rise in visitors has inevitably meant an increase in souvenir purchase, and the local artisans have learned to differentiate between the nationalities coming to their country. Thompson and Cutler's research shows that Scandinavian tourists prefer batik which uses more traditional motifs and colours, and that they perceive this as being more authentic.⁶⁹

German tourists favour brighter colours, with abstract designs and wildlife imagery, particularly elephants, although Thompson and Cutler note that elephants are no longer to be found in The Gambia.⁷⁰ The British visitors, on the other hand, generally prefer bright colours and non-traditional designs, and are more likely to buy products that have been made into clothing or functional

⁶⁷ UNESCO report. *Tourism, Culture and Development in West Africa: strategic options and project proposals*. Sept 2004. UNESCO.org. Web. 2 Nov 2012.

⁶⁸ Thompson, Craig and Elizabeth Cutler. "The effect of nationality on tourist arts: the case of The Gambia, West Africa." *International Journal of Hospitality Management*. 16.2 (1997): 226. JSTOR. Web. 13 June 2011.

⁶⁹ Thompson and Cutler 227.

⁷⁰ Thompson and Culter 227.

items such as table cloths and tea towels.⁷¹ These basic preferences are carried over into other crafts such as a woodcarving: Scandinavians opt for authenticity, the Germans like masks (but smaller versions) and wildlife, the British being more utilitarian in their purchase of bowls and chess sets. What also sets the British apart is their apparent fondness for products that have nothing to do with The Gambia: “Carvings of the three monkeys (see, hear and speak no evil), toys and sexually suggestive items...”⁷²

The important factor in the development of craft products in The Gambia is that the producers are also the vendors, and thus have direct communication with their buyers, allowing them to adapt very quickly to changing demands. However, the study ends by stating that some craft producers refuse to make certain items available for Western tourists as they feel it would debase their culture, or was simply inappropriate. What these objects are is not explained.⁷³ It would appear that the local culture has maintained its own sense of propriety that is non-negotiable.

Changing markets within West Africa

In another study Elizabeth Davis explains how Tuareg artisans in Niger in West Africa traditionally had Tuareg noble warriors as their principal customers, but these were replaced during the late 19th century first by

⁷¹ Thompson and Cutler 227.

⁷² Thompson and Cutler 227.

⁷³ Thompson and Culter 228.

Hausa⁷⁴ bulk-buyers, then the mid 1960s by Western tourists, and increasingly, as western aid agencies became established in the desert region of northern Niger, by Western expatriates.⁷⁵ The result is that objects associated with desert life, such as saddles, portable beds and flat sandals, have all but disappeared from the artisans' repertoire. Today, the artisans produce silver objects (such as earrings, condiment holders, knife-holders and jewellery boxes) and leather objects (such as folders, photograph albums and small furniture) that are obviously of Western derivation yet fashioned in 'Tuareg' style.⁷⁶ This influence by Western customers on what is produced can be viewed in two ways: as an incitement to abandon Tuareg traditions or, through the use of Tuareg motifs and materials, as a way of preserving those traditions. Some artisans view the Western influences as an opportunity to innovate, to develop their creative practice in a contemporary context. As Davis notes, "They prefer this sort of production to what they describe as the "traditional," monotonous manufacture of a limited set of objects for noble patrons."⁷⁷ Davis describes this as a "...production of identity through difference that matches the Western search for the self."⁷⁸ She explains:

Here, the "other" is the past form of the self: the old, the rural, the "traditional." The question for "modern" Tuareg artisans, then, is not "are we them?" but "are we us?" – a mirror image that reflects not

⁷⁴ The Hausa are the largest ethnic group in West Africa. A Sahelian people, they are located in northern Nigeria and south-eastern Niger, with significant populations in Cameroon, Ghana, Cote d'Ivoire, Chad and Sudan.

⁷⁵ Davis, Elizabeth. "Metamorphosis in the Culture Market of Niger." *American Anthropologist*.101.3 (1999): 494. JSTOR. Web. 13 June 2011.

⁷⁶ Davis 494.

⁷⁷ Davis 494.

⁷⁸ Davis 494.

only the logic of the Western inquisitor but the unequal ground of the interrogation.⁷⁹

The Western expatriate customers offer the Tuareg artisans not only a reliable, elevated source of income that was denied them by their noble clientele, but also a new cultural status that allows them to escape the rigid socio-vocational classifications within rural Tuareg societies.⁸⁰ In his introduction to *The Craft Reader* Glenn Adamson makes a hugely important point about craft as a creative practice; that it is fluid, evolving, reactive and relative.⁸¹ If Western expatriates create new markets for craft in Africa it seems only reasonable to credit the artisans with foresight and responsiveness as they tap into a lucrative income stream that will radically improve their lives. Erik Cohen stresses the exploitative nature of craft production for the tourist market. “The middlemen,” says Cohen, “allegedly make the bulk of the profits, while the craftsmen, remote from the market, and lacking access to it, receive a pittance.”⁸² By selling directly to tourists the artisans take control of the profits, something that has not escaped the notice of governments across Africa.

Villages Artisanales

Villages Artisanales have become a common feature in West African cities, as governments recognise the potential to present a pleasant, air-conditioned

⁷⁹ Davis 494.

⁸⁰ Davis 499.

⁸¹ Adamson, Glenn. *The Craft Reader*. Oxford: Berg, 2010. 2.

⁸² Cohen, Erik. Cohen, Erik “The Commercialization of Ethnic Crafts.” *Journal of Design History*. 2.2&3 (1989): 161.

retail environment for tourists that obviates the need to negotiate crowded markets or remote locations. In Senegal, according to Roy Dilley, there are several of these villages around the country that have been established since the 1980s (the customers being exclusively European or North American) and the relatively high prices being charged reflect a recognition of the social relationship between producer and consumer.⁸³ Dilley points out that "...the image and experience of the production process is consumed – even photographed for a small consideration – in a manner similar to the way in which the craft product is itself consumed."⁸⁴ The Village Artisanale in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, is more fully described in Chapter Three. This interest in the experience of the artisan has been a significant factor in the growth of ethical consumerism, where the provenance of a product becomes its Unique Selling Proposition (USP.)⁸⁵

Fair trade and the ethical consumer

Since 1988, when the first Fairtrade label, Max Havelaar coffee, was sold in Dutch supermarkets,⁸⁶ the Fair Trade movement has sought to connect consumer with producer, most notably in commodities such as coffee and chocolate, in ways that promote social justice through a greater distribution of profits. This in turn has led to craft being included in the list of products that can sustain such a personal, human connection. Jeffrey Alexander states that an artistic object draws us deeper into what he calls 'iconic meaning' and that

⁸³ Dilley, Roy. "The Visibility and Invisibility of Production Among Senegalese Craftsmen." *Journal of Royal Anthropological Institute* 10.4 (2004): 804.

⁸⁴ Dilley 805.

⁸⁵ The factor or consideration presented by a seller as the reason that one product or service is different from and better than that of the competition

⁸⁶ History. *Fairtrade Foundation*. N.p. 2012. Web. 9 May 2012.

if successful, the viewer, or consumer, loses interest in the specific details of the object and its manufacture.⁸⁷ The object becomes a universal symbol, a 'collective representation' that draws us 'to the heart of the world.'⁸⁸ Alexander proposes that what makes an object iconic is the way it affords movement from surface to depth – a form of what he terms 'immersion'. Alexander explains that immersion involves a dual process: one called 'subjectification' where people are able to seemingly draw an object into themselves, transforming it from object to subject, and allowing it to take on a life whereby one no longer sees the object itself, but "oneself, one's projections, one's convictions and beliefs."⁸⁹ The ethical consumer is, after all, still a consumer, but one that seeks a product which can reflect their own ethical behaviour. Craft consumption, as discussed in Chapter One, not only fulfils the desire for novelty, but also provides an emotional outlet for self-expression. Gloria Hickey argues that consumption is not to be confused with materialism, but is based on differentiation and identity.⁹⁰ Sandra Alfoldy notes that craft flourishes because of its "...aesthetic of cultural definition"⁹¹ In other words, the singularity of the craft consumer's identity, or aspiration of identity, is mirrored in the singularity of the craft object itself.

Kevin Murray points out that craft as a development tool creates products best suited to "alternative markets...where they will be valued for their symbolic

⁸⁷ Alexander, Jeffrey. "Iconic Experience in Art and Life: Surface/Depth Beginning with Giacometti's *Standing Woman*." *Theory, Culture & Society* 25.5 (2008): 6.

⁸⁸ Alexander, 6.

⁸⁹ Alexander, 7.

⁹⁰ Hickey, Gloria. "Craft within a consuming society." *The Culture of Craft*. Ed. Peter Dormer. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997. 84.

⁹¹ Alfoldy, Sandra. "Buy Me and become Me." *Obscure Objects of Desire: Reviewing the Crafts in the Twentieth Century*. Tanya Harrod ed. London: Crafts Council, 1998. 45.

importance rather than their practical function.”⁹² The authenticity of the product is what is desired:

Such craft offers an antidote to weakened social ties, disconnection from the physical world and disenchantment. Even further, in purchasing the product, the consumer is invited to feel a sense of solidarity with the producer in their opposition to the crass world of global capitalism.⁹³

Some writers, however, assert that the ethical consumer is something of a myth⁹⁴ and that assertions of an ethical ‘self’ do not translate into ethical purchasing behaviours. In terms of African craft, the fair trade markets in Europe and North America may well be precarious and unreliable.

World market for craft: an overview

The world market for craft is in a state of flux. There is a flood of cheap, imitative, fully or partly machined craft and decorative art from countries such as China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan, which has penetrated the market for traditional hand crafted products. According to a government report on the South African craft industry published in 2007, the current world market value for crafts is an estimated US \$235 billion in 2003, with an annual growth rate

⁹² Murray, Kevin. “Outsourcing the hand: an analysis of craft-design collaboration across the global divide.” *Craft + Design Enquiry* 2 (2010): 5. Craft Australia Research Centre. Web. 23 Feb. 2011.

⁹³ Murray 5.

⁹⁴ For example, see Belk (2001); Devinney, Auger and Eckhardt (2010.)

of 5.1% between 1999 and 2003.⁹⁵ This represents a lucrative market that Asian manufacturers have not ignored.

In 2003, the top ten markets (which include countries such as USA, Germany, United Kingdom, Japan, Hong Kong, France, Canada, Belgium and Spain) accounted for 77.5% of the total world imports of crafts and decorative products. The USA is the largest importer of crafts and decorative products and imported US \$75.8 billion worth of crafts and decorative products in 2003. This translates into 32.3% of the world imports. Taking into account the significant number of re- exports to Canada, Mexico, and other South American and many African countries, however, Frost & Sullivan (2005) estimate the nett consumption by USA to be around US \$50 billion.⁹⁶

The report concludes that the bulk of imports by the USA are low value products, but that EU countries favour more expensive, medium to high quality products.⁹⁷

African craft on the internet

It seemed appropriate to explore further the nature of the African craft that is sold globally through the internet, the great democratiser of markets. Entering

⁹⁵ *The Creative industries in South Africa*. Creative Industries Sector Report, prepared for the Human Sciences Research Council, 15 December 2007. 37. labour.gov.za. Web. 12 May 2012.

⁹⁶ *The Creative industries in South Africa*, 38.

⁹⁷ *The Creative industries in South Africa*, 38.

the search terms, *African craft* and *l'artisanat de l'Afrique* on the internet provided an interesting snapshot of not only how *much* craft is for sale but how differently the products are designed and marketed, depending on whether the websites originated in Europe, North America, West Africa or the rest of Africa. A search was conducted in April 2012. The first 70 websites (Table 2) were analysed and then assessed for four qualities: tradition, design-led, aid-related, strictly business (Table 3.) The websites originating in anglo-saxon countries (UK, Canada, USA) were more aid-related in nature than their other European neighbours, in that they evoked stories of the hardships of people's lives, stressed the 'love' that had gone into the crafts and emphasised the difference that could be made by purchasing their products. Many of these websites were directly linked to aid agencies. French websites, which formed the largest sample overall (and selling mostly West African crafts) were almost all business-oriented (fig. 2.12) with only 10% being aid-related. South African websites formed the second largest sample, with less than 40% being concerned with aid. West African websites were not associated at all with social enterprise, but were 100% business driven. These West African websites were also more 'traditional' in their overall design and in the nature of the products on sale. By contrast, the European and North American websites included more design-led products, or were presented in a way that suggested more contemporary practice (fig. 2.13.) South Africa led the way in being both design-led *and* commercial in their approach, which may reflect its position as Africa's leading exponent of craft-related design.

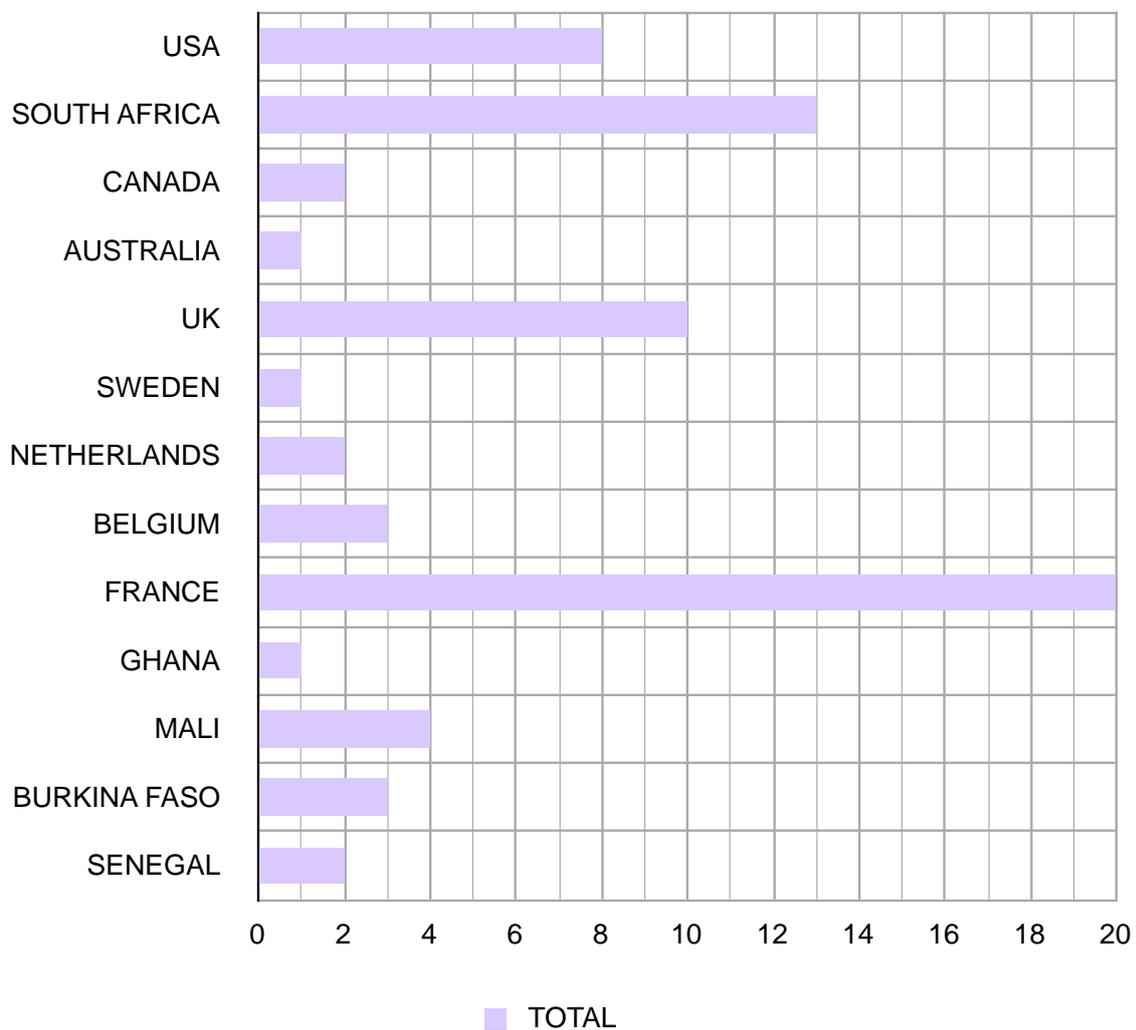


Table 2. Overall numbers of first 70 companies. Websites selling African craft. Survey carried out on 17 April 2012. Original in colour.

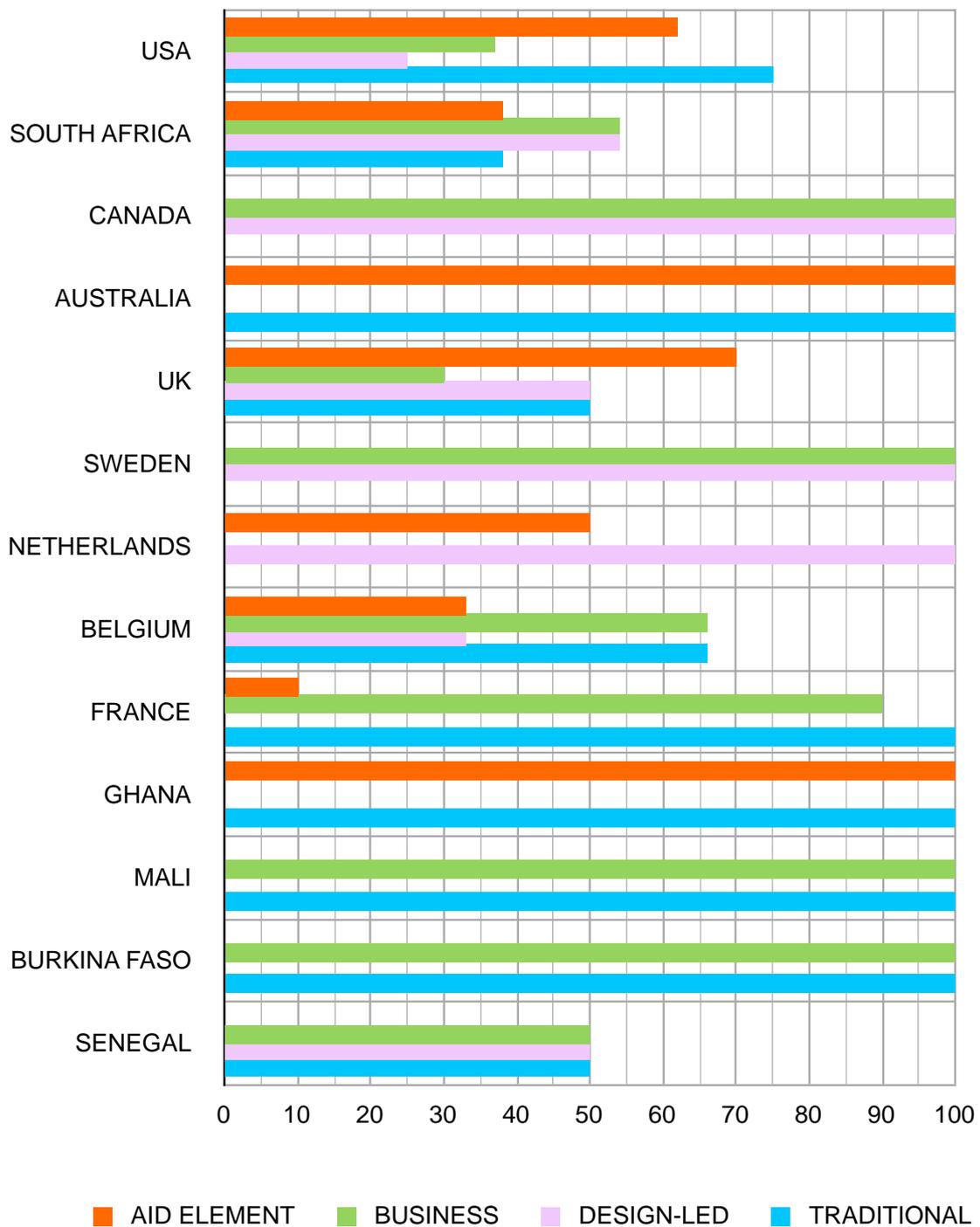


Table 3. Marketing elements. Websites selling African craft. Survey carried out on 17 April 2012. Original in colour.



trésors ethniques (art africain, arts premiers et artisanat du monde entier..)

Fig. 2.12
French website selling mass-crafted West African objects. *artisanat-africain.com*.
Original in colour.

masques africains		statuettes africaines	perles africaines, perles d'inde, perles en argent et apprêts, perles artisanales SOLDES	
bijoux africains	bijoux d'inde, bijoux du Népal et du Tibet	bijoux afghans	bijoux touareg	
objets usuels	tissus africains, tissus d'Inde	artisanat contemporain	Les coups de coeur de trésors ethniques	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Beaded Animals Fair Trade Chocolate Fun and Functional Kids New African Designs Special Order 		<p>countries. We are always on the look out for contemporary African crafts that are edgy, streetwise and urban in design. From ingenious telephone wire bowls, mosaic silicone vases, recycled plastic bags to recycled t-shirt Mielle bags, we will continue to bring you the very best of African craft, design and contemporary products.</p>		

Fig. 2.13
Bundu Designs. Internet retailer based in Canada and North America. *Bundudesigns.org*.
Original in colour.

The high number of northern European and American websites that directly associated their products with social enterprise, or aid, might reflect the development cultures of these countries.

The ability of craft not only to create meanings, but also to adapt to new markets, to tap customer tastes effectively, and to generate new sources of income is not in doubt. Perhaps this is what has attracted more intense, targeted investment from the West in what is already a vast and sprawling global industry: development. The African craft sector has been identified as being crucial to generating much-needed income both from tourism and from export markets, and it is in this area that development aid is increasingly being directed. Culture, crafts and tourism are rapidly becoming inseparable partners, according to Rogerson and Rogerson⁹⁸ and this demand for experience as well as product could well hold the key to greater expansion of markets for African craft.

The Aid Industry

Paul Collier states that aid was invented after the Second World War to rebuild Europe and it worked extremely well.⁹⁹ The challenge today is the few countries which are *not* developing. These are places where the poverty gap is widening, and where civil war, plague and ignorance – concentrated in Africa and central Asia – are keeping people in a state of permanent deprivation.

⁹⁸ Rogerson, Christian M. and Jayne M> Rogerson. "Craft routes for developing craft business in South Africa: is it good practice or limited policy option?" *African Journal of Business Management* 5.30 (2011): 11736. academicjournals.org. Web. 7 May 2012.

⁹⁹ Collier, Paul. *The Bottom Billion: why the poorest countries are failing and what can be done about it*. New York: Oxford University Press Inc, 2007. 106.

These people are the ‘bottom billion’ according to Collier.¹⁰⁰ He describes the four ‘traps’ that aid agencies face in trying to help them: conflict, natural resources, being landlocked and bad governance. Aid used to be concentrated on building infrastructure – roads and communications - but this has changed since the 1990s as development policy has moved towards what Collier calls more ‘photogenic’ activities such as health, education and environmental programmes, encouraging the private sector to finance infrastructure.¹⁰¹ But without infrastructure it is almost impossible to trade effectively and if you are landlocked you must orient your markets to serve your neighbours, on whom you can only really depend for growth, which, as Collier notes dryly, is not a problem if you are Switzerland.¹⁰²

Poverty = Africa

One aspect of aid that is relevant to this study is the increasing conflation of ‘poverty’ with ‘Africa.’ Discussing the background to the *Make Poverty History* (MPH) campaign in 2005 Graham Harrison argues that this association is due to a range of factors that have their foundation in the historically embedded imperial nature of Africa campaigning in Britain:

MPH was not *ab initio*; rather, it emerged within a social tapestry already created by abolitionism, colonial humanitarianism, advocacy for decolonization, Band Aid, anti-apartheid, and a range of ‘Africa events’ which have been routinized into the mass media

¹⁰⁰ Collier 3.

¹⁰¹ Collier 108.

¹⁰² Collier 57.

through televised charitable appeals. In short, one can discern an imperial campaign tradition in Britain, based in Christian and Fabian liberalism, and premised on how the British government can ‘help’ Africa.¹⁰³

Woven through the portrayal of Africa as supplicant is the shadow of the Other; in this case the suffering, distant Other who is somehow dependent on the ‘responsible’ behaviour of the British government. Harrison argues that historically Africa has served to evoke ‘moralities of empathy’ which have emerged as a meta-narrative for a range of campaign organisations, NGO policies and even governments themselves.¹⁰⁴ Although MPH commendably attempted to avoid concentrating on Africa (especially the tired and familiar symbolism of images of emaciated African children, famine landscapes and ultra-violence) the 2005 campaign website featured four images of people from the developing South, of whom three were African. All three were children.¹⁰⁵

Obstacles arising in business or development in Africa seem to be labelled as somehow indicative of fundamental problems within African society, as though they are non-rational and wildly unpredictable. Janet Roitman writes:

This is not simply a matter of avoiding western concepts. It is rather that the conceptualisation of the state and market as reified entities

¹⁰³ Harrison, Graham. ‘The Africanization of Poverty: a Retrospective on ‘Make Poverty History.’” *African Affairs*. 109, 436 (2010): 392.

¹⁰⁴ Harrison 393.

¹⁰⁵ Harrison 398.

which function in a predefined, ideal way precludes examination of African states and markets as anything but deviations from a model, as opposed to phenomena which issue from African societies and are products of African histories.¹⁰⁶

Crewe and Harrison identify two perceived engines for progress: technology and money.¹⁰⁷ Technology is fundamentally and inextricably fused with European ideas of modernity; non-European cultures had historically been measured according to their familiarity and expertise in European science and technology from at least the 17th century.¹⁰⁸ Crewe and Harrison sum up: “Underlying the two components – first, ‘we’ have knowledge to give and, second, knowledge makes people free – is an implicit assumption that ‘they’ are ignorant.”¹⁰⁹

Craft development

Increasingly, the craft sector is being identified by development agencies as an appealing and ‘dignified’ way for the poor, especially women, to earn money in a safe and comfortable environment. As a tool for development craft appears to be ideally suited to adapt to the lifestyles of the rural poor. However, Deborah Fahy Bryceson argues that veering away from producing staple food crops, or export crops, in favour of non-agricultural income diversity can result in social upheavals that have far-reaching consequences,

¹⁰⁶ Roitman, Janet. ‘The Politics of Informal markets in Sub-Saharan Africa.’ *The Journal of Modern African Studies*. 28.4 (Dec. 1990): 675.

¹⁰⁷ Crewe and Harrison 30.

¹⁰⁸ Crewe and Harrison 31.

¹⁰⁹ Crewe and Harrison 33.

as the countryside in West Africa becomes increasingly “de-peasantised.”¹¹⁰ Fahy Bryceson notes that traditional craft skills in West Africa were preserved in areas where rural elites held some prominence and demanded specialised goods, or where there was a seasonal slack period in the agricultural calendar which gave time for agrarian producers to make craft themselves.¹¹¹

However, the knowledge that is imparted to African artisans by western agencies hinges on the artisans’ supposed ignorance of market trends and market access. Peter Dormer writes in 1994 that “there is an insidious assumption, especially prominent in the twentieth century, that to be accomplished in craft does not include an accomplishment of composition and design.”¹¹² The idea that designers think and artisans do as they are directed reflects an outdated ideology in the West, where professional art, craft and design practice is more integrated, but perhaps one that is still prevalent when applied to the relationship between western designers and artisans from the developing world. Only the knowledgeable west, apparently, can offer the support and transferable skills that are essential to succeed in a demanding, trend-driven, capitalist, global economy that is based on competition, and, in the case of craft, in participating in *how* such products gain access to markets.

The ‘Ethnic Chic’ hall at Maison et Objet

I visited the enormous design exhibition, *Maison et Objet*, in the northern suburb of Paris, Villepointe, in February 2008. This show brings together a

¹¹⁰ Fahy Bryceson, Deborah. “The Scramble in Africa: Reorienting Rural Livelihoods.” *World Development* 30.5 (2002): 725.

¹¹¹ Fahy Bryceson 730.

¹¹² Dormer, Peter. *The Art of the Maker*. London: Thames & Hudson, 1994. 47.

wide variety of *genres* in a sprawling complex of exhibition pavilions (fig. 2.14) and one in particular was the focus of my visit; 'Ethnic Chic' in Hall 1. Filled with exhibitors from around the world, Hall 1 contained a wide selection of crafts. West African textiles (fig. 2.15) contemporary South African craft (fig. 2.16) and examples of mass-manufactured craft from Europe (fig 2.17.)

Parc des Expositions de Paris Nord Villepinte
Paris Nord Villepinte Exhibition Centre

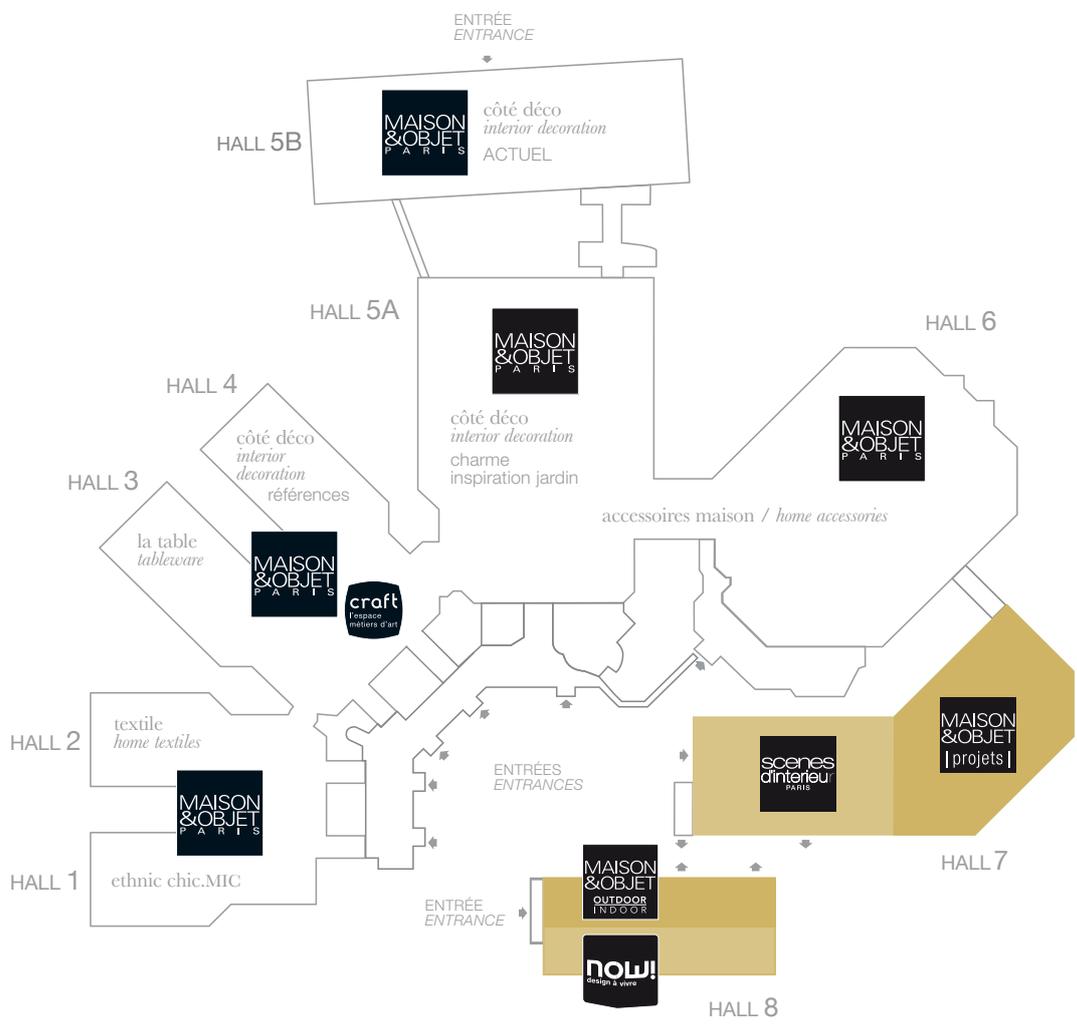


Fig. 2.14
Plan of the Halls at Maison et Object, Villepinte, Paris. *Maison et Objet* website.



Fig. 2.15.
French wholesaler of contemporary West African bogolan (mudcloth) and leather accessories. Maison et Objet, Paris. Personal photograph by the author. 7 Feb. 2008. Original in colour.



Fig. 2.16.
South African company, Van Heerden Design. Maison et Objet, Paris. Personal photograph by the author. 7 Feb. 2008. Original in colour.



Fig. 2.17
Mass-crafted products from Africa. Maison et Objet, Paris. Personal photograph by the author.
7 Feb. 2008. Original in colour.

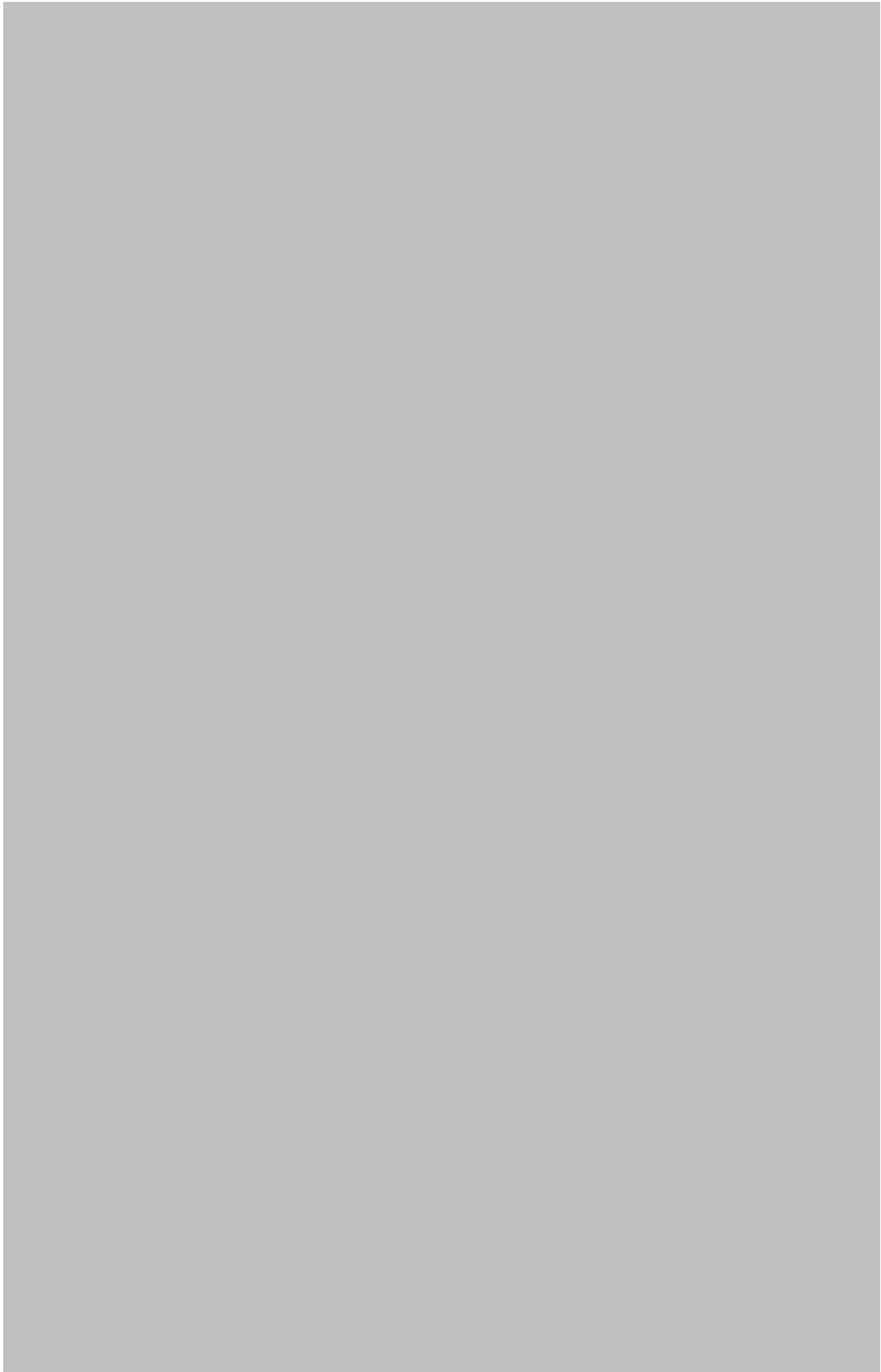
The current *Maison et Objet* website describes Hall 1 in a manner that includes notions of exoticism, travel and fairtrade:

Dreams of far-off places, a melting pot of world cultures, contemporary exoticism for a home that exudes the sensual charm of vibrant ethnic influences. When an object is an invitation to travel, the home becomes a place for escape...Whether industrial or tribal, Oriental or African, ancestral or contemporary...At *ethnic chic.MIC*, with each new session the principles of fair trade gain more followers. Here more than in any other sector, the awareness of the fragility of natural and human resources is clear.¹¹³

Exhibiting at *Maison et Objet*, like all the major European and North American design trade fairs, is hugely expensive, and beyond the reach of the vast majority of craft companies within the African continent. In any case, Africa has its own design trade fairs, such as Design Indaba¹¹⁴ in South Africa, and a host of smaller, craft-oriented trade fairs. The pan-African *Salon International de l'Artisanat de Ouagadougou* (SIAO) in Burkina Faso is the largest and most important craft fair on the continent, attracting exhibitors from every country in Africa. Design Indaba (fig. 2.18) showcases the creative talents of South African designers, and many work collaboratively with the country's artisans in development projects that reflect the South African government's investment in the craft sector. If Africa's artisans find it difficult to access European and

¹¹³ Presentation page. *Maison et Objet*. N.p. Web. 11 May 2012.

¹¹⁴ Established in 2004, the design trade fair is a major annual event that covers all design disciplines.



Design Indaba Home page. *Designindaba.com*. Web. Original in colour.

North American markets then perhaps it is commercial ‘bridging’ that must be the focus of development aid in the craft sector, especially towards the luxury markets. Design could well be the answer.

Deeper luxury

Africa seems to have lost its reputation as the last frontier for luxury goods, by becoming a place where such goods can be produced by artisans – with expert guidance. That the design world is engaged with social enterprise, assisted by numerous aid organisations, may suggest an assumed dependency or lack of knowledge on the part of artisans. On the other hand, it may be that this engagement with design is creating a genuine new skill-set amongst the continent’s artisans that they will develop into self-sufficient, creative industries. The examples of high-end design companies working with African artisans are numerous, and include Artecnic (fig. 2.19) and Urban Zen by Donna Karan (fig. 2.20.) They make statements about creating more meaningful, even spiritual, relationships between consumers and craft objects, reflecting a trend identified by the World Wildlife Fund as the new “Deeper Luxury.”¹¹⁵ This kind of luxury represents a paradigm shift in consumption, say Jem Bendell and Anthony Kleanthous, where the benefit to artisans is seen by consumers as essential to an “elite experience, and to the prestige ascribed to them by their peers.”¹¹⁶ In other words, the sustainable, the rare, the ethically produced and the hand made are becoming

¹¹⁵ Bendell, Jem and Anthony Kleanthous. “Deeper Luxury: quality and style when the world matters.” *World Wildlife Fund*. November 2007. PDF file.

¹¹⁶ Bendell and Kleanthous 6.

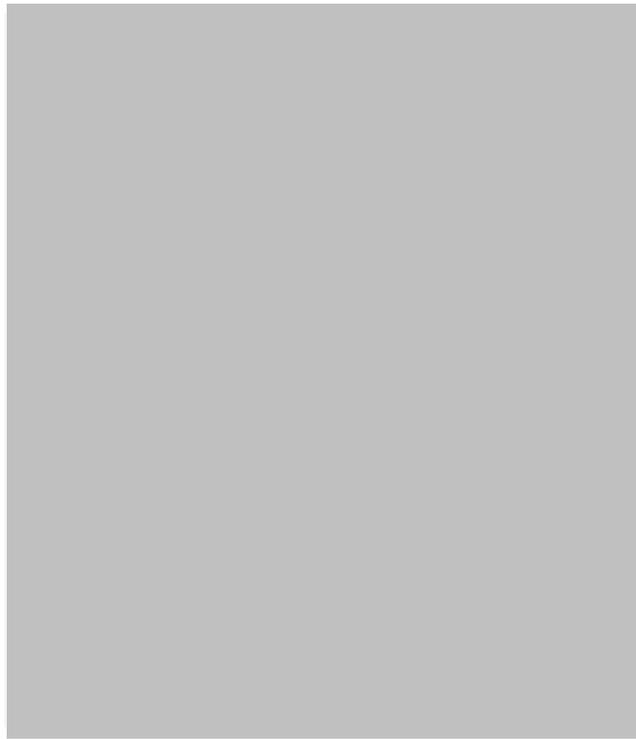


Fig. 2.19
Artecnic Beads and Pieces Bottle (\$450.00) by Hella Jongerius. *Design Public*. Web. Original in colour.

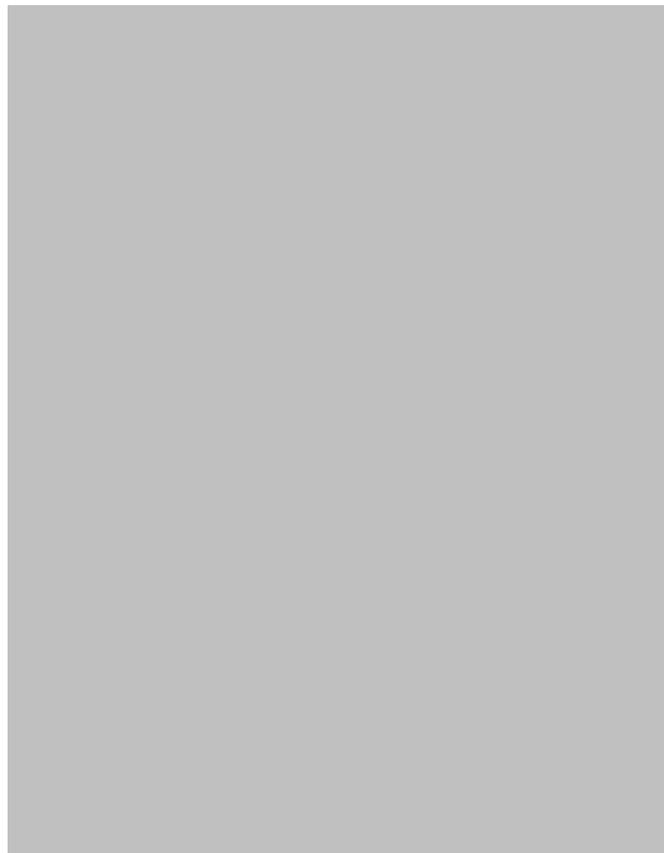


Fig. 2.20
Urban Zen by Donna Karan. Leather tassel necklace from Senegal, \$1875.00. *Handeye magazine*. Web. Original in colour.

the new luxury products. Two examples of companies working with African artisans that meet these descriptors are Moroso and Vivienne Westwood.

Moroso: *M'Afrique* Collection

Launching at the Milan Salone in 2009, (fig. 2.21) *M'Afrique* is a collection of products from Italian furniture manufacturer, Moroso, which has been the result of several designers' work. In an interview for the New York Times Patrizia Moroso, the company's creative director, explained that she felt Africa was misrepresented in the minds of Italians:

So the original idea was to change the perception of Africa in the minds of the people, and to show that contemporary art, photography, design, or architecture can also be found in Africa in the most beautiful way. My husband, who is from Senegal, and I went to the biennale in Dakar and contacted some of the artists who we eventually asked to be part of the show, such as Soly Cissé,¹¹⁷ Fathi Hassan¹¹⁸ and Mandémory.¹¹⁹ And then we also asked David Adjaye, who designed the new Moroso headquarters in Milan, to show his research project "African Cities." And Stephen Burks¹²⁰ put everything together in a beautiful show.¹²¹

¹¹⁷ Senegalese painter.

¹¹⁸ Egyptian painter, living in Marche, Italy.

¹¹⁹ Boubacar Touré Mandémory, a Dakar-based, self-taught photographer, who represents a contemporary movement in Africa to reject ethnographic-realist representations of the continent.

¹²⁰ New York-based product designer.

¹²¹ Burrichter, Felix. "Patrizia Moroso: L'Afrique, C'est Chic." *New York Times*. nytimes.com. 19 May 2009. Web. 5 Jan. 2010.



Fig. 2.21
The M'Afrique show at Moroso's showroom in Milan during Salone 2009. *Moroso website.*
Original in colour.

The essence of the collection (fig. 2.22) was the collaboration between European designers, such as Patricia Arquiola, Tord Boontje and Ron Arad, and highly-skilled, craft-led designers from Senegal, such as architect Chieck Diallo¹²² who already participated in global markets. A search on the Moroso website for 'Chieck Diallo' in its roll call of designers, however, revealed 'no results.' Cheap mass-production was not the aim of the collection:

Contrary to popular belief, these pieces are relatively expensive to produce as it's a labour-intensive process – the prototype for the very first chair by Tord Boontje took ten days to make. "You can't expect the uniformity and speed that we are used to with European manufacturing," says Moroso. "But if you are happy with that you can have a more interesting project, something with a difference."¹²³

American designer Stephen Burks, who worked on the outdoor furniture, was especially enthusiastic about the inspiration he had found in Dakar, Senegal's capital, which he described as "Colorful and bohemian, but real."¹²⁴ Burk was also moved by the character of the people with whom he worked. "There seemed to be more shared experience and openness amongst the people in Dakar, especially, that maybe we've forgotten in our urban lives."¹²⁵

¹²² Senegalese architect and product designer.

¹²³ Agerman, Johanna. "M'Afrique." *ICON* 084 June 2010. *ICON* online. Web. 28 July 2011.

¹²⁴ Recker, Keith. "Milan Senegal/Dakar Italy." *HandEye*. *HandEye* online. 3 June 2009. Web. 28 July 2011.

¹²⁵ Recker, N.p.



Fig. 2.22
Woven wire 'Bayakou' chairs. Moroso, M'Afrique Collection 2009. *Moroso website*. Original in colour.

Ron Arad's sofa (fig. 2.23) and the Binta armchairs by Philippe Bestenheider (fig. 2.24) used wax print fabrics commonly found in West African markets. These, however, were sourced directly from Vlisco¹²⁶ in the Netherlands.¹²⁷ Increasingly being reinvented as furnishing fabrics in the West, the association of these fabrics with Africa is strong. They have been used most recently by celebrity singer Gwen Stefani (fig. 2.25) and fashion designers such as Junya Watanabe (fig. 2.26) and Burberry (fig. 2.27) who seem keen to exploit this connection.

Moroso's *M'Afrique* collection is a commercial product, aimed at the discerning and relatively wealthy European and North American consumer who values high-end craft and design. The company stresses craftsmanship and quality, rather than aid and dependency, as its primary motive in manufacturing in Senegal. However, the marketing of *M'Afrique* was firmly rooted in the 'idea' of Africa, with the furniture photographed in a savannah-type setting (although Patrizia Moroso admitted that this was in fact Udine, northern Italy).¹²⁸

¹²⁶ Leading manufacturer since 1846 of wax print textiles for African markets.

¹²⁷ Recker, N.p.

¹²⁸ Burrichter, N.p.



Fig. 2.23
Ron Arad seating for Moroso M'Afrique Collection. *Moroso* website. Original in colour.



Fig. 2.24
Binta armchairs by Philippe Bestenheider for Moroso M'Afrique Collection. *Moroso* website. Original in colour.



Fig. 2.25
Singer Gwen Stefani in her own label LAMB. Spring 2011 Collection. *LAMB* website. Original in colour.

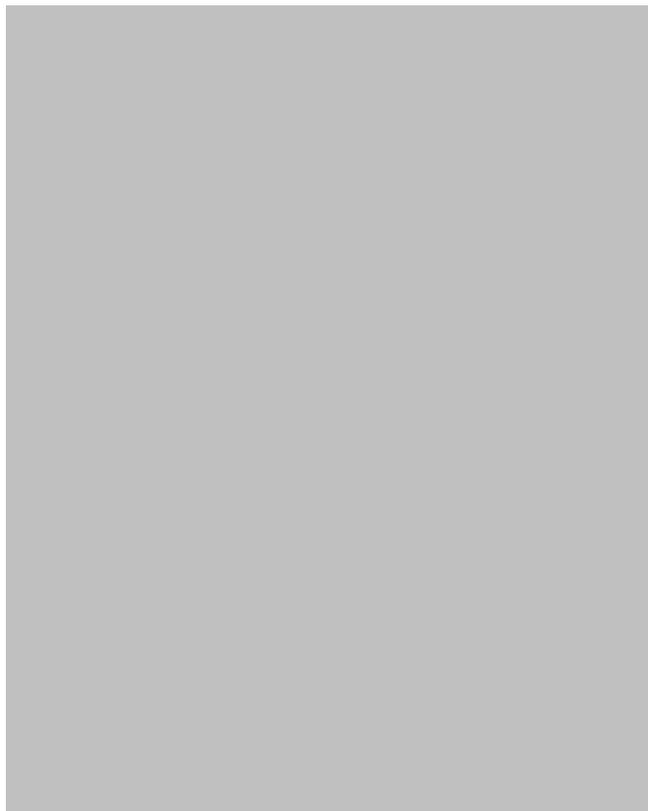


Fig. 2.26
Junya Watanabe Spring/Summer Collection 2009. *Agnauta Couture blog*. Original in colour.



Fig. 2.27
Burberry Summer 2012 Collection. Porsum printed silk dress. *Burberry* website. Original in colour.

Vivienne Westwood: Ethical Africa Collection

This newest collection (Autumn/Winter 2011) from Vivienne Westwood, the iconic British fashion designer, is a series of bags (fig. 2.28) that have been made in Kibera, Nairobi's largest slum. Working with the International Trade Centre¹²⁹ (ITC) – a United Nations and World Trade Organisation (WTO) initiative – under the Ethical Fashion Programme (EFP) the designer visited Kenya to work on the collection, working with marginalised people who wanted to learn new skills and earn a living. The EFP, which works specifically to connect “some of the world's most marginalised people to the top of fashion's value chain for mutual benefit”¹³⁰ has established a series of micro-entrepreneurial ‘hubs’ across Kenya that includes tailoring, pattern-making, screen-printing and embroidery. The empowerment of women, says the EFP, is their top priority. The EFP has also worked with fashion label Fendi to create a collection of accessories (fig. 2.29) in Cameroon, and their impact report for 2011 is included in Appendix II. The benefits of producing luxury goods for western fashion labels are obvious. But Simone Cipriani, head of the EFP, warns that if fashion companies renege on their promises, the damage is severe. “There are cases of micro-producers abandoning their own cottage industries to work with outsiders and then stops and they are also deprived of the little they had before. The result is brutal. They starve.”¹³¹

¹²⁹ Supports the work of many thousands of marginalised women micro-producers from developing African countries.

¹³⁰ Cipriani, Simone. *The Ethical Fashion Programme: poor communities and trade*. ITC. May 2012. PDF file.

¹³¹ Cipriani N.p.



Fig. 2.28
Ethical Africa Collection by Vivienne Westwood. Made through the Ethical Fashion Programme. *Vivienne Westwood* online shop. Original in colour.



Fig. 2.29
Fendi bags made through the Ethical Fashion Programme. International Trade Centre. *intracen.org*. Original in colour.

Vivienne Westwood and her team, which included photographer Jurgen Teller, went to Kibera to oversee the production of the collection, resulting in some striking images (fig. 2.30 and fig. 2.31) for various magazine articles that appeared when the collection was launched. The fashion designer's famous name was undoubtedly a significant factor in the coverage of the collection.

The bags have attracted a hugely favourable critical response; the *Ethical Africa Collection* was nominated for the 2012 Design Museum's Design of the Year Award. "This is work, not charity" declared Tamsin Blanchard in the *Telegraph*,¹³² reiterating the idea that the project is not so much about creating dependency, but equipping marginalised people with marketable skills for life by demanding the same quality from the suppliers as any professional company. Not only do they now have the ability to pay school fees and other basic needs, says the Vivienne Westwood website, but "all women involved in Vivienne Westwood's Ethical Fashion Africa collection are empowered by the pride they take in their work and the new skills learnt."¹³³ It should be noted that the *Ethical Africa Collection* might more accurately be described as the *Ethical Kenya Collection*, the entire production being based in that one country, rather than the entire continent.

The differences between *M'Afrique* and *Ethical Africa* lie in their ideologies and approaches to creating products in Africa. *M'Afrique* presents its products as collaborations between cultures; different, but equal in skill. *Ethical Africa* is

¹³² Blanchard, Tamsin. "Into Africa." *Telegraph Online*. 24 March 2011. N.p. Web. 2 April 2012.

¹³³ News. *Vivienne Westwood*. N.p. Web. 12 May 2012.



Fig. 2.30
Vivienne Westwood in Kibera, Nairobi, Kenya. Summer 2011. Photography by Jurgen Teller.
Vivienne Westwood. Web. Original in colour.



Fig. 2.31
Front cover of the *Sunday Times* magazine. 5 Aug. 2011. Original in colour.

essentially a development project that aims to impart skills in order to create stable income specifically for women. Both companies have created high-end, fashionable products that command high prices and an association with a quality brand. It is the intentional targeting of this kind of consumer market, and the implications for the long-term sustainability of such markets, that forms the platform for the research questions.

These kinds of projects are typical of a recent trend for what Devinney, Auger and Eckhardt refer to as “star-spangled initiatives”¹³⁴ where well-known western celebrities drop in on African development projects.

The celebrity push to save Africa

In 2007 the iconic American magazine *Vanity Fair* published an edition that was entirely devoted to Africa (fig. 2.32) that was guest-edited by Bono, the Irish rock musician. Photographer of the stars, Annie Leibovitz, provided images of several prominent celebrities, such as Madonna, Mohammed Ali, Barack Obama, Brad Pitt and Bill Gates, in a special series of 21 covers. Leibovitz described them in no uncertain terms: “These are incredible people of our time, involved in this effort to make Africa better, to get Africa self-sufficient, and to try to get rid of aids on the continent.”¹³⁵ Bongani Madondo described the effort to highlight Africa’s problems as being solved by Europeans and North Americans as “Vanity Farce,” pointing out that most of

¹³⁴ Devinney, Timothy, Pat Auger and Giana Eckhardt. *The Myth of the Ethical Consumer*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010. 1.

¹³⁵ Robinson, Lisa. “It’s Bono, on Line One.” *Vanity Fair*. July 2007. Web. N.p. 18 May 2012.



Fig. 2.32
Vanity Fair special covers by Annie Leibovitz. *Vanity Fair*. July 2007. *Web*. Original in colour.

the fourteen black faces were Americans. Only three actually came from Africa.¹³⁶

One of Vanity Fair's featured celebrities helping Africa was Madonna, who was lauded for her role in building schools in Malawi, a poor country in south-east Africa. The Raising Malawi project, conceived as providing schools and colleges as an educational boost for girls, was a high profile case that featured in many newspapers and magazine articles (fig. 2.33) Drawing support from Hollywood stars and even the Kabbalah Centre International,¹³⁷ the plan was to build a \$15 million school for about 400 girls. The project has foundered amid accusations of corruption and cronyism, with \$3.8 million of the original \$11 million funding simply vanishing without any accountability.¹³⁸ Madonna laid the foundation stone in a lavish ceremony in 2008. The stone was inscribed with a simple message: dare to hope.¹³⁹ Today, the site is a wasteland where not one brick has been laid.

John Bisika, Malawi's National Secretary for Education was blunt in his assessment of the project, noting that mapping and planning were generally the more conventional way to assess school building needs. "We've had no written or verbal communication." he told The Guardian newspaper. "For

¹³⁶ Madondo, Bongani. "Vanity Farce: the Africa Issue." *Transitions* 98 (2008): 98. JSTOR. Web. 18 May 2012.

¹³⁷ Organisation devoted to promoting Jewish mysticism. The Director, Michael Berg, is also co-founder of Raising Malawi.

¹³⁸ Nagourney, Adam. "Madonna's Charity Fails in Bid to Finance School." *New York Times Online*. 24 March 2011.

¹³⁹ Nagourney N.p.



Madonna during a visit to Malawi in 2007. *New York Times*. 4 Mar. 2011. Web. Original in colour.

someone to go to the papers and say, 'I'm building schools,' without telling the government, I find it a strange way of working."¹⁴⁰

Those whom Michael Knox Beran call the "Africrats" are easy targets for criticism. These people, says Beran, revel in the exoticism and supposed pastoral simplicity of people who have not yet mastered the intricacies of the market economy:

Under the guise of helping Africans, they aggrandize themselves, burnish their fame – and, not least, get themselves adored. Their tours of Africa are exercises in hero worship, part Roman Triumph,

¹⁴⁰ Smith, David. "Madonna's new schools pledge angers Malawi officials." *Guardian Online*. 23 Feb. 2012. Web. 25 May 2012.

part Felliniesque spectacle. the landing of the jet on some remote, shimmering tarmac; the heat of the Africa sun; the exotic savour of the desert or the jungle air; the fawning masses; all contribute to the narcotic spell that these progresses cast over those who undertake them.¹⁴¹

The next chapter describes the 'progress' of the SOS-Save Our Skills charity through Burkina Faso in West Africa, where the field work was undertaken over a three year period. The ambition to produce high-end, luxury products from some of the world's poorest communities was the at the core the SOS manifesto.

¹⁴¹ Beran, Michael Knox. "Hearts of Darkness: trendy paternalism is keeping Africa in chains." *City Journal*. N.p. 2008. Web. 18 March 2008.

CHAPTER THREE: EXPLORING THE FIELD

Burkina Faso and SOS-Save Our Skills

“To sell the family’s cloth is to sell the family’s value.”¹

DOGON PROVERB

Introduction

Between November 2007 and March 2009 I travelled three times to Burkina with the SOS director Karin Phillips, and with a variety of people who were involved in some extent with the project, either directly employed or by association. Each trip lasted ten days or so and usually culminated in some sort of event: cotton conferences, fashion shows, exhibition openings. What struck me most particularly on each field trip was the extent of formal speech-making and quasi-ceremonial protocols that appeared to be required on meeting anyone in authority, and at any level. One co-visitor, Aboubacar Fofana, a well-known textile artist from Mali, told me that it was absolutely necessary to formally acknowledge the most senior person present and to make a speech, even a small one, to announce one’s intentions. While sipping on a calabash of the local brew at yet another three hour-long village gathering where I understood nothing of what was being said, I realised that establishing any sort of commercial venture within the rural communities was going to be a long drawn out affair, requiring tact, sensitivity and a more thorough understanding of the nuances of Mossi culture.

¹ Perani, Judith and Naomi Woolf. *Cloth, Dress and Art Patronage in Africa*. Oxford: Berg, 1999. 31.

This chapter begins with an account of the SOS structures and personnel, the initial funding and leverage funding this attracted, and a description of the SOS manifesto, as briefly mentioned in Chapter One. The three field trips and the sites of production, both rural and urban, and by male and female weavers, provide a setting for understanding the problems and obstacles encountered in the development of the SOS fashion and interiors collections. The chapter concludes with an analysis of contemporary local markets for cloth in Burkina, and how local taste seems to be at odds with design aesthetic of SOS director Karin Phillips.

Background and establishment of SOS-Save Our Skills

The UK-based Karin Beate Phillips (fig. 3.1) is the director and founder of the British European Design Group (BEDG), an organisation that assists design companies by acting as a sponsor for government funding schemes offering financial assistance for UK based businesses to attend foreign trade fairs, seminars, inward and outward missions.



Fig. 3.1
Karin Phillips. Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso. Personal photograph by the author. 29 Nov. 2007. Original in colour.

In the BEDG website profile Phillips describes her experience and expertise as far-reaching:

A linguist, economist and publicist by profession, German born Karin-Beate Phillips acquired her extensive professional expertise in a wide and diverse range of sectors including heavy and light industries, engineering and construction, patenting and licensing, design, textiles and fashion, food, health and cosmetics, journalism, publishing and printing, marketing, branding, advertising and public relations, sponsorship and fundraising, event and museum marketing.²

In 2006 Phillips decided to establish a charity that would address the decline in the world's manual crafts and help to preserve the traditional skills of artisans. Together with Desiré Maurice Ouédraogo, an established Burkinabé textile engineer who runs a natural dye import company in Ouagadougou, she set up SOS – Save Our Skills, an organisation which would initiate and support a number of textile craft producers within Burkina Faso, acting as mentors and educators to the craftspeople employed. Ouédraogo was already involved with *l'Union des Professionnels du Textile et Habillement du Centre (UPROTEX,)* a professional trade body representing the weavers and tailors of Ouagadougou. Phillips considered the involvement of local people within the charity crucial to its success. The aim was that SOS would bear the responsibility for marketing all the products internationally; designing trade show stands, literature and

² About page. *British European Design Group*. Web. 10 Aug. 2009.

websites. Burkina Faso was chosen to test the pilot project because of its indigenous cotton industry and weaving traditions, and also because, although poor, it is a relatively stable country in sub-Saharan Africa. Phillips had already spent some time in Burkina Faso collecting textiles and meeting villagers in various communities. She had, with the help of Ouédraogo, identified two sites that would be suitable for production. Sulgo, a small settlement about 100km north east of Ougadougou, had been the subject of a doctoral thesis by Dr. Jocelyne Voukouma Boussari.³ She had written an account of the community being the historical home of strip weaving in the country, and where the villagers were honoured with the task of weaving the Moro Naaba's⁴ funeral cloth. Phillips decided that Sulgo, as the "cradle of weaving culture"⁵ within Burkina, was the ideal place to produce high quality weaving. She also planned to build a weaving shelter and visitors' centre where tourists could buy 'authentic' African textiles. Phillips' insistence on 'authenticity' would prove to be a fundamental characteristic of the textile products, opening them up to such a self-styled classification through SOS certificates for museums and galleries in Europe and North America. Added to this certification of the actual products was a proposed system of weaver and spinner quality classification that, Phillips suggested, would guarantee the recognition of individuals' skills and establish strong quality controls. The aim, for SOS, was to create a collection of authentic textiles that could be traded at a high price, while maintaining ancient, traditional forms and motifs. For the first exhibition, at the

³ Secretary General of the *Ministère de la Promotion de la Femme* (Ministry of Women's Affairs) Government of Burkina Faso. Head of Research (Anthropology) at *Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique et Technologique*.

⁴ The Moro Naaba is the term for the Mossi 'emperor' in the Moore dialect of the central plateau region of Burkina Faso. A ceremonial title with no legislative power, the emperor is nevertheless highly respected within Mossi society.

⁵ Conversation with author. 2 May 2007.

International Contemporary Furniture Fair (ICFF) in New York in May 2007, which took the form of an introduction of the *idea* of SOS rather than a commercial selling show, Phillips had gathered a collection of textiles from the region that she had decided were both 'authentic' and 'traditional.'

SOS at the ICFF New York

Thus my first encounter with the SOS brand came when I visited New York's ICFF in May 2007, at the Jacob Javits Convention Center in Manhattan's West Side garment district. This major international design fair is held annually and attracts top designers from around the world, with museums, magazines and galleries holding events associated with the design industry at various venues around the city, much as London's Design Festival celebrates each year in September. The Convention Center is a monolith of glass that stretches along the side of the Hudson river facing New Jersey, and has been an annual venue for the BEDG contingent of British designers since 1998, the exhibition space for which occupies a sizeable slice of the hall. I had exhibited there myself on numerous occasions.

During the 2007 exhibition British designer Tom Dixon, then Creative Director of Habitat, approached Phillips to discuss the new project, describing his interest in Africa and how he would be willing to donate some time to work on new products but not to have his name used. I had interviewed Dixon in 2005 about his involvement in various craft projects in South Africa and Tanzania for my Masters dissertation, and he had offered some insightful comments about various projects. This seemed to be a good opportunity to harness the talents of a major designer who could offer a significant boost to the SOS charity

through his extensive experience of creating products in African countries and which would result in some practical benefit to the artisans in Africa. Phillips, however, was adamant that all the work would be that of the artisans, with only minimal interference from ‘outsiders.’ She later privately expressed concerns that a professional designer like Dixon would attempt to impose their ideas and make the products ‘too commercial.’⁶ This rather disconcerting statement made me question my own role as designer in the project and wonder if any ideas I had would be labelled also as ‘too commercial.’ Phillips’s rationale was that knowledge had to be protected, that the ancient craft skills should be in some way categorized and given status, much as Japan’s artisans are ‘national living treasures’ who embody the cultural identity of their country, and whose customers were willing to pay elevated prices.⁷

Phillips’ desire to encourage this type of elite consumer was reflected in the choice of exhibits shown at the ICFF in 2007: an entire West African double-heddle loom, cotton skeins and spinning equipment, examples of the narrow strip weave in isolation, and also sewn into clothing featuring animal motifs (fig. 3.2). The stand’s exo-structure (fig. 3.3) was a simple combination of cream and black with the occasional flash of red that emphasized the SOS logo repeatedly. There was little doubt for the spectator that this was not as commercial company but an NGO whose aim was to educate the visitor about

⁶ Conversation with author. New York, 24 May 2007.

⁷ Carter, Robert Edgar. *The Japanese Arts and Self Cultivation*. Albany NY: State University of New York Press, 2008. 2.



Fig. 3.2
SOS stand, ICFF New York. Personal photograph by the author. 19 May 2007. Original in colour.



Fig. 3.2
SOS stand, ICFF New York. Personal photograph by the author. 19 May 2007. Original in colour.

West African narrow strip weaving as a rare and highly skilled, ancient craft. The stand had been designed and built by Willo Atfeld, a Frankfurt-based designer, with the identity and literature of SOS (fig. 3.3) designed by Clemens Hackl, a London-based German graphic designer. The stand was placed at the main entrance to the ICFF (fig. 3.4,) a large and enviable space that had been subsidized by ICFF organisers George Little Management.

During the four days that I attended the show there was a slow but steady trickle of visitors who consisted mainly of academics from design colleges around America, African-American visitors to both the ICFF and the Stationery Show (being held in the adjacent hall), and design students. There were some buyers who visited the stand but there were as yet no products that could be ordered by retailers. SOS were selling bundles of printed postcards that featured drawings by the village children from Sulgo in Burkina, of scenes from everyday life: weaving, farming, spinning. At \$5.00 per bundle they were selling steadily and SOS finished with about \$500.00 in cash. Despite subsidy, the stand had still cost around EUR 44,000, according to SOS accounts .

Funding and sponsors

SOS was awarded EUR19,585 in 2007 by the Centre for the Development of Enterprise (CDE) in Brussels, an EU organization that channels funding into commercial enterprise in developing countries. Phillips explained how it had been spent:



Fig. 3.3
SOS literature, designed by Clemens Hackl. *BEDG*. Original in colour.



Fig. 3.4

SOS stand, ICFF New York. Personal photograph by the author. 19 May 2007. Original in colour.

It paid mostly for improving the design skills of the UPROTEX members and the subsequent development of the textile collections as well as advice on marketing and branding etc. for the individual members of the trade association.⁸

Phillips was keen to point out that no money was paid directly to SOS; all funding was sent to the marketing company she and Ouédraogo had set up, *Afrique Authentique – Authentic Africa* (AA-AA) which had registered two brands to reflect the type of products to be sold. These brands are fully discussed in Chapter Four.

The second tranche of funding for AA-AA from the CDE was EUR33,900 for UPROTEX for the further development of the fabric collections for the *Projet de Tissage* pilot scheme. Phillips was equally keen to justify exactly how this money was spent. Amongst other things, she explained, it went to,

...assistance to the individual members, registration of the trademark, design, development and registration of the L'Esprit de Burkina trademark, printing of the publicity materials, workshops on creativity for Burkina based artisans, workshops on marketing and business development, attendance at the local trade events, fashion défilé at the Ran Hotel, workshop with the local photographers, workshops with the local model agency, attendance

⁸ Phillips, Karin. "Dotting the I's." Message to the author. 7 March 2011. E-mail.

and travelling of Uprotex members to the TissusPremier trade fair in Lille including trade fair costs etc. so perhaps again 1/3 was allocated to the Projet de Tissage and AA-AA. All other costs involved were financed through - as usual - my own work and even borrowed finance.⁹

Phillips was adamant that the funding for SOS had been provided exclusively by her, from funds raised from her deceased father-in-law's charity, the LD Phillips Trust, and various other sources to the tune of around £65,000, which included the fees of £15,000 she earned from setting up the initial CDE *Projet de Tissage* in Burkina Faso. SOS was involved in several events in Burkina over a three year period: fashion shows, museum exhibition, cotton conferences, trade shows, the precise details of which are described in Chapter Four.

What became clear was that SOS needed more funding in order to realise its ambitions of establishing a commercial textile enterprise in Burkina, and by chance, a few days after my return from New York in 2007, an opportunity arose that affected the progress of SOS quite dramatically.

Shell Foundation

In June 2007 I attended a lecture at CENTRIM's Freeman Centre at the University of Sussex. The speaker was Kurt Hoffman, then Director of Shell Foundation, who described his view of the current development 'scene' and

⁹ Phillips, Karin. "Dotting the I's." Message to the author. 7 March 2011. E-mail.

how his foundation was attempting to introduce private enterprise into aid programmes. In his lecture Hoffman estimated that in the last thirty years alone some \$600 billion has been given to Africa.¹⁰ Hoffman highlighted key problems in dispersing funds with probity and effectiveness: corruption and unspendable money. The first is a straightforward misappropriation of funds. The second is somewhat hard to understand. Hoffman explained that nearly 54% of EU budgets for aid lies dormant in European bank accounts, an amount of roughly \$180 billion that will probably never get spent due to uncertainty and indecision about its destination. Hoffman also revealed the degree of duplication and representation involved in processing aid funding, which is to say the vast numbers of unreadable reports and useless meetings that he described as the “leisure of the theory class.”¹¹ The amount of time that is taken up with the administration of aid is also a key factor in the considerable delays encountered in the field.

At the reception after the lecture I was introduced to Hoffman by Professor Mike Hobday, then Director of CENTRIM, and we talked briefly about the SOS project. Hoffman told me that Shell Foundation was very interested in cotton production and craft, and he thought setting up a meeting with SOS would be a good idea. We duly exchanged cards.

It was not until September 24th 2007 that the meeting at Shell headquarters in London could be arranged. Present were Karin Phillips, myself and two Shell

¹⁰ Hoffman, Kurt. Lecture at Centre for Innovation in Management (CENTRIM) Freeman Centre, University of Sussex. 4 June 2007.

¹¹ Kurt Hoffman lecture.

Foundation managers: Rosanne Gray (Business Manager) and Alison Warters (Programme Manager of Shell Foundation initiative 'Trading UP'.)¹² Warters began by describing the philosophy behind Shell Foundation's strategy for overseas development, which combines business thinking with financial aid. She alluded to Integra,¹³ a foundation that works to increase fair trade in Slovakia and Bulgaria and which had financed the promotion of craft products from that region, as being an ideal model for aided enterprise in West Africa. Integra's policy is to expand the markets for craft by concentrating on using designers to create 'high end' products. This concentration on mid to high end hand-made products mirrors the conclusion of the Craft Report from South Africa, as mentioned in Chapter Two, which identifies Europe as the main consumer of such craft. My entire research was centred on the collaboration between designers and craft producers that resulted in high-end products, and thus Shell Foundation's ideology seemed to be a perfect match for SOS.

The meeting ended with a firm expression of commitment for future collaboration. Six months later Shell Foundation awarded \$100,000 to AA-AA to continue developing the textiles for export with UPROTEX members and to create a fashion collection the following year, becoming the main funder of the SOS marketing company, *Afrique Authentique*. The lack of funding directly to SOS itself was the result of Shell Foundation's policy of only granting funding to companies registered in the targeted countries.

¹² Trading UP acts as a 'bridging entity' connecting major retailers with developing world producers and small businesses.

¹³ A non-government organization in Bulgaria and Slovakia, part of the larger Integra network of partnering agencies involved in social and economic development of the countries in Central and Eastern Europe.

Before the award to SOS had been granted, I arranged to travel to Burkina Faso in November 2007 with Karin Phillips and Rosanne Gray, on a field trip that would establish the framework for product development. In all, three trips were made between November 2007 and March 2009 to visit different kinds of weaving activities: strip weaving and broadloom weaving in both rural and urban areas, and in male and female spheres.

Rural male strip weavers of Napalgué

My first visit to Burkina Faso in November 2007 was ostensibly to tour the various sites that SOS had identified as being suitable for development. In talking to strangers from another culture I was aware of how difficult it might be to establish not only a meaningful relationship but also to get any sense of the essential truth of a situation, especially through interpreters. The areas I visited are marked on the map (fig. 3.5)

In 1979 Peggy Reeves Sanday wrote that any ethnographic research required the researcher to become part of the situation that was being studied, a process that saps the emotional energy and creates a kind of disorientation, or culture shock.¹⁴ Reeves Sanday explains that this arises “from the need to identify with and at the same time to remain distant from the process being studied.”¹⁵

¹⁴ Reeves Sanday, Peggy. “The Ethnographic Paradigm(s)” *Administrative Science Quarterly*. 24.4 (1979): 527.

¹⁵ Reeves Sanday 527.



Fig. 3.5
Map of Burkina Faso with field sites marked in red. United Nations Cartographic Maps. *UN*. Web. 26 Feb. 2009.. Original in colour.

This was certainly my reaction when I first entered the village community of Napalgué. There was little to protect me from coming face to face with the extreme poverty that up until then I had merely observed on the streets of Ouagadougou (fig. 3.6) from the safety and comfort of an air-conditioned four wheel drive, windows firmly shut against the swarms of supplicant youngsters at traffic lights, a narrative that played before me in a slightly unreal fashion like a film. Napalgué, on the other hand, was particularly distressing because of the children I encountered there (fig. 3.7) They were obviously malnourished, dressed in a hotch-potch of rags that had perhaps been salvaged from a charity¹⁶ and their faces covered in dust and flies. They pressed against me, curious and friendly. It was Day Two of my first field trip in

¹⁶ Karin Phillips had arrived in Burkina with me carrying an extra two huge suitcase full of children's clothes that she intended to donate to the weavers' families. We had travelled on Afriqiyah Airlines to take advantage of the famously generous baggage allowance.



Fig. 3.6
Street scene, Ouagadougou. Personal photograph by the author. 28 Nov. 2007. Original in colour.



Fig. 3.7
Children of Napalgué, Burkina Faso. Personal photograph by the author. 19 May 2007. Original in colour.

November 2007, and the journey from Ougadougou to Napalgué had been an exhilarating drive through a rural landscape of typical West African savanna, dotted here and there with *concessions*¹⁷ of thatched straw roofs and mud bricks. We left the main road and had driven over the grass that was marked only by dusty trails, impassable in the wet season, as our SOS interpreter Ouédraogo explained. I felt more like a tourist *voyeur* than a researcher, so delighted with the strangeness and novelty of my situation but also acutely aware of the colour of my skin, even after only 24 hours in the country.

My position as a British, urban, white, middle-class postgraduate researcher seemed at odds with the subject of my enquiry: the African, rural, uneducated, poor artisans of Burkina Faso. The pre-planned framework for constructing the research was necessarily informed by my social, political and economic autobiography, and this background was crucial in forming my reactions to what I saw around me. Caroline Knowles acknowledges this dichotomy in her own ethnographic fieldwork.¹⁸ Knowles points out that she is not black, and neither are any of her family. The sense of belonging that she feels for her home is both political and emotional, and it is these sensibilities that she brings to her research in the field; her autobiography is, after all, that of belonging to a colonial, racist oppressor. “How difficult it is to be British!” she writes, adding that the difficulty stems from being one of those for whom blackness is not “a major dimension of social disadvantage and exclusion to

¹⁷ A group of dwellings arranged in familial groups.

¹⁸ Knowles researches the lives of mentally ill black people in a variety of countries around the world.

be British.”¹⁹ From this viewpoint, however, Knowles suggests that the field is where she can consciously align herself selectively away from “the racism and gross social inequalities which come from casting belonging in those terms.”²⁰

She explains,

In the work of the transnational researcher, home and the positioning of the self in terms of home through the stories that are constructed about the self occupy a central position in defining the field in its broadest sense of a choice of locale as well as the choice of a domain of social relationships and objects of intellectual enquiry.²¹

In other words, ethnographic fieldwork away from home is not just a matter of placing the researcher within the research frame, but also of identifying how the researcher actually generates the research frame. To add to the difficulty in establishing an objective research frame was my *alter ego* as a designer. My personal outlook is to assess the visual as a primary source of interest and pleasure, in addition to functionality and commercial viability, and that was already proving to be an enormous distraction.

The SOS team with me (Karin Phillips, Desiré Ouédraogo, Rosanne Gray) stopped and tried to chat briefly with the boy apprentices who were our first

¹⁹ Knowles, Caroline. “Here and There: doing transnational fieldwork.” *Constructing the Field*. Abingdon: Routledge, 2000. 66.

²⁰ Knowles 67.

²¹ Knowles 67.



Fig. 3.8
Apprentice weaver. Napalgué, Burkina Faso. Personal photograph by the author. 2 Dec. 2007.



Fig. 3.9
Apprentice weavers. Napalgué, Burkina Faso. Personal photograph by the author. 2 Dec. 2007

encounter at Napalgué, (fig. 3.8 and fig. 3.9) but they were reluctant to say anything. Their teacher spoke to Desiré Ouédraogo in Mooré, as no-one living this far from the capital spoke French, and we then walked to a clearing where several large logs were strewn in a circle. We sat and waited as evening approached. Slowly, people began to gather as they caught sight of us from the other compounds; women and children at first and then the men as they came home from the surrounding fields. The village elders then arrived and we all sat down together, (fig. 3.10) the men gathered around the SOS team to sit on the logs while the women sat with the youngest children a little distance away, on mats and cloths that had been laid out on the ground, and chatted amongst themselves (fig. 3.11) After we had shaken the hands of every man present the business of discussing the SOS proposal began.

Ouédraogo translated Phillips' speech from French into Mooré, and then back into French as the various villagers responded. Attempts to record the encounter were futile, as the recording was untranscribable due to background noise and the difficulty in understanding any of the responses, the villagers' in Mooré and in Ouédraogo's heavily accented French. From my own handwritten notes and later discussions with both Phillips and Ouédraogo (which I quickly realised would be the only way to extract any sense of meetings during field trips) the following exchanges were made.

Phillips began by thanking everyone present for their time, and went on to describe her philosophy for developing the strip weaving industry in their area. SOS would buy all their yarn at a premium rate and also their hand-sewn



Fig. 3.10
Napalgué, Burkina Faso. Personal photograph by the author. 2 Dec. 2007.



Fig. 3.11
Women of Napalgué, Burkina Faso. Personal photograph by the author. 2 Dec. 2007.

blankets and *pagnes*. SOS would institute strict controls to ensure that the weaving was of the highest quality and encourage a formalised apprenticeship system that would also award qualifications and certificates. Phillips emphasised that the traditional weaving was of paramount interest to SOS, and that the planting of organically grown cotton would be the first priority.

The village headman responded with a gracious speech that thanked Phillips for her efforts in visiting their community. If, he said, such a proposal was truly to be made, then the whole village would be extremely thankful for it. They had worked as professional weavers for generations and nearly all their cloth was sold to Ghanaian traders who travelled around Burkina Faso collecting the basic cloth. Through our interpreter, Ouédraogo, the headman told us that the Ghanaian traders had paid them the same rate per metre for the last twenty



IMG_5967.jpg



IMG_5968.jpg



IMG_5969.JPG



IMG_5971.jpg



IMG_5972.jpg

IMG_5973.jpg

Fig. 3.12

Ecrú rolls of strip weaving. SOS-Save Our Skills. Original in colour.



them into blankets, dyed with indigo or commercial dyes, and thus even their place of origin became lost.

The whole community then accompanied the SOS team on a tour of some of the village compounds, and, as darkness fell, we made our way back to the car by torchlight. At one point I became separated from the rest of the group and stumbled into a family compound. Three generations of one family were grouped around an enormous television set that was powered by a generator. They appeared to be watching the evening news.

It was a salient reminder that these villagers, although poor and living remotely in a rural backwater of West Africa, were at the same time connected to people of different cultures and *au courant* with international events. I apologised and backed out of the compound. Having become reunited with my group we attempted to find our way. We became hopelessly lost after a few minutes' driving, having no roads or markers to guide us back to the main road, which ran between Ouagadougou to Bobo Diassolou, Burkina's second city. The only guides were the narrow trails made by bicycles, which were almost invisible under the car headlights. Finally, we found ourselves in the middle of another *concession* and were pointed in the right direction. It appeared that even reaching the weavers of Napalgué would be something of a challenge.

In the car on the way back to the hotel in Ouagadougou we discussed how the Napalgué villagers could organize the quality controls needed to sustain an increase in cloth production. Phillips was disconcerted at not only the

appearance of a television, but also at the prevalence of ‘western’ clothing amongst the villagers, and the ownership of satellite mobile ‘phones. She bemoaned the encroachment of civilization as a ‘corrupting’ influence on the village communities and wondered how long it would be before their ‘pure’ way of life disappeared forever.²²

Charles Piot, the French anthropologist who spent many years in West Africa, writes of this connection to modernity as being a natural state of such communities. He refutes the notion of the remote village as ...”an outside, a place in which to locate the Other, a site of redemption at some remove from the métropole and the global system...”²³ Piot continues,

While I understand the romance and appeal of such a vision, and can imagine its promotion having had (at an earlier moment) politically progressive possibilities, today such a project often serves to feed reactionary political agendas...²⁴

Another weaving community that was also possessed satellite mobile ‘phones lay closer to Ouagadougou and SOS Africa director, Desiré Ouédraogo, called ahead to warn of our impending visit a few days later.

²² Conversation with author. 2 December 2007.

²³ Piot, Charles. (1999) *Remotely Global: village modernity in West Africa*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. 178.

²⁴ Piot, 178.

Rural male strip weavers of Sulgo

Sulgo (fig. 3.13) is a village about 100km north east of Ouagadougou, near the town of Ziniaré. As mentioned earlier, this village was charged with making the funeral cloth of the *moro naaba*, the ceremonial emperor of the Mossi people, and that they were immensely proud of this tradition.



Fig. 3.13
Village of Sulgo, Burkina Faso. Personal photograph by the author. 1 Dec. 2007. Original in colour.

The *moro naaba* still lives in a large palace in Ougadougou which is the site of a weekly ceremonial called *nabayius gou* (the Emperor goes to war.) This is a 'drama' performed at the Moro Naaba Palace in Ouagadougou every Friday morning at 7am, depicting the magnificently attired emperor apparently being forcibly restrained by his wives and courtiers as he sets off to make war with his brother, referencing Mossi historical events from hundreds of years ago.²⁵

²⁵ Manson, Katrina and James Knight. *Burkina Faso*. Chalfont St. Peter: Bradt Travel Guides Ltd, 2006. 149.

Phillips had decided that Sulgo's link with the culture and traditions of the Mossi, the dominant people of Burkina Faso, would provide a logical platform for the SOS project to develop a centre of excellence in weaving, with a visitor's building and shop where tourists could watch the cotton being spun and woven before buying the products. No tourists visited the area as yet, but Phillips was sure that being so close to Ouagadougou would be an incentive for tourists to make an excursion to Sulgo.

In November 2007 the SOS/Shell Foundation team²⁶ travelled to Sulgo to review the progress of the building plans which had been formulated the previous year. As at Napalgué it was apparent that we should greet each male villager individually, and they lined up politely to shake our hands one by one. The community had gathered under a wood and straw shelter (fig. 3.14.) The women sat together in another section of the shelter, (fig. 3.15) and did not come forward to greet us or to shake our hands. They were busy spinning the cotton yarn by hand. We toured the newly planted cotton fields adjacent to the compounds (fig. 3.16) to inspect the first harvest of organic cotton that was just coming into bloom. SOS had organized and paid for the research into natural pesticides to replace the expensive chemical pesticides that the village had used for many years. After formal speeches by Ouédraogo and the headman, Patrice, and the ceremonial sipping of a local brew from a hollowed calabash, Rosanne Gray, the business manager from Shell Foundation,

²⁶ Rosanne Gray, Shell Foundation Business Manager, Karin Phillips, SOS Director, Desire Ouédraogo, SOS Africa Director (and our interpreter) and the author.



Fig. 3.14
Villagers of Sulgo, Burkina Faso. Personal photograph by the author. 1 Dec. 2007. Original in colour.



Fig. 3.15
Women spinning cotton yarn. Sulgo, Burkina Faso. Personal photograph by the author. 1 Dec. 2007. Original in colour.



Fig. 3.16
Inspecting the cotton crop. Sulgo, Burkina Faso. Personal photograph by the author. 1 Dec. 2007. Original in colour.

announced that she would like to go and sit with the women and attempt to spin the cotton. Ouédraogo translated this request, and we went over to the women's section where they made space for us to sit down with them. We attempted to spin the yarn as the women instructed us, (fig. 3.16) but our clumsy efforts were met with laughter and smiles. Our fingers had to be lubricated with ash, that was held in a small pot. Then, holding the stick

around which the yarn was wound and simultaneously flicking the spindle, the yarn should be teased out into a long thread that is wound as it is produced. Neither Gray nor I could manage even a millimetre and we agreed that our arms were aching after only a few minutes.



Fig. 3.17
The author and Rosanne Gray of Shell Foundation, attempt to spin. Sulgo, Burkina Faso. Personal photograph by the author. 1 Dec. 2007. Original in colour.

The women, through Ouédraogo, explained that it only took about a week to learn how to spin the thread, but several months to be able to spin the really fine thread. “Do you wish to learn how to weave?” asked Gray. The question was met with more laughter and then silence, as the women looked to our interpreter. Ouédraogo quickly explained that only the men were permitted to weave in the countryside, as it was simply “too hard” for women to do. Women, he said, had to look after the babies which were strapped to their backs, making it impossible for them to sit on the ground and pull a loom. The men of Sulgo had already explained to Phillips that it was simply unthinkable that women should weave cloth; their role was to provide the raw material. The

women, it seemed, picked the cotton alongside the men, but then had responsibility for carding and spinning the yarn. I asked whether SOS could provide the women with a metal upright loom, like the ones that been imported into Burkina during the 1980s. The reply was emphatic. Phillips wanted only the 'authentic' weaving, and not western-influenced 'technology' of any kind. This included spinning wheels and metal needles. The women were to carry on with their 'ancient' way of spinning, that was, Phillips claimed, a skill in its own right, and one she would reward with its own certification.

I was slightly concerned that the 'professionalism' of the weaving would remain firmly in the hand of the men, and although none of the women expressed any desire to learn, it was apparent that they were largely inhibited by the presence of both the village men and the male SOS interpreters. I was also concerned that the prohibition on spinning wheels, a medieval technology, would place a greater burden of drudgery on the women, who, although they expressed to me that they enjoyed sitting together and chatting, were responsible for most of the domestic chores and all the child rearing in a difficult environment. How would they fit the additional spinning, needed to fulfil the increased weaving production that SOS was planning, into their domestic life?

Some of the women later put on their traditional woven cloth and danced for us (fig. 3.18) which highlighted the rather artificial, ceremonial nature of our visit.



Fig. 3.18
Traditional indigo-dyed woman's pagne. Child in second-hand Western clothing. Sulgo, Burkina Faso. Personal photograph by the author. 1 Dec. 2007. Original in colour.

Although the women had put on their indigo-dyed pagnes, they also wore a distinctive headscarf of red and white. The pattern, featuring white doves and known in Mooré as 'luile pende' or 'the scarf with doves,' is worn only by Christian communities,²⁷ and is almost certainly a cheap print imported from China. I commented to Phillips that perhaps it might be an interesting idea to incorporate the white dove into the Tissus Villages brand design, both Sulgo and Napalgué being minority Christian communities, but she commented that

²⁷ Reinders, Margriet and Sidi Traoré. *La Tenue Traditionnelle au Burkina Faso*. Ouagadougou: Imprimerie du Progres, N.d. 41.

besides such cotton prints were 'alien' to Africa they were also nothing to do with the male weavers, and were therefore inauthentic.²⁸

Different agendas

Sulgo had been the site of several misunderstandings over the nature of the proposed tourist centre development. When we toured the site in November 2007 the visitors centre was little more than a pile of newly-made mud bricks but a on my third visit in 2009, the entire structure was almost complete. Phillips related the story of its construction.²⁹

First, Phillips had designed the large visitor centre in the traditional manner, which is to say the walls were to be made of mud bricks and the roof of straw, to imitate the local vernacular building style. The centre would provide a retail outlet and a space for tourists to view the weavers and spinners at work, wearing their own woven cloth in the traditional style. Phillips insisted on straw as it looked picturesque (an important consideration for attracting the tourists she hoped would soon be visiting the community) and was more in keeping with the ethos of the project: to promote the use of sustainable materials and processes, and to preserve the traditions of the community through the continued use of local knowledge in building techniques. Phillips was attempting to persuade the villagers that their own indigenous style was infinitely preferable to modern, western methods of construction and that outside visitors from Europe and North America would also prefer a 'typical' African setting where they could view the 'real' villagers at work. The men of

²⁸ In fact, cotton prints such as *luile pende* have been imported by Africans since the 1840s.

²⁹ Conversation with author. 20 Nov. 2008.

Sulgo, however, warned Phillips that they had never built straw roofs on such a large scale before and that they thought it would be too heavy for the mud bricks to support. They argued that they preferred breeze-block walls and a corrugated tin, or even tiled, roof as it was completely waterproof (an important consideration in a tropical climate that has an extended rainy season of several months in the summer) and that using modern materials meant not only that the whole structure could be easily and quickly built but that it would last for years.

However, Phillips insisted on her plans and the centre's construction went ahead with the traditional mud bricks (which the villagers also had to make themselves) and a large straw roof. Within weeks, Phillips admitted ruefully, the roof had collapsed and the entire structure had to be heavily reinforced at much greater expense than if the modern materials had been used.

After the centre was finally built the village men once again approached Phillips and announced that although they were extremely grateful for the visitor centre, they could not contemplate sitting together with the women, as it was not 'seemly' to do so. They insisted that another, smaller structure be built a respectable distance away from the main centre (fig. 18) so that the women could spin the cotton together. Phillips obliged.



Fig. 3.19
Large visitor's centre, with smaller women's shelter on the right. Sulgo, Burkina Faso.
Personal photograph by the author. 6 Mar. 2009. Original in colour.

Another few months went by when the village men once more voiced their concerns to Phillips. They thanked her for the development of the tourist centre and the women's shelter, but felt that SOS had misunderstood their position within the local community. They were not professional weavers at all; they simply wove cloth in the dry season when they had some time before the harvest, and the funeral cloth for the *Moro Naaba*, whilst a great honour for their community, was only required every 25 years or so. Phillips told me that the men had voiced some irritation at being described as 'weavers' when they were in fact farmers, a profession they felt was of a higher social status than weaving.

What is certainly true is that professional caste systems are very much an entrenched part of life in West Africa, and in Burkina Faso have their origins in the history of occupations over the last five hundred years, when the Mossi

first arrived to enslave the indigenous people.³⁰ Even today, as Desiré Ouédraogo told me, one can tell from a person's surname whether their ancestors were slaves or nobles. He elaborated further. Older people (over the age of 60) had facial scarring and this indicated that they were not to be taken as slaves, as they either belonged to a particular noble family as bonded labour, or belonged to a particular professional caste: weavers, potters, musicians.³¹ It would appear that farmers who owned their land were of a higher caste than weavers. Eventually it was decided that all production of the narrow strip weave would be confined to Napalgué, with extra supplies coming from Sulgo if necessary, but that Sulgo would still act as the tourist destination, a representation of ancient Burkinabé cultural heritage. In this, SOS appeared to be falling into a well-established and recognised pattern of behaviour.

The false front

Erik Cohen writes of the 'staging' of authenticity where inhabitants of exotic places are encouraged to 'play the native' for visiting tourists whose thirst for authentic experience is relentless, but who are equally relentlessly 'managed' as soon as they step outside their hotels:

It follows from these assumptions that commoditization, engendered by tourism, allegedly destroys not only the meaning of cultural products for the locals but, paradoxically, also for the

³⁰ Rashid, Ismail. "Class, caste and social inequality in West African History." *Themes in West Africa's History*. Ed. Emmanuel Kwaku Akyeampong. Oxford: James Currey, 2006. 123.

³¹ Conversation with author. 4 Dec. 2007.

tourists. It thus emerges that, the more tourism flourishes, the more it allegedly becomes a colossal deception.³²

Cohen asserts that the modern tourist, disillusioned with the 'inauthenticity' of the modern world, looks for the unity between the 'self' and society that somehow endowed the pre-modern world with reality, and that this can only be found in a primitive, pristine and natural environment that is seemingly untouched by modernity.³³ Nadège Chabloz describes just such a tourist experience in a village in Burkina Faso in 2007, relating French tourists' accounts of being welcomed in an 'authentic' ceremony by the villagers of Doudou. "The welcome of the village was so spontaneous," said one tourist, "and so authentic. That's why I never go to cities in developing countries."³⁴ Dean MacCannell calls this *antitourism*,³⁵ but notes the anti-tourist is doomed to find only a replicated experience that is shared by all the other tourists, a version of the Other that is a controlled and comfortable.³⁶

We had witnessed for ourselves the male weavers of the countryside in Sulgo and Napalgué, as yet untouched by tourism, and I wondered how SOS would impact on their lives if large numbers of visitors began to arrive to watch them weave. On a later trip to Sulgo in 2009 I asked the village headwomen (fig. 3.19) how she felt about foreign tourists arriving to watch her spin the cotton.

³² Cohen, Erik. *Contemporary Tourism: Diversity and Change*. Oxford: Elsevier, 2004.102.

³³ Cohen 103.

³⁴ Chabloz, Nadège, "Le Malentendu: Les rencontres paradoxales du tourisme solidaire." *Actes de la Recherche en Sciences Sociales*. 5.170 (2007): N.p. PDF file.

³⁵ MacCannell, Dean. "Remarks on the Commodification of Cultures." *Hosts and Guests Revisited: Tourism Issues of the 21st Century*. Eds. Valene L. Smith and Maryann Brent. New York: Cognizant Communication Corp., 2001. 382.

³⁶ MacCannell 383.



Fig. 3.20
Head woman, centre forefront. Sulgo, Burkina Faso. Personal photograph by the author. 6 Mar. 2009. Original in colour.

She shrugged. Through our interpreter she told me that life in the village was mostly very dull, and when the white people came to look at them they had an excuse to wear their scarves and stop working for a while. It was an interesting thing to look at white people, she said.³⁷

Men also weave in the cities as well as in the villages. They are, however, professional, full-time weavers who create specialist fabrics for local consumption, and SOS also took a keen interest in their work.

³⁷ Conversation with author, through interpreter. Sulgo, Burkina Faso. 6 March 2009.

Urban male weavers in Koudougou and Ouagadougou

Koudougou is a large town some 100km from Ouagadougou (see map fig. 3.5) and has, according to Ouédraogo, a large number of weaving ateliers that produce traditional wedding blankets and cloth for women's *pagnes*. In December 2007 the SOS team visited one weaver, known as Dady. Behind the high mud walls of the compound the weaver's looms – both narrow for strip weave and metal upright for wider fabrics - stood in the open air, his children playing in the compound as he worked. A charming and friendly man, who took the time to show us his looms and some of his finely-woven products (fig. 3.21,) Dady explained, through Ouédraogo, that his atelier housed himself and two other weavers that he employed when business was going well. At that time he was looking for another skilled weaver to join the atelier, as he could hardly keep up with the orders from his largely female clientele. I looked at the weaving on his looms (fig. 3.22) and we discussed the pros and cons of working on the metal upright looms as opposed to the traditional stick double-heddle looms. Dady said he loved working on the metal looms as they were so much easier to use, but that some clients wanted him to use the narrow stick looms as it was more traditional. These clients tended to be commissioning wedding blankets (fig. 3.23) that would be kept and passed on down through the family. The metal looms he kept for weaving fashion fabrics for the local female clients, most of whom wanted lurex in the cotton cloth. Local markets for woven cloth are discussed later in this chapter.

Back in Ouagadougou we visited a young master weaver, Teby, (fig. 3.24) who had become something of a protégé of Phillips and Ouédraogo. His backyard atelier was equipped with the traditional narrow loom and also a



Fig. 3.21
Dady, right, master weaver. Koudougou, Burkina Faso. Personal photograph by the author. 30 Nov. 2007. Original in colour.



Fig. 3.22
Metal upright loom. Atelier Dady. Koudougou, Burkina Faso. Personal photograph by the author. 30 Nov. 2007. Original in colour.



Fig. 3.23
Wedding blanket. Atelier Dady. Koudougou, Burkina Faso. Personal photograph by the author. 30 Nov. 2007. Original in colour.



Fig. 3.24
Teby, master weaver. Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso. Personal photograph by the author. 30 Nov. 2007. Original in colour.

brand new wooden broadloom (fig. 3.25) that had been designed and manufactured by Ouédraogo, a business he ran alongside his dye import company. He explained that looms of this nature were hard to manufacture simply because of the dearth of natural wood materials in Burkina generally. All wood had to be imported from Ghana and thus was more expensive.³⁸

Teby showed us the woven animal motifs he had been working on for Phillips. Some, he explained, were traditional animal motifs that Burkinabé rural communities adopted as a kind of totem such as turtles and crocodiles (fig. 3.26) and others were entirely new motifs that he had designed to reference the traditional motifs in a modern manner. Teby was also experimenting with Ghanaian Adinkra³⁹ symbols, woven in large format instead of the usual clusters of smaller symbols.

This was a young and energetic weaver, only twenty years old, who was keen to learn and adopt new ideas within his own practice, while still retaining the essential quality of the strip weaving. Phillips explained that she was writing a booklet about the history and meanings of the Burkinabé animal totems and had asked Teby to design and weave some horses that she could include in her book. Although horses were never used as totems by the Burkinabé, Phillips felt that they would reflect the Tuareg horse culture in the north of Burkina and thus become an attractive addition to an appealing and

³⁸ Conversation with author. 30 Nov. 2007.

³⁹ Visual symbols that reference proverbs, printed onto imported cotton with calabash stamps in Ghana.



Fig. 3.25
Broadloom and Desiré Ouédraogo in Atelier Teby. Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso. Personal photograph by the author. 30 Nov. 2007. Original in colour.



Fig. 3.26
Samples of new weaving. Atelier Teby. Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso. Personal photograph by the author. 30 Nov. 2007. Original in colour.

picturesque catalogue of animals.⁴⁰ Unfortunately, the horse motifs appeared to resemble donkeys and were rejected by Phillips as ‘ugly’ and ‘unsuitable.’ By contrast, I personally thought them extremely attractive: fresh, slightly comedic and full of vigour (fig. 3. 27) I asked Teby if I might take a few lengths of weaving home with me as samples to perhaps make into other products, and he generously allowed me to do so. I would later turn these pieces of weaving into new products, as described in Chapter Four.



Fig. 3.27
Samples of new weaving. Atelier Teby. Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso. Personal photograph by the author. 30 Nov. 2007. Original in colour.

As mentioned earlier, women do weave in Burkina Faso, both in the countryside and in urban ateliers, but they exclusively use the metal looms introduced in the 1980s, for producing fashion fabrics, and broadlooms for furnishing fabrics.

⁴⁰ This book is now published and contains some animals that have been entirely constructed by graphic designer Clemens Hackl, together with a constructed ‘history’ of their use in Burkinabé textiles.

Urban female weavers in Kadougou and Ouagadougou

During a conference⁴¹ in Ouagadougou in 2007 Phillips and I had met the well-known Senegalese textile designer, Aissa Dione, whose finely woven fabrics (fig. 3.28) had adorned the conference hall. Dione told us that although her main site of production was Dakar in Senegal, she also produced her cloth in Koudougou, one of Burkina's second cities, significantly using broadlooms, and that she sold much of her work in Paris and New York where she was a regular exhibitor at both Maison et Objet and the ICFF. Dione's work blends traditional African aesthetics with European and North American style trends. Using subtle colour combinations and innovative weaving techniques to



Fig. 3.28
Aissa Dione fabrics. UPROTEX conference, Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso. Personal photograph by the author. 29 Nov. 2007. Original in colour.

⁴¹ UPROTEX conference on the future of the textile industries of Burkina Faso. Ran Hotel, Ouagadougou. 29 November – 1 December 2007.

create, for example, voiles for interior designers, Dione's fastidious approach to designing and working with Burkina's artisans has resulted in some beautiful work, geared towards a contemporary, Euro-American market. The centre in Koudougou was funded by the United Nations Industrial Development Organisation (ONUDI) and designated for the improvement of women's lives, and therefore all the broadloom weavers were female. Dione's work is described in more detail in Chapter Five.

Karin Phillips decided that she would like to see the centre, and so the whole team travelled to Koudougou, some 100km south east of Ouagadougou. The UN centre (fig. 3.29) proved to be a well-equipped room holding six large, wooden broadlooms that produced furnishing fabrics for Dionne and more traditional weaving for local clients (fig. 3.30)

Although the entire process was by hand, Phillips felt that the use of machined yarn, spinning wheels and broad looms was not 'authentic' enough for the traditional SOS collection that she was planning. She preferred the simple, plain white, handspun country cloth from the strip weavers in Sulgo and Napalgué, and therefore decided that her project would not use Koudougou broad cloth either. However, Phillips bought almost every piece of cloth that was not destined for Dionne's atelier in Dakar, remarking that the combination of colours would work well as table runners and napkins, something that the weavers had failed to identify or appreciate.⁴²

⁴² Conversation with author. 30 Nov. 2007.



Fig. 3.29
Broadlooms, ONUDI weaving project. Koudougou, Burkina Faso. Personal photograph by the author. 30 Nov. 2007. Original in colour.



Fig. 3.30
Traditional weaving. ONUDI weaving project. Koudougou, Burkina Faso. Personal photograph by the author. 30 Nov. 2007. Original in colour.

Back in Ouagadougou we also visited an urban atelier (fig. 3.31) run by an experienced weaver called Mdme Abadou, which was entirely staffed by female weavers using the upright metal looms. She told us that she paid her weavers 1 or 2 euros per day, depending on their skill, and that the weavers were allowed to bring their children to the atelier while they trained. After 2 or 3 months they were permitted to take a loom back to their homes so that could continue to work without disruption, an important consideration for mothers. The only stipulation was that the weavers worked for Mdme Abadou exclusively from then on. This was not a development project but a local initiative run by a local female weaver, and although the prices that were paid to the women were slightly lower than those paid at Koudougou, nevertheless the system appeared to be thriving. “Un petit revenu stable est mieux que rien,”⁴³ said the proprietor, Mdme Abadou. All the weaving was produced on the distinctive metal upright looms and was almost entirely lurex-infused fashion fabrics (fig. 3.32) for local consumption. I asked Mdme Abadou why lurex was woven into the cotton. She replied that it was very simple – that the women in Ougadougou adored it.⁴⁴

Although a woman’s roles in narrow strip weaving in rural areas is heavily proscribed, the same kind of broadloom and narrower metal upright looms that I saw in Koudougou and Ouagadougou are evident in the countryside.

⁴³ A small, stable income is better than nothing.

⁴⁴ Conversation with author. 4 Dec. 2007.



Fig. 3.31
Woman and child. Weaving atelier, Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso. Personal photograph by the author. 4 Dec. 2007. Original in colour.



Fig. 3.32
Women weaving gold lurex with cotton on metal upright loom. Weaving atelier, Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso. Personal photograph by the author. 4 Dec. 2007. Original in colour.

Rural female weavers of Kombissiri

The final atelier I visited, this time without Phillips, in March 2009, was situated near Kombissiri, about 30km south of Ouagadougou (see map fig. 3.5) on the road leading to the town of Põ and the border with Ghana (fig. 3.33.) This was a project set up by a Dutch national, Magriet Reinders,⁴⁵ who lives in Burkina Faso, as a vehicle for promoting women's economic empowerment. Phillips did not want to accompany me as she felt the centre, producing contemporary fashion fabrics, was 'artificial' and used chemical dyes rather than natural ones. The female weavers used broadlooms to weave furnishing fabrics and the narrower, upright metal looms for fashion fabrics. They were all inhabitants of the local rural neighbourhood which would otherwise have offered no opportunity for employment.

The centre featured an airy, modern boutique filled with scarves, cushion covers and couvertures, bags and other accessories. (fig. 3.34) The main clientele for furnishing fabrics and accessories was the expatriate community in Ouagadougou, while the other products were destined for the Village Artisanale and the tourist market. The weaving was both innovative and modern with beautiful scarves and window dressings of voile, that was reminiscent of Aissa Dione's work in Koudougou. The various covered pavilions housed different kinds of looms and were a pleasant place to sit and work in the shade. There was also a guest pavilion, (fig. 3.35) with three tastefully decorated bedrooms and its own bathroom and garden. The scope

⁴⁵ Reinders has written a comprehensive history of Burkinabé textiles that was published in Ouagadougou.



Fig. 3.33
Women's weaving centre, Kombissiri. Personal photograph by the author. 8 Mar. 2009.
Original in colour.



Fig. 3.34
Goldsmith's Design Student, Ester Kneen. Retail boutique, women's weaving centre,
Kombissiri. Personal photograph by the author. 8 Mar. 2009. Original in colour.



Fig. 3.35
Visitor accommodation, women's weaving centre, Kombissiri. Personal photograph by the author. 8 Mar. 2009. Original in colour.

for tourism, perhaps in the vein of agro-tourism in Europe, was obviously on the agenda, and, as the manager Clementine Bafiogo explained, they had already entertained university students from the Netherlands. I had taken with me a 1970s baby wrap from Nigeria (part of the Teaching Collection at the School of Humanities, University of Brighton) as inspiration for some new kinds of weaving and I showed the weavers the cloth (fig. 3.36) asking them if they could possibly imitate the tufted technique in a variety of colourways. I was curious to see if new techniques could be learned easily, not having seen this type of weaving in my previous two visits to the country. Although the initial sampling (fig. 3.37) I obtained the next day was first rate, the subsequent delivery I received in the UK a month or so later was of very poor quality. None of my instructions had been followed, including colourways and



Fig. 3.36
Examining the Nigerian wrap, women's weaving centre, Kombissiri. Personal photograph by the author. 8 Mar. 2009. Original in colour.

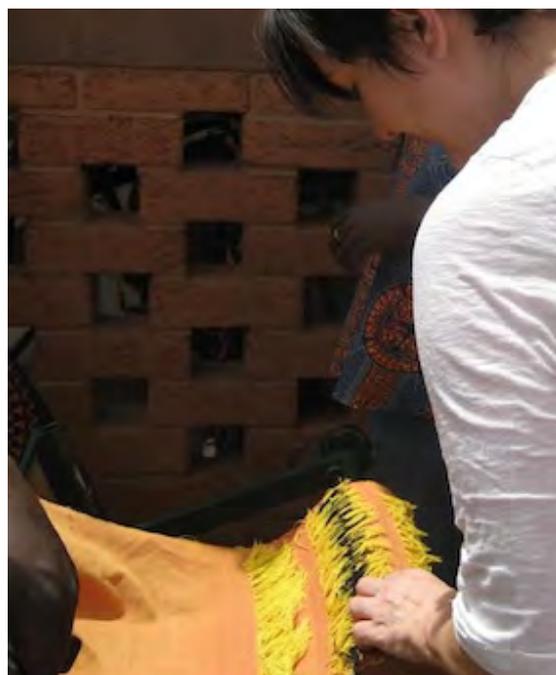


Fig. 3.37
The first sample of tufted weaving, women's weaving centre, Kombissiri. Personal photograph by the author. 9 Mar. 2009. Original in colour.

cutting, and the final result was unusable. I was puzzled. I knew that these women could produce really fine weaving, and I also knew that they had produced a perfect sample before. What had gone wrong? It seemed unlikely that that any new design innovations had to be supervised on the ground, as the women were expert weavers and knew how to produce what I wanted.

Karin Phillips was cynical when I explained what had happened. She told me that this occurred every time she had tried to get something slightly more complicated made. “You have to stand over them at all times!”⁴⁶ It appeared, somewhat unsurprisingly, that the scrutiny of their local clients was more important to the weavers than that of outsiders from another continent. They seemed unconcerned about attempting to satisfy a foreign aesthetic unless the foreigner was on their doorstep. Another factor may have been that I did not explain my order sufficiently, and that the drawings I left with Mdme Bafiogo were lacking clear direction. In any case, I had gathered more than enough textiles in my outings to the villages and also from the cloth markets in Ouagadougou itself.

Local taste, local markets

Writing in 1975, Venice Lamb⁴⁷ describes her first encounter with an apparently chaotic, colourful, bustling West African market. Although Lamb is not specific in her description of where and when her first visit occurred, she could be writing about any market in the region. In particular she writes that

⁴⁶ Conversation with author. 25 June 2009.

⁴⁷ Lamb, Venice (1975) *West African Weaving*. London: Duckworth, 1975. 11.

the section where the textiles were being sold “both intrigued and dazzled”⁴⁸ her due to the sheer number of different patterns and fabrics on offer. As Lamb became more familiar with the nature of these West African textiles she realized that they could be categorised under a very small number of headings, and she broadly lists three main types: machined plain cloth, Dutch Wax prints (also known as Java or Hollandaise) and African hand-woven ‘country’ cloth.⁴⁹ To some extent this is still true today, and although the fabrics on offer are heavily supplemented by imported Chinese cotton prints, the street markets of Ouagadougou still offer a bewildering array of different kinds of textiles that perfectly match the categories mentioned by Venice Lamb.

Pagnes and blankets made up from strip woven panels of cotton, such as were found at the ateliers of Dady and Teby, are not readily available in the markets, but become collectors items locally in a number of ways. Christopher Roy explains that although rarely used as clothing in modern times, the exception being festivals and ritual occasions in the countryside, the cloths are nonetheless highly prized amongst women in central Burkina Faso who collect them as gifts, or pass them through several generations of women in one family.⁵⁰ The distinctive blue and white stripes of the Dafing⁵¹ weavers, as shown in Chapter One, are names after common aphorisms such as “death comes to everyone”, “you cannot change your mother” or “to have a co-wife is not good.”⁵² More complicated wedding blankets, such as the beautiful

⁴⁸ Lamb 11.

⁴⁹ Lamb 11.

⁵⁰ Roy, Christopher D. “The Art of Burkina Faso.” *University of Iowa Online Archive*, 2002. PDF file.

⁵¹ The Dafing and the Yarsé are the two main weaving peoples who have become integrated as Mossi.

⁵² Roy N.p.

example from the atelier of Dady command high prices. Margriet Reinder's chronicle of the wide variety of textiles still being made in Burkina Faso reveals a rich and interesting sweep of styles and techniques, although in her conclusion she notes that local specialisms are gradually becoming eroded as more industrially produced cloth enters markets.⁵³

A report by the United Nations Industrial Development Organisation (ONUDI) in 2006 looked at both Burkina Faso's imported and domestic textile markets in the context of development in the area. It confirmed that the woven cloth tended to be a luxury item, available to the middle classes at high cost due to the amount of time needed to both spin the yarn and then weave the cloth.⁵⁴ Various textile products, the report said, were exported through informal channels to neighbouring countries, of which Cote d'Ivoire, Niger, Ghana and Senegal were the most important. The report also noted that Burkina exported the raw material (cotton) and to some extent the yarn, but that it imported added-value, finished products; Chinese printed textiles in particular were mentioned.⁵⁵ There appears to be a strong argument for encouraging the production of cotton goods within Burkina, ensuring a vertical integration of manufacture⁵⁶ and the retention of profits within the country, rather than simply exporting the raw material.

⁵³ Reinders, Margriet and Sidi Traoré. *La Tenue Traditionnelle au Burkina Faso*. Ouagadougou: Imprimerie du Progres, 2006? 80.

⁵⁴ "Evaluation Indépendante BURKINA FASO: Développement de la transformation industrielle et artisanale du coton." ONUDI (*Organisation Des Nations Unies Pour Le Développement Industriel*) 2006. Web. PDF file. 19.

⁵⁵ ONUDI report 19.

⁵⁶ A system of manufacture that has control of most aspects of its processes, from raw materials to final product, distribution and so forth.

A local fashion show

During the first field trip to Burkina Faso in 2007 I attended a fashion show at the Ran Hotel in Ougadougou, where several Burkinabé designers were displaying their work, using the local textiles that could be found in the markets. In the audience were many extremely well-dressed men and women. The men almost exclusively wore smart, western suits, while the women were attired in wax print outfits or traditional West African swathes of woven cloth that incorporated lurex. We were not permitted to sit in the front row as this was reserved for the wives of local government ministers and other dignitaries. Karin Phillips, who sat next to me, was vocal in her disapproval of the women's attire, saying that the inclusion of lurex was evidence of western 'corruption' of the local weaving heritage.⁵⁷

The models on the catwalk displayed a selection of fantastical outfits, some of which had been inspired by the cotton industry of Burkina Faso (fig. 3.38) Others were a blend of European and African styles (fig. 3.39) and others still were perfectly 'traditional' examples of dress from Burkina (fig. 3.40) and from Senegal (fig. 3.41) There was a musical interlude, where a well-known local singer, (fig. 3.42) accompanied by dancers, was modelling a spectacular wedding dress that again blended western and local fashion. The audience, in contrast to Phillips, were loudly vocal in their appreciation of the fashion on display.

⁵⁷ Conversation with author. 1 Dec. 2007.



Fig. 3.38
Dress made from hand-woven dan fani and embellished with woven straw mats. Fashion Show, Ran Hotel, Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso. Personal photograph by the author. 1 Dec. 2007. Original in colour.



Fig. 3.39
Dresses made from hand-woven, lurex-infused dan fani and embellished with raw cotton. Fashion Show, Ran Hotel, Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso. Personal photograph by the author. 1 Dec. 2007. Original in colour.



Fig. 3.40
Traditional West African men's boubous. Fashion Show, Ran Hotel, Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso. Personal photograph by the author. 1 Dec. 2007. Original in colour.



Fig. 3.41
Traditional West African woman's kaftan. Fashion Show, Ran Hotel, Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso. Personal photograph by the author. 1 Dec. 2007. Original in colour.



Fig. 3.42
Western-styled wedding dress and local dancer. Fashion Show, Ran Hotel, Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso. Personal photograph by the author. 1 Dec. 2007. Original in colour.

That the Burkinabé, like all Africans, consume fashion and textiles entirely on their own terms is, of course, self-evident. There appears to be a thriving market locally for both the ceremonial ‘traditional’ cloth that Phillips was keen to preserve, and also the more modern lurex-infused weaving that nearly all the women of Ougadougou seemed to wear on special occasions. In addition, new markets, such as ex-patriate consumers of the Kombissiri women’s weaving and Aissa Dione’s commissions in Koudougou, have introduced an element of western design into the traditional textiles that is still resolutely African in its execution.

Crafts specifically for foreign tourists and export, on the other hand, are produced and sold in quite a different manner.

Village Artisanale Ouagadougou

The SOS team visit to the government-funded Village Artisanale in the centre of Ouagadougou found a large air-conditioned boutique (in which I was unfortunately forbidden to take photographs) where the visitor can purchase a large variety of products: woven cloth, leather, bogolan, indigo-dyed strip weaving, jewellery, sculpture, basketry. The boutique and its café are surrounded by a large complex of artisan studios, where visitors can take photographs and buy at their leisure, direct from the maker.

The weaving being sold was a mixture of lurex and more traditional *faso dan fani* (fig. 3.43) all produced in a wide variety of colours. Only women were weaving this cloth, the men being mostly concerned with metalwork (fig. 3.44) and wooden sculpture (fig. 3.45) that I had seen in craft shops all around the capital. Other craft products were balsa wood ornaments (fig. 3.46) and wirework novelties (fig. 3.47) that appeared specifically designed for tourists. There were also ornaments made from plastic bags (fig. 3.48) that the maker told me were entirely sustainable, although he later assured me that the bags were brand new and quite clean, somewhat defeating his sales pitch. Replicas of masks from Burkina and neighbouring countries also featured in several ateliers (fig. 3.49.) The products featuring strip weaving were finished pagnes of tie-dyed indigo cloth and bogolan which, although traditionally associated with Mali is increasingly being made in Burkina Faso and exported worldwide.⁵⁸

⁵⁸ The artisan selling bogolan at the Village Artisanale told me that most of his cloth was dyed in his atelier in Ouagadougou, but that he also imported from Mali. He sold the cloth through his website.



Fig. 3.43
Weaving atelier, Village Artisanale Ouagadougou. Personal photograph by the author. 2 Dec. 2007. Original in colour.



Fig. 3.44
Metalwork atelier, Village Artisanale Ouagadougou. Personal photograph by the author. 2 Dec. 2007. Original in colour.



Fig. 3.45
Woodwork atelier, Village Artisanale Ouagadougou. Personal photograph by the author. 2 Dec. 2007. Original in colour.



Fig. 3.46
Balsa wood ornaments, Village Artisanale Ouagadougou. Personal photograph by the author. 2 Dec. 2007. Original in colour.



Fig. 3.47
Wirework ornaments, Village Artisanale Ouagadougou. Personal photograph by the author. 2 Dec. 2007. Original in colour.



Fig. 3.48
Recycled plastic bag toys, Village Artisanale Ouagadougou. Personal photograph by the author. 2 Dec. 2007. Original in colour.



Fig. 3.49
Masks, Village Artisanale Ouagadougou. Personal photograph by the author. 2 Dec. 2007.
Original in colour.

With its own website the *Village Artisanale* is a hub for craft exports in Burkina Faso. American agencies such as the USAID West Africa Trade Hub (WATH) and Aid to Artisans (ATA) both operate extensively within the country, exporting quantities of goods to America, where cotton ‘folklorique’ goods are the only permitted duty-free cotton from Africa.⁵⁹ Twice a year, since 2009, African Now, a trading initiative set up by the WATH to promote design-led craft products from West Africa, has taken several products from makers at the *Village Artisanale* in Ouagadougou to the New York International Gift Fair (fig. 3. 50) which takes place every January and August.⁶⁰ This is discussed more fully in Chapter Five.

With a range of cloth production sites to choose from, and a large variety of textiles available, SOS could now begin to decided how to progress with the creation and promotion of a unique collection of products from these sources.

⁵⁹ ONUDI Report 20.

⁶⁰ Archive. *Africa Now!* Web. 12 May 2012.



Fig. 3.50
African Now stand at the New York International Gift Fair, 28 Jan. – 2 Feb. 2012. Trade Fairs.
Africa Now. Web. 15 May 2012. Original in colour.

The next chapter describes the two brands that SOS felt reflected their ethos, *Tissus Villages* and *l'Esprit de Burkina*, and how I attempted to design products that would fit within the brief given to me by Karin Phillips.

CHAPTER FOUR: AFRICA, MEET AFRICA

SOS collections

“It is very encouraging to see so many Africans wishing to work with the foundation and also wishing to learn more themselves, about their own cultures and identities.”¹

KARIN PHILLIPS, SOS DIRECTOR

Introduction

Following the SOS-Save Our Skills project over three years has been both an exhilarating and frustrating experience. In commercial terms the project has failed, as this chapter will detail; no products as yet are in the market and financial chaos has marred the latter stages of the project’s development, despite the warnings of Shell Foundation director Kurt Hoffman. However, there is a silver lining on the horizon in the shape of a collection of products that are to be put into production by the end of 2012; a collection that I designed in response to this failure. Having donated this collection, royalty-free, to the SOS charity I feel that my part in their story is at an end and I sincerely hope that they make good use of my designs.

The theme that SOS director Karin Phillips constantly reiterated throughout the four years I was associated with the project was the absolute necessity for the ‘authenticity’ that would open the eyes of the Burkinabé to their own heritage. Phillips felt strongly that this awareness was something they patently and

¹ Phillips, Karin. *Brief Report: visit to Burkina 27.11.07*. SOS-Save Our Skills document, 7 Jan 2008. 2.

wilfully ignored through their obsession with adopting the modernity of the West. To counter this, Phillips had decided to enter the cultural life of the capital, Ouagadougou, in order to win hearts and minds.

Having attended one fashion show at the Ran Hotel in 2007, as described in Chapter Three, and finding it uninspiring, Phillips settled on a glossy, European-style fashion show as being an ideal vehicle to demonstrate the SOS design ethos. Phillips was developing the two brands that would define and promote the new products she hoped to make, and the textile producers of both brands would be harnessed to provide the fabrics on show. Other, more traditional products, would be put on display at the national museum of Burkina, together with an interpretation of their provenance, written by Phillips. The collections would then be presented at trade shows such as the International Contemporary Furniture Fair in New York, and Ambiente in Frankfurt.

In this chapter the two SOS brands, *Tissus Villages* and *l'Esprit de Burkina*, are first analysed and assessed, followed by a description of the various events staged by Phillips between 2008 and 2009, as she worked to establish SOS as a luxury brand both within Burkina Faso and in world markets. My design work is described in relation to the SOS brief, with an account of the extensive sampling carried out over a period of three years.

SOS Marketing strategy

Karin Phillips had quickly decided on a marketing strategy for the products she was proposing to make: the creation of marketing company that would sell two brands that symbolised the different approaches and levels of authenticity that she wanted to promote. The umbrella marketing company was to be named *Afrique Authentique-Authentic Africa* (AA-AA) as an unequivocal statement about the nature of the objects on sale, and the two brands it would promote were to be called *Tissus Villages* and *l'Esprit de Burkina*. Phillips's vision was to 'educate' the Burkinabé about their own cultural heritage and identity, something she felt was sadly lacking in the aesthetic of the weaving, and in particular the lurex, they currently consumed.

During a long meeting at the end of the first visit to Burkina in December 2007, I sat with Phillips and Desiré Ouédraogo, the SOS African director, in the bar of the Hotel Mercure in Ouagadougou, to review their progress. Phillips noted that a possible market for *Tissus Villages* would be luxury European and North American spa hotels, and that a range of cotton kaftans and fringed towels could be put into production almost immediately. Phillips stressed that everything had to be made by hand, and that therefore it would take quite a long time to make each kaftan. They would subsequently be very expensive. *l'Esprit de Burkina* products should also be targeted towards a high-end, contract furnishings market. It was vital, said Phillips, that the brands were promoted as being very exclusive and high-end. They were not for the high street. She identified two trade fairs that would be an ideal platform for bringing the SOS textile products to market: *Heim-Textil* in Frankfurt and *Tissus Premiers* in Lille, both enormous contract textile and accessories trade

fairs. Phillips also wanted to exhibit at the *ICFF* New York and at *Ambiente*, the huge annual design and lifestyle fair in Frankfurt. The aim was to expose the textiles to the world's top interior designers who would commission special projects and thus maximise profits for the weavers.

I therefore began my first attempts to sample for these two brands using the brief that Karin Phillips had made extremely clear during our first visit to Burkina in November 2007.

Tissus Villages

“There is no greater luxury in this world than the luxury of the exclusively handmade product” proclaims the *Tissus Villages* brochure (fig. 4.1) that was designed and printed by Clemens Hackl, the London-based graphic designer that Phillips used for all her professional materials. The brochure carries no information about what is on offer, but rather concentrates on reiterating the fact that the *Tissus Villages* fashion and interior collection is “100% organic,” “100% made by hand by superbly skilled craftsmen and women who have learned their métiers as part of their family heritage,” “100% ethical, respecting the cultural identities and traditions of the makers.” Phillips had chosen a graphic illustration of a thatched straw hut, like the ones we had seen in Sulgo and Napalgué, to represent the ‘honesty’ and simplicity of the homespun cotton products.

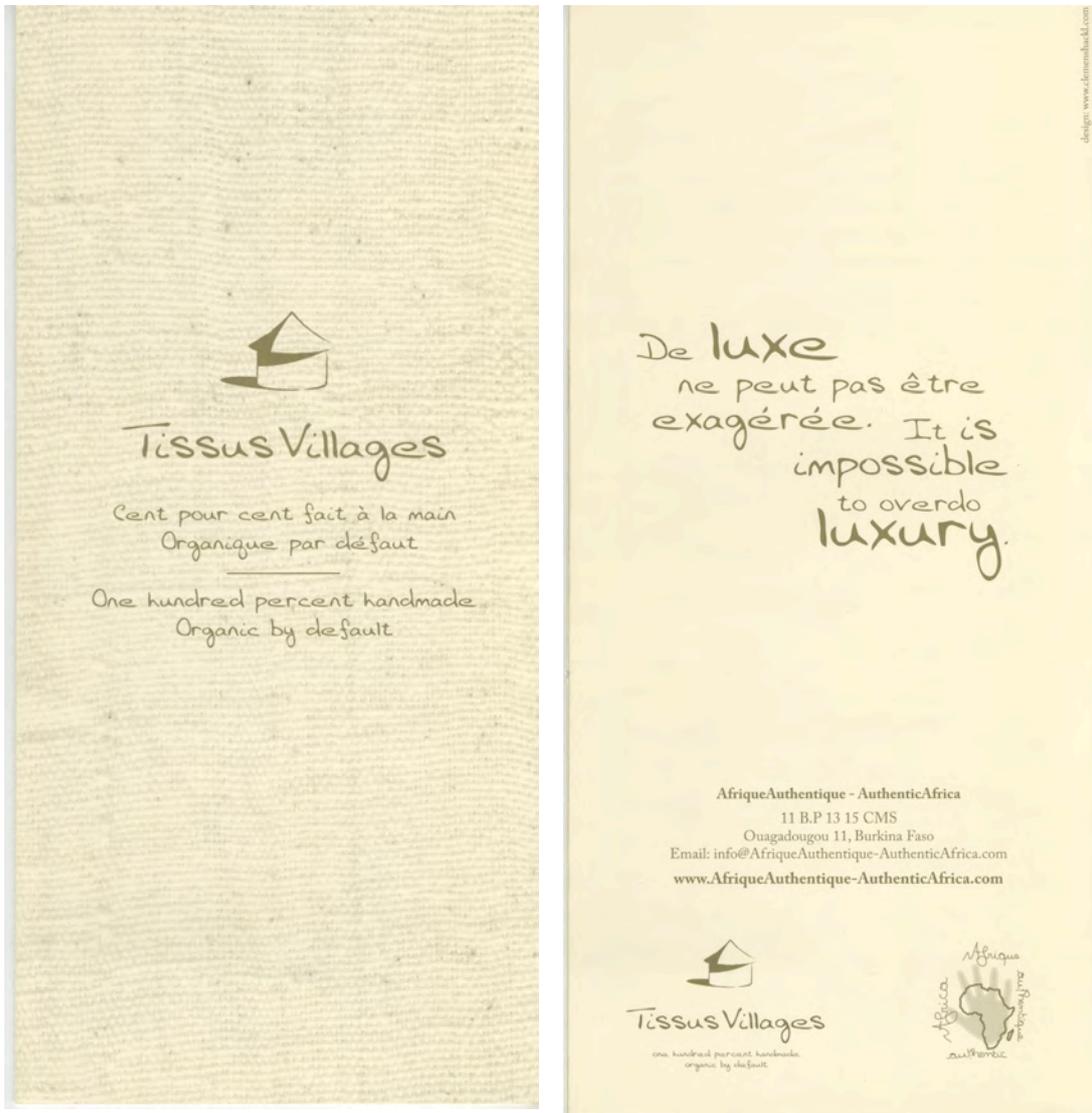


Fig. 4.1
Tissus Villages brochure – front and back cover. Personal photograph by the author. 3 May 2009.

The overwhelming impression that I carried away from my first trip to Burkina Faso was the utter lack of inspiration I felt with regard to the strip-woven cloth and its potential for reinvention and re-use as a commercial product in the West. It is hard to convey how disappointing this was, most especially in view of the initial enthusiasm I had felt when the project was first proposed to me. With a suitcase full of rolls of stripweave, skeins of handspun yarn and lengths of *faso dan fani*, I unpacked in my studio at home and contemplated the task before me. What I was looking at were essentially rolls of *ecru* bandages. To me, a western designer with a host of manufacturing processes at my fingertips, it seemed almost absurd that this cloth should be woven in such narrow widths, only to be sewn together into a larger piece before more complicated dyeing and fringeing could be done. It slowly dawned on me that if this was how I felt, after having visited the country and researched the craft practices *in situ* with an appreciation of the complexity and skill of the artisans, how could this cloth be marketed and sold as a luxury brand to a western audience ignorant of these skills?

The brief that Phillips gave me straightforward: no machined yarn, no machined sewing, only natural dyes, no zips, only horn buttons that could be made locally, no complicated sewing techniques. Her idea was that the collection would be made in the heart of the countryside, in the villages of Sulgo and Napalgué. When I visited these communities I was struck by the sheer lack of facilities: no tables, cutting equipment, or storage for producing textiles in any meaningful quantity. I also noticed that the strip weaving tended to become discoloured as it made its journey from hand-spinning and the laying-out of many yards of warp threads in the dust of the compounds.

Although the finished weaving washed very well in a standard washing machine back in the UK, there were still marks that could be seen running through the fabric. When I mentioned this to Karin Phillips she told me that in her opinion the signs of being made in a rural village in Africa would be an asset.² As I contemplated the cloth I wondered if I could experiment with fringing, pleating, ruching and crocheting as a way of adding extra value to the finished products. I discussed this with Phillips and we agreed that I should start on some prototypes using these techniques.

Making the samples

Making prototypes early in the design process is extremely important. They don't have to be aesthetically pleasing but they do need to be plentiful, something that any product designer knows well.

Prototypes don't need to be refined or take a long time to make, it is more important to create something quickly, test it, and then iterate the design. They can vary from paper sketches, to a physical model, to a fully acted out service.³

This experimentation is perhaps the designer's best strategy, one that artisans would find difficult to imitate. Taking the materials outside their natural *milieu* was the ideal way to re-think them, to re-invent and analyse them as independent, autonomous objects that had become adrift from their cultural

² Conversation with author. 19 Jan. 2008.

³ *Design Council*. London: Design Council. Web. 26 Jan 2012.

moorings. Carlos Teixeira describes the difference between design and craft knowledge as being fundamental:

While craft expertise operates locally through the abilities to localize, question, and open innovation, design knowledge functions universally through the operations of criticism, experimentation, and artistic performance.⁴

Craft, however, wherever it is found in the world, generally follows a flexible pattern of production. Poonam Bir Kasturi describes this as a natural condition:

The craftsperson follows work methods and processes that are not standardized, but are integrated into his life and the rhythms of the community. “Simultaneous,” “nonlinear” and “networked” are ways of thinking that come naturally to this community. It is part of their inheritance. It is a way of life. They don’t need to learn about “flexibility” – they live it.⁵

Kasturi seems to be suggesting that introducing new techniques and methods of working is not a problem for artisans, given that their work is so flexibly linked to their everyday lives. This contrasts somewhat with Karin Phillips’s insistence that traditional ways of making up the cloth had to be preserved intact, without the intrusion of such modern equipment as spinning wheels, treadle sewing machines or even metal needles.

⁴ Teixeira, Carlos. “The craft of prototyping.” *Strategic Design Research Journal* 4.1 (2011): 31.

⁵ Kasturi, Poonam Bir. “Designing Freedom.” *Design Issues* 21.4 (2005): 76.

These traditionally made village *pagnes* (fig. 4.2) that I brought home with me were impressive for a number of reasons. The quality of the cotton was extremely good; soft and supple with beautiful fringeing at either end. It was sewn by hand but was completely symmetrical, with no 'billowing' of cloth that so often accompanies hand sewn and hand dyed cloths. When washed it retained its shape, even after tumble-drying. But the strip weave rolls that I cut into lengths and then sewed on the machine seemed to have a life of their own. It was only when I eased the tension to almost zero and allowed the cloth to move freely with the needle that the cloth became a joy to work with. Robust but supple, the strip weave's enclosed borders became its strength. With no open hems to worry about there were a number of ways to manipulate the cloth to create different effects.

As mentioned earlier, I had decided that texture would be a crucial part of re-inventing the strip weave. The creamy ecru cotton would be perfect for layers of fringeing (fig. 4.3) although this was a relatively time-consuming process. It also lent itself to pleating and folding, and to crochet (fig. 4.4.) Although not 'traditional' in the sense that Phillips required, crochet is a manual craft skill that simply requires a crochet hook to accomplish. Having seen the finishing to several *pagnes* and the way that fringeing was so neatly added, I knew that the village women could easily master crocheting in a very short time.



Fig. 4.2
Plain cotton village pagne from Sulgo, Burkina Faso. Personal photograph by the author. 14 May 2012.



Fig. 4.3
Cushion sample using fringed strip weaving. Personal photograph by the author. 2008. 14 May 2012. Original in colour.



Fig. 4.4
Samples of ruched and crocheted cotton. Personal photograph by the author. 22 Aug. 2008.

However, Phillips decided that this technique would be impractical to apply to village production, and that perhaps it might be more useful to search for a production facility in Ouagadougou itself, where finishing and storage could be carried out in a clean environment. We had visited a government-funded school in Ouagadougou in November 2007 that was entirely devoted to training young women in artisanal skills, *Centre de Formation Feminine et Artisanale* (fig. 4.5) where the students learned wool carpet weaving (fig. 4.6,) and embroidery (fig. 4.7.) The director, Mdme Ouemi, showed us around the large, well-equipped studios (fig. 4.8) where students largely worked on producing wool carpets for local government office buildings. In the school's showroom we looked at the various products (fig 4.8) and discussed the possibility of establishing a training programme that would expand the students' repertoire of skills. Phillips thought that the school might perhaps be an ideal place to produce finished *Tissus Villages* textiles. In the end, it was the teachers at the school, rather than the village women in Sulgo and Napalgué, who sewed the SOS *Tissus Villages* fashion collection which is discussed later in this chapter. With the possibility of such a production facility being available, I also sampled the 'donkey' weaving that the young weaver Teby had given me (fig. 4.9) and experimented with home-dyed bed linen (fig. 4.10) to emulate the earth colours of natural dyes.

L'Esprit de Burkina

L'Esprit de Burkina was intended to be a collection of the traditional *faso dan fani* of Burkina Faso which is produced by members of UPROTEX in Ouagadougou. Using modern, machined cotton yarn, the *L'Esprit de Burkina*



Fig. 4.5
Centre de Formation Feminine et Artisanale, Ouagadougou. Personal photograph by the author. 3 Dec. 2007. Original in colour.



Fig. 4.6
Student weaving wool carpet samples. Centre de Formation Feminine et Artisanale, Ouagadougou. Personal photograph by the author. 3 Dec. 2007. Original in colour.



Fig. 4.7
Students learning embroidery. Centre de Formation Feminine et Artisanale, Ouagadougou.
Personal photograph by the author. 3 Dec. 2007. Original in colour.



Fig. 4.8
Students in weaving studio. Centre de Formation Feminine et Artisanale, Ouagadougou.
Personal photograph by the author. 3 Dec. 2007. Original in colour.



Fig. 4.9
Animal motif cushion sample. Personal photograph by the author. 19 Mar. 2009 Original in colour.



Fig. 4.10
Dyed strip weave cushions and bed runners. Personal photograph by the author. 19 Mar. 2009 Original in colour.

collection (fig. 4.11) was an attempt to innovate with new effects and colourways that would be suitable for fashion and interiors, while still reflecting the traditional stripes and ikat designs of the region. The resulting cloth had been exhibited by SOS during a cotton conference⁶ in 2008 (fig. 4.12.) I had seen versions of this cloth everywhere. In the textile markets and *Village Artisanale* of Ouagadougou, in the female weaving ateliers of Ouagadougou, Koudougou and Kombissiri, the *faso dan fani* that is utterly unique to Burkina Faso is sold in lengths of six metres, to reflect the amount needed to make a women's outfit. It was easily available, fairly inexpensive for a westerner, and, crucially for SOS, woven in large quantities.

I began by adapting fabrics to make plain cushion covers (fig. 4.13) and bags (fig. 4.14) as I felt the simple beauty of the fabric should be enjoyed. These could have been a straightforward, cheaper product for AA-AA to market, with the added benefit of being a uniquely Burkinabé product. However, I felt that their use in new products was somewhat limited to a few roles: table linen, bags and cushion covers, and certainly not for the high-end market that Phillips had identified. Although Phillips approved my samples, none of them was put into production at any time. This, Phillips explained, was because they were too easy to copy, and that she preferred something more original. The *l'Esprit de Burkina* textiles were, however, used in the creation of various fashion items in the SOS fashion show, which is described later in this chapter.

⁶ International Cotton Advisory Committee (ICAC.)



Fig. 4.11
Esprit de Burkina logo, designed by Clemens Hackl. Original in colour.



Fig. 4.12
Esprit de Burkina display by SOS at the International Cotton Advisory Committee (ICAC) conference, Ouagadougou. Personal photograph by the author. 18 Nov. 2008. Original in colour.



Fig. 4.13
Samples of cushion covers using striped woven fabrics (and bogolan.) Personal photograph by the author. 2 May 2009. Original in colour.



Fig. 4.14
Samples of cushion cover and bag using striped woven fabrics. Personal photograph by the author. 2 May 2009. Original in colour.

The possibilities of Wax Prints

I began to combine the *faso dan fani* with wax prints that I had picked up at the cloth markets in Ouagadougou during my three field trips and suggested to Phillips that an uncompromisingly modern version of these fabrics might go down well at the London Design Festival in September 2010, which I would be happy to organise. I had seen this fabric used by the various fashion designers and product designers described in Chapter Two, and thought that, combined with the rather austere stripes of the *dan fani*, a pleasing contrast could be achieved. Images of a sample (fig. 4.15) that I had made and a rough design for a stand (fig. 4.16) was sent to Phillips with an outline of how the product could be made: classic striped textiles with colourful wax prints made up as floor cushions, and an enormous printed textile wall hanging as a backdrop. I suggested that DesignersBlock, a well-established show for cutting-edge design in London would be a challenging and high-profile arena for SOS to show off the work.

This was not a proposition that Phillips approved. The wax prints, she said, were not part of the textile heritage of Burkina. This statement is certainly true of weaving, but exposes an ignorance of the complicated and extensive trade in such textiles which, as described in Chapter Two, has its roots in the commercial relationship between Africa and Europe which extends far back into time. Today, wax prints are still traded in subtle networks, as Charles Piot notes:



Fig. 4.15
Samples of cushion covers using *Esprit de Burkina* striped woven fabrics combined with wax print cotton. Personal photograph by the author. 2 May 2009. Original in colour.

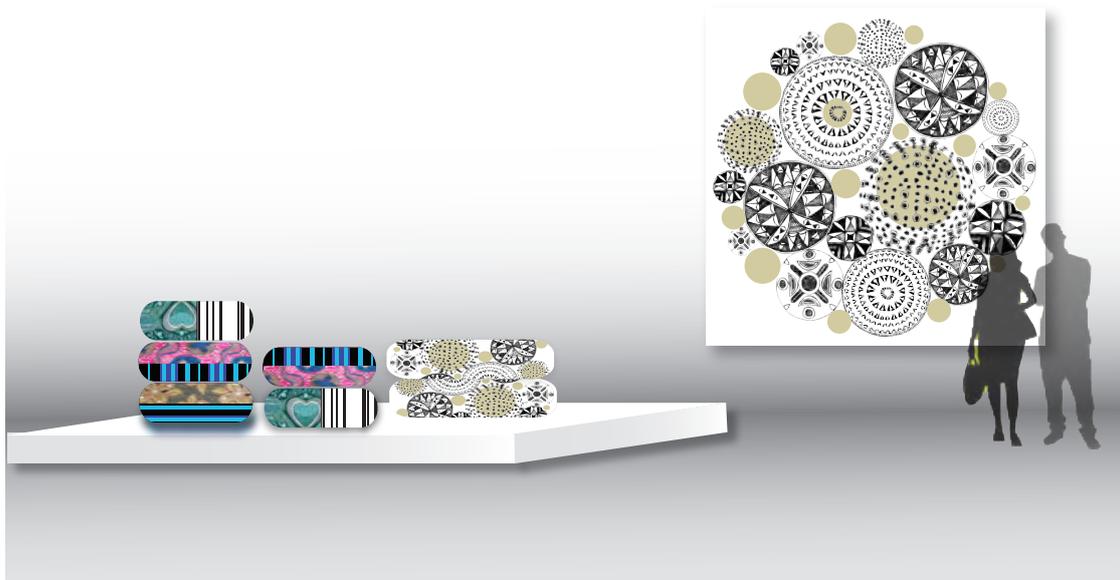


Fig. 4.16
Illustrator artwork by author of proposal for exhibition at Designers Block, London, 2010. Original in colour.

What, for instance, is the identity of a piece of cloth that is manufactured in Holland, but designed by African women (the “Nanas Benz” who run the cloth market in Lomé, and whose name derives from the cars they purchase with money made in the lucrative cloth trade, travel to Holland each year to select the patterns) and universally thought of as “African”?⁷

Despite my proposals, Phillips was adamant that the wax prints could not be included in the final collection of products that the SOS marketing company in Burkina would promote.

Afrique Authentique-Authentic Africa

As the main Burkina-based commercial company, *Afrique Authentique-Authentic Africa* (AA-AA) was set up to market and sell both the textile products of *Tissus Villages* and *l'Esprit de Burkina*, and various craft objects, such as wooden bowls, stools and furniture. ‘Afrique Authentique’ is a name that is also used by both a French eco-tourism company, and an American dealer in African art and craft, whose site offers expensive artefacts of dubious quality and origin. AA-AA is registered in Ouagadougou at the offices of Désiré Ouédraogo and its inception was fundamental in winning the Shell Foundation grant of \$100,000, as none of the Foundation’s donor funds are given to sponsors outside the recipient country. The AA-AA boutique was to be established in the SOS pavilion at the Musée Nationale de Burkina, using the same pavilion and objects on display. Phillips asserted that she was tired of

⁷ Piot, Charles. *Remotely Global: village modernity in West Africa*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999. 198.

seeing the same mass-crafted object on sale in the West as being typically African. I had some sympathy with this. What Nigerian Nobel laureate Wole Soyinka described as ‘neo-Tarzanism’⁸ seems to be a prevailing characteristic of such craft; an oversimplified, fictionalised meta-narrative of Africa which must include leopard skins, zebra stripes, dark wood and tall thin women. AA-AA, claimed Phillips, would transform the way Burkinabé craft was valued and consumed by creating a *chic*, modern environment for its display in global markets. To help her with her vision Phillips recruited a fashion and accessory designer to work specifically on a collection of apparel and jewellery, to compliment the interior textile products on which I was working.

SOS Creative Director

Florence Edmond, a designer from Martinique, had first met Karin Phillips during a trade show for Caribbean fashion accessories called *Belle Comme Terre* in 2007. Phillips had quickly recognised that Edmond’s signature style of rustic simplicity was what she was trying to achieve with the SOS brands of *Tissus Villages* and *Esprit de Burkina*. By April 2008 Edmond was living in Ouagadougou, paid by SOS as a full-time Creative Director with a salary of EUR 2000 a month, an extremely handsome salary for the region. SOS had also paid for her rented apartment above a German patisserie, Café Vienne, which was situated opposite the American embassy in the heart of the city.

An established jewellery designer in Martinique, Edmond’s distinctive style is a combination of European design school training, with references to both Africa

⁸ Soyinka, Wole “Neo-Tarzansim: the poetics of pseudo-tradition.” *Transition* 48 (1975): 38.

and to the Caribbean. Working in wood, silver and found objects, Edmond produces original, one-off pieces rather than mass-crafted collections. Phillips considered that Edmond's extensive experience of working with artisans in her own country would be of enormous benefit for SOS. In addition, Edmond is a native French speaker and of African origin. Phillips felt this too would be of great value to the project. Together, Phillips and Edmond spent six months designing and producing a fashion collection for the *Tissus Villages* brand that would be premiered in Ouagadougou in 2008.

The SOS Fashion Show

The team that I met in Ouagadougou in November 2008 was comprised of Karin Phillips, her husband Denzil Phillips, Florence Edmond, SOS creative director, fashion photographer Joseph Hunwick, and Shell Foundation business manager Rosanne Gray. We were later joined by Charlie Davies, an ex-fashion editor of the Sunday Telegraph, whose husband was working as a missionary in northern Burkina Faso, near Djibo. She had contacted Karin Phillips through a mutual acquaintance she shared with Rosanne Gray, and wished to discuss developing a range of leather goods with SOS. The Fulani and Tuareg peoples of the area where Davies was living were famed for their leather saddles, although she considered a range of leather fashion accessories would be more commercially viable. Davies wished to establish a design company within Burkina that would simply use the skills already available, shipping bulk to Europe and distributing from there. She had hoped that Phillips would take her products under the AA-AA umbrella, but Phillips decided that the samples Davies had brought with her were too 'westernised' and thus not suitable for a collection of 'authentic' African products. Phillips

told Davies that AA-AA might consider stocking Fulani saddles, if they could be sourced and supplied with authentication. Davies's company, Sahel Design, and the successful online marketing outlet she has since established, Jamshop, is discussed fully in Chapter Five.

Phillips had received some funding from the International Cotton Advisory Committee (ICAC) conference that was taking place in Ouagadougou at the time. In return for Phillips's (and my) time in decorating the conference halls with artistic displays of cotton baskets and artfully arranged skeins of cotton thread, the organizers had contributed towards the cost of a catwalk to be constructed over the swimming pool (fig. 4.17) at the 4-star Hotel Mercure in Ouagadougou. The rest of the funding came from the *Société de Filature du Sahel* (FILSAH) who had supplied the yarn for the *l'Esprit de Burkina* fabrics. The lead-up to the fashion show was thus doubly hectic and tense. The women's artisanal college in Ouagadougou, *Centre du Formation Feminine et Artisanale*, was the site of production for the fashion collection, and each garment had to be hand-sewn with hand-spun cotton thread, a difficult task as the delicate thread was prone to breaking frequently. In the days before the event the seamstresses were working through the night to finish in time. Florence Edmond's European-Caribbean influences were evident through the entire collection, although some of the outfits were specifically designed to channel an African aesthetic. All the garments, without exception, were made



Fig. 4.17
Karin Phillips adds the finishing touches to the table settings at the SOS fashion show. Hotel Mercure, Ouagadougou. 20 Nov. 2008. Personal photograph by the author. Original in colour.

from ecru cotton strip weave cloth and all the accessories were made from crocheted cotton, cowrie shells and cotton skeins. The entire collection was cream coloured and designed in response to the use of narrow strip weave lengths. Joseph Hunwick was positioned at the end of the catwalk to record each model as she walked. Hunwick had picked the models, all amateurs, as he walked through the streets of Ouagadougou. The child models were all children of SOS personnel in Ouagadougou.

The fashion show concept was designed and directed by Karin Phillips. Village drum beats and the plaintive singing of village women (recorded by SOS director, Desiré Ouédraogo) wafted from the loudspeakers as the first model emerged from the white cotton backdrop: a young boy of about 12 years old, referencing the age at which the weavers begin their apprenticeships. He wore nothing but a short *frou-frou* skirt of bunched strip cloth and some skeins of cotton wound around his ankles (fig. 4.18) garments never worn in the villages, where shorts and T-shirts were the norm. The next models were dressed in a similarly skimpy fashion, with tiny skirts and bodices (fig. 4. 19 and fig. 20.) with several children's dresses included (fig. 4.21) in the procession of outfits. The overall impression was that of a fictionalised, African rural idyll, where barefoot natives, dressed in impeccable white loincloths, stroll happily through the savannah. The wedding dress was a Caribbean-influenced confection of metres of strip weave, so heavy that the model had some slight difficulty in pulling it along the catwalk (fig. 4.22) The Europeans and Americans in the audience were loudly vocal in their appreciation. The Africans seemed politely puzzled. The audience was a group of attendees at



Fig. 4.18
Young model featuring Tissus Villages fashion and accessories. Hotel Mercure, Ouagadougou. 20 Nov. 2008. Photograph by Joseph Hunwick © SOS 2008. Original in colour.



Fig. 4.19
Model featuring Tissus Villages fashion and accessories. Hotel Mercure, Ouagadougou. 20
Nov. 2008. Photograph by Joseph Hunwick © SOS 2008. Original in colour.



Fig. 4.20
Model featuring Tissus Villages fashion and accessories. Hotel Mercure, Ouagadougou. 20 Nov. 2008. Photograph by Joseph Hunwick © SOS 2008. Original in colour.



Fig. 4.21
Models featuring Tissus Villages fashion and accessories. Hotel Mercure, Ouagadougou. 20 Nov. 2008. Photograph by Joseph Hunwick © SOS 2008. Original in colour.



Fig. 4.22
Model wearing Tissus Villages wedding dress. Hotel Mercure, Ouagadougou. 20 Nov. 2008.
Photograph by Joseph Hunwick © SOS 2008. Original in colour.

the International Cotton Advisory Committee (ICAC) annual conference, and came from all over the world, and from every cotton producing country in Africa; people who were senior decision-makers and policy advisors of governments. What was particularly noticeable was the complete absence of buyers, fashion journalists or merchandisers. Rosanne Gray, the Shell Foundation business manager who had funded AA's involvement in creating the collection, turned to me and asked whether any of the clothes might be a marketable item. I could not point out one that fitted the description. The collection was pretty to look at, but it had taken months to sew by hand, and almost a year to make enough cloth in the first place.

At the table next to ours sat a group of village weavers from Sulgo. They had been transported to Ouagadougou by minibus by Phillips so that they could see how their cloth had been transformed into a professional fashion show, but they seemed ill at ease amidst the glamour of the banquet. They ate their five courses in silence, prodding at the smoked salmon with some suspicion. I noticed that the hotel waiters did not offer them champagne. Phillips had asked them to wear 'traditional' clothes and they had obliged, with homespun strip weave and indigo-dyed wraps that looked incongruous amid the sculpted chiffon evening dresses and black dinner jackets of the other guests. As soon as the fashion show finished they were ushered around the back of the hotel and into their waiting minibus for the journey back through the night to Napalgué.

Another feature at the fashion show was a collection of modern *boubous*⁹ which had been designed by the *l'Union des Professionnels du Textile et Habillement du Centre* (UPROTEX) urban weavers with *l'Esprit de Burkina* fabrics. With Edmond's creative guidance and a new ikat design, they had used city tailors to fashion the cloth into new versions (fig. 4.23 and fig. 4.24) of the traditional men's and women's flowing robe. This was one of the most successful collections and could well have been produced commercially.

There was a brief pause after the last model left the catwalk, before the third and final collection appeared. And then suddenly, to a fanfare of thumping disco beats there emerged two beautiful models in shiny silk suits, complete with vertiginous heels and tiny fascinators perched on their heads. As they sashayed down the catwalk to rapturous applause the compère announced that the President's wife, Madame Campaoré, had decided that her favourite fashion designer in Ouagadougou, Clara Lawson Ames, should show the cotton conference attendees a taste of contemporary, seasonal African fashion. This was a revelation. The fabrics were a mix of silks and lurex-infused local cotton weaves, with gold accessories. Phillips forbade Hunwick to take any photos of the models, but the images below are typical of Ames' work (fig. 4.25 and fig. 4.26) which feature a contemporary mix of European and African fashion.

⁹ West African flowing, wide-sleeved robe. Usually worn by men, but also by women in some parts and known as m'boubou.



Fig. 4.23
Model wearing Esprit de Burkina *m'boubou*. Hotel Mercure, Ouagadougou. 20 Nov. 2008.
Photograph by Joseph Hunwick © SOS 2008. Original in colour.



Fig. 4.24
Model wearing Esprit de Burkina *m'boubou*. Hotel Mercure, Ouagadougou. 20 Nov. 2008.
Photograph by Joseph Hunwick © SOS 2008. Original in colour.

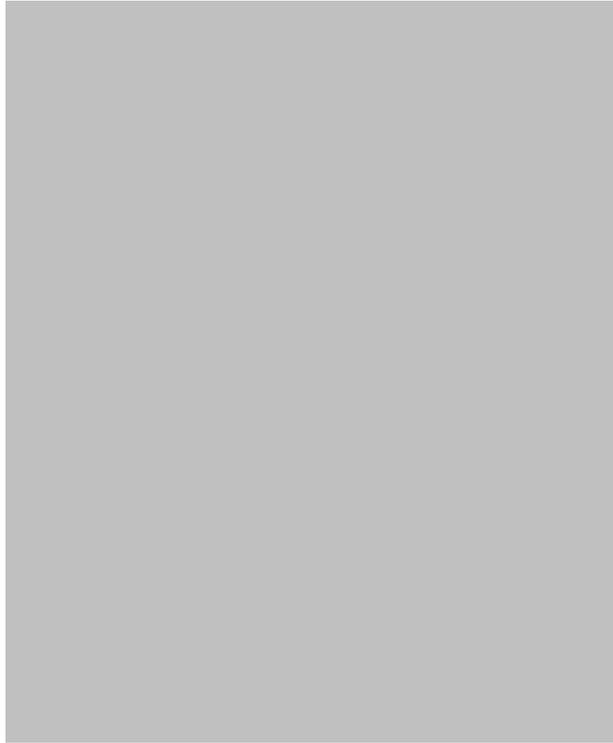


Fig. 4.25
Model wearing designer fashion by Clara Lawson Ames. Gallery. Clara Design. Web. 12 May 2012. Original in colour.



Fig. 4.26
Models wearing designer fashion by Clara Lawson Ames. Gallery. Clara Design. Web. 12 May 2012. Original in colour.

The SOS motives behind the inception and execution of the fashion show were very clear to see. It was an attempt to show SOS fashion designs purely for export, and in a western-styled, conceptual manner, to a Burkinabé audience. Karin Phillips was jubilant after the show had finished. She remarked that, apart from the “hideous” clothing that ended the evening (Clara Lawson Ames’ designs) the audience would understand how “tasteful” and “beautiful” their own heritage could be.¹⁰ Phillips wanted some distinctive photography and commissioned the photographer, Joseph Hunwick, to take studio shots of the models the following day, (fig 4.27 and fig. 4.28) styled by Florence Edmond.

The exhibition at the Musée Nationale de Burkina

Karin Phillips felt that the fashion show’s ethos, specifically that of promoting a new appreciation of strip weaving, should be reinforced with a permanent exhibition. To that end she had first approached Madame Alimata Sawadago, the Director of the Musée National de Burkina (fig. 4.29) Phillips and I met her during my first visit in 2007 to discuss the possibility of leasing one pavilion to SOS as an exhibition space and retail outlet. In 2007 it was being used as a tourist craft boutique (fig. 4.30) selling the usual array of Mossi woven hats and various mass-produced bogolan and indigo-dyed cloths. Mdme. Sawadago agreed to the rental period of two years and Phillips began planning an exhibition of the weaving heritage of Burkina, complete with looms from the countryside and traditional clothing. Phillips also intended to include

¹⁰ Conversation with author. 20 Nov. 2008.



Fig. 4.27
Model wearing Esprit de Burkina m'boubou. Photograph by Joseph Hunwick. © SOS 2008.
Original in colour.



Fig. 4.28
Tissus Villages accessories made from cotton skeins, cowrie shells and horn. Photograph by
Joseph Hunwick. © SOS 2008. Original in colour.



Fig. 4.29
Karin Phillips, Desiré Ouédraogo, Alimata Sawadogo. Musée Nationale de Burkina, Ouagadougou. Personal photograph by the author. 28 Nov. 2007. Original in colour.



Fig. 4.30
Pavilion (interior and exterior) at the Musée Nationale de Burkina, Ouagadougou. Personal photograph by the author. 28 Nov. 2007. Original in colour.



Fig. 4.31
Grounds of the Musée Nationale de Burkina, Ouagadougou. Personal photograph by the author. 28 Nov. 2007. Original in colour.

artefacts such as reed chairs and carved stools, calabash drinking bowls and even a traditional bed.

Although it had been intended to coincide with the fashion show in 2008, it was not until 2009, with an extended lease, that the grand opening of the *Afrique Authentique* exhibition at the Musée Nationale de Burkina took place. A vast open ground in the centre of the city (fig. 4.31) with pavilions dotted here and there, at quite considerable distances from each other, the buildings were constructed in the local vernacular style, with a modern element, and although made of concrete were designed to resemble the mud brick and plaster outer shell that is so typical of the palaces and mosques in that part of West Africa.

In November 2009 I attended the opening ceremony of the SOS pavilion at the museum. SOS had invited the Mossi emperor, the *moro naaba*, to attend, and a lavish ceremony took place (fig. 4.32) that included local singers and dancers. The programme had been devised by the AA-AA staff in Ouagadougou.

Inside, the pavilion had been designed and decorated by Phillips and Edmond (fig. 4.33) to reflect a western appreciation of minimalist simplicity. The artefacts were carefully arranged on rustic twigs and branches (fig. 4.34) with a central plinth that housed an entire double-heddle weaving loom (fig. 4.35) surrounded by baskets of cotton balls and weaving accessories such as shuttles. Weavers from Napalgué had set up the loom, and I had chatted to



Fig. 4.32
Opening ceremony at the Musée Nationale de Burkina, Ouagadougou. The Mossi emperor, the *moro naaba*, in white. Personal photograph by the author. 11 Mar. 2009. Original in colour.



Fig. 4.33
Interior of SOS pavilion at the Musée Nationale de Burkina, Ouagadougou. Personal photograph by the author. 11 Mar. 2009. Original in colour.



Fig. 4.34
Interior of SOS pavilion at the Musée Nationale de Burkina, Ouagadougou. Personal photograph by the author. 11 Mar. 2009. Original in colour.



Fig. 4.35
Setting up the loom in the SOS pavilion at the Musée Nationale de Burkina, Ouagadougou. Personal photograph by the author. 10 Mar. 2009. Original in colour.

them through the SOS driver and interpreter as we worked to finish the exhibition arrangements (I was charged with putting up the exhibition vinyl signage.) They did not understand why the exhibition was taking place. “Why,” said one, “is our humble weaving being shown to the city people like this? Why are the village pots and gourds being put on these shelves”¹¹ They viewed their weaving being very ordinary, the interpreter told me, the kind of cloth that only rustic peasants would wear, albeit on special occasions. I replied that Karin Phillips wanted to show the world that they were highly skilled and could make beautiful things. The weavers simply smiled and shook their heads.

Karin Phillips had also asked me to make several panels to decorate the SOS pavilion’s office walls, and I quickly assembled them before the exhibition opened. These were simply wooden stretchers covered in strip of various kinds of woven cloth: *faso dan fani* and local wax prints. When they were finished Phillips decided to mount them in a section of the main gallery by the entrance, and to label this as an art exhibition called *Cotton Art* by Katherine Ladd (fig. 4.36) Phillips asked if I could supply a short rationale of the work to include in her programme, and although I did attempt to write a short piece I decided that, in all honesty, I could not justify the ‘exhibition’ of *Cotton Art* as being ‘art’ and so declined to contribute. The programme included my name nonetheless (fig. 4.37.)

¹¹ Conversation with author. 11 Mar. 2009.



Fig. 4.36
 'Cotton Art' by Katherine Ladd. Musée Nationale de Burkina, Ouagadougou. Personal photograph by the author. 10 Mar. 2009. Original in colour.



Fig. 4.37
 Invitation to the opening ceremony of the SOS exhibition at the Musée Nationale de Burkina, Ouagadougou. © SOS 2009. Original in colour.

Authentic Africa?

As mentioned in Chapter One, 'authentic' is a word that sits uneasily on the shoulders of 'honest' and 'real,' implying an absolute truth that goes beyond mere verbal or visual description.¹² David Phillips states that this deception is reinforced within a museum environment, as the object seems to be lifted out of the cycle of commercial exchanges and cut off from its social and cultural environment.¹³ By presenting the weaving and village artefacts as objects with the transcendent values of 'art,' not only did the work itself attain a new status but "both the identities and cash value of stock in hand of everyone who bought into that particular merry-go-round go up a notch." As Karin Phillips attempts to reassign a certain kind of status and value to the artefacts, she will simultaneously cast on herself the status of 'connoisseur' and arbiter of taste. In other words, an authority. David Phillips notes that the degree to which museum exhibition plays a part in reinforcing notions of canonical authority can be compared to the organised church's "policing of authenticity" of the relics of saints.¹⁴

The main ambition of SOS was to 'reveal' their cultural identity to the Burkinabé. "Never before," said Karin Phillips, "has there ever been an professionally curated exhibition about strip weaving and its history in Burkina Faso."¹⁵ Phillips's idea was that knowing about their 'cultural heritage' would instill 'pride' in the local people, which she felt was a form of empowerment. Sharon MacDonald quotes philosopher Charles Taylor's notion of "expressive

¹² Phillips, David. *Exhibiting Authenticity*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997. 5.

¹³ Phillips 15.

¹⁴ Phillips 17.

¹⁵ Conversation with author. 4 Dec. 2008.

individuation.”¹⁶ This, says MacDonald, is the idea that not only is every single national identity different, but that “this distinctiveness is deep-seated and that we have a kind of ‘calling’ to express it.”¹⁷ However, this is, according to MacDonald, a 19th century methodology that encourages people to envisage themselves as members of an “ordered but nevertheless sentimentalized nation-state,” whereas the reality is that globalised world systems produce diverse and separatist identities: ethnonationalisms, regionalisms and transnational powers.¹⁸

Karin Phillips also planned the eventual transfer of the SOS exhibition from ‘art’ to ‘shop’ after a few months, turning one part of the pavilion into the main retail boutique for AA-AA.

The SOS stand at the ICFF May 2009

Following the fashion show and the museum exhibition, and in collaboration with Aboubacar Fofana, an indigo artist from Mali, a small collection of textiles and village artefacts was ready for exhibiting to a Western audience. Florence Edmond had hand-dyed some cushion covers in Ouagadougou, using the *faso dan fani* of *l’Esprit de Burkina*. Choosing the International Contemporary Furniture Fair in New York as the venue for the introduction of the collection, Phillips hoped to build on contacts made during the launch two years previously in 2007, described in Chapter Three.

¹⁶ MacDonald, Sharon. “Museums: national, postnational and transcultural identities.” *Museum and Society* 1.1 (2003): 2.

¹⁷ MacDonald 3.

¹⁸ MacDonald 5.

As director of the British European Design Group (BEDG,) with an annual presence at the ICFF sponsored by the UK government's UK Trade & Industry (UKTI,) Phillips was uniquely placed to be able to choose a prominent display area for AA-AA. The BEDG block-books a section of the ICFF main hall and then sells booths to individual British companies, subsidised by UKTI, to help UK design businesses gain access to export markets. In 2009 Phillips requisitioned the largest space in the British contingent's area of the ICFF and set up the AA-AA stand to showcase the various products from Burkina. At the centre of the stand was an entire pavilion (fig. 4.38) of gauzy, indigo-dyed muslin by Aboubacar Fofana, complete with his intricately dyed cushions and the rest of the AA-AA products (fig. 4.39)

Although there were was a good deal of interest from buyers, no orders were taken during the show. Philips explained that they had no stock and no idea of lead times for delivery to the USA and that several buyers had expressed frustration at not being able to get adequate information from the SOS website, whose design remains the same holding page with no product images or information, at the time of writing. Neither could the buyers source contact details of the individual designers and makers, with the exception of Fofana who has a professional website. Karin Phillips was however emphatic that the show had been "...a huge success without parallel in New York."¹⁹ and that she had prepared the ground for an even more spectacular exhibition the following year. I felt that this may have been a slightly too optimistic view.

¹⁹ Phillips, Karin. "ICFF NYC." Message to the author. 10 June 2010. E-mail.



Fig. 4.38
Indigo-dyed cotton products by Aboubacar Fofana. SOS stand at the ICFF New York in May 2009. © SOS 2009. Original in colour.



Fig. 4.39
Florence Edmond inspects the Esprit de Burkina textiles. SOS stand at the ICFF New York in May 2009. © SOS 2009. Original in colour.

Ambiente Frankfurt

In 2010 SOS again exhibited their textiles at an enormous design fair; *Ambiente*, which takes place in Frankfurt every March. Although I did not attend Karin Phillips sent me an update, with images, of how the stand had looked during the show. The products were the same textiles (fig. 4.40) that had been displayed at the ICFF in 2009, but the stand itself was bigger (fig. 4.41) and more complicated in its construction. Phillips described it in her email:

we had a wonderful stand at Ambiente - gigantic and beautiful - with wonderful collections - THE FIRST REAL ONES AND PRICES - and lots of interest and now have to do all the follow-up.²⁰

At the time of writing no follow-up has been done from this show, and the products, all prototypes, have still not been manufactured in any quantity.

Creating the toy collection

During 2008 I designed appliquéd animal cushions for children. Using source books on African design, I searched for imagery that I could translate into

²⁰ "Still Alive...and Brighton." Message to the author. 19 Mar. 2010. E-mail.



Fig. 4.40
SOS stand at Ambiente, Frankfurt. © SOS 2009. Original in colour.



Fig. 4.41
Detail of SOS stand at Ambiente, Frankfurt. © SOS 2009. Original in colour.

textile products.²¹ In Gregory Mirow's *Traditional African Designs*,²² a book devoted to line drawings of West African art and craft motifs, I found a page devoted to the appliqué cloth imagery of the Dahomey Kingdom (fig. 4.42,) the most powerful state in West Africa during the 18th and 19th centuries, whose descendents today live in northern Benin and southern Burkina Faso.²³ The lion and the cow seemed the most appealing animals for western children, and I quickly made samples of these (fig. 4.43) although I also made a sample of the fish (fig. 4.44) which I later discarded. Using felt was a time-effective way of prototyping the products, as I did not have the skills to use cotton cloth. It meant that I could cut and sew without hemming, and the samples could be made very quickly. I took the lion and the cow to Burkina during my November 2008 visit, explaining to Phillips that I had merely copied the original design in a different material, but that appliqué was a traditional technique of the region and could thus be described as 'authentic.' They were approved by Phillips and Ouédraogo as being entirely suitable for AA-AA, in the original form found in Benin and using natural dyes, and would be marketed as a separate children's collection that would stand apart as evidently contemporary products.

A new jacquard weave

One of the most encouraging developments of the entire SOS programme of events was the creation of an entirely new weaving design that referenced the

²¹ For example, see John Gillow's *Printed and Dyed Textiles from Africa*, Diane Horn's *African Printed Textiles*; Rebecca Jewell's *African Designs*; Kerstin Bauer's *African Styles*. These source books reference various museum African textile and artefact collections.

²² Mirow, Gregory. *Traditional African Designs*. New York: Dover Publications Inc. 1997.

²³ Law, Robin. "Dahomey and the Slave Trade: Reflections on the Historiography of the Rise of the Dahomey." *Journal of African History* 27.2 (1986): 237.



Dahomey appliqué cloth, Benin.

Fig. 4.42
Line drawings of Dahomey appliqué designs. Mirow, Gregory. *Traditional African Designs*.
New York: Dover Publications Inc. 1997. 5.



Fig. 4.43
Samples of animal cushions in felt. Personal photograph by the author. 25 Oct. 2008.



Fig. 4.44
Sample of fish cushion in felt. Personal photograph by the author. 16 May 2012.

Mossi motifs found in the more traditional kinds of weaving. As mentioned earlier, the animal totems are a hallmark of Mossi weaving and were re-worked by the young master weaver, Teby, at his atelier in Ouagadougou. In Napalgué, meanwhile, during 2009-10, other weavers had begun to experiment with the graphic elements of the animal motifs, such as cowrie shells and grids (fig. 4.45) One in particular, Massan Dembele, was very skilled in this technique. Phillips had intended that this weaving, would embellish the plainer cloth as she had shown at *Ambiente* in March 2010, but I could see that the weaving lent itself to a randomly haphazard arrangement that, for me, channelled an aesthetic not dissimilar to the work of Italian design company Missoni.²⁴ I was, for the first time, excited at the prospect of a unique material that could be made into a truly contemporary, yet utterly African-designed product. This is discussed further in Chapter Five.

The final assessment

In March 2011 I spent several hours with Karin Phillips at her home in Richmond, as she updated me on the developments within SOS. The situation, she said, was quite disastrous. Florence Edmond, the Creative Director of SOS who had overseen the fashion show in 2008, had disappeared from the scene entirely, taking all the fashion accessories with her to Martinique. Edmond had shown some of her work at the SOS ICFF show in New York in May 2009, under the auspices of AA-AA, but all her expenses had been paid by Phillips to the tune of €10,500. Over the last three years

²⁴ Italian manufacturing company specialising in graphic patterned knitwear and home accessories.



Fig. 4.45
Samples of new jacquard strip weaving. Personal photograph by the author. 16 May 2012.
Original in colour.

Edmond, said Phillips, had been paid half of the original \$100,000 investment but there were still no products.

At the *Maison et Objet* trade fair in Paris in August 2009 Phillips had met Marie Weissberg, a French woman who had been trained in textile production at the University of Toulouse, and who currently lived in Bamako, Mali's capital. Phillips offered her a job with SOS and the terms were generous by local standards: €1000 per month basic salary, €200 per month rent paid on a house in Ouagadougou, and 2 flights home to France every year. Weissberg quickly established herself as an interior designer in Ouagadougou, winning contracts to decorate both the French Embassy in the capital, and Burkina's Ministry of Commerce in Bobo Diassoulou, the country's second city. Although these contracts were technically negotiated through AA-AA, and SOS paid for all the initial materials in advance, Weissberg's payment terms were ill-defined and unsatisfactory, according to Phillips. Money was simply not coming in.

In December 2010 SOS had applied for, and won, Comic Relief funding of €15,000. €12,000 was immediately assigned to setting up a production studio in Ouagadougou, and €3000 went to SOS staff salaries and the rental for the SOS museum pavilion. Phillips had decided that she wanted to regain control of all production, rather than rely on Weissberg. Philips also wanted to see accounts. Weissberg had not submitted a single account or even a report in over a year, and the money was quickly being drained without any explanation of where it had gone, although one obvious expense was the car that Weissberg had bought for herself. "Marie," said Phillips, "is not communicating

with me enough, and there seems to be no equipment, no machines, no premises at all!”²⁵

SOS had just received a last tranche of funding from the *Centre for the Development of Enterprise* (CDE) in Brussels of €19,500, and this was all that was left. Phillips felt that Weissberg was not pulling “an intentional ruse” but rather that she was disorganised and unable to face difficult situations. However, Phillips was puzzled that several other income streams were also missing. “The money from the museum boutique – where is it? The money from the SIAO²⁶ – where is it?”²⁷ There had been sales but there was no evidence of any income. Phillips stressed that there had been no problems of this kind up until that moment, the staff and operations in Burkina being extremely low cost. She admitted that only one signature was required on the company cheque book, which broke Comic Relief rules, but that she had needed to be flexible due to the distance; Desiré Ouédraogo, the SOS director in Burkina, was often away for weeks at a time with his own dye export company, and Phillips lived in the UK. It was simply not practical, said Phillips, to operate any other way.

The next chapter describes the series of events leading up to my exhibition at the ICFF, and how the products I displayed were even further removed from the original designs.

²⁵ Conversation with author. 2 March 2011.

²⁶ Salon Internationale de l'Artisanat de Ouagadougou. I assume that SOS had exhibited there in 2010.

²⁷ Conversation with author. 2 March 2011.

CHAPTER FIVE: BAMAKO AND BEYOND

the New York exhibition

Introduction

The rejection of my sampling for SOS, and the simple inertia over the production of what been approved, seemed to constitute a kind of ‘full-stop’ as far as the research was concerned. From an optimistic beginning I suddenly found that the issues around which I had formulated my design work were charged with a more negative aspect. How could I resuscitate this project, in the sense of my personal contribution as a designer, while still keeping a coherent grasp of the original research questions? In order to form a practice element that would fit within the research frame, I decided to design an entirely new collection that I would commission independently from SOS as a client.

Further exploration of museum source books and other research into West African design led me in a different direction altogether as I searched for ways to rationalize and expand the collection for my own taste as a designer rather than following the directives of Karin Phillips.

This chapter describes the eventual exhibition of a collection at the International Contemporary Furniture Fair in New York, with the buyer survey that was conducted during the show. The products I showed, evolved through

circumstances into an entirely different proposition as this chapter explains, epitomised the dichotomies around western constructions of taste, authenticity and tradition in an African context. Testing these perceptions by constructing an entirely 'fictitious' collection would hopefully cast a more penetrating light upon the way western buyers and consumers view crafted objects from Africa. This chapter continues with an account of meeting three Senegalese designers exhibiting at the ICFF, and how one in particular, Aissa Dione, challenges the SOS ideology with particular regard to tensions between technology, 'authenticity' and the creation of vectors of African identities. The chapter concludes with a debate around issues of technology, anti-technology and craft.

Introducing a free hand

Whilst frustrated with the intransigence of the SOS brief, and also with the continued rejection of all my samples for their supposed 'inauthenticity,' I nevertheless began researching West African design from ample resources in the UK. I reflected that had I been researching in Africa I would have found it much more difficult to access a wide variety of information on various textile patterns, ritual artefacts and imagery, and of art in general. Compared to a localised viewpoint for the artisans I, by comparison, could enjoy an overview of the region's arts and crafts. People in general learn through the written and/or spoken word, with associated imagery, but in large parts of Africa there is simply no access to books, the internet or local museums and galleries. This is a major stumbling block in the evolution of designed products and craft objects, or rather the evolution of an African designer caste that can reference all the culture that is spread before Euro-American designers in the manner of a large and wondrous sweet shop. Andrew Rens, Achal Prabhala and Dick Kawooya argue that this exposure is essential to Africa's development "...since access to cultural goods in turn produces *producers* of cultural goods."¹ This lack of access is felt across all academic disciplines within Africa, not simply from the point of view of an artisan in search of inspiration. However, it must be noted that when I broached the subject with Phillips she expressed her sadness at the lack of science material available at the University of Ouagadougou, but she also expressed approval of a kind of cultural isolation; describing access to cultural media as being in some way a corrupting

¹Rens, Andrew, Achal Prabhala and Dick Kawooya. *Intellectual Property, Education and Access to Knowledge in Southern Africa*. TRALAC (Trade Law Centre for Southern Africa). IPRS.org. Web. 11 April 2012.

influence on the perceived 'purity' of village experience for the SOS artisans. Western design education, said Phillips, was adversely affecting the work of creative practitioners in African, and within the African diaspora worldwide, leading to a bland mixing of cultural references that had lost their meanings.²

Authentically African, designed in Europe

The collection I wanted to commission from SOS was to be a reflection of the issues that had arisen over the previous three years: authenticity of African art and design, Western patronage of African artisans, Western taste. What was crucial to successfully integrating reflective enquiry into practice was to achieve what Joyce Yee calls a "metarecognition" – an ability to recognise and make sense of my own experience.³ When thinking about the nature of the products I wanted to make, I quickly settled on the animal cushions and toys that I had developed in 2009.

As mentioned in Chapter Four, I had found images of Dahomey appliquéd animals in a museum source book that had appealed to me as being ideal children's products. Margaret Howell writes that their meaning, as a cultural product, was lost over the years. They had journeyed from being symbols of various royal kings – or 'fons' – of the Dahomey people of Benin, with only tightly controlled family guilds allowed to produce them, to tourist craft sold in

² Conversation with author. 14 March 2009.

³ Yee, Joyce. "Connecting Practice to Research (and back to Practice): Making the leap from design practice to design research." Paper presented at the International Conference of Design Principles and Practices, London 2007. 8. JSTOR. Web. 25 Jan. 2012.

every market in the country.⁴ According to Howell, the original technique was taught to the Dahomey royal artisans by Brazilian Portuguese settlers, and that it had been recorded as far back as the 1840s by European travellers.⁵ Thus the 'authenticity' of these animals was a moveable and fluid definition, obscured by cross-cultural relationships that were woven through their history. It was time, I thought, to reinvent them again.

The Bamako Collection takes shape

All my felt lion and cow toy samples, described in Chapter Four, were taken to her home in Martinique in May 2009 by Florence Edmond, then Creative Director of SOS, so that she could price the screen-printed and appliqué versions for production in Burkina. Unfortunately, as mentioned in the Chapter Four, after Edmond returned to Martinique she decided not to return as Creative Director of SOS. Phillips explained the situation with regard to Edmond:

Wonderful Florence after nearly 8 months of waiting for her to recover and hanging in with everything including ongoing costs and no progress - then decided to take a job as an art teacher at the local high school.. So, there I stood - there we stood... I do understand her situation because we simply could not pay her after May for what? I already paid out of my own pocket and both of them

⁴ Howell, Margaret. *African Design: An Illustrated Survey of Traditional Craftwork*. 1966. Mineola, NY: Dover Publications Inc., 2003. 32.

⁵ Howell 33.

are utterly empty by now - mortgages included.⁶

This meant that I had no way to retrieve my samples, although the separation artwork had been produced digitally (fig. 5.1) and could be reproduced without problem. I decided that screen-printing, which SOS director Desiré Ouédraogo had assured me was already well established in Ouagadougou, would be an ideal way to create the effect that I wanted. I re-designed the lion and cow animal cushions and toys (fig. 5.2,) including a new smaller toy that was a westernised version of the cow (fig. 5.3) which I called 'Little Mo.' Free from the need to design appliquéd products, I could turn to other colours and designs. In addition to the animal toys I designed a small range of graphic print cushions that also referenced the innovative jacquard weaving more closely, with elements of the bogolan designs I had seen in the Village Artisanale in Ouagadougou (fig. 5.4.) I felt that the design process, drifting back and forth across continents, was a satisfying and energising experience that lifted the products beyond mere imitation of a certain motif into creative cross-cultural sampling on both sides. The artwork was sent to Ouédraogo in January 2011.

Preparing for the ICFF New York

Once the collection had been designed I decided on a suitable exhibition. Through the British European Design Group (BEDG) whose director is also Karin Phillips, I booked and paid for a booth at the International Contemporary Furniture Fair (ICFF) in New York for May 2011. UKTI had given me a government grant of £1000 towards the cost of the stand fees. This was

⁶ "Still Alive...and Brighton." Message to the author. 19 Mar. 2010. E-mail.

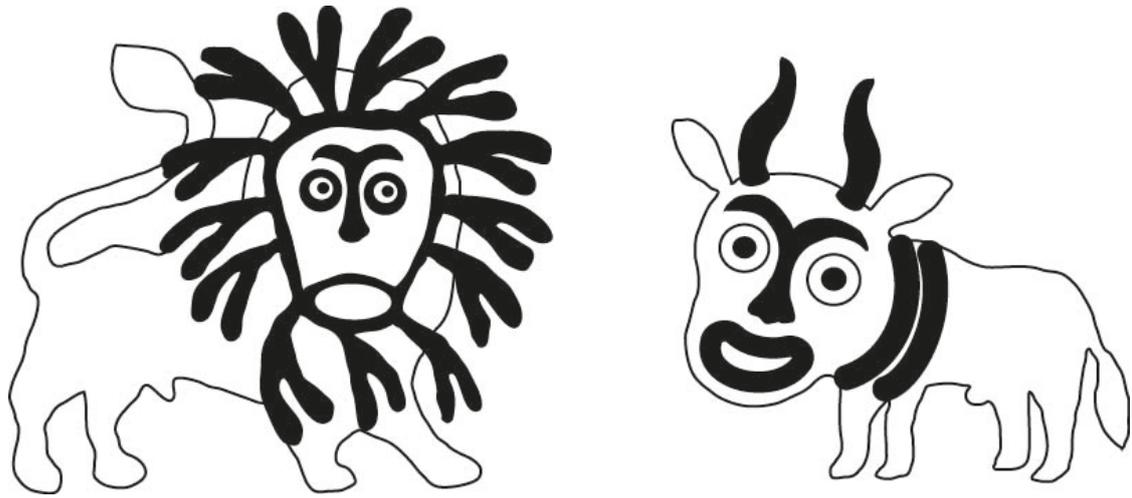


Fig. 5.1
Vector animal artworks by the author. 2008.



Fig. 5.2
Vector animal artworks by the author. 2008. Original in colour.

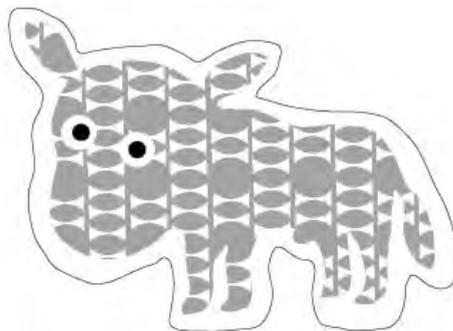


Fig. 5.3
Vector animal artwork Little Mo by the author. 2008. Original in colour.

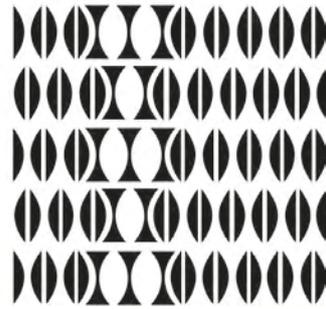


Fig. 5.4
Revised vector print animal and cushion artwork by the author. 2010. Original in colour.

administered through the BEDG, although they deducted an additional administration fee of £150. I was also generously supported by the University of Brighton with £1000 to help cover my costs. The remaining £1500 to cover flights, accommodation and sample costs was paid by myself.

In addition to the screen printed products I planned to show a large 2mx2m couverture (fig. 5.5) made entirely from the new jacquard strip weaving, sewn and finished in Napalgué, that would reflect the 'deeper luxury' concept described in Chapter Four, and to explore buyers' perceptions around this. The inclusion of the jacquard couverture was to provide a context for the other products. I also wanted to gauge the reactions of buyers to the two types of product; both made in Africa, but both reflecting more subtle aspects of modernity and tradition. The plan of the stand (fig. 5.6) tried, in rather a small space, to present the contrasting elements as a coherent entity.

In late February 2011 Phillips told me that the screen printed samples could not be made as the production facility had not materialised, citing the series of financial disasters described in Chapter Four. However, there was still the jacquard weaving that could be made into products, and Phillips assured me that there was sufficient stock already in Burkina to fulfil a small order.

So I emailed my final order on 23 March 2011, this time to Marie Weissberg, the SOS Production Manager, with new design visuals of the new jacquard couverture and floor cushions that I thought would sell in New York. I also requested lead times for repeat orders and bulk order discounts and shipping.

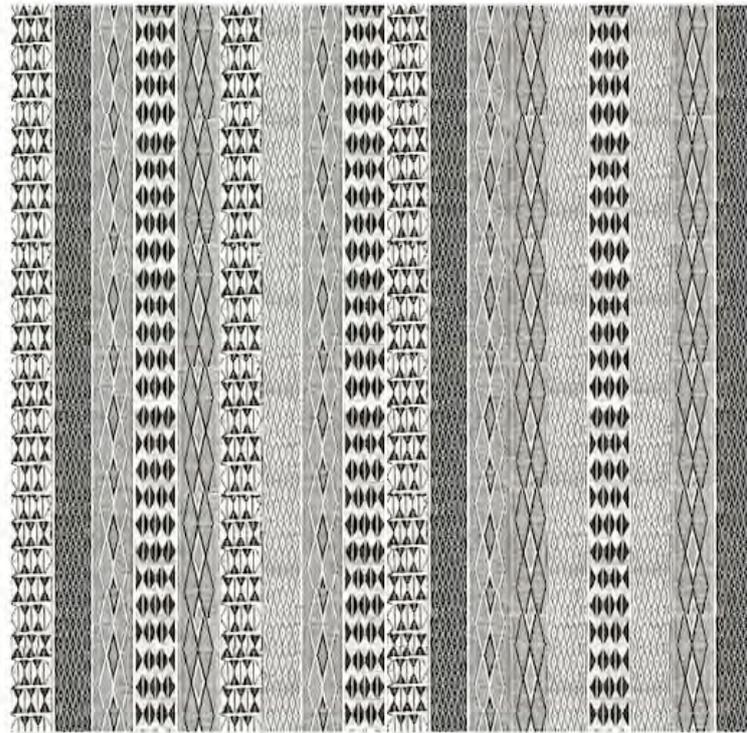


Fig. 5.5
illustrator artwork of proposed couverture by the author. 2011.



Fig. 5.6
Artwork of proposed stand at the ICFF New York 2011. Personal photograph by the author. 29 May 2012. Original in colour.

The reply on 24 March 2011 was both encouraging and disconcerting. While I had firm wholesale prices for the first time, it appeared that there was not enough jacquard in stock. The pricing would place the couverture at a retail price of around €900.00, something I considered a good price point for a luxury item. The cushion covers would cost €98.00 each. Weissberg told me that the first sample of the finished jacquard couverture would cost €350.00, making my lowest possible wholesale price for buyers around €450.00, a profit of €100.00 per item. This had to swallow shipping costs both from Burkina and onwards from the UK that were as yet unknown, although I factored in a worst-case-scenario figure of €50.00 per item. Even so, my profit margin would be smaller than I had envisaged. There were other problems too, Weissberg said:

Our own order for that fabric was been (sic) gave the 7 January and is not all ready yet. Because there were some social problems in the weaver's area, actually nobody can tell us how many (sic) time it will take to finish our order.⁷

Testing these products on the open market was the object of the research exercise and so I duly asked for a *pro forma* invoice so that I could pay. Karin Phillips then intervened and asked Weissberg to go ahead with the order immediately so that the couverture could be shown at the ICFF in May 2011, deferring payment until they were ready to ship.

⁷ Weissberg, Marie. "Commande pour AA." Message to the author. 24 march 2011. E-mail.

However, Weissberg's next message⁸ on 14 April 2011 revealed that once again insurmountable problems would delay the production of the samples. The dyes had run, the weaving was of poor standard. If I wanted a "short" lead time of less than 6 months, and if I wanted several items, I would have to finance the stock in advance. Essentially, Weissberg was telling me that none of the products could be made and delivered with any certainty, even for another exhibition in September 2011. If I had not been involved in a PhD research project I would probably, as a professional specifier, have completely abandoned the product at this point.

In the end, absolutely nothing was forthcoming. With just four weeks until I flew out to New York I had not one product to place before buyers. I needed to quickly to re-think the nature of the collection while still incorporating the theoretical framework that had informed much of the research, most particularly around the issues of authenticity and taste, in an entirely new collection that would now have to be made urgently in the UK.

Fabricating authenticity

I turned once again to the designs I had made of the stuffed animal toys, and in particular the artwork separations I had prepared for sending to Burkina. These products were to have been screen-printed on organic cotton. I quickly produced camera-ready artworks for digital printing that would emulate the appearance of screen printing and sent them to R.A. Smart in Macclesfield, a highly respected and long-established fashion fabric printers. Using some

⁸ The full text of the email conversation over a few months is listed in Appendix III.

rustic, heavy-duty oatmeal furnishing linen that I sourced online, R.A. Smart prepared my ten metres of printed fabric in a remarkable ten days. I left for Macclesfield in the early morning of 4 May 2011, picked up my printed fabric and then drove on to Rochdale to a professional textile CMT (cut, make and trim) company, J.H. Cuncliffe & Co. With little time to spare I had to cut out each sample myself on the factory floor before handing the fabric to the machinists, who then produced professionally piped and finished cushion covers, both square (fig. 5.57) and round (fig. 5.58) versions. The stuffed animals (fig. 5.9) were made by a local seamstress in Brighton during the weekend of 7 and 8 May 2011.

On 10 May 2011 I flew to New York with all the samples, stand fittings and cushion fillers in a series of huge packages as excess baggage, not having had any time to ship the exhibition contents. Although hectic and inconvenient, this proved to be a cheaper option than standard air freight as the customs officials in New York were remarkably sanguine as I walked through. I had experienced problems with the authorities before, when I had tried to take delivery of a shipment of silk cushions for an exhibition in 2003, and the customs officials had been suspicious that the package was not for commercial exhibition, and could possibly be cotton, a highly restricted import. However, in 2011 there was no such issue. In total I had been charged a mere £65.00 to bring the materials into the US.

Thus I arrived in New York with a collection, but not a part of it actually made in Burkina. The *Bamako Collection* had been designed to give an impression



Fig. 5.7
Final digitally printed square cushion samples. Personal photograph by the author. 27 May 2011. Original in colour.



Fig. 5.8
Final digitally printed round cushion samples. Personal photograph by the author. 27 May 2011. Original in colour.



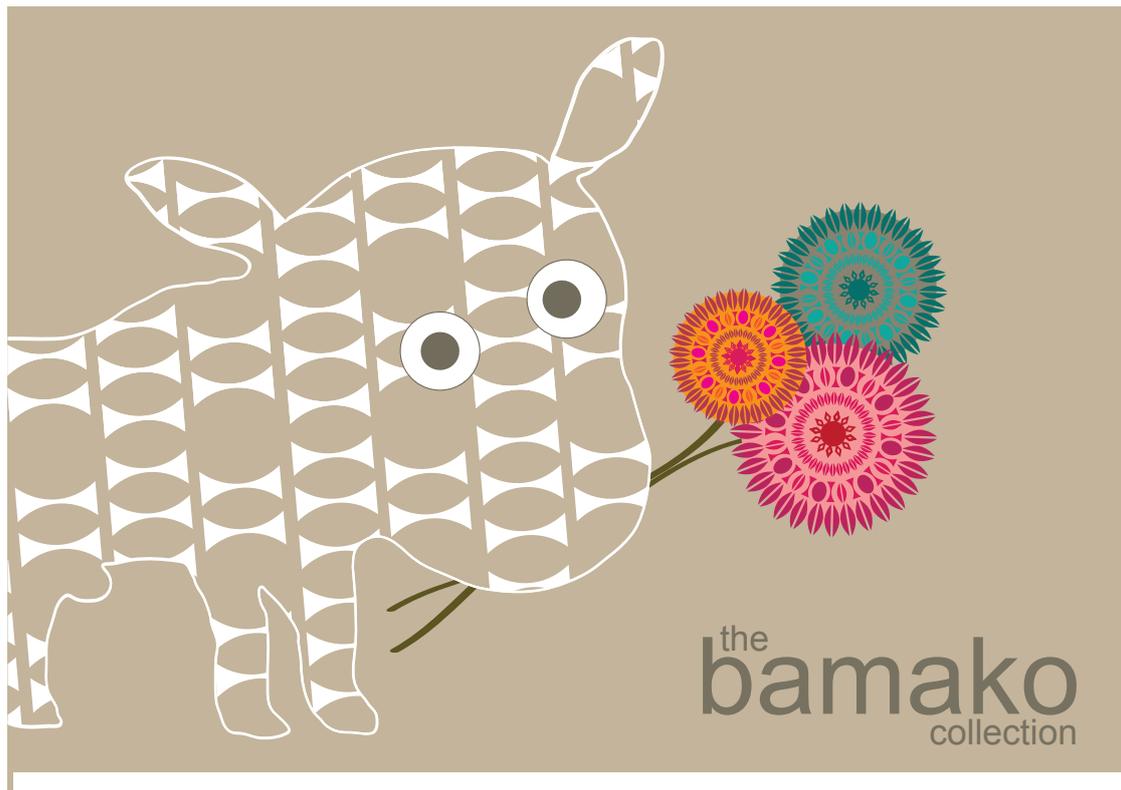
Fig. 5.9
Final digitally printed animal cushion samples. Personal photograph by the author. 27 May 2011. Original in colour.

of authenticity though its deliberate association with West Africa and travel, as the show card stressed (fig. 5.10) Even the name referenced Mali rather than Burkina Faso, as I was not sure that many American buyers would be as familiar with a Burkinabé name. 'Bamako' as a word has a pleasingly exotic appeal to Western ears, something that I hoped would convey the sense of a quirky children's product. The infantilisation of 'Little Mo' (fig. 5.11) was completed by extracting all the graphic elements except the open, round eyes, which I then crossed very slightly for comic effect.

The colours I chose for the show card were muted and pastel, with the occasional burst of strong colour. The wording of the signage (fig. 5.12) emphasised the 'African-ness' of the products but placed them securely within a Western context, one that I hoped would prove accessible and reassuring to buyers.

The design of the booth was spare and white, a gallery-style space in which to exhibit the colourful toys to their best advantage (fig. 5.13) There was to be no dominant, Africa-associated colours of orange, black and brown, and only the graphic print square cushions (fig. 5.14) were boldly earth-coloured – white, black and oatmeal. I wanted to convey at least a sense that the simplicity of the 'screen-printing' was plausible as an African product. The final effect (fig. 5.15) seemed to fit in with the general atmosphere at the ICFF.

In my original plans some months earlier I had intended the screen-printed toy products to sit next to the more traditional jacquard-woven throws and floor



Delightful stuffed animals for children aged 4 to 94, based on traditional West African imagery that is at least 150 years old - yet Claude the lion and Maurice the cow appear so refreshingly modern and full of life.

Cushion designs that reflect the West Africans' love of cowrie shell motifs and graphic symmetry which are used to dye and decorate the cotton textiles of the region - reinvented and presented to a new audience.

The collection is inspired by designer Katherine Ladd's travels to West Africa over the last three years - a vision of Africa that is colourful, contemporary and joyful.

100% flax linen and entirely made in the UK.



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the
bamako
 collection

Fig. 5.10
 Digital artwork by author for ICFF New York *Bamako Collection* May 2011. Original in colour.



Fig. 5.11
Little Mo stuffed animal toys. ICFF New York *Bamako Collection*. Personal photograph by the author. 27 May 2011. Original in colour.



Fig. 5.12
Vinyl lettering and Little Mo graphic. ICFF New York Personal photograph by the author. 14 May 2011. Original in colour.



Fig. 5.13
Display of animal toys and cushions. ICF New York Personal photograph by the author. 14 May 2011. Original in colour.



Fig. 5.14
Display of cushions. ICF New York Personal photograph by the author. 14 May 2011. Original in colour.



Fig. 5.15
Bamako Collection stand. ICFF New York Personal photograph by the author. 15 May 2011.
 Original in colour.

cushions, but as these were now non-existent I had quickly run up a cushion cover which was made from a sample book that Karin Phillips had given me a few months previously. There was just enough weaving to make a small cushion (fig. 5.16) and I showed this next to a roll of narrow strip weaving (fig. 5.17) to illustrate its provenance and influences when I asked buyers about their preferences. The price list (fig. 5.18) was as accurate a wholesale guide as I could manage, but was equally fictitious.

The questionnaire

The ICFF was a golden opportunity to test my collection in an objective environment, and gain an idea of the attitudes of the buyers and designers at first hand. David Byrne suggests that the gathering of accurate, measurable data is fundamental to the research process:

Without measurement we can describe neither current condition nor the history of current condition – we cannot say what the social world is like and we cannot construct a narrative of how it got to be like it is.⁹

I devised a short questionnaire (fig. 5.19) and chatted through the questions at the show to elicit complimentary, qualitative replies. Forty eight respondents chosen at random proved to be equally divided between design professionals such as interior designers and specifiers (22) and retail buyers (23.) There

⁹ Byrne, David. *Interpreting Quantitative Data*. London: Sage Publications Ltd, 2002. 13.



Fig. 5.16
Jacquard strip weave cushion. Personal photograph by the author. 25 May 2012. Original in colour.



Fig. 5.17
Jacquard strip weave cushion on display at the ICF New York. Personal photograph by the author. 15 May 2012. Original in colour.

the
bamako
collection

US \$ PRICE LIST MAY 2011*

	CODE	PRODUCT	SIZE	COLOURWAYS	1	5-10	11+
	0120	CHAKA- round cushion	Dia24"	Orange/mauve	115.00	52.00	44.00
	0121			Black/white/oatmeal	115.00	52.00	44.00
	0123			Pink/red/oatmeal	115.00	52.00	44.00
	0124			Black/green/khaki	115.00	52.00	46.00
	0130	CHAKA - round cushion	Dia18"	Orange/mauve	95.00	42.00	37.00
	0131			Black/white/oatmeal	95.00	42.00	37.00
	0132			Pink/red/oatmeal	95.00	42.00	37.00
	0134			Black/green/khaki	95.00	42.00	37.00
	0140	COWRIE - sq. cushion	24"x24"	Black/oatmeal 2 side	125.00	57.00	52.00
	0141			White/oatmeal	115.00	53.00	52.00
	0142			Black/white	115.00	53.00	52.00
	0143			Black/oatmeal - rev	115.00	53.00	52.00
	0144	COWRIE - rectangle	12"x20"	Black/oatmeal 2 side	65.00	30.00	27.00
	0145			White/oatmeal	55.00	25.00	22.50
	0146			Black/white	55.00	25.00	22.50
	0147			Black/oatmeal - rev	55.00	25.00	22.50
	0150	MALI - sq. cushion	24"x24"	Black/oatmeal 2 side	125.00	57.00	52.00
	0151	- floor cushion	32"x32"	Black/oatmeal	140.00	64.00	58.00
	0152	MALI - rectangle	12"x20"	Black/oatmeal 2 side	65.00	30.00	27.00
				Black/oatmeal	55.00	25.00	22.50
	0160	LITTLE MO- stuffed cow	11"x8"	Cerise/white	22.50	10.50	9.50
	0161			Aquamarine/white	22.50	10.50	9.50
	0162			Lime/white	22.50	10.50	9.50
	0163			Violet/white	22.50	10.50	9.50
	0164			Cerise/oatmeal	22.50	10.50	9.50
	0165			Aquamarine/oatmeal	22.50	10.50	9.50
	0166			Lime/oatmeal	22.50	10.50	9.50
	0167			Violet/oatmeal	22.50	10.50	9.50
	0170	CLAUDE - stuffed lion	24"x24"	Orange/oatmeal	225.00	102.00	92.00
	0180	MAURICE - stuffed cow	25"x22"	Green/oatmeal	225.00	102.00	92.00

*Minimum of 5 units or 10+ mixed order to qualify for wholesale prices.5% discount on orders over \$1000.00.
Claude and Maurice available as 1 unit orders only.

Prices are ex-works. Shipping to US via UPS charged at cost only itemized with pro forma invoice.

Made from finely woven 100% flax linen fabric. Cushions supplied with luxury curled duck feather pad. Toy animals supplied with safety approved polyester stuffing (machine washable at 40°)

Fig. 5.18
Wholesale price list devised for the ICF New York, May 2011.

Position in organisation.....

1. Do you perceive hand-made African craft as a high-end, luxury product?

YES NO (please circle)

2. Do you think labels such as “fair trade” or “ethical produced” help to sell products in significant quantities?

YES NO (please circle)

3. How much do you estimate customers would pay for the handwoven pillow?

\$50 \$75 \$100 \$150 (please circle)

4. Do you have confidence in the reliable supply and quality of African craft products?

YES NO (please circle)

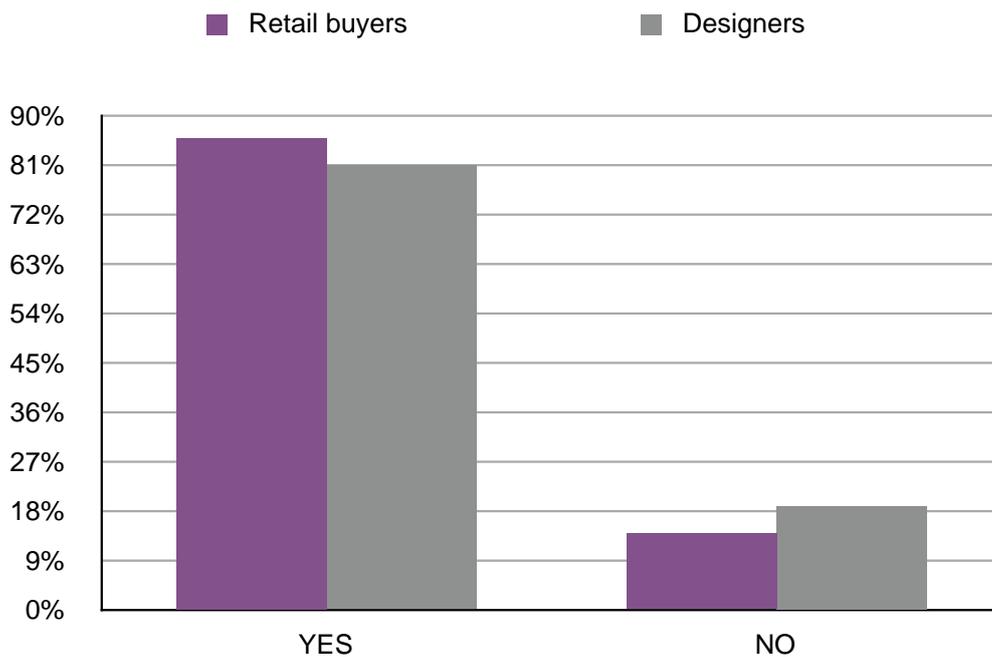
5. What is your favourite product on the stand?.....

THANK YOU FOR TAKING THE TIME TO COMPLETE THIS QUESTIONNAIRE!

Fig. 5.19
Buyer questionnaire devised for ICFF New York, May 2011.

were only three non-design/retail respondents and these have been discounted from the survey. This was an attempt to break down and analyse a small section of the ICFF visitor profile. In the end, the sample reflected fairly accurately the overall visitor profile of the 2011 show of 58% design professional (although this included designers who were also retailers) and 42% retail buyer/merchandiser.¹⁰

Question 1 was about the perception of African craft as a ‘high-end’ product and the overwhelming majority of both design professionals and retail buyers responded affirmatively.



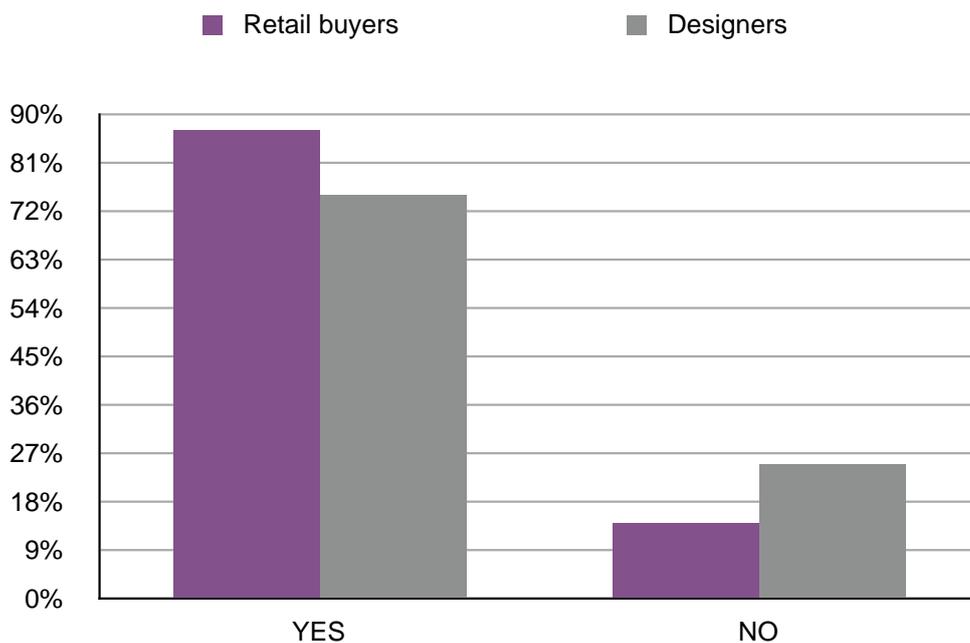
Q. 1. Do you perceive hand-made African craft as a high-end, luxury product?

There were a few qualifying statements with this response. Some retailers felt that such a product had to have a ‘targeted market’ such as wealthy, female

¹⁰ Exhibitor prospectus for the 2012 ICFF. ICFF.com. Web. 12 April 2012.

customers. Others were more specific. “Clients,” said one, “like to have the authenticity of the hand-made when it has cultural links.” Another retailer commented that a premium could be charged as long as the product was extremely well presented and there was additional information about the actual making and the maker. Most felt that pricing in the US market should be relatively high, to reinforce the notion of luxury, and that the product should be ‘quite special.’ All stressed the importance of good quality.

Question 2 asked whether the labels of words like ‘fair trade’ and ‘ethical’ helped to sell products in significant quantities. Again, the majority of respondents were positive that this was the case.

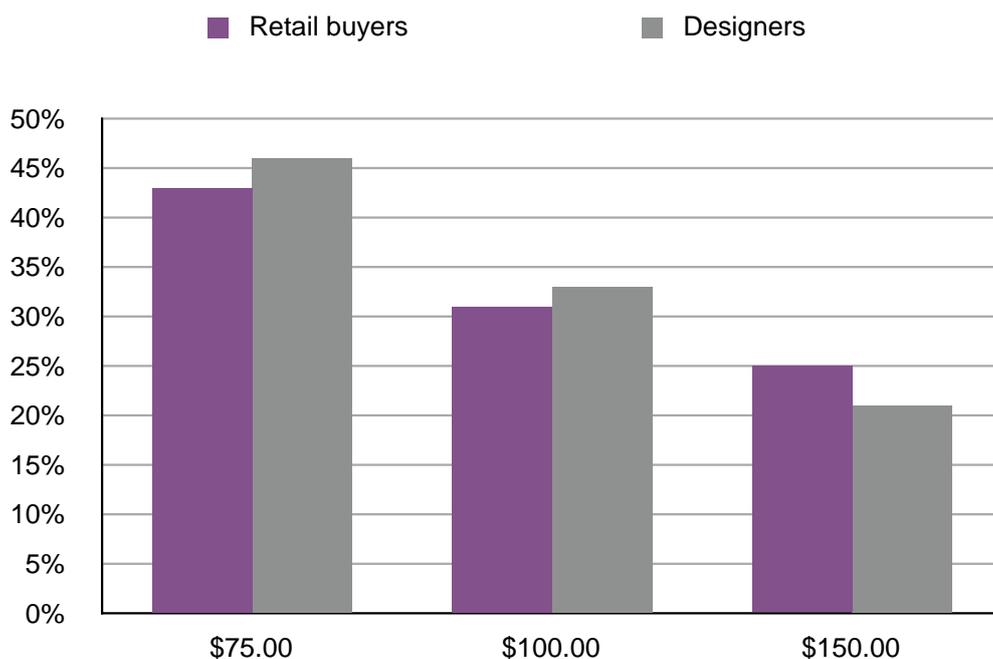


Q. 2. Do you think labels such as “fair trade” or “ethical” help to sell products in significant quantities?

Comments to this question included many from buyers about the importance of accurate pricing, and how customers were quite discerning when it came to ‘value for money.’ Designers noted that people were ‘more aware’ of issues around making craft products and social enterprise, and one stated that ethical

provenance gave the product ‘a badge of authenticity’ as an added bonus. Retail buyers were more emphatic that ethical sourcing was only valuable if the product was of good quality and price, with one commenting: “But, at the end of the day, if someone likes a product they don’t give a hoot if it’s made by an African or in the UK.” One designer felt that people *expected* ethical credentials from African craft products. Of the respondents who did not agree that ethical labels helped to sell products, most stressed that customers looked for quality and value for money above anything else.

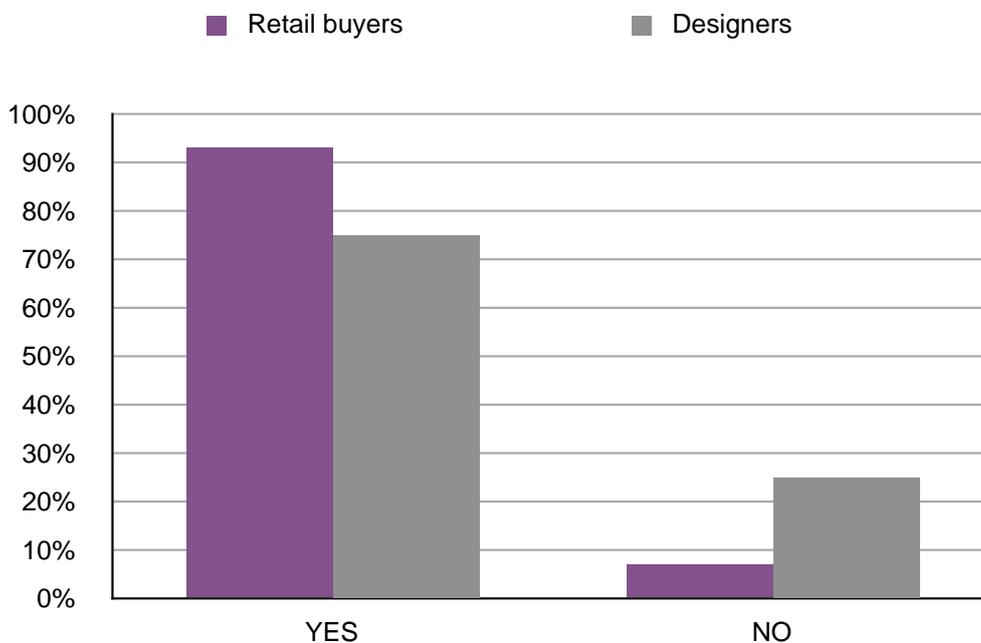
Question 3 asked each respondent to judge the value of the hand-woven, 60x30cm jacquard cushion on display. Before they did so, I briefly told each one how it had been made, where it had been made and by whom. The price range reflected the retail price that could reasonably be expected from the wholesale prices quoted by SOS. The jacquard was shown next to the original, traditional strip weave to explain how the design had evolved.



Q. 3. Respondents were invited to assess the retail value of the handwoven cushion.

On the whole, respondents tended to opt for the mid range, between \$75 and £100, with no respondent opting for the \$50 price. Retail buyers were concerned that the relatively high price should guarantee top quality products. One interior designer declared that the prices were all too low, noting that in ABC Carpet & Home¹¹ such a 'pillow' would cost over \$200. The majority of retail buyers opted for the \$75 mark, however, with the exception of those who had some knowledge of hand-woven techniques. This was quite a small item to command a retail price that translates to roughly £65.00, but by no means exceptional for such a product. One designer commented that she would pay a premium for the product because it was 'not touristy' but more 'western-designed' and less challenging than 'typical African stuff.'

Question 4 asked respondents whether they had confidence in ordering African craft.



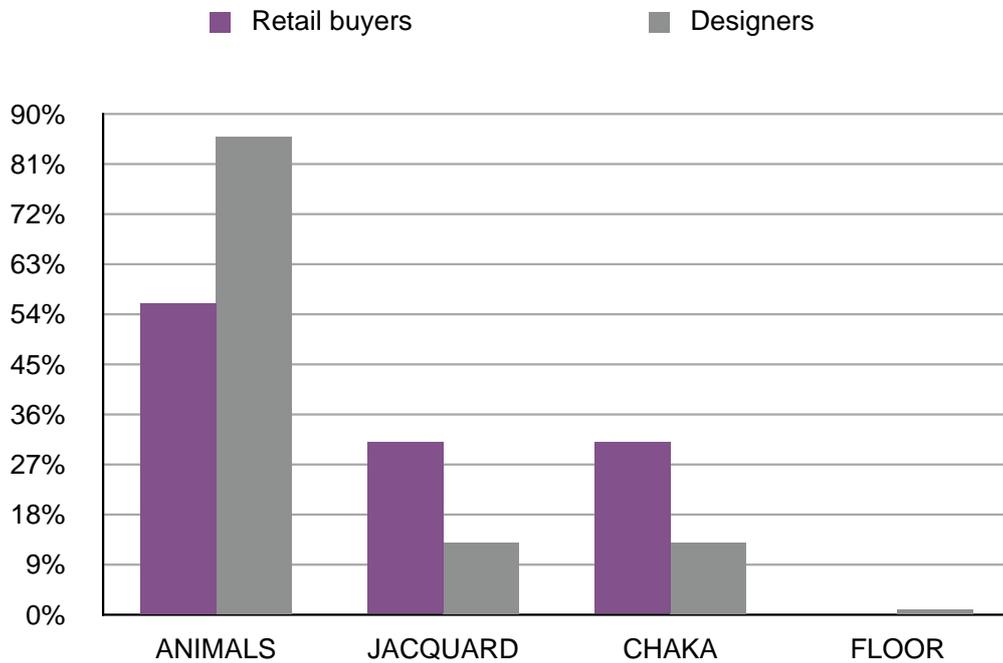
Q. 4. Do you have confidence in the reliable supply and quality of African craft products?

¹¹ A famous New York landmark, ABC Carpet & Home is a luxury boutique on Broadway selling unique pieces from around the world.

The vast majority of buyers (93%) apparently had no qualms about committing to such an action, compared to 75% of designers. There was a discernable difference in that designers were less optimistic about the reliability of ordering from African craft sources. However, *both* groups made strong qualifying statements when answering the question, leading me to suspect that the positive answers might have been motivated by a self-conscious political correctness. Nearly all stated that they would only have confidence if they were assured of the reliability and credibility of what they variously described as 'middle men,' 'wholesalers,' 'suppliers,' 'exporters' and 'intermediaries.' They spoke of the importance of establishing relationships over a period of time, with strict controls for quality assurance, with one designer commenting that he would have to 'really know' the source and build up confidence accordingly. One retailer spoke of how he expected 'charming flaws' and 'nuances' in African craft products, but that it would be 'tricky' to get consistently good quality over a longer period. The nature of these qualifying statements was a strong theme, and all were unsolicited.

Question 5 simply asked respondents to name their favourite products on the stand. Both designers and buyers felt that the animal products were the most successful on display, with several respondents commenting that they were 'cute' and not 'too African,' that they would 'fit in' with a contemporary interior. Several buyers told me that I was in the wrong show, and that the products would have sold much better at the international Gift Fair, which had been held in the Javits Centre in January. The animals and the Chaka floor cushions were the only products for which buyers actually wanted to place orders,

although the jacquard cushion would have had a few orders, from specialist textile retailers and upmarket boutiques, if it had been available at all.



Q. 5. What is your favourite product on the stand?

The animals also attracted a modest amount of media publicity, featuring in numerous design blogs, such as the influential *Design Milk*,¹² after the show with requests for follow-up press packs from *Elle Decoration*, *Dwell*, *InStyle*, and *House Beautiful*. Many of the journalists were enthusiastic about the products being representative of a new sentiment towards Africa, that Africa was so ‘now.’ Some found the products ‘refreshing’ and ‘so modern.’ One was more specific. “You kind of get bored with seeing the same old brown wood and, you know, the tribal textiles. I want to show my readers that stuff from Africa can be really modern and well-designed.” I was interested to note that

¹² Design Milk attracts some of the biggest names in design as advertisers on its influential blog site, design-milk.com. Covering art, architecture, fashion, interior design and technology.

this particular journalist had not associated my products with the UK in any way. But I was not the only exhibitor with a connection to Africa.

Africa Now

One visitor to the *Bamako* stand was Elaine Bellaza, the Advisor for Home Decor and Fashion Accessories at the USAID West Africa Trade Hub. Africa Now was the brand name for their presence at international trade fairs. As mentioned in Chapter Four, Africa Now had been taking products from the *Village Artisanale* in Ouagadougou to the huge gift and interior decor trade fairs since 2009. An irrepressibly energetic and enthusiastic champion of African design, Bellaza was hosting a stand at the ICFF that showcased the work of three well-known West African designers: Aissa Dione, Chieck Diallo and Aida Duplessis. All three designers' work exhibited a high degree of technical skill and material innovation. The stand (fig. 5.20) was large and professionally presented, and in fact it was only the word 'Africa' that identified the designers' work as being specifically from the continent.

I explained to Bellaza the production problems leading up to the exhibition, and she expressed some amazement. She told me I could make everything without problem in Senegal, with weavers, dyers, screen printers, tailors and embroiderers already established in thriving ateliers all around Dakar. Bellaza also was slightly surprised that SOS had not capitalised fully on such services in Burkina Faso. She was of the opinion that, like Aissa Dione, whom I had met in Ouagadougou in 2007, Burkina was a good place to have high quality products made from a range of professional artisans. All the designers on the



Fig. 5.20
Africa Now stand at the ICFF New York. Personal photograph by the author. 15 May 2011.
Original in colour.



Fig. 5.21
Yeleen Design. Africa Now stand at the ICFF New York. Personal photograph by the author.
15 May 2011. Original in colour.

Africa Now stand, said Bellaza, produced exclusively in West Africa and sold all over the world, at the highest end of the luxury market.¹³

A native of Bamako in Mali, Aida Duplessis studied interior design in Paris. Her company, Yeleen (fig 5.21,) creates textural, innovative textiles and exhibits at the *Ethnic Chic* halls at *Maison et Objet* in Paris every year.¹⁴ Born in Mali, Chieck Diallo studied architecture at the Normandy School of Architecture in France. He continued his training at the Ecole Nationale Supérieure de Création Industrielle (ENSCI) in Paris and then, as a post-graduate, studied furniture design.¹⁵ His collaboration with Moroso on the *m'Afrique* collection (fig. 5.22) was briefly described in Chapter Two. Neither of these two designers was available to talk to me at the times I visited the African Now stand, but I did have the opportunity to renew my acquaintance with Aissa Dione.

Reinventing traditions in Senegal

Senegalese Dione (fig. 5.23) is a well-known textile designer, whose beautiful fabrics (fig. 5.24) are sold throughout the world. She told me that this was her fourth ICFF, and that she usually exhibited at *Maison et Object* in Paris. She had set up a large 3000m² factory on the outskirts of Dakar in 2009, where thirty 140cm wide broadlooms were installed.¹⁶ Employing over 100 weavers,

¹³ Conversation with author. 15 May 2011.

¹⁴ Accueil. *Yeleen Design*. Web. 14 June 2011.

¹⁵ Accueil. *Diallo Design*. Web. 14 June 2011.

¹⁶ Conversation with author. 15 May 2011.



Fig. 5.22
Chair from Moroso Collection and Cheick Diallo, the designer. *Cheick Diallo*. The Inspired African. Web. 21 May 2012.



Fig. 5.23
Aissa Dione in Senegal. Localzo, Nicola. *Studio portraits (Aissa Dione.)* Nicola Localzo. Web. 14 May 2012



Fig. 5.24
Aissa Dione and her textiles. Africa Now stand at the ICFF New York. Personal photograph by the author. 15 May 2011.

spinners and dyers, Dione also incorporates European-style working conditions: a 40 hour week, health insurance and holiday pay, as mentioned in Chapter Three. One of the reasons why I had met her in Ouagadougou in 2007, and why she was manufacturing her textiles in Burkina Faso, is that almost all cotton grown in Senegal is exported as a raw material. Dione has had to find other networks of supply within West Africa. She had originally used the narrower looms of the local weavers in her factory. However, Dione found that the textile produced was not practical for a Western market and so introduced the more modern, wider looms as a standard in her new factory in 2009. She employs male Manjak weavers in Senegal and has adapted their traditional pit looms to sitting looms. Their textiles are quite distinctive in the region and the weavers are originally from Guinea-Bissau, but largely work in Senegal where patronage is more lucrative.¹⁷ The Manjak, or Manjako, weaving has an interesting history. John Picton and John Mack describe Manjak cloth as the exception to the rule that Europe did not influence the design process in West African textiles. Portuguese traders took West African weavers as slaves and introduced more complex geometric designs in the cloth. These new textiles were subsequently traded around the West African coast and into Europe.¹⁸ When it found its way to Guinea-Bissau it was enthusiastically taken up by the Manjako and Pepel peoples, whose technical innovations were copied by the Mandingo of Mali, Senegal, Guinea and Cote d'Ivoire.¹⁹

¹⁷ *Doing Business. Women in Africa*. 2008. Report by World Bank Group Gender Action Plan. N.p. PDF file.

¹⁸ Picton, John and John Mack. *African Textiles*. London: British Museum Publications, 1979. 130.

¹⁹ Picton and Mack 130.

Dione's business exports the hand-woven fabrics to luxury brand names like Hermès and Christian Lacroix, and is becoming increasingly well-known in Europe and North America. Dione told a World Bank report team that she could quadruple her turnover if employment restrictions were not so stringent in Senegal, and if banks were more flexible. It was difficult to hire and fire weavers, said Dione, and one order from Europe for several hundred thousand euros had to be refused as she could not acquire credit from her bank in Senegal to finance it.²⁰ Even so, in 2011 Dione's turnover was about €900,000.²¹

Technology and artisans

Aissa Dione is using traditional techniques in combination with innovative materials and technologies, combining silk or cotton with raffia and adopting the broadloom instead of the narrow double heddle loom. She designs on a computer, creating drawings that can be easily understood by her weavers.²² In this she is entirely in keeping with a trend that is sweeping the craft world in Europe and North America, where, reports Crafts Council executive director, Rosy Greenlees, at least 50% of [UK] artisans use digital technology in their work.²³ The freedom that comes with using technology to aid the design process cannot be understated. My entire sampling had been manufactured in little over four weeks and to an extremely high standard, something that I take for granted as a European designer. How artisans can fit into this system of making, in a productive and meaningful way, is difficult to pinpoint.

²⁰ *Doing Business. Women in Africa*. N.p.

²¹ *Doing Business. Women in Africa*. N.p.

²² Conversation with author. 15 May 2011.

²³ Greenlees, Rosy. "Our role in an age of change." *Crafts* 235 (2012): 89.

What exactly *is* technology?

But the creative blending of technology, materials and artisanship is nothing new. Perhaps the most important point to note is not that new technologies or materials are introduced into artisan communities for their own sake, but that what actually constitutes ‘technology’ for the artisans is a variable definition. As a word, ‘technology’ is usually associated with machines and high-tech equipment, or hardware, but in its purest sense it simply means something that assists in the production of something.²⁴ The prospect of removing, even in a small way, the drudgery of some artisanal chores must surely be welcomed.

The SOS insistence on absolutely *nothing* in the production of *Tissus Villages* products being machined is in direct contrast to many artisan communities from developing countries who have, through contact with Europe, adopted new materials and techniques in their work.

Writing about potters in Thimi in Nepal, Ani Kasten observes that the artisans were initially reluctant to adopt new electric wheels and kilns that were the result of an intentional NGO attempt to introduce new technology into the workshops in 1987.²⁵ This was replaced by enthusiasm as they began experimenting with glazes that had been impossible before with the traditional, lower temperature kiln. The commensurate effects of the stronger, higher quality pottery were quickly noticeable:

²⁴ *Designers Meet Artisans: a practical guide*. New Delhi: Craft Revival Trust and UNESCO, 2005. 141. PDF file. 7 Jan. 2010.

²⁵ Kasten, Ani. “The Potters of Thimi.” *Ceramics Monthly* 60.5 (2012): 32-37. EBSCOhost. Web. 23 May 2012.

The quality of goods, as well as prices, increased. Many Nepali households were not willing to pay such high prices for ceramic goods because, in their minds, clay was a low-quality material, and wares produced in Thimi were thought of as disposable, utilitarian objects.²⁶

Thanks to the new technology the potters expanded their range of products over a period of 25 years and began to enter export markets, while this new creative expression attracted younger artisans to the profession.²⁷ Kasten notes, however, that the potters still referenced traditional styling and motifs in their practice, thus preserving an aesthetic that was unique to their community, and to Nepal.²⁸

Sarah Rhodes describes the introduction of jewellery cleaning technology when she worked for Made, the company that makes contemporary jewellery in Kenya for Western clients:

The Made producers had been cleaning the oxidised jewellery individually by hand with a pan scourer and lemon juice. Not only is this unpleasant for the producers, but it is unnecessarily time consuming and labour intensive. I was able to source a large, electric slow cooker and swimming pool acid to set up an electric

²⁶ Kasten N.p.

²⁷ Kasten N.p.

²⁸ Kasten N.p.

pickle pot. The jewellery is placed in the pot and left to soak and only needs to be rinsed afterwards.²⁹

Such a pragmatic and useful alteration to the producers' daily routine, affecting an action that is not crucial to the design of the piece being made, but rather necessary in terms of volume of production, can allow more creative freedom to the artisan. The blanket prohibition on mechanisation that SOS has attempted to introduce is well-meaning but ultimately restrictive and prescriptive.

Anti-technology

SOS has made its policy of using only sustainable materials and methods, without mechanised processes, into a kind of mantra that has erroneously conflated the meaning of 'sustainable' with 'anti-technology.' This Western ideology is dangerously linked to a romanticised version of the past, where, as Richard Sennett states, the 'inhuman' machine culture that matured in the 19th Century turned the craftsman into a kind of bastion of the 'human.'

Now, against the rigorous perfection of the machine, the craftsman became an emblem of human individuality, this emblem composed concretely by the positive value placed on variations, flaws and irregularities in handwork.³⁰

²⁹ Rhodes, Sarah. "Designing for Social Change." Paper presented at Making Futures conference, Plymouth College of Art, 2009. *Plymouth College of Art*. PDF file. 77.

³⁰ Sennett, Richard. *The Craftsman*. Yale: Yale University Press, 2008. 84.

The writings of John Ruskin, the great Romantic analyst of craft, and William Morris made the work of craftsmen a symbol of resistance to capitalism and to machines, says Sennett, and declares that these cultural and social changes are still with us:

Culturally we are still struggling to understand our limits positively, in comparison to the mechanical; socially we are still struggling with anti-technologism; craftwork remains the focus of both.³¹

Ezra Shales argues that the concept of the 'craftsman-artist' was a strategy to combat the division of labor but it contains a crucial contradiction: when the Arts and Crafts movement designated the craftsman as being creatively autonomous, it simultaneously signaled a withdrawal of engagement from the collective social economy:

The cliché of "freedom" has become ingrained in craft lore. The craftsman-artist continues to be described as an inspired individual, as if the process were redemptive for society as a whole. The idealization of the individual atelier as a bulwark against "alienated labor" has remained widespread even now, as new disciplines, such as digital craft, challenge the primacy of traditional processes.³²

³¹ Sennett, 84.

³² Shales, Ezra. "Technophilic Craft." *American Craft*. Vol 68, No. 2 (2008): 78-80. *Craft Council*. Web. 1 July 2011.

Shales points to the need for redefining the essential nature of artisanship. “Too many remain tethered to the "handmade" as a criterion,” he says, “despite David Pye's having pointed out the word as an imprecise and romantic folly 40 years ago.”³³

This idealisation of the artisan is a key signature of the market for ‘deeper luxury’ which may well be the only one that places a high value on the hand-made as a criterion of excellence and exclusivity, or distinction. This market is small and rarified compared to that for mid range craft, and although niche markets can operate successfully alongside the mainstream, it is a precarious foundation stone on which to build an entire craft project.

A postscript: Sahel Design and Charlie Davies

A venture that uses many different kinds of local crafts skills within Burkina Faso by combining digital design with the hand made, and which appears to be flourishing in the middle range craft market, is Sahel Design. As mentioned in Chapter Three, Charlie Davies is a resident of Burkina Faso and lives in Djibo, a town in the north of the country. Her past experience as a fashion editor of the Telegraph had encouraged her to seek out artisans in her neighbourhood in order to try and create a collection of fashion accessories made of leather and woven cotton. When I met Davies in Ouagadougou in November 2008 she had proposed to Karin Phillips that her range of leather bags might be suitable for AA-AA to adopt, but Phillips had rejected these, asking Davies if she could supply her instead with an authentic Fulani saddle.

³³ Shales N.p.

Undaunted, Davies returned to Djibo and began researching local capabilities in order to begin sampling for her new company, Sahel Design. When she wanted to find artisans who could spin or weave she took decisive action:

When I started researching local craft traditions I couldn't find anyone who actually knew how to do it. Everyone I asked remembered seeing women do it but couldn't physically introduce me to them. So I put out a local radio announcement asking for spinners. The flood gates were opened and a tidal wave of over a hundred women, mostly over the age of sixty arrived on my doorstep. That was three years ago and since then I have worked with several of them, mainly in one village where there is a weaver too.³⁴

The online retail outlet for Sahel Design, Jamshop, sells an eclectic range of woven cotton cushions (fig. 5.25,) leather bags (fig. 5.26,) jewellery (fig. 5.27,) and children's clothing (fig. 5.28) that all capitalise on local, Burkinabé skills while still belonging firmly in the realm of 'contemporary' design. The website is design-led, user friendly and fully e-commerced. There appears, as in the *Africa Now!* products, to be no tension in this relationship between modernity and African craft, but rather a commitment to producing high-quality, design-led, crafted objects from a range of good quality materials, using whatever technologies come to hand.

³⁴ Davies, Charlie. *Spinning a yarn the African way*. Sahel Design, 2012. Web. 22 May 2012.



Fig. 5.25
Cushion covers. Jamshop. Web. 27 May 2012.



Fig. 5.26
Bags. Jamshop. Web. 27 May 2012.



Fig. 5.27
Jewellery. Jamshop. Web. 27 May 2012.



Fig. 5.28
Toddlers Summer Clothing. Jamshop. Web. 27 May 2012.

The leather bags include elements of the traditional Fulani art of plaiting (fig. 5.29) which is used for their horse reins, girths and stirrups. They are made locally, but the leather is sourced from a luxury leather wholesaler in Ouagadougou, whose main clients are upmarket Italian leather designers, including Gucci. Davies explained how she shipped to Europe:

When I'm not here [in the UK] my sister has agreed to handle despatch and customer service. I've got various people collecting and bringing things back from Burkina for me. Exporting by shipment from there was ridiculously expensive and the most efficient way I have found so far of getting products back is to bring them back personally through the red channel at Heathrow.³⁵

In summing up her experience of sourcing her products, Davies was emphatic that living in the country was vital:

They do say that Burkina is one of the hardest countries to do business in and I would have found it really hard to get anywhere without actually living there.³⁶

³⁵ Davies, Charlie. "Lovely shop!" Message to author. 10 April 2012. E-mail.

³⁶ Davies, Charlie. "Lovely shop!" Message to author. 10 April 2012. E-mail



Fig. 5.29
Techniques. Making a traditional leather girth. Sahel Design. Web. 27 May 2012.

I had kept in touch with Charlie Davies over the years since I met her in Ouagadougou in 2008, watching the development of her products, which she had told me about as they progressed. She had been extremely discouraged by the SOS reaction to her work, but had nevertheless started her business by building slowly within the local artisans' abilities. She knew that the women, who made up the largest proportion of her workforce, were unable to work away from home and that production had to fitted around their lifestyle.

Sahel Design's success story, on a smaller scale though it may be compared to other high-profile design companies, reveals a methodology that may be hard to replicate. Davies' commitment to live in Burkina with her husband and young family for many years, in one of the very poorest communities on the

planet, is a faith-based mission that puts the welfare of the artisans first. With little money to launch her business, Davies has nevertheless doggedly succeeded whereas Karin Phillips has yet to make any significant sales. Davies lives and works with the artisans, and they know that she will not simply disappear in a few months' time, leaving nothing behind but a few mud bricks and some good intentions.

The next chapter considers whether the research questions and creative practice have been successfully integrated, and what lessons have been learned between 2007 and 2011.

CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSIONS

MAN OH MAN, are we in for it now, was my thinking about the Congo from the instant we set foot. We are supposed to be calling the shots here, but it doesn't look to me like we're in charge of a thing, not even our own selves.¹

Introduction

At a party in Brighton in December 2010 I chatted to a young (white) woman who had recently returned to the UK from Kenya, where she had worked for a development charity that distributed micro-finance to create small businesses. "Honestly," she sighed, "you do your best to help these people but really, I just give up!" I asked why she seemed so disillusioned. She explained that she had been involved in organising a round of financing for several slum communities and she thought that traditional craft production was an ideal way to increase local incomes. "But nearly every single person we gave money to just went off and started a mobile phone shack selling phone credit!" She raised her eyebrows. "They don't seem to understand how dignified and uplifting craft is."

That the rural poor of Africa could possibly enjoy any autonomy in their choices for their own livelihoods, that their rejection of the 'dignity' of a career in craft production was based on intelligent, logical reasoning, that they might well consider the life of an artisan boring, repetitive and, more importantly,

¹ Kingsolver, Barbara, *The Poisonwood Bible*. London: Faber & Faber Ltd, 1999. 26.

insecure as an income stream, was simply discounted. This was a young, well-educated development professional who, despite her Masters degree in Anthropology of Development, and who assured me that she was aware of falling into the trap of viewing Africans as the 'Other,' still, in the 21st century, was pedalling outdated, paternalistic notions of the benevolent, and by implication superior, wisdom of the West.

This chapter is a concluding assessment of the research and thus seeks to rationalise the creative practice with the theoretical approaches. The research questions that frame the debates are, as explained in Chapter One, relatively straightforward, although none of the actual outcomes of the SOS project have been so simple.

Constructing Africa

In Chapter Two, Gustave Jahoda's *Images of Savages*, a socio-history that contextualises racial prejudice, demonstrated how deeply rooted Western perceptions about Africa that go back over a thousand years are still supporting prejudices today: associations with 'apes' and 'monsters,' how even the word 'black' is associated with notions of sin and evil, the myth of unbridled sexuality. Jahoda describes the European invention of the child-like savage; innocent, carefree and simplistic, with a love of crude colours and shapes and whose aesthetic lent itself to 'primitivism,' the European, more sophisticated version of its art. At the same time this child-like savage nurtured a darker side; that of the cannibal, the head-hunter, the fetish-worshipper. All these misconceptions were funnelled into spurious scientific studies in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and created generalised myths about Africans, the legacy of which still exists in popular culture. Witness the ill-advised NIVEA advertising campaign of 2011 that exorted a stylish, groomed black man, pictured in the act of throwing away a bearded, afro-styled, severed head, to 're-civilize yourself.'²

At every stage of Europe's relationship with Africa, mythologies have been invented that satisfy our romanticised view of the African Other: the explorers' vivid accounts of 'dark' Africa, the vast 19th century colonial exhibitions of 'our' Africa, the 'discovery' of African art in the early 20th century, the 'ethnographic' coffee table books of today. The echoes of such mythologising ideologies, an

² Flock, Elizabeth. "Nivea pulls 're-civilized' ad that sparked racial controversy." *Washington Post*. 19 Aug. 2011. Web. 26 May 2012.

often unhealthy mixture of prejudice and self-regard, mixed further with altruistic sociologies, have resulted in a *pot pourri* of sickly sentiment with regard to the so-called 'natural' or 'unspoiled' native and his cultural activities. The longing for the perceived innocence of the less developed world emerges from a cultural matrix that includes the psychology of 19th century romanticism, a reaction to political and economic progress in the West. For example, as slave-owners rationalised the practice of slavery by invoking paternalistic and romantic ideologies, they re-created a fictionalised, feudal idyll that had ceased to exist in the new world order of free labour relations.

SOS has re-created an aesthetic version of Africa that is founded on fantasy. Their fashion collection, although beautiful to look at, was a concoction that could never be worn, even in the so-called 'natural' environments of Sulgo and Napalgué, and certainly never sold commercially in Europe and North America. On the other hand, the interior textiles that SOS exhibited at the ICFF and at Ambiente in 2009 show much more promise, and it is in this direction that SOS are currently concentrating their development efforts.

The right to bear alms

It seems to be generally assumed in the West that our science and technologies qualify us to undertake the betterment of societies that we view as failing, inferring that 'we' possess knowledge and 'they' are ignorant. In truth, all we have are the riches of a consumerist, capitalist society, and the ability to travel to exotic places as explorers, colonists, tourists and, more recently, as 'developers.' Edward Said acidly observes that:

Too often social thought anchors its research in the vantage point of the dominant social group and thus reproduces dominant ideology by studying subordinate groups as a “problem” rather than people with agency – with goals, perceptions, and purposes of their own.³

The research shows that this fallacy is well recognised in professional development agencies, and writers such as Emma Crewe, Elizabeth Harrison remind us that blanket assumptions about, for example, the powerlessness and acquiescence of African women are simplistic.⁴ People, even the poor, negotiate power within their own spheres, and the process of changing perceptions about gender equality is as difficult in Europe as it is in Africa. Similarly, the process that SOS has instigated in Burkina Faso – the introduction of a global, high-end value system onto an almost entirely localised object of consumption – is fraught with many of the same difficulties that such a project would encounter in, for example, Turkey or Italy or Spain. Janet Roitman comments that business problems deemed as peculiar to Africa tend to be viewed as deviations from the ideal model, or the Western ideal of the “state and market as reified entities” rather than products of African cultures and histories.⁵

But a sensitivity to the cultural ‘norms’ within other societies can result in misguided development ideologies. As mentioned in Chapter Three, SOS

³ Said, Edward W. “The Clash of Definitions.” *Identities: Race, Class, Gender and Nationality*. Eds. Linda Martin Alcoff and Eduardo Mendieta. Oxford: Blackwell, 2003. 340.

⁴ Crewe, Emma and Elizabeth Harrison. *Whose Development? An Ethnography of Aid*. London: Zed Books Ltd, 2002. 70.

⁵ Roitman, Janet. ‘The Politics of Informal markets in Sub-Saharan Africa.’ *The Journal of Modern African Studies*. 28.4 (Dec. 1990): 675.

wanted to make certification of its weavers and spinners a major part of its programme by introducing a recognised system of validation that could spread throughout Burkina, and eventually all of West Africa. Part of this included an apprenticeship system, which already exists informally in every part of the region. However, Olga Nieuwenhuys points out that actively harnessing child labour in development projects can be compared to the toleration of the subordination of women as being somehow ‘culturally acceptable.’⁶ Something that a Western development worker would never tolerate in their own society becomes acceptable as a romanticised rural model that slots women and children into defined economic and social roles more fitting to a preindustrial society.⁷ Identifying a balance between objective benevolence and subjective prescription is difficult to negotiate.

The helpless but deserving African has become a recurring thematic strand in the popular media, resulting in the veneration of the supposedly innocent and oppressed poor. This sentiment, says Bertrand Russell, is “...transient and unstable. It begins only when the oppressors come to have a bad conscience, and this only happens when their power is no longer secure.”⁸ He continues: “The idealizing of the victim is useful for a time: if virtue is the greatest of goods, and if subjection makes people virtuous, it is kind to refuse them power, since it would destroy their virtue.”⁹

⁶ Nieuwenhuys, Olga. “The Paradox of Child Labor and Anthropology.” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 25 (1996): 237.

⁷ Nieuwenhuys 240.

⁸ Russell, Bertrand. “The Superior Virtue of the oppressed.” *Unpopular Essays*. 1950. London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1970. 63.

⁹ Russell 63.

The morality of aid

The recent spate of celebrity involvements in aid projects in Africa, as described in Chapter Two, can be seen as validating the characters of both the (usually very rich) donor and the extremely poor but grateful recipient. In the case of the singers Bob Geldof and Bono, entirely new careers have been spawned from their campaigning efforts to save Africa.

Perhaps the general reluctance to simply give money to the poor of Africa rather than finance expensive 'interventions' might be grounded in a belief that this is somehow irresponsible and even immoral. To do so would be to subscribe to the notion that the poor are agents of their own destinies, with the wit and intelligence to determine their own fates. Cultural interventions such as SOS, on the other hand, are deemed to be more moral as they are perceived to contribute to the continuation of the idea of society (or the maintenance of heritage) and thus have an importance beyond mere money. Such interventions also fit the 'photogenic' activity mentioned by Paul Collier in Chapter Two as being so much a trend in development circles. It is the *culture* of those being developed that reflect humanity in all its idealised glory back onto those who are doing the developing. The language used by craft projects to describe their products reveal just such a preoccupation, and, as described in Chapter One, 'Handmade with love' is a common phrase. SOS also use emotive language to describe the 'humanity' and 'pride' that is being developed through their interventions.

Craft as ethnicity

The global trade in craft is alive and well. Conflicts do indeed exist between the local and the global, between artisan and client, and also between cultural and commodity values. There is a strange contradiction in the desire by SOS to create a contemporary version of strip woven textiles as a marker of ethnic 'authenticity' and the realities of textile production in a global economy in which production seeks the cheapest labour market. Walter Little and Patricia MacAnany comment:

Reinvention abounds as once active production locales consider reinventing themselves as living museums of cultural heritage, creating a past rather than a product that can be purchased. Textile traditions are reinvented as hopeful creations of ethnic or nationalist identity but often exacerbate social inequalities.¹⁰

John and Jean Comaroff describe 'copyrighted' culture as the "simulcra of ethnicized selfhood," and note that in the poorer parts of the world, and in the absence of any other kind of income, making cultural products is the only choice available.¹¹ In this case, SOS could actually be described as promoting a meaningful and ultimately lucrative industry within Burkina Faso which, if successful, is in keeping with a general trend.

¹⁰ Little, Walter E. and Patricia A McAnany eds. *Textile Economies: Power and Value from the Local to the Transnational*. Plymouth: AltaMira Press, 2011. 5.

¹¹ Comaroff, John L. and Jean Comaroff. *Ethnicity Inc.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009. 139.

Tourism

The promotion of the village of Sulgo as a tourist destination, where visitors can taste the ‘real’ Africa as opposed to the implied ‘false’ Africa of safaris and *villages artisanales*, is a direct attempt to capitalise on this trend. SOS has created an environment that is simultaneously accessible yet authentically ‘primitive’ enough to appeal to the most discerning antitourist. By basing the rationale for Sulgo as being the birthplace of Burkinabé weaving on an academic footing (using the PhD thesis of a government minister) SOS has both authenticated the experience and cast itself as the enabling agent. This is also evident in the museum display (and subsequent retail outlet) at the Musée Nationale de Burkina. The insistence on a ‘real’ straw roof and ‘real’ hand-made mud bricks for the main visitor centre at Sulgo is a deliberate policy to create a Potemkin village¹² in the ‘real’ Africa, while the extreme poverty of the inhabitants is temporarily masked with traditional dress and displays of weaving and spinning. The tensions behind the building of the centre, as described in Chapter Three, will most certainly never be evident to the tourists. However, it must be noted that in my conversation with the village headwoman of Sulgo she expressed a real interest in meeting tourists. How this plays out in reality is another matter.

Craft and design

Associating ‘tradition’ and ‘authenticity’ in textiles with an absence of mechanisation is a recurring SOS theme. So too is the debilitating presence of

¹² An impressive facade or show designed to hide an undesirable fact or condition. According to Websters Dictionary, the idiom was named after Grigori *Potëmkin*, who supposedly built impressive fake villages along a route Catherine the Great was to travel.

Western design influences in traditional African craft products. But this is an outdated attitude that does not reflect reality. The research shows that objects are influenced by different cultures all the time, as in the example of Manjak textiles in Chapter Five, and there have been many commentators who have reflected on the nature of such liaisons. Developing countries are by no means unique when it comes to negotiating new directions for craft, and in establishing new relationships with designers.

Penny Sparke uses the example of the straw donkey, or “Modernism’s ‘other,’”¹³ to illustrate how Italy capitalised on its craft and folk art traditions between 1945 and 1960, resulting in an innovative new aesthetic that came to represent Italian design, the defining characteristics of which included a respect for traditional artisanship.¹⁴ Sparke identifies the importance of regional, small-scale, family-centred manufacturing of hand-made objects, using natural materials that had been sourced locally, all of which contributed to the sense of ‘authenticity’ of the products.¹⁵ The interaction between this artisanally skilled workforce and the designers of the time (all of whom had an architectural background) resulted in a highly adaptive and flexible system of manufacturing, which, due to its craft basis, was able to change and adapt very quickly.¹⁶

¹³ Sparke, Penny. “The Straw Donkey: Tourist Kitsch or Proto-Design? Craft and Design in Italy, 1945 – 1960.” *Journal of Design History*. 11.1 (1998): 65.

¹⁴ Sparke 59.

¹⁵ Sparke 60.

¹⁶ Sparke 64.

This way of working already exists in parts of West Africa. The West African designers on the Africa Now stand at the ICFF New York in 2011, and the various designers who liaised with Moroso on their M'Afrique Collection, all exploit local artisanal techniques in their work. The result, as in Italy, is a flexible and adaptive industry that produces original and exciting work. The main problem for West Africa is that such collaborations seems to be concentrated in certain areas, like Dakar in Senegal, or Bamako in Mali. Artisans as a whole, especially in rural areas, tend to be more isolated, although, as the example in Chapter Three of Margriet Reinders' weaving atelier at Mossimbiri shows, there are other ways to create beautiful, contemporary work. Aid to Artisans and African Now are already working in Burkina Faso, and, as shown in Chapter Five, take both designers *and* artisans' products to the same international trade fairs as SOS.

Woven into the story of the SOS project is the assumption that artisans need designers to create appealing products for Western markets. But Poonam Bir Kasturi, describes the notion that artisans cannot design as a myth:

The crafts community always has lived on the [above] premise of "approximate equals," but now in the face of globalization and free market economy thinking, this social structure has given way to fierce competition, loss of quality, and the firm establishment of the

“upper.” So the myth that the craftsman cannot design is sustained.¹⁷

Maira Vincentelli, in Chapter Four, makes the observation that there are a huge number of craftspeople whose practice stems from ‘traditional’ or indigenous origins, and that their work does not rigidly conform to some sort of unchanging cultural stasis, but is fluid and reactive. Speaking of pottery she says:

Such makers have not trained in college or university and have limited access to contemporary issues and debates in the art world. Nevertheless they too are contemporary makers who adapt their ceramics to evolving circumstances and fresh opportunities.¹⁸

Vincentelli stresses that there is nothing new in this, but in the connected, fast-moving, modern world the process tends to be accelerated. Factors that affect change include colonialism, postcolonialism, improved transport and communication, tourism, global trade, development projects, expanding middle-class markets and the use of such artefacts in domestic spheres to signify social standing and taste. If this process is a natural one, then the SOS could be said to be a manifestation of this process. Their intervention is specifically to create ‘deeper luxury’ products from indigenous craft traditions, in markets that span continents, and thus it could be said that their rationale is

¹⁷ Kasturi, Poonam Bir. “Designing Freedom.” *Design Issues* 21.4 (2004): 71.

¹⁸ Vincentelli, Maira. “Gender and Ceramics: Old Forms and New Markets.” *Interpreting Ceramics*. Issue 10 (2008): n.pag. Web. 4 Jul. 2011.

both logical and following a well-worn path. The significant development of the new jacquard strip weaving was the work of one weaver, Massan Dembele, from the rural village of Napalgué, who was inspired by his association with SOS to create an entirely new interpretation of his craft. This exciting new form, I believe, holds great potential for the ‘deeper luxury’ concept that SOS is struggling to articulate as a brand, and is a good example of the scope for creativity that weavers can achieve by themselves.

Technology and craft

Eschewing technology as an adversary of sustainability is both short-sighted and ideologically unsound. Victor Papanek writes that many people express this concern about technology impacting on the environment through a “nostalgic longing for the past, in an attempt to return to a seemingly simpler, more primitive way of life.”¹⁹ Denying its use, as in the case of medieval spinning wheels for the women of Sulgo and Napalgué, as a marker of ‘authenticity’ seems rather strange. Spinning wheels originated in India in the 8th century CE, and had spread to the Middle East, Europe and China by the 12th century.²⁰ Their use is well-established throughout Africa, and, as their operation requires little more than pushing a wheel by hand, there seems to be a good case for their adoption by the SOS project. Every single weaving atelier that I visited in Burkina used spinning wheels. It was only in the remoter villages that the spinning was done entirely by hand.

¹⁹ Papanek, Victor. *The Green Imperative*. London: Thames & Hudson, 1995. 25.

²⁰ Headrick, Daniel R. *Technology: a World History*. New York: Oxford University Press Inc., 2009. 63.

Although I understood the SOS position when it came to defining strategies about the use of materials that could only be sourced locally, as a way of ensuring long term sustainability, the banning of even basic technology in this instance was, I felt, a misplaced and prescriptive attitude.

Africa is a continent that is embracing technology, and one area where it leads the world is in mobile phone consumption. Far from being an anachronism in village life, mobile telephony is reaching even further into the countryside, and even offers banking and financial services that were previously unthinkable.²¹ Jenny Aker and Isaac Mbiti state that “Mobile phone subscriptions increased by 49 percent annually between 2002 and 2007, as compared with 17 percent per year in Europe (ITU, 2008).”²²

The deliberate policy of ‘preserving’ ancient craft skills by de-technologising them seems entirely peculiar to SOS. Nowhere else in Burkina did I find such an attitude, and in the case of the Africa Now designers, the exact opposite seemed to be true.

Revolving the field

The research began with the intention of providing an ethnographic view of the weavers’ communities but evolved over time into a study that looked back from the weavers towards SOS and its relationships with sponsors, personnel and institutions within Burkina. I also began to question my own motivations.

²¹ Nyairo, Bosire. “Microfinancing gains pace in Africa.” *New York Times*. 2 May 2007. *New York Times*. Web. 2 May 2012.

²² Aker, Jenny C. and Isaac M. Mbiti. “Mobile Phones and Economic Development in Africa.” Center for Global Development Working Paper. 2. *Social Science Research Network*. Web. 3 May 2012.

As a professional designer living and working in Europe I had little time to spend with the producers, having undertaken three field trips lasting about ten days on each occasion. I was also acutely aware that I was as alien to the weavers and spinners as they were to me. I was, as the headwoman at Sulgo remarked, an 'interesting thing' to observe. Wherever I went in Burkina I was trailed by dozens of people trying to take advantage of an encounter with a white visitor to their country, and I completely understand this as a natural state of affairs. To be blunt, I stuck out like a sore thumb.

Each time I visited Burkina I was swept up in the 'romance' of dawn travel to the villages in the countryside, showing the giggling children their images on my digital camera, the chaotic strangeness of the capital with its anarchic traffic and roadside shacks selling anything and everything. As I grandly toured the rural villages was I any less culpable than others in the 'mission' to save these poor, wretched artisans? I became used to having a driver and an interpreter, to being chaperoned, or cocooned, from the harsh realities of life. SOS director Desiré Ouédraogo very kindly and solicitously tried to make our visits as comfortable as possible, and although I did try once to stay in a small hotel in the centre of the capital, I was persuaded by the SOS staff that this would be too 'hard' and was (admittedly with some relief) whisked off to the 4 star Hotel Mercure, where all the SOS personnel stayed when they were in the country. The pool, they assured me, was lovely after a hard day out in the countryside. As was the air conditioning. Since I started to research this project I have become inured to the congratulations I receive from friends and colleagues on my 'bravery' in venturing to Africa, or my 'altruism' in giving my

time to 'save' the artisans, as I recognise patterns of behaviour in myself. A lot of the time it was like being on holiday.

If I had generated, as Caroline Knowles observes in Chapter Three, my own research frame,²³ then the main task was to penetrate the 'front' that SOS presented to me, a facade that conveyed an assumption that its development activities were absolutely right, and that they (SOS) had privileged knowledge about how to achieve their aims. Part of this 'front' could easily be dissolved through simple observation, simple listening and simple absorption of events that occurred. Another part had to be interpreted through the narrative, or the version of events that Karin Phillips and SOS had constructed as their face to the world. Ethnographic theory describes 'narrative' as stories people tell about themselves and their world.²⁴ In other words, narrative informs the way people relate to each other, how they are positioned and work within society. Being aware of this as a researcher has certainly helped to uncover the deeper motivations that have driven the SOS project forward. A strong theme has been SOS as the saviour of Burkinabé heritage.

Creating and re-creating cultural heritage

Phillips had investigated the culture of Burkina Faso and nominated herself as its guardian, citing her discovery of both mythological and factual background knowledge that informed her approach to the weaving project, and ultimately

²³ Knowles, Caroline. "Here and There: doing transnational fieldwork." *Constructing the Field*. Abingdon: Routledge, 2000. 67.

²⁴ Rapport, Nigel. "Narrative as a fieldwork technique: processual ethnography for a world in motion." *Constructing the Field: Ethnographic Fieldwork in the Contemporary World*. Ed. Vered Amit. Abingdon: Routledge, 2000. 74.

to the culture of the country itself. Phillips' research led her to areas of inspiration which included the Sunjata, the epic, magical story of the Mande people,²⁵ the animal totems of Burkina Faso's weavers, the tradition of weaving the funeral cloth of the emperor of the Mossi, the Moro Naaba, by the village of Sulgo, the 'birthplace' of weaving in the region

Phillips associated the mythology of West Africa as being fundamental to its cultural richness, and spoke of timeless societies that needed to be revived and preserved. In this she was attempting to ascribe the properties of these myths to the realities of contemporary society in Burkina. Nigel Rapport supports the Levi-Strauss assertion that "...myths should be understood as machines for the suppression of the sense of passing time and space."²⁶ Rapport suggests that this hypothesis is a way to illuminate how using myths is the narrative of 'self' trying to establish a sense of permanency to life.²⁷ What then, should we make of a Western development agency using the myths of another culture to impose rationales for cloth production? It could be that, disillusioned with the fragmented nature of Western culture, Phillips is seeking a coherence, or integration into a deeper narrative, in Africa that is lacking at home. The 'authenticity' of these myths and traditions is in direct opposition to what she has described as the 'inauthenticity' of colonial (and subsequently post-colonial) experience, something that has resulted in what Phillips views as the cross-cultural 'pollution' embodied in wax print textiles, tourist art and western fashions.

²⁵ The epic tale of sorcery, battle, betrayal and final victory of Sunjata Keita, founder of the Mali Empire around the 13th century. The Sunjata." *Encyclopædia Britannica*. 2011. Web. 04 Jul. 2011.

²⁶ Rapport 76.

²⁷ Rapport 77.

Authentic for whom?

The authenticity that SOS seeks is not to be found. The research demonstrates the universality of cross-cultural ‘pollution,’ as, for example, in Chapter Two where the effects of tourist consumption and ex-patriate patronage on local crafts is discussed. In the world of mass-manufactured goods, iconic craft objects can be found being made in disparate locations. Moira Vincentelli gives an example of Moroccan tagine pots being made by Lombok potters in Indonesia for a North American market.²⁸ This sense of the inevitability of the transformation or even replacement of crafted objects in a cultural context also envisages such change as a springboard for a future that, while different, is also challenging and rewarding. As Erik Cohen writes,

...these consequences should not be considered as something extraordinary and exceptional, as ‘breaks’ in the normal life and cultural development of an ethnic group, but rather as one of the contemporary counterparts of processes which have impinged upon it, in different ways, throughout most of its history.²⁹

Viewing African cultures as being in stasis rather than as autonomous, reactive and fluid is a dangerous ideology that drifts perilously close to postcolonialism. Imposing this ideology on indigenous artisans, as SOS appear to have done, leaves the project open to accusations of cultural imperialism which, ironically, is what SOS purports to be challenging. Karin

²⁸ Vincentelli, Moira. “Gender and Ceramics: Old Forms and New Markets.” *Interpreting Ceramics* 10 (2008): N.p. Web. 25 Oct. 2009.

²⁹ Cohen, Erik “The Commercialization of Ethnic Crafts.” *Journal of Design History*. 2.2&3 (1989): 166.

Phillips' conflation of an absolute such as 'authentic' with the notions of 'ethical' and 'ecological' reveals a deeper political message that is very much a western preoccupation; the notion of the simple, innocent, rural poor whose relationship with the earth is somehow seen as older, wiser and more natural than the decadent west's.

SOS's wish to protect and preserve, but also certificate, the products of these people is a symptom of what Jean Allman calls an 'impossible' Western paradigm of modernity/tradition binaries.³⁰

Designers in Burkina

The trading company set up by Charlie Davies in northern Burkina Faso, described in Chapter Five, far from the capital and in a region that is more challenging than the SOS sites, is an example of how a western designer can successfully integrate their work with local artisans. But this evolution in the kinds of products being made by Sahel Design is founded on principles that would be impossible for an average designer in Europe to follow. Davies has lived for many years in the country with her family, and has endured the same hardships as the artisans with whom she works. Her success is hard fought and hard won. Similarly, the women's weaving project at Kombissiri, described in Chapter Three, was founded by Margriet Reinders who has also lived in Burkina for many years. The professional boutique, tasteful visitor accommodation and innovative broadloom weaving are all examples of how,

³⁰ Allman, Jean. *Fashioning Africa: Power and the Politics of Dress*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004. 3.

with well-used development funding, a commercial venture can be established that challenges local behaviours but still provides an environment that is acceptable. The local women work together in an enclave that is considered respectable, and as the centre is situated in the heart of their community they can easily access that workplace with their children.

The work that is produced from these two projects is essentially African. It is produced exclusively by local artisans from local materials, in an environment that is familiar and comfortable to the producers. The clientele for both projects is Western; ex-patriates in Burkina and export markets in the case of Kombissiri, and purely export markets in the case of Sahel Design. Charlie Davies' methodology was straightforward:

- Live in the society where production is to take place.
- Listen to local cultures and operate within them rather than impose an outside ideology. Build slowly and surely.
- Identify local skills: gaps that need filling, specialisms that can be harnessed.
- Present a professional face to the world with a well-designed, functional, e-commerce website.
- Create a distribution hub in a stable situation, or another country if necessary.

Integration of practice and theory

The purpose of displaying the *Bamako Collection* was to test a series of assumptions about African craft products and to elicit a genuine response from

Western buyers and specifiers. The purpose of the *creation* of the *Bamako Collection* products, purely as objects in their own right, was to epitomise the dichotomies between authenticity and modernity that had lain at the heart of almost all the tensions I had experienced during the previous three years in my association with SOS. My digitised, Westernised version of Dahomey imagery could no more be described as ‘inauthentic’ than the original appliquéd versions, whose origins were entirely a product of Western technique and African stylised figurative imagery. Placing them in a commercial context removed the personalised element in their creation and transformed them into commodities that could be objectively assessed. As a set of objects, they were the direct result of different stages of the research: my design work for SOS, the rejection due to ‘inauthenticity’ of this design work, the decision to make my own products using the SOS artisans, the failure of SOS to supply my products, the availability of high technology in the UK to manufacture ‘authentic’ African products. The resulting exhibition at the ICFF New York in May 2011 and the reaction to the *Bamako Collection* provided some valuable insights.

Even an implied association with Africa seemed enough to jolt buyers into making strong statements about the nature of both what was made and how it would reach the US, something that they would never have contemplated with a European set of products.

Addressing the research questions

How much does the African-ness or perceived ‘authenticity’ of ‘traditional’ craft products represent a trope of Africa that is outdated?

This question would be anachronistic if directed at the craft industry of South Africa, where new forms of indigenous crafts are encouraged and marketed globally. In the case of West Africa, however, it is more pertinent. The internet survey conducted as part of the research looked at not only how much African craft was available on the internet, but also assessed the nature of what was on offer. The proliferation of 'traditional' African craft, or mass-crafted tourist objects was matched by contemporary, design-led craft, but split by cultures. Northern Europe, South Africa (and, to a lesser extent, North America) were more likely to favour contemporary crafts, while the companies selling 'traditional' craft were generally either from France or West Africa. South Africa had a high element of contemporary craft. This suggests that there might be a trend coming from countries with strong design industries, such as the UK, Sweden, the Netherlands and South Africa, that challenges the traditional view of African craft and seeks to establish new markets for such products.

As African designers are becoming more established preconceptions about African 'style' is changing too, although this is still nascent. Buyers at the ICFF commented that they associated 'African stuff' with dark wood and certain colours, and that it would be interesting to present their clients with something more 'refreshing' and 'modern.'

Is African craft generally classified as being the product of 'aid,' 'charity,' or 'development' in the minds of Euro-American buyers?

The questionnaire at the ICFF in New York in May 2011 specifically asked buyers whether they thought that being associated with 'ethicality' or 'fair trade' helped to sell African craft products. Overwhelmingly, buyers said that

this was indeed the case, and that consumers were more aware of issues around social enterprise and pro-poor commercial development. However, only one designer expressed the opinion that people expected African craft to be sourced in this way. Most were fairly pragmatic in their assessment, asserting that customers looked for value for money and quality above anything else. African craft as being 'ethical' is not a guarantee of sales, but is a strong element in encouraging sales. There was also a definite sentiment that African suppliers were simply unable to provide the products direct, and that a middle man, preferably based in the US or Europe, would be essential to guarantee both quality and supply. That this agent would most probably be an NGO was not mentioned directly but could have been implicit.

Do western designers working in African craft projects to 'improve' local skills collude, consciously or not, in the idea of Africa as dependent?

By implication, even becoming involved in such a project suggests that this is true. I was struck by how much I viewed the artisans as being problematic in their working arrangements and in the kinds of products in the markets. Karin Phillips was emphatic in her assessment of local crafts skills; backward, crude and too influenced by Western tastes. The whole ethos of the SOS project was based on the assumption that the weavers of Burkina, although skilled in some respects, had to be trained to supply high quality cloth that would pass muster at a European trade fair. This was not the tone of every craft/design project I looked at, such as Moroso or Artecnicca in Chapter Two, but the general sentiment behind all such projects was that the artisans were in some way deficient, and that the designers could 'interpret' their skills more

effectively. Whether this is simply commissioning using craft as a manufacturing technique is open to debate.

Scope for future research

This research has used one project, SOS–Save Our Skills, to examine a range of issues that affect craft production in West Africa. The aim was not to provide a model for Western designers, a sort of ‘how to work in Africa’ guide for the uninitiated, but a deeper insight into the motivations of design-led interventions that might make a designer pause and think about the nature of their own work. My impression at the end of the research is an overwhelming sense of futility at the waste of money and resources that I witnessed, from the rebuilding of the Sulgo visitor centre to the expensive SOS exhibitions at the international design fairs. With the best of intentions, the project has still to make any significant sales. With a more humble approach, and with more willingness to perhaps wholesale to other retailers rather than try to establish a global, luxury brand straight away, SOS could have generated income to grow a business. As it is, SOS is more of a cultural organisation, such as English Heritage, in its aspirations.

But perhaps the most important lesson I learned from the research was to examine my own motives, especially with regard to my personal heritage as a white, Western designer, with all the baggage of my culture, class and education. The best work that I saw in Africa (and in Europe) was the direct result of African designers and African artisans, working together to interpret their own histories and cultures, which includes their relationships with Europe and North America.

In the world of design there are no rules when it comes to creative practice; all cultures are open for reference as inspiration. Future research in this area could include an exhibition project that asks African designers to work with European artisans from poor communities. Turning the assumptions about dependent Africa around and creating work that embodies notions of the essence of creativity as being a universal. Perhaps it is time to turn the spotlight on ourselves.

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APPENDIX I

SOS Save Our Skills Manifesto



SAVE
OUR
SKILLS®

WHAT? A NEW INITIATIVE WHY? TO SAVE OUR MANUAL SKILLS FROM EXTINCTION
WHERE? EVERYWHERE BY WHOM? EVERYONE FOR WHOM? ALL OF US
HOW? BY SUPPORTING SOS – SAVE OUR SKILLS

SOS - SAVE OUR SKILLS

SAVE our manual skills

SAVE our creative independence

SAVE our cultural identities

SAVE our energy resources

SAVE our natural environment

WHAT is SOS?	A new initiative
WHERE is SOS?	Everywhere
WHY do we need SOS?	To save man's manual skills and self sufficiency
BY WHOM?	Everyone
FOR WHOM?	All of us
HOW?	By supporting:

SOS - SAVE OUR SKILLS

“EVERYONE IS TALENTED, EVERY HEALTHY MAN HAS A DEEP CAPACITY FOR BRINGING TO DEVELOPMENT THE CREATIVE ENERGY FOUND IN NATURE.”

Maholy Nagy

PREAMBLE

Man has taken millennia to develop his manual skills. Skills which allowed him to survive, evolve and progress even under adverse conditions, and which - in due course - also brought culture and civilization into his existence.

From the very beginning these skills depended first and foremost on man's ability to identify - within the limitations of his physical environment - all sources of local materials which he could use for his various needs such as food, shelter, clothing, transport and defence. Once identified, the second stage was to develop the most economic and lasting way to use each material to the best of its potential.

Archaeology shows that prehistoric man already invented a wide range of objects designed to facilitate daily life on many levels. As skills to make these objects grew through practice, trial and error, so did society's awareness of the ability of the individual maker - proving one to be more apt, more thorough, productive, innovative or even artistic than another.

At no stage in early history, however, is there an indication that selection was made by gender, age or social status of the makers, choosing instead the most able, who could best execute of the task at hand.

But even in those early days criteria such as availability of manpower and materials were vital issues in addition to the individual's skill. As a result, specialisation must have evolved naturally in most societies. Frequent use brought the need for more sophisticated tools, rationalised use of materials and simplification of work processes to cope with demands from the community as a whole. It will have prompted creativity and innovation – by the makers and the users. For objects of domestic life such as clothing, products for child care, small scale farming and husbandry, improvement will also have come from both man and the women, who were traditionally responsible for all aspects of daily life. For hunting, farming, animal breeding, transport and defence it would have come from the men of the community.

Inevitably, better survival chances and growing populations led to increased demand, eventually turning part time occupation into full time profession.

Still, skills were not yet taught officially. For their continuation, makers and communities depended on the possibility that any skill could be passed on to the next generation, frequently as an automatic process within the makers' families.

**" IN THE END ALL EDUCATION IS SELF
EDUCATION."**

From their early infancy, children watched individual family members undertake tasks relating to their various skills. Learning to help formed an integral part of their growing up. If there was a basket maker in the family, they learnt how to collect wild reeds in areas only known to him. They learnt how to cut and dry the reeds properly, which tools to use for each step of the process and how to care for the tools. Finally, depending on individual ability, they would be taught how to weave the various shapes and patterns known to the family, where and to whom the end products could be sold and how to calculate the proper prices for bartering or selling.

**" NOT PRODUCT BUT MAN IS THE OBJECT IN
VIEW."**

Maholy Nagy

Life was the school, and the ultimate certificate of this learning process was the ability to use the acquired skills to ensure better survival, improved incomes and ultimately also social status - first within the community but spreading geographically as skills of individual people, families, communities and regions matured to recognisable individual signatures.

This was and still is in many isolated societies the core 'school' and the core 'enterprise' of human civilisation, which has ensured survival of the species since its beginning.

Within his own environment, this has also allowed man to be independent – as much as possible - of 'imported' supplies and the finance required to afford them.

Les artisans de la campagne cedent de plus en plus a la necessite de se procurer beaucoup d'argent. Ils sont donc en train de perdre eux aussi cette authenticite qui est vraiment chere. C'est la

It is this survival and independence that has been endangered and almost rendered extinct by the advent of localized machined mass production and the resulting economic risks which force the producing nations to sell their goods on global markets to justify the quantities required for maximum profitability. If even in the poorest African society a T-shirt made in Pakistan costs a fraction of a shirt made locally by hand, it is neither logical or economically viable for a local weaver to continue his craft and trade or for his children to learn them.

But it is not only his skill and craft that will die. The entire biological and environmental infrastructure will perish at the same time. The cotton fields of the village will be abandoned and not be replaced by another crop if the villagers cannot gain any revenue from planting and harvesting, selling or processing the cotton.

Barren fields deprive the wildlife that helped to maintain them of the habitat that ensures their survival. The makers of the tools will find themselves without work. The women and children involved in any of the making processes will have no additional training, occupation and income. In poor countries and remote areas it will be hard if not impossible to find suitable alternatives. Ultimately the survival of the entire community will be put at risk as it becomes more and more dependent on finding work outside its own geographical environment. More bizarre still to have to earn income solely to purchase items required for daily life which they used to make themselves, spending hard earned money on products sold by people who do not even contribute to the overall welfare of the community.

Equally threatening are other factors affecting the environment such as oversupply and waste disposal. Formerly, production was regulated by demand. In the absence of ability to import, the exploitation of natural materials used in the making of all products had to be kept at a level that guaranteed its natural regeneration.

Infinitely more damaging, however, have been the economic effects of industrialisation on human employment and the general monetary welfare of

societies.

On the positive side, people who have work have income, which provides material security.

On the negative side, this development resulted in a change of perceptions which has since lead to a inverse valuation of manual work, as man started to serve the machine which took over his production. The effects are diametrically opposed in the industrialised and the non-industrialised world.

Whereas in the industrialised world, a surplus of mass produced goods is now resulting in premium prices for everything 'made by hand', exceeding those of the most luxurious machine made products, people in non-industrialised societies, who at best can only afford inexpensive mass production, have devalued manual skills and their products to such a degree that no one can afford to work in these ancient crafts anymore.

And whereas in the industrialised world an extra cost-incurring design or brand label has to be added to the machine made product to increase its perceived value, the rural craftsmen and -women in non-industrialised societies are not even aware of the value of their manual skills or their own design input and would never consider increasing a price because theirs is a 'family design' or their own 'makers' brand'.

If we lose our last indigenous machine-independent skills, which alone can ensure continued supply of life's most basic and necessary objects of daily use, the implications, will not only be disastrous for our own species but also for the survival of our natural habitats.

It is therefore imperative that we not only research and document these skills but also return to them the superior environmental, intellectual and economic value that they deserve. That we start treating the practitioners not as impoverished members of underdeveloped societies but as representatives of man's most precious assets – his own abilities and his creative independence. And, as a result, that we pay prices appropriate to their skills to ensure their economic and cultural survival.

It is also imperative that we reverse the continuing degradation of the manual skills employed to make cheap 'tourist' souvenirs, designed by people ignorant of either the history or cultural identity of the makers, produced in monotonous quantity with no specific purpose or use in mind and with no possible function for the local community.

They are purchased from the makers by exporters or distributors at prices far below the actual value of the skill, material and time required for their production. And in the worst case scenario the product is even taken away from the local craftsman to Asia for mass production. This, then, at last, is the death warrant for the survival of the local makers and their skills, art and cultural identity as well as their and their communities' independence.

This process has made and continues to make vast numbers of highly skilled people totally reliant on low-income work outside their own skills, which is hard or impossible to obtain in many poor countries.

No longer able or having the time to make their own products of daily use, they now have to purchase them, which is often difficult if not impossible bearing in mind the little they earn for their labour and certainly eliminates all but the cheapest mass produced goods in the local markets.

The low quality and life expectancy of these products create additional unnecessary waste and other environmental problems, especially in societies unable to afford the expensive waste disposal and environmental technologies of the industrialised world.

How much beauty and happiness in this world would not exist, if it were not for the diligence and agility of our hands, small and fragile as they are, but capable of performing miracles, if guided by minds, who are worth these priceless tools of love and labour.

Karin Phillips



SAVE
OUR
SKILLS[®]

WHAT? A NEW INITIATIVE WHY? TO SAVE OUR MANUAL SKILLS FROM EXTINCTION
WHERE? EVERYWHERE BY WHOM? EVERYONE FOR WHOM? ALL OF US
HOW? BY SUPPORTING SOS – SAVE OUR SKILLS

SOS – SAVE OUR SKILLS AIMS TO ENSURE

- **The survival of the last traditional craft skills in the world, especially in more remote areas**
- **The safeguarding of these skills and the functional objects made by them**
- **The safeguarding of the natural environment that sustained these objects**
- **The safeguarding of the non-renewable energy resources of this world**
- **The safeguarding of the cultural identity that created these objects**

**FOR THE GLOBAL
INDEPENDENCE OF
MANKIND AND NATURE**

SOS – SAVE OUR SKILLS

APPENDIX II

Ethical Fashion Programme Report

THE ETHICAL FASHION PROGRAMME

POOR COMMUNITIES AND TRADE

NOT CHARITY, JUST WORK





“IT’S QUITE INCREDIBLE TO
THINK THAT WE MIGHT SAVE
THE WORLD THROUGH
FASHION...”

Vivienne Westwood

THE ITC ETHICAL FASHION PROGRAMME

The ITC (International Trade Centre) is the joint agency of the United Nations and the World Trade Organisation dedicated to EXPORT IMPACT FOR GOOD. Within the ITC, the Poor Communities and Trade Programme (PCTP) aims to reduce global poverty by involving the micro-entrepreneurs of the developing world with international and regional trade. Its flagship project is the Ethical Fashion Programme. This is not about charity. It is about fair and dignified work.

NOT CHARITY, JUST WORK

The Ethical Fashion Programme connects some of the world's most marginalised people to the top of fashion's value chain for mutual benefit. It enables communities of artisans and micro-manufacturers - the majority of them women - to thrive in association with the talents of the fashion world. This develops local creativity, fosters predominantly female employment and promotes gender equality in order to reduce extreme poverty.

It also answers the growing demand of consumers that fashion should be fair.

The Ethical Fashion Programme promotes a system of shared values and is a new model of global partnership for development in a sustained and measurable way. It already involves over 7,000 people who live in conditions of extreme poverty and share a strong desire to change their lives; it operates according to the UN-standard triple bottom line of People, Profit, Planet, which acknowledges social, economic and environmental concerns.

Our meaning of **ETHICAL** goes beyond doing no harm. It means taking an active role in poverty reduction and sustainable livelihood creation while both protecting and cleaning up the environment. The Ethical Fashion Programme works directly with those living in slums and barren rural areas, with the aim of empowering them through quality work which minimises the negative impact on their surroundings.

We respect the pressures of the **FASHION** industry. We plan ahead and are able to deliver on time without relying on unreasonable overtime or using any kind of exploitation. Our business model makes provision for appropriate lead times in production and shipping, ensuring products are delivered according to industry standards; this while utilising entirely fair processes.

This is not a niche initiative. Underpinned by a methodology designed specifically to make trade possible in challenging circumstances, this **PROGRAMME** promotes sustainable business rather than aid dependency. It facilitates disadvantaged communities and their groups of artisans to enter the international value chain, thus developing their export capacities while also strengthening their domestic and regional markets. We enable entire communities to improve their livelihoods; this is verified by regular Social Impact Assessments.

Through a unique system of work, we enable international fashion houses and distributors to source high quality products from Africa and to help consumers make informed purchasing choices. While our primary objective is eradicating poverty, we facilitate those fashion forces committed to be fair. The Ethical Fashion Programme actively seeks collaboration with the world's best known brands to ensure the maximum impact of products that are truly desirable.

Simone Cipriani
Head, Poor Communities & Trade Programme
Chief Technical Advisor, Ethical Fashion
International Trade Centre

WORKING WITH WOMEN



Our business dynamic is paralleled with a social dimension including a rigorous code of ethics and gender equality. All stages of production are designed to empower women; this by raising their daily income long-term and ensuring sustainability through capacity-building, skills training and technical assistance.

The empowerment of women is our top priority. This is why working with the most marginalised communities of women is a critical element for choosing groups. This is why we operate in some of the world's most disadvantaged areas. This is why we work with Internally Displaced People (IDPs), HIV/AIDS sufferers, child-mothers, victims of abuse and other women exposed to extreme insecurity and poverty. Most of the women we work with are the sole breadwinners in their households. The money they earn while working with us is their only source of income and is what enables them to buy food, pay for school fees and medical care etc. Moreover, working with us is an opportunity to escape other forms of labour, often dangerous, hard and barely rewarding. In some of the areas we work in, women are excluded from important decision-making processes and do not have a voice in community life. Even worse, a number suffer abuse such as domestic violence, female genital mutilation and other atrocities.

“MORE THAN 1 BILLION IN THE WORLD TODAY, THE GREAT MAJORITY OF WHOM ARE WOMEN, LIVE IN UNACCEPTABLE CONDITIONS OF POVERTY, MOSTLY IN THE DEVELOPING COUNTRIES.”

UN Inter-Agency Network on Women and Gender Equality

WHY WE WORK WITH WOMEN?

Because women are the stronghold of their communities. Because they are the ones running the household. Because we know that if a woman earns something - however small - it will be shared with children and those most in need. Statistics show that the women spend 80% of their income on family expenditures while the men contribute just 18%. In addition, work that is dignified and remunerated fairly enables these women to gain respect and a social status among their peers. These facts are clearly demonstrated in the Social Impact Assessment activities we conduct regularly.

HOW WE ACHIEVE THIS

The ITC's Ethical Fashion Programme enables distributors and designers to source fashion and lifestyle products from marginalised communities of women and groups of micro-producers in Africa. Our job is to create the link and to organise the work while building capacities. It is African women, through their outstanding skills and commitment, who make the system work. The Ethical Fashion Programme is not a charity, but a 100% market-based initiative. We believe that giving employment opportunities, meaning a dignified job with fair wages, is the way forward to poverty alleviation and gender equality. Furthermore, the skills that these artisans build while working with us give them added-value and are assets that will stay with them forever.

GUIDED BY THE FAIR LABOR ASSOCIATION



As part of our mandate for producing ethical goods, we have joined the Fair Labor Association and created a department that ensures all our operations comply with the Code of Conduct*.



FORCED LABOUR

There shall not be any use of forced labour, whether in the form of prison labour, indentured labour, bonded labour or otherwise.

CHILD LABOUR

No person shall be employed at an age younger than 18 or younger than the age for completing compulsory education in the country of manufacture where such age is higher than 15.

HARASSMENT & ABUSE

Every employee shall be treated with respect and dignity. No employee shall be subjected to any physical, sexual, psychological or verbal harassment or abuse.

NON-DISCRIMINATION

No person shall be subjected to any discrimination in employment, including hiring, salary, benefits, advancement, discipline, termination or retirement, on the basis of gender, race, religion, age, disability, sexual orientation, nationality, political opinion, or social or ethnic origin.

HEALTH & SAFETY

Employers shall provide a safe and healthy working environment to prevent accidents and injury to health arising out of, linked with, or occurring in the course of work or as a result of the operation of employer facilities.

FREEDOM OF ASSOCIATION

Employers shall recognise and respect the right to freedom of association & collective bargaining.

WAGES & BENEFITS

Employers recognise that wages are essential to meeting employees' basic needs. Employers shall pay employees, as a floor, at least the minimum wage required by local law or the prevailing industry wage, whichever is higher, and shall provide legally mandated benefits.

HOURS OF WORK

Except in extraordinary circumstances, employees shall not be required to work more than the lesser of 48 hours per week and 12 hours overtime or the limits on regular and overtime hours allowed by the law of the country of manufacture or, where the laws of such country do not limit the hours of work, the regular work week in such country plus 12 hours overtime and be entitled to at least one day off in every seven day period.

OVERTIME COMPENSATION

In addition to their compensation for regular hours of work, employees shall be compensated for overtime hours as is legally required in the country of manufacture or, in those countries where such laws do not exist, at a rate at least equal to their regular hourly compensation rate.

*The FLA developed its Workplace Code of Conduct based on International Labour Organization (ILO) standards.

A CLEAR ENVIRONMENTAL AGENDA



ENSURING WE MINIMISE FURTHER DAMAGE TO THE ENVIRONMENT IS ESSENTIAL.

BEST PRACTICES FOR PRODUCTION

For all the products made through our programme, we involve product designers from the industry as well as local experts to ensure all processes use environmentally-friendly methods. We favour natural, local and organic materials. We work with a network of communities specialised in recycled materials and we encourage new ideas to re-use discarded materials. We are constantly innovating new techniques that are more considerate towards the environment such as natural dyes and manual processes.

IMPACT ASSESSMENT

We have a tailor-made Social Impact Assessment developed in collaboration with a panel of regional experts including doctors, professors and environmental specialists. Using this tool, we regularly assess the impact of the project on the lives of the communities as well as the environment around them.

FOLLOWING INDUSTRY STANDARDS

Because we work within a network of experts from the industry, the more established community groups operate according to strict industry guidelines. This applies particularly to production processes involving leather (vegetable tanned when possible) and cotton (organic if available). With informal groups, we work with them to help them to achieve industry standards.

CARBON FOOTPRINT

Reusing and recycling are a way of life among those with whom we work. Skills are almost entirely manual, and most sewing machines are treadle-operated. The use of electricity and water – such precious resources across Africa – is minimal.

The communities we work with travel by foot, by bicycle or by public transport, whether in Kenya, Uganda or Geneva. A small core of the team does fly; mostly long distances between Europe and Africa. Stringent planning ensures every trip is maximised. Through all our operations, we stress an environmentally conscious attitude and we ask our fashion partners to plan ahead to allow shipping by sea.

SOCIAL IMPACT ON PEOPLE

Poverty is multidimensional. Factors beyond that of income must be addressed to foster active participation across diverse communities. Assessing real benefit requires examining several dimensions of life. Local and international experts carry out Social Impact Assessments.



The majority of those who participate in our programme have only primary education and some are illiterate. For instance, among the Maasai, despite yearning for it, 80% of women have no formal education. Maasai women have on average 8 children. In other communities, the average is 4. Of those surveyed, 40% live in informal dwellings ranging from manyattas of mud and thatch to shelters of timber and iron sheets. 54% fear eviction.

Violence is a topic that many do not feel free to talk about.

- Over a fifth of those who work with us earn less than US\$1 a day without orders from The Ethical Fashion Programme. With orders, they can earn \$4 - \$7. Casual labourers earn less while fundis (artisans) earn more. Interestingly, there is no correlation between the level of education and the income of the artisans: even with no education, an artisan who is highly skilled in his/her trade will earn as much as his production capacity allows.
- The entire sample of women surveyed affirmed they had earned respect from their male counterparts, especially from their husbands, thanks to their ability to earn a living and to take care of family needs as well as restocking their animals.
- A big order from Coop Italia came when Kenya was experiencing profound drought. All surveyed confirmed this order had enabled them to feed their families.
- 94% of the people interviewed confirmed being involved with the programme has increased their self-confidence.
- 94% of the total respondents claim they have been able to learn useful skills.
- 90% of those who are involved claim that proceeds enable them to make improvements in where they live.
- 88% mentioned their ability to make independent financial decisions as the most important change in life and 54% cited the ability to invest as expressly indicating this change.
- 86% claim that their diets have improved thanks to workplace meals; 84% cited access to fresh foods.
- 68% claimed the income allows them to eat three times a day.

A SYSTEM THAT WORKS

Through our network, some of the poorest people in the world have access to an income which benefits the entire community. The Ethical Fashion Programme has a holistic approach that is 100% dedicated to supporting disadvantaged communities to change their lives.



We collaborate with a network of self-managed, artisanal groups who together, make up an extended 'multi-craft workshop', spread over a vast geographical area.

The majority of these micro-entrepreneurs are organised into Self Help Groups (SHGs) with a communal goal of achieving economic empowerment. Forming a SHG is the most cost-effective way for a community group to become a registered business. To be registered is key for the simple reason that a registered worker exists under the law. Just one benefit of this is that the children of that worker are then far more likely to be able to secure a place at school.

Each of the diverse groups we work with observes the same quality standard. Each is supported by a team of technical supervisors. It is up to each group to select its management from within. The Ethical Fashion Programme provides the business infrastructure to support and enable these groups to thrive while also managing the necessary logistics from product development to production to dispatch.

Central to The Ethical Fashion Programme is a hub which is both a physical place and a business entity. The hub, through which all production passes, is located at the GoDown Arts Centre, a vibrant creative nexus in downtown Nairobi. It is operated by Ethical Fashion Africa Ltd (EFAL), a not-for-profit company, founded by The Ethical Fashion Programme and owned by a charitable trust. EFAL co-ordinates the work of all the community micro-entrepreneurs to ensure this matches standards of artisanal fashion production anywhere else in the world.

While members of each group are paid for the work they do, at the same time, EFAL implements a strong social agenda. When it comes to the many dimensions of poverty, one solution cannot fit all. It is the communities themselves, along with key trustees, who decide what they need. All EFAL profits are reinvested into the business.

**“IT IS WIDELY UNDERSTOOD THAT AFRICA’S PROBLEMS
CAN’T BE SOLVED BY CHARITY.”**

Ilaria Venturini Fendi, Carmina Campus

MICRO-ENTREPRENEURS AT THE HUB

Here are some of the registered groups based at our hub at the GoDown Arts Centre;



AL FASHION

Screen printing

To meet the demand for screen-printing, EFAL sponsored a group of unskilled manual labourers to train in this relatively basic process that requires simple materials: a wooden frame, a net and some paint. Now this group uses it to transform plain cotton and reused materials into funky, colourful bags.



FASHION DESIGNERS

Pattern-making, cutting

This group has worked on all EFAL orders since the very beginning. Their skills include marking-up fabrics, cutting cloth and gluing components together. Their efficiency at preparing pieces for production, which are then sent out far and wide among communities, is essential to ensure high quality items.



FASHION MASTERS

Tailoring and heavy-duty stitching

EFAL helped these skilled tailors to respond to fashion industry demand with training in the stitching techniques required for heavy duty materials. As a result, this group is making accessories using reclaimed tent canvas and blankets. Working hand-in-hand with European fashion experts has added to their versatility.



STITCH MATTER

Tailoring

Fast fashion producers often shift countries in search of a cheaper price, rendering already vulnerable garment workers without an income. When these individuals were laid off, EFAL was on hand with further skills training. Today, this group enjoys greater job security producing high-end accessories for leading fashion names.



UNIQUE DESIGNERS

Embroidery, tailoring and hand stitching

When these women joined together, they found shared skills lead to improvements not only in their technical prowess but also in structure and efficiency. Each individual within this group owns her own treadle sewing machine. This team ensures all EFAL orders are finished beautifully and on time.

COMMUNITIES IN THE SLUMS AND BEYOND

In keeping with the Millennium Development Goal, we work mostly with women. However, some communities are mixed; while bone, brass and glass craftsmanship remains the reserve of men. The majority of communities are spread across Kenya and Uganda.



ALFRED BONE

Horn & Bone - Kibera, Kenya

These young men supply products such as beads and buttons made from horn and bone. They source the raw material from carcasses of the giant horned African cow. By hand-carving bones of different hues from cream to tan, these artisans are also cleaning up a health hazard from Kibera, Africa's largest slum.



AMBASSADORS OF HOPE

Plastic bag crochet and handicrafts - Nairobi, Kenya

Most of this group are single mothers. Skilled at many handicrafts, they have found a new talent; crochet using the plastic bags that litter their surroundings. Burning plastic waste is a widespread health hazard in densely-populated urban areas. This group is raising awareness, cleaning the environment and expanding their business.



BIDWA

Paper Beads - Banda, Uganda

These women are Internally Displaced People who fled civil war and had little choice but to work in a stone quarry. Now, they transform waste paper into coloured beads and can afford healthcare, education and housing. While they still sometimes work at the quarry, the more beads they roll, the fewer rocks they need to crack.



BRASS OF KIBERA

Recycled Brass - Kibera, Kenya

Thanks to demand from the fashion world, a growing number of men are involved in this initiative; to strip down old vehicles dumped in the slums, salvage the brass within, smelt it and then reshaped it into fashion insignia to decorate and brand accessories. Through their industry, leftover metal gets a whole new life.



ENDUATA

Beaded accessories - Ngong Hills, Kenya

Enduata means "vision". These Maasai women are proving willing to shift the traditional aesthetic of their beaded ornaments to more fashion-based taste. For this community, who suffered immensely from recent droughts, the income from beadwork has allowed them to restock their cattle and win the respect of their menfolk.



JIAMINI

Leather - Thika, Kenya

Jiamini means "confidence". Thanks to repeat orders, these are the specialists in sandal production and leather accessories. Based in the small town of Thika, they use leather leftovers, all 100% tanned in Kenya. In an area hit hard by unemployment and poverty, this group has become a stronghold in their community.



KAREN END

Screen-prints, tailoring, crochet - Dagoretti, Kenya

One of the most diverse groups of artisans in the programme, these women use their local church as a workshop. Proven veterans of fulfilling orders for plastic crochet bags, cloth bags and T-shirts, their community also unites to address different social issues, empowering these women yet further.



KINAWATAKA

Recycled straws - Kampala, Uganda

Where plastic straws around a Coca-Cola factory used to be litter, now it is the raw material for vivid accessories. Women skilled in Ugandan basketry techniques wash, dry, shape, tie and weave these straws and by so doing, have found employment and more; the social agenda also addresses HIV/AIDS prevention and family planning.



KOROGOCHO GROUP

Tie-dye and leather - Korogocho, Kenya

Korogocho is the site of a notorious dumpsite. For many, rag picking was the only job opportunity. With the help of EFAL, formal structures are being put in place to help these young artisans - expert at tie-dye, weaving, leatherwork and more - to overcome daily life-struggles so that, collectively, they can profit from their growing skill-base.



SANCHAT

Screen-prints, crochet, tailoring and more - Gilgil, Kenya

The majority of women in a rural town 110 km from Nairobi are Internally Displaced People who fled the violence that followed the disputed 2007 elections. Community groups, gathered under the Sanchat Charitable Trust, now create everything from crochet to the decorative tassels used in key-rings and bag charms.



SATUBO

Beading - Laikipia, Kenya

The name is amalgamated from Samburu, Turkana, Borana; the tribes of this far-flung pastoralist community who lost their livestock to the Lamina drought, so were burning charcoal to sell to survive. EFAL and the Zeitz Foundation united to direct orders to Satubo in a positive example of countering climate change.



WATOTO KACELL

Weaving, beading, tailoring - Gulu, Uganda

This sizeable co-operative of about 150 members offers the widest range of skills and are divided into six distinct units of production. All based around the town of Gulu in an area hard hit by civil war, distinct groups within this community are experts at making banana fibre, barkcloth, tie & dye, beaded jewellery, weaving and more.



WOMEN OF HOPE SELF HELP GROUP

Paper beads - Kampala, Uganda

These women live in the Banda area of Kampala, home to refugees from the war-torn north of Uganda. Most are single mothers, many HIV positive. They are proving committed, organised and dynamic artisans who create paper beads and a variety of appliqué work. Thanks to orders, this community has greatly expanded.

THIS WORKS

BARBARA AKENA - A LIFE CHANGED BY PAPER BEADS

"I am living with HIV. I was married when I was only 14 years. Due to the war, we came here. We worked crushing stones. Sometimes the stones would fall and many people lost their lives. Now, making paper beads helps us a lot. We don't go to crush stones anymore. We can sit at our door and make beads. So if we could get a proper market for our beads I think we could manage."

SUSANNE MUNGWAI - WEAVING PLASTIC BAGS AND A COMMUNITY SPIRIT

"I love my work. It has brought so much for my family. These friends, they make me laugh and talk. I enjoy their company. We don't fight. We cooperate. We help one another and it's good, for a change, to be out of the house."

CREATIVE COLLABORATION

FROM HIGH STREET TO HIGH END

The Ethical Fashion Programme endeavours to involve as many communities as possible in every order. In the AW 2011 Vivienne Westwood collaboration, nine urban and rural groups played a part; their participation ranging from manual, semi skilled to skilled as well as supervisory roles. Equally, Ilaria Venturini Fendi has worked with us to ensure her Carmina Campus accessories make use of both a broad skills base and as many reclaimed materials as possible, the latter ranging from bottle tops to military blankets.

BIG CAPACITIES

The core groups we work with range from 15 individuals to over 100. We never coerce artisans to work the excessive overtime hours endured by vulnerable people elsewhere in the fashion chain. If necessary, many extra hands can be mobilised to meet sizeable orders on time (our largest order so far exceeds 300,000 pieces). However, every individual providing work for the Ethical Fashion Programme does so under the stringent conditions of the Fair Labor Association.

We are open to industry approaches from those who share the belief that fashion should be fair. This is why as well as collaborating with famous designers, we actively seek the mass market orders that insure employment growth among the poorest of the poor. In this, we are grateful to Coop Italia for the ongoing orders of bags and t-shirts that prove we are not a niche operator.



STRONGER TOGETHER; WHEN COOP ITALIA JOINED FORCES WITH ALTA ROMA, VOGUE ITALIA AND THE ITC IN 2010, THE RESULT WAS AN ORDER FOR 70,000 T-SHIRTS.

WHO TO TALK TO AT ITC

The main team in Africa is composed only of local staff. This also ensures that cultural and social context is taken in account throughout the system. The Ethical Fashion Programme acknowledges that, in the future, fashion partnerships forged must be self-sustainable after the supporting agency, the ITC, has withdrawn. We also endeavour to use local freelancers - anyone from cameramen to stylists - this tapping into a growing wealth of talent.

THE ETHICAL FASHION PROGRAMME IS
HEADQUARTERED AT THE ITC IN GENEVA.

PATRICIA FRANCIS

Executive Director of the ITC

A citizen of Jamaica, Ms. Francis has years of experience in the developmental dimension of trade and investment. One of the only women who heads a United Nations Agency, she is a global expert in the quest to ensure the world's poor benefit from trade.

SIMONE CIPRIANI

Head, Poor Communities & Trade Program, Chief Technical Advisor Ethical Fashion

Mr. Cipriani helms the Ethical Fashion Programme and conceived the soft system methodology that underpins its success. He combines an early career in the Italian shoe industry with years in the developing world. He is a renowned expert on using trade as a vehicle out of poverty.

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“THE EFP IS ABOUT COMMUNITIES
LEARNING TO LOOK AFTER
THEMSELVES, TAKING CHARGE OF
THEIR OWN LIVES AND
PARTICIPATING IN GLOBAL TRADE.”

PATRICIA FRANCIS, ITC EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

