

# A HANDMADE FUTURE

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

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# INTRODUCTION

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.<sup>1</sup> 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:

...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.<sup>2</sup>

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.<sup>3</sup> 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.<sup>4</sup>

With such an abundance of scholarly interest in this area there

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<sup>1</sup> 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.

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<sup>2</sup> Phillips and Steiner, 3.

<sup>3</sup> 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)

<sup>4</sup> For example, see Lamb (1975); Picton and Mack (1979); Steiner (1985); Stoltz Gilfooy (1992); Picton (1994); Rovine (2001); Kriger (2006)

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*<sup>5</sup> 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 area<sup>6</sup> highlights the precarious nature of craft production in developing countries. Scrase reminds us that artisanal labour is primarily a commercial venture and, like Anitra Nettleton in her 2010 article on craft and modernity in South Africa,<sup>7</sup> 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*<sup>8</sup> is a chastening read for any designer contemplating working on a

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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.

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.

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.<sup>9</sup> 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 drivers that accompany the creation, production and marketing of a commercial collection. They speak instead of being "handmade with love."<sup>10</sup>

### 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

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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](http://craftaustralia.org). Web. 23 Feb. 2011.

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

“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:

- 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<sup>11</sup>

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11 SOS Manifesto. See Appendix I.

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”<sup>12</sup> 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 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?

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

- 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?

The contribution to knowledge is in the observation of a development project over four years; a continuous record of its inception, funding, first steps and outcomes. In Chapter Five, where the testing of the products I created is described, the research demonstrates a clear transition of theory to practice, or research made tangible. 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.

## 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.<sup>13</sup> 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."<sup>14</sup> 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 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.<sup>15</sup> Susan Talburt cites Harry Wolcott's

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

14 Pink 81.

15 For example, see Geertz (1973); Belsey (1980); Wolcott (1990); Lather (1991)

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."<sup>16</sup> Halburt 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"<sup>17</sup> are never fully representable "in language or verifiable as faithful copies of the 'real.' We gesture to them as best we can."<sup>18</sup> 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.

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.<sup>19</sup>

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."<sup>20</sup>

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, how researchers approach their questioning, and the inherent complexity of the culture under scrutiny. There is also another dimension. In as

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

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

18 Talburt 81.

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

20 Lyon 27.

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.<sup>21</sup> 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,’...”<sup>22</sup> and he goes on to list many words with similar meanings. “Authentic,” Phillips says, “very much

wants to join this club, but does not quite qualify for membership.”<sup>23</sup> 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.<sup>24</sup>

The classification of African craft as ‘authentic’ or otherwise is a seemingly western preoccupation that has created lucrative markets that operate globally. Anita 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.<sup>25</sup> 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.<sup>26</sup> Larry Shiner’s acerbic article on the “ideology of authenticity”<sup>27</sup> 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.<sup>28</sup> Of particular interest

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

22 Phillips, 5.

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23 Phillips, 5.

24 Phillips, 5.

25 Nettleton, 56.

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

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

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

has been John and Jean Comaroff's exploration of the 'branding' of ethnicities and the resulting perceived 'authenticities' that indigenous communities subsequently assume through their dealings with tourists and global markets.<sup>29</sup> Authenticity, say the Comaroffs, is the "specter that haunts the commodification of culture everywhere."<sup>30</sup> 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.<sup>31</sup> An appreciation of these debates in various established theoretical works<sup>32</sup> 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.<sup>33</sup> 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 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,<sup>34</sup> 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.<sup>35</sup> 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.<sup>36</sup> 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-

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

30 Comaroff and Comaroff, 10.

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

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

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

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

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

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

produce objects that are an inferior version of the specialised, ritual-associated crafts that are the reserve of a local connoisseurship.<sup>37</sup> Timothy Scrase points out that, following Bourdieu, ...“we can delineate a class distinction in the types of crafts produced and consumed.”<sup>38</sup> 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.<sup>39</sup> Gloria Hickey notes, however, that buyers 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.<sup>40</sup> Hickey also describes the qualities of craft as a gift, where the gift-givers are “hoping to create personal meaning with a distinctive object.”<sup>41</sup> 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.”<sup>42</sup> 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’

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37 Scrase, 454.

38 Scrase, 453.

39 Scrase, 453.

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

41 Hickey, 87.

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

and ‘individual’ than design, art or luxury goods, craft businesses can fulfil consumers’ need to demonstrate individualism...”<sup>43</sup>

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”<sup>44</sup> which he proposed were crucial to human development, and not just in childhood but 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.<sup>45</sup>

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

44 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.

45 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.

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.<sup>46</sup> Assessing the attractiveness of ethnic crafts in a development context has been informed by such debates.

### Gender and development

Authors who comment on gender politics within the development field are plentiful.<sup>47</sup> Their voices, together with those that address general issues around Africa and poverty,<sup>48</sup> 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."<sup>49</sup> 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.<sup>50</sup> 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.<sup>51</sup> 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:

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.<sup>52</sup>

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46 Woodward, 376.

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

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

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

50 Crewe and Harrison, 25.

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

52 Crewe and Harrison, 30.

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.<sup>53</sup> 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."<sup>54</sup>

Sangeetha Madhavan reminds us that complicated networks of co-residential familial constructs in sub-Saharan Africa mean that women negotiate power in their own spheres<sup>55</sup>, 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.<sup>56</sup> 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 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

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53 Crewe and Harrison, 46.

54 Crewe and Harrison, 53.

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

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56 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.

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.

