CHAPTER 1

Designs on/in Africa

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> Always use the word 'Africa' or 'Darkness' or 'Safari' in your title. Subtitles may include the words 'Zanzibar', 'Masai', 'Zulu', 'Zambezi', 'Congo', 'Nile', 'Big', 'Sky', 'Shadow', 'Drum', 'Sun' or 'Bygone'. Also useful are words such as 'Guerrillas', 'Timeless', 'Primordial' and 'Tribal'... Never have a picture of a well-adjusted African on the cover of your book ... (Wainaina 2005)

Kenyan writer Binyavanga Wainaina, writing from Norwich, England, in 2003–2004, penned a quick fire email to the editor of *Granta* magazine, responding to the 'Africa' issue. 'Populated by every literary bogeyman that any African has ever known, a sort of "Greatest Hits of Hearts of Fuckedness"', the *Granta* Africa issue stirred Wainaina's ire. For him the *Granta* issue offered 'nothing new, no insight, but lots of "reportage" ... as if Africa and Africans were not part of the conversation, were not indeed living in England across the road from the *Granta* office. No, we were "over there", where brave people in khaki could come and bear witness' (Wainaina 2010). His email, a searing satire, was published by *Granta* in 2005. He goes on: 'In your text, treat Africa as if it were one country. It is hot and dusty ... Or it is hot and steamy ... Don't get bogged down with precise descriptions. Africa is big: fifty-four countries, 900 million people who are too busy starving and dying and warring and emigrating to read your book ... so keep your descriptions romantic and evocative and unparticular' (Wainaina 2005). *Fuck Afrika I* an inkjet illustration (Fig. 1.1), by South African graphic designer Garth Walker (2008), pictures a similar parody: a crisp, ink outline of a compact 35mm camera with a brand name 'AFRIKA' in the top right, a comic book graphic star to indicate the flash
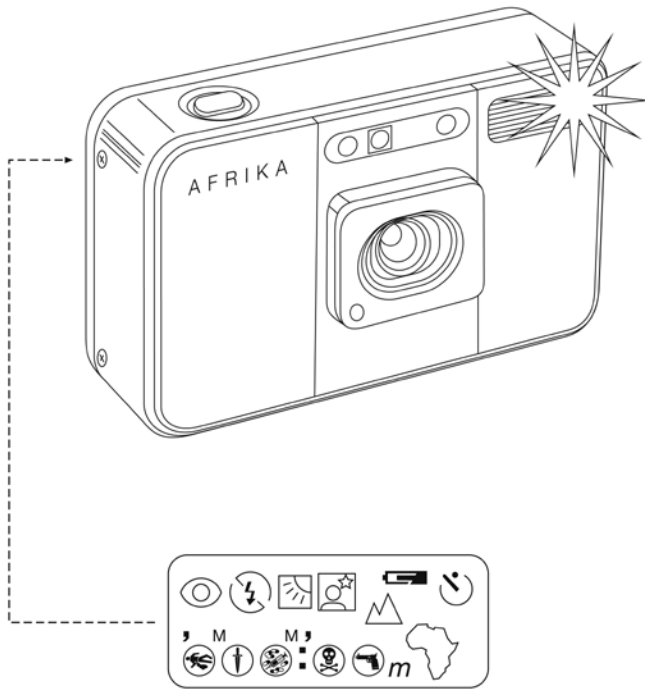
Fig. 1.1 *Fuck Afrika I*, Garth Walker 2008, inkjet print, reproduced here by kind permission of Garth Walker. Garth Walker's commercial work can be seen at www. misterwalker.net/ and his renowned experimental graphics publication 'I–jusi' at www.ijusi.com/.

and an inset diagram to reveal the icons describing the camera modes out of sight on the back of the camera. The icons in the inset for Walker's 'AFRIKA' camera reiterate the stereotypical images of Africa that Wainaina lists: a full sun, an outline of the continent, a gun, a skull and cross bones, a dagger, syringe and needles, a dead body.[1]

The title of this chapter does include 'Africa'; indeed it shall endure throughout. Why? Not to treat 'Africa as if it were one country', but because the 'category', or the 'sign' of Africa, as Wainaina and Walker drive home, persists. It looms large. As an imaginative object, the continent is, as James Ferguson puts it, more than the sum of its localities (Ferguson 2006: 4). In popular discourse and media representations, as a name, an idea and an image and also as a subject for scholarly study, 'Africa' remains fraught, at times burdened with alterity. It is this very sign of 'Africa' that intrigues; its predicament appears to be a persistent consigning of Africa to further taxonomies: of hopelessness, of urgency, of inconvenience, of silence, of perseverance. In the neo-liberal frame of the universal 'global', Africa is un–modern, an anomaly, 'globalization's anti– thesis' (Bjørnsen 2008). The recent methodological shift in the humanities and social sciences to a 'global perspective' has meant that historians of the West

have made impressive efforts to directly engage with Africa's once ignored, now urgently implicit connections, with and across the Euroverse (Berg 2007; Desan, Hunt and Nelson 2013; Colley 2013). For design history, entangled by its Euro-American and ethnocentric historiography, the global – and Africa within that global – is an important project of inclusion and diverse representation (Teasley, Riello and Adamson 2011; Margolin 2005).

So, what is this place in the world that Africa occupies? How is the category of Africa understood as one through which a world is structured (Mudimbe 1988; Ferguson 2006; Mbembe and Nuttal 2004)? What might the relationships be between the imagined/constructed and the real – in writing and in life? For categories, arbitrary as they are, are historically constructed, impose rules and can structure how people live.[2] And how might design histories engage with work which has sought to unpick predominant images of 'Africa'? Distinctive to the field amongst other forms of history is its multi-dimensional subject matter: design. The multi-dimensionality of design is particularly illuminating if it is understood as object, process and intention, animated by tensions and ambiguities and by its histories as focused on exploring the 'translations, transcriptions, transactions, transpositions and transformations that constitute the relationships among things, people and ideas' (Fallan 2010: vii). These ways of thinking about the empirical work of design history suggest quite well how Africa might be written as a part of the world.

This essay is exploratory; magpie-like, I have sought what might be interesting or useful or instructive for design histories of Africa. I consider the 'global' in history's current focus; some historians, Africa scholars especially, are sceptical of the flattening impetus of recent discourses of globalization, and argue in favour of retaining a focus on Africa precisely because the category of Africa is constituted through a series of practices that come under historians' scrutiny. Through some examples of things, people and ideas in Africa, this chapter tries to write against the grain of what Africa is not.

Africa and the Limitations of Global History

Writing in what Geoff Eley calls the 'din' of 'globalization talk' (Eley 2007: 161–162), African historian Frederick Cooper questions globalization as a concept and analytical tool (Cooper 2001). He acknowledges the validity of an underlying 'quest for understanding the interconnectedness of different parts of the world' (Cooper 2001: 189–190), yet remains (see also Cooper 2013) dissatisfied with the word 'global', as too singular, boundless in its claims to universality and unfeasibly planetary in scale; and with globalization as a pre-sentist obsession with processual teleology that seeks to explain 'the progressive integration of different parts of the world into a singular whole' (Cooper 2001: 211). Here, Cooper detects the traces of modernization theory of the 1950s

and 1960s; yet its premise that postcolonial nations progress from traditional to modern, rural to urban, subsistence to industrial economies was discredited for its (first the West then the rest) ethnocentric tendency to propose a broad, large-scale process, seemingly 'self-propelled' and thus occluding historical detail and precise questions about people's agency (Thomas 2011: 729–731; Cooper 2005: 113–117; 2001).

Cooper warns Africa scholars especially of a concept that emphasizes 'change over time but remains ahistorical, and which seems to be about space, but which ends up glossing over the mechanisms and limitations of spatial relationships' (Cooper 2001: 190). Rather, he argues for 'historical depth', 'precision' and particular alertness to the 'time-depth of cross-territorial processes, for the very notion of "Africa" has itself been shaped for centuries by linkages within the continent and across oceans and deserts – by the Atlantic slave trade, by the movement of pilgrims, religious networks, and ideas associated with Islam, by cultural and economic connections across the Indian Ocean' (Cooper 2001: 190). While he accepts that histories written as though contained in solely national or continental structures may be limited, he balks at the language of globalization that suggests the only container is planetary. David A. Bell also queries the effectiveness of placing past events in such 'vast contexts' (Bell 2013). Indeed, what happens to the analyses of power – and its limitations – in the flatness and abstraction of planetary scale, when the structure of Empire (for example, or 'nation') is replaced with universal 'global flows'? What happens to national histories on which global histories rely? For the 'global' must depend on an inter-national or even local context to be made real or illustrative.

Words and definitions seem to matter. For James Ferguson, 'The global, as seen from Africa, is not a seamless, shiny, round, and all-encompassing totality (as the word seems to imply). Nor is it a higher level of planetary unity, interconnection, and communication'. Indeed, for Ferguson, writing about Africa's place in the current neo-liberal, world order, Africa throws into sharp focus the inadequacy of the concept-word, and emphasizes rather the asymmetry and inconsistency of globalization:

> Rather, the 'global' we see in recent studies of Africa has sharp, jagged edges; … It is a global not of planetary communion, but of disconnection, segmentation, and segregation – not a seamless world without borders, but a patchwork of discontinuous and hierarchically ranked spaces, whose edges are carefully delimited, guarded, and enforced. (Ferguson 2006: 48–49)

Nevertheless, the 'global turn' in history – perhaps the striving for a 'global approach' or 'global history' collectively – has generated a huge range of studies, often opening up valuable new perspectives. Much work has been done to emphasize globalization as a historical phenomenon (Moyn and Sartori 2013; Desan, Hunt and Nelson 2013; Eley 2007), frame its chronologies (Hopkins 2006; 2002) and locate the historical roots of the concept (for a brief review, see Subrahmanyam 2007: 332). Historians and design historians have

variously deployed the 'global' as a meta-analytical category (e.g. to emphasize interconnectedness; Adamson, Riello and Teasley 2011), as a substantive scale of historical process, for example to focus on modes of circulation of goods, or imperial transformations (Bayly 2004), or, more innovatively, to consider the intellectual history of the conception of the 'global' as used by people in the time and place historians study (Moyn and Sartori 2013; Colley 2013). Some avoid this highly contested term – the 'global' – because of its need for definition and attendant perils (see the essays in Desan, Hunt and Nelson 2013): global histories and design histories tend, like their subjects, towards complexity and contradiction. Much 'global' history scholarship involving detailed, in-depth research seldom offers a seamless picture of 'planetary communion' (Ferguson 2006: 48–49); indeed, in this work, the 'global' is perhaps less scalar, more a way to connect empirical detail and larger processes or structures across two or more places or regions. In which case, can the study of flows, circuits, connections and power dynamics between two or more locations contribute to our shared grasp of 'globality' (a condition so complex yet so singular and vast in its inscription that it is doubtful if it should be applied at all)? Are these approaches best described as 'interconnected history', and thus is there a more 'differentiated vocabulary' to enhance thinking about specific, complex connections and confines in writing design history, and African design histories in particular (Cooper 2013: 284; 2001: 213)?

Towards Histories of African Design

For scholarship on Africa, these emphases on connections and confines have the potential to unravel dominant and enduring imaginings of Africa as being apart from the world, residual, a poor reflection of something else, to highlight instead the entanglements within and 'embeddedness in multiple elsewheres of which the continent actually speaks' (Mbembe and Nutall 2004: 348). 'Multiple elsewheres' are important: for current visions of the 'global' tend to focus on the expansion of European 'modernity', which is also temporally limited and fixes Africa's inter-continental connections and diaspora in the Western hemisphere/ Atlantic Eurosphere. Lynn M. Thomas explains how Africa has been key to defining an image of the 'modern': as its antithesis, as a signifier of modern ills, as a sign of modern primitivism, as a site to test modernization theories, while modernity has reified the divide between precolonial, colonial and postcolonial histories (Thomas 2011: 727–733).[3] The history of Africa's long-distance connections is older, and differently sited, than its history of connections with Europe. Studies in historical archaeology have shown in nuanced detail how shifting patterns of coastal Swahili (East African) cosmopolitan culture between the tenth and sixteenth centuries grew out of alliances between local elites and foreign merchants (men, both) who negotiated trade in commodities from the

Fig. 1.2 Stoneware bowl with a thick green celadon glaze inside and out except for its unglazed centre and base (height – 7.6 cm, diameter – 18 cm); dated circa 1400–1500, Ming Dynasty, made in Longquan, China, found in Malindi, Kenyan coast. Malindi was a key entrepôt for Afrasian trade between China, Arabia and Africa, and Chinese celadons such as this one here were widely used as tableware in this part of Africa. © The Trustees of the British Museum. All rights reserved. Reproduced under a Creative Commons BY-NC-SA 4.0 licence.

southeast African interior beyond the coast (including iron, ivory, gold, timber, skins, slaves and tortoise shell) in exchange, in part, for Islamic, Chinese and later southeast Asian ceramics, key luxury imports of the Islamic Oceanic trade. Evidence of diverse consumption by elite men, women and children in Swahili societies of these imported ceramics – as tableware in public festivals, for display in intimate, honorific or ritual contexts or worn as personal ornamentations, including re-use – show the socio-cultural status of these ceramics in urban Swahili culture (see Fig. 1.2 for a fine example of Ming Dynasty Lonquan Ware discovered in Malindi, Kenya). Alongside this, the limited evidence of these objects, either in agricultural coastal settlements or the continental interior that supplied raw materials for this coastal trade, suggests that urban Swahili elites carefully guarded and delimited the distribution of such luxury products (Zhao 2013; 2012). Swahili mercantile power was clearly large scale in its connections across the Indian Ocean – or to describe this connection in its own terms, the 'Afrasian Sea' (Pearson 1983)[4] – and evolved over a long time, but it was also complex and contingent upon its particular geography and maritime climate, and the expansion of the Islamic world.

   This example of Afrasian Sea trade in ceramics is a study of historical archaeology and is thus perhaps a little provocative for a design history that clas-sically considered its subject to be 'modern' and 'industrial', serially produced (Pevsner 1936; also Teasley, Riello and Adamson 2011: 6; Lees-Maffei and Houze

2010; Margolin 2005), and thus European and ethnocentric. That 'design' was, and still is at times, deployed as a signifier of Euro-industrialized economies suggests that particular forms of power might have become lodged in the very definition of design: objects from Africa not described strictly as design by industry have all too often been labelled variously as curiosities, ethnography (Shelton 2000) or art. How can we study design in 'precolonial', 'colonial' and 'postcolonial' Africa when confronted with the fact that this use of design emerged in part from the history of what we are trying to examine – that is, the history of the so-called 'first' industrial revolution which has been shown to be wedded to Europe's colonial expansion? A careful re-reading of postcolonial scholarship will remind us of a 'deep suspicion of metanarratives that enfold global history into the history of the modern west' (Moyn and Sartori 2013: 18). If Europe can no longer be studied in isolation (a key imperative of the 'global' turn in history), as the central place from which would materialize the stimulus for action in the rest of the world, then what do we do with the European and ethnocentric uses of design? Perhaps a way beyond this apparent impasse is less about re-defining design, more about engaging with the writing of design histories beyond this time limited, industrial Euroverse. Vilem Fusser's essay on the etymology of 'design' (1995: 50–53) offers a playful, even ironic reflection; his essay is designed 'to bring to light the crafty and insidious aspects of the word 'design' (53):

> As a noun, it can mean, a 'purpose', 'plan', 'intention', 'goal', 'malicious intent', 'plot', 'form', or 'fundamental structure'. . . . As a verb, 'to design' means, among other things, 'to concoct something', 'to feign or simulate', 'to draft', 'to sketch', 'to shape', or 'to proceed strategically'. (Fusser 1995: 50)

Fusser is artful, cunning; and he concludes that 'The word "design" has won its current central place in common discourse because we (seemingly correctly) are beginning to lose faith in art and technology as the source of values, and because we are beginning to look behind the word and concept of design' (52). These thoughts have strongly influenced theorists such as Ben Highmore, who look to a universe of objects that design histories might examine (Highmore 2009). We might also take this as a mandate for deeper, longer histories of people, ideas, objects, intentions and processes, and their thoroughly entangled relationships; then we can engage with the worldliness of African life. Design history does not have to stand at the edge of Africa – which 'we cannot yet determine', or which has 'not yet become' – and perceive it as an 'epistemological abyss' (Mbembe and Nuttall 2004: 349). In any case, historical archaeology (in which Africanists are engaged in similar efforts to break the discipline out of Eurocentric definitions of an archaeology of 'modernity' and of 'colonial encounters', Schmidt 2006: 3–6), with its concern for objects as historical documents, is well aligned with design history's place in a wider cultural history (see Fallan 2010).

Writing Africa's place into the world and its historical linkages with European expansion entails a challenge: how to counter images of Africa as 'un-modern' and detail time-depth, precise histories of dynamic – even if unequal – societies? An example comes in Jeremy Prestholdt's study of ordinary East Africans' consumption, during the mid-nineteenth century, of commodities like textiles, which influenced long-distance trade relationships – uneven/ asymmetrical ones – across both Atlantic and Indian oceans. Prestholdt describes the chain of links from foreign agents and local buyers in Zanzibar and the East African coast, to caravans of porters and their European leaders trading commodities with consumers and gifting them to local political elites in whose territories they traded or journeyed. Zanzibar's middlemen handled goods from ports in America, Europe and Asia, where products popular in East Africa were made, to trade for African copal, ivory and cloves. The East Africans' demand for textiles and in particular a diverse and changeable taste in textiles was shown to affect textile production, first in Salem, Massachusetts, and then in Bombay, India. Prestholdt shows how consumers' 'fashions' (described as such, and as 'like England' by a contemporary European trader) often rendered undesirable the cloth imported from America and India – local taste determined the weight of cloth or colour and even proportions and placement of stripes. Zanzibar artisans became deft at customizing cloth surpluses to meet the requirements of exacting customers, and inevitably, to add value. In the context of this complex and long-distance, if picky, market, Salem and Bombay both industrialized their cloth production, the latter in the 1850s and with investment from Indian, not British, capital (Prestholdt 2004). Not only were East African consumers not 'un-modern', their demand for particular textiles impacted on urban industry further afield. In a period before Britain effected colonial control in Zanzibar, these complex relationships reveal agency in multiple locations and reciprocity across long-distance connectivity, even if all actors were not equal. While this earlier work offers a limited discussion of how these textiles – of such significant quantity – were used (there is a tantalizing reference to elders wearing up to fifteen yards of cloth: 778), Prestholdt's later work includes a study of how locals in Zanzibar (still precolonial) took in and adapted imported Western commodities in ways that confounded Westerners yet exemplified local 'domestication', or naturalization of foreign goods (Prestholdt 2008).

National Design Histories of/in Africa

This wider, deeper African historiography is instructive, vital even, for the history of the continent and cannot be reduced to that of European arrival and colonial encounter. The pre-, colonial, and post- periodization forces false dichotomies and, indeed, works to privilege 'colonial', i.e. 'modern' history, which inevitably relies on the confines of the European documentary record

(see Reid 2011). In the immediate glow of independence, historians of Africa, keen to contribute to nation-building work across the continent, often focused on somewhat singular, precolonial pasts, projecting nationalism backward to locate an authentic African history. Richard Reid has suggested that some of this early nationalist historiography may have been 'naïve' (motivated by having been denied a history) or attended by 'political cynicism' (to wrest and secure power) (Reid 2011: 136; see also Ranger 2004). Yet, states and people that have existed prior to colonization cannot be overlooked. Reid (2011: 155) makes an urgent claim for the importance of deep, complex and plural precolonial African histories, as vital to illuminate present-day matters in the 'body politic' and social fabric of contemporary African nations.

Zimbabwe provides a salient example here. In the 1980s, the architectural ruins of precolonial Great Zimbabwe (dated from the eleventh to the fifteenth century) were valorized as the symbol of Zimbabwean independence. In particular, eight extant carved soapstone birds became vital to the new nation: about 40 cm in size, combining human and avian features and surmounted on metre-long pillars, these carvings had been excavated at the turn of the twentieth century, and while their original arrangement is unknown, these birds are understood to have once mediated royal power. From 1980 the image of the 'Zimbabwe Bird' (No. 1 as numbered by Matenga 1998) was widely used, appearing on the national flag, currency (see Fig. 1.3), airline livery and much more, including everyday popular goods like t–shirts, ties and tie pins, domestic clocks, etc. to celebrate a new nation. Named after the ruins of this urban kingdom and symbolized widely by the icon of the bird, Zimbabwe claimed an ancient African lineage that had been refuted until 1980: European travellers, British colonists and Rhodesian minority rule had worked to maintain their ideological claims on the land through a steady assertion that the ingenuity and splendour of the ruins could only imply foreign workmanship. Beyond this nationalist claim on Great Zimbabwe, Innocent Pikirayi's comprehensive archaeology of *Zimbabwe Culture* (2001) unhitched this agenda to combat colonial myths, and offered rather a complex history of ethnically diverse autochthonous culture of the whole plateau (including its long-distance trade in gold for Indian and Persian glass beads and Chinese ceramics via the Swahili coastal traders mentioned above). However, on a still narrower path of 'patriotic history', the Zimbabwean government initiated in 2003 a costly 'national heritage' ceremony to join two parts of a long separated soapstone bird (one fragment was returned from Germany). For many Zimbabweans this '[p]atriotic history elevates Great Zimbabwe, but also . . . empties it and devalues it' to 'just a piece of stone' (see Ranger 2004: 231–232). Locals who live around (for them a sacred) Great Zimbabwe are as excluded as they were by Rhodesian conservationists; those who sold hand-crafted curios are attacked for gratifying white tourists and thus impoverished; a costly ceremony insults a ravaged nation; and ruling party claims on Zimbabwean material culture are

Fig. 1.3 Proof coinage of Zimbabwe, 1980 and Zimbabwean One Hundred Trillion Dollars note, 2008. Proof coinage was issued in 1980 to celebrate Zimbabwean independence with the symbol of the 'Zimbabwe Bird' named thus at independence. The largest coin is for one Zimbabwe dollar. The one hundred trillion dollars note includes a small foil figure of the Zimbabwe Bird in gold on the bottom right. Issued in 2008, this note exemplifies a period of hyperinflation; Zimbabwean currency was abandoned in 2009. Author's own photograph.

ethnically exclusive. The opportunity for precolonial Zimbabwean material culture to provide a sustainable, plural African identity today seems utterly lost to an increasingly troubled society and a morbid 'body politic' (Reid 2011: 155), which remains mired in anti-colonial rhetoric.

Certainly, the impact of less than a century of active colonization is still highly charged. 'Africa', as V.Y. Mudimbe has shown, as an invention, a category, was framed in large part through the history of slavery and colonization (Mudimbe 1988). Since then African historiography has developed a complex trajectory (for a summary, see Cooper 1994; Reid 2011); in particular, Edward Said's *Orientalism* ([1978] 2003) influenced a sharp focus on the apparatus that collected, curated and classified knowledge of Africa. It is in this context that design histories have productively engaged with Africa, examining for instance an exhibitionary complex (Bennett 1988; 1995) of institutions, sites, images, people and objects of design and material culture that were shaped into world-wide displays of all varieties (human spectacles, pageants, 'International', 'Empire', 'World's Fair') and museum collections (cabinets of

curiosities included) from the nineteenth to the mid-twentieth century. This chronology parallels a 'new' colonialism in which Europe's encounter with Africa solidified through colonization. It was a new colonialism which was part of an increasingly bourgeois Europe – property owning, industrially-minded, entrepreneurial, market driven (Hobsbawm 1987) – that both underpinned colonial accumulations and was not unchallenged by the same colonies. The historiography unpacking imperial displays has been significant for examining the politics of representation: of Europe to itself, of 'others' to Europe, and of 'others' to themselves, where a national or continental European 'self' depended upon inscribing 'otherness' onto non-European objects, people and societies (Greenhalgh 1988; Mitchell 1988; Coombes 1997; MacKenzie 1999). In addition, these studies have been important for illuminating how intrinsic colonies were to being British, French, Dutch, or German, for nation building was co-constitutive with empire building.

After London's Great Exhibition of the Industry of All Nations of 1851, regular mass spectacles took place across the British Empire in various colonies and colonial nations (e.g. Johannesburg, 1936). Extending over vast acreages, lasting for six months to a year, these events boasted the privileged/protected extension of national trade (Colonial and Indian Exhibition, 1886), set up competition in trade between nation-empires (Franco-British Exhibition, 1908) or were founded on economic boosterism (British Empire Exhibition, 1924–1925), and drew in millions of national and colonial visitors to these edifying, entertaining fantasies of empire as peaceable, socially ordered, grand – an extension of nation. Such displays reified the ability of Britain – and other imperial nations – to conquer and rule. As Mitchell argued, 'Exhibitions, museums and other spectacles were not just reflections of this certainty, however, but the means of its production, by their technique of rendering history, progress, culture and empire in "objective" form' (Mitchell 1988: 7). In this 'system of representation', which 'set up the world as a picture' (Mitchell 1988: 6), African objects were presented as commodities, often raw materials for British industry (Woodham 1989), privileging British science, technology and industrialization as demonstrating progress and modernity. This strategy of display came to include, from 1886 in Britain, the display of colonial subjects, often contained within the exhibition grounds, dressed in 'authentic' attire to portray a racialized, 'primitive', timeless past, as a living sign of themselves, often set against European whiteness as a sign of civilization and modernity (see also Qureshi 2011).

While empires – and their exhibitions – operated within a particular spatial system crossing boundaries, they also imposed territorial borders or trading monopolies, sometimes damaging older connections, such as that across the Indian Ocean described above. Empires and their exhibitions were not quite so coherent or universalizing as to be described as 'global', nor were they unequivocal, and to circumvent the dangers of generalizing European

national aspirations and universalizing 'coloniality' and colonial contexts, the rigidity of such dichotomies as 'self' and 'other' has been mitigated by suppler 'bricolage' (Cooper 1994: 1528) of the complex or ambiguous practices of colonizer and colonized. Timothy Mitchell's work on displays of Egypt in the nineteenth-century exhibitions reveals how Egyptian elites responded to images of themselves as 'other', criticizing some aspects of stereotyping, while allowing that it also played a role in validating new representations of themselves and Egypt. In becoming increasingly familiar with European images of Egypt, local ruling classes strategically aligned themselves with colonizers, and removed or altered from their self-presentations that which might be considered 'other' (Mitchell 1988).

South African displays in the colonial metropolis, and within its own territories, reveal a fragmented colonizer and multiple images and actions of colonized Africans. Wedded to local concerns about uniting Afrikaans and English speakers and its fledgling dominion nationhood, exhibition commissioners curated a distinctly national display for the 1924 Empire Exhibition in Wembley, London, and set out its colonial-vernacular, Cape Dutch pavilion as a European-but-not-English, hybrid sign of white permanence in the landscape of other African colonial displays. English-speaking commissioners equivocated over sending African 'primitive' dancers to the exhibition as living exhibits in the entertainment style of older, nineteenth-century spectacles. In the event, the dancers were omitted in favour of promoting a picture of successful white South African industry, and images of Africans as potential labour were carefully downplayed while ethnographic images of Africans were utilized to claim South Africa's own anthropological expertise (bhagat 2011). In yet another arena South Africa's white exhibition commissioners voiced concern about the prejudice and lack of hospitality experienced by Africans who had travelled to London to visit the event.

More clarity is required on what Africans thought of the structures of colonial identity being inscribed on them (inevitably Africa is contained within an imperial archive, even if it is read critically). In part, this can be seen in the example of the Johannesburg Empire Exhibition, where all established tropes of 'othering' African people, as living exhibits or as illustrative image, were employed by exhibition organizers – as labouring accessories to industrial displays, as spectacular dancers, as exotic 'near extinct races' – alongside new roles as theatre performers and as jazz musicians, playing African-American ragtime, swing and jazz for the evening events that formed part of the exhibition's entertainment line-up (bhagat 2003; Coe 2001). More revealingly, Africans were present as visitors and as journalists to the exhibition. African journalists differed in their views about it: some aligned themselves with images of African labour as urban and part of Johannesburg's dramatic capitalist success, while communist journalists strongly criticized the exhibition's imperialist venture, condemning false representations of genuinely poor township living

Mrs. Farrell, better known as Dal Faro, the famous sculptress, keeps the Bushmen interested with her lifelike work.

Fig. 1.4 South African press image showing a white South African artist working in the so-called 'Bushmen' exhibit at the 1936 Empire Exhibition, held in Johannesburg, South Africa. *Sunday Express*, 15 November 1936. A group of Khoisan people were brought to the Empire Exhibition by a game hunter, Donald Bain, to be displayed as examples of a 'dying race'.

conditions and decrying the exploitative horror of the display of the 'near extinct' Khoisan (see Fig. 1.4), even while maintaining the image of Khoisan primitiveness, claiming it as a sign of South Africa's (as the extension of empire) failure to civilize and distribute the fruits of its wealth (Coe 2001). While empire exhibitions presumed universalizing stories, the very form of such exhibitions, like the empires themselves, contained visions of empire that were created by multiple and fragmented metropolitan, as well as diverse colonial, discourses. Dissonant, local voices disrupted an empire-wide apparatus, shot through with conflict as between journalists of differing political allegiances or long-distance connections, for example, between African jazz musicians and African Americans (see Coplan 1985). African jazz performers in 1936 reinforced African exhibition visitors' self-image as contemporary urbanites

and as connected to transatlantic racial politics, possibly more than they felt connected to the Khoisan as fellow countrymen.

An 'African Atlantic' (John Thornton, cited in Diouf and Prais 2013: 206) operated variously through its long history, for example, in the early twentieth century when African and African American intellectuals connected through political and intellectual alliances in European and North American metropoles at various Pan-African conferences (1900, 1919, 1945; see Diouf and Prais 2013). The implications of these long-distance linkages are important for writing Africa through its multiple elsewheres, and as much for Africa's postcolonial nation states as for colonial Africa. The past is not a foreign country in Africa: the Atlantic in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century was – and still is – traversed by container ships carrying huge bales of second-hand clothing from the West to markets across Africa. Press coverage of this world-wide trade in second-hand clothing paints quite the usual image of Africa – as wanting, lacking, put-upon by the West: 'All over Africa, people are wearing what Americans once wore and no longer want. Visit the continent and you'll find faded remnants of second-hand clothing in the strangest of places. . . . The white bathrobe on a Liberian rebel boy with his wig and automatic rifle. And the muddy orange sweatshirt on the skeleton of a small child . . .' (Packer 2002: 1). In much the same way as Prestholdt (2008) describes the nineteenth-century Westerner as being confounded when confronted by Zanzibaris dressed in Western fashions, Packer's image of Africans in Western dress reiterates colonial taxonomies of 'hybrid' African cultures as a sign of degeneration and semi-civilization; it is an image that Walker's AFRIKA camera might have shot.

In contrast to this, Karen Tranberg Hansen's study suggests instead a complicated industry. The sale of used clothing has a long history in Atlantic trade connecting London and the West African coast, since the eighteenth century. Hansen focuses on the 1990s and moves across the trade between north America, northern Europe and finally Zambia where she has intricately traced the varied effects of *salaula* (the Chibemba word for second-hand clothing, meaning 'to select from a pile in the manner of rummaging', Hansen 2004: 7; see also 2000) against numerous media claims that cohere around a motif of global trade destroying local industries. Hansen outlines more subtle combinations of a failing economy, cheap textile imports and subsequent Chinese owned re-direction of textile manufacturing to export cloth as reasons for the death of local industry. Beyond this, a complex economy of trade, skilled artisanry and discerning consumer choice developed around *salaula* (see Fig. 1.5), including the transport of bales of clothing, the construction of market stalls and tailoring to repair, alter, and transform *salaula* garments according to consumer taste. Consumers have come to view *salaula* as providing value for money, everyday fashion and 'incomparable' or 'not common' styles (Hansen 2004: 9). Hansen offers a salient comment about local and press coverage of this trade: 'The

Fig. 1.5 The used clothing market in Lusaka, Zambia, © Cordelia Persen, 21 February 2009. This image shows not only clothing stalls, but also Zambian's discerning choice and display of dress – from army surplus worn with trainers by the man on the left, the polo shirt worn with a wax print wrap by the woman stall holder in the middle of the picture, the bystander in a long leather coat on the right beside the car, to the man in orange tunic, khaki trousers and gum boots behind the car. Available at: https://flic.kr/p/694Fw5. This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NoDerivs 2.0 Generic License (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nd/2.0/).

single most striking point about accounts of the negative effects of the second-hand clothing trade appearing in local and Western news media is their lack of curiosity about the clothes themselves and how consumers deal with them. In effect, in these accounts the clothes themselves are entirely incidental' (Hansen 2004: 9). A close look at what is actually happening in Africa reveals people, ideas, objects, intentions enmeshed in intricate relationships: design matters.

Conclusions

My aim here is to understand the worldliness of Africa. I have been less concerned with 'globalizing' Africa, or design history, and more interested in paying attention to supple conceptions of local, national, regional and long-distance connections of the continent that became Africa. This is not to privilege any

state over other forms of human connection, but also not to over-emphasize vast, abstract conceptions of the 'global' over smaller, more contingent agencies of human connections. By highlighting the complexity of African engagement with other places in the world – an interaction which is often asymmetrical – involving objects and people, ideas, processes and intentions, I hope to show how design histories in / of Africa might throw off the shackles of its categories of Eurocentric exclusion and embrace an inter-disciplinary approach to scholarship. As Achille Mbembe and Sarah Nuttall explain, 'compartmentalization of knowledge undergirds the obsession with Africa's uniqueness, and it feeds the overwhelming neglect of *how* the meanings of Africanness are made' (Mbembe and Nuttall 2004: 350). By interrogating the pre-, post- and colonial material and design culture of Africa, and remaining attentive to the intricacies of periodization and often troubled national historiographies, design history can enhance the work of writing an 'Africa' different from 'its Eurocentric pseudo-synonym, by turns taxonomic, by turns homogenizing' (Tageldin 2014: 320), and may indeed work to write of the continent as a plural unity, as a part of the world.

Notes

1. 'Fuck Afrika I' by Garth Walker was made in response to an invitation by David Krut Projects, South Africa, for *Drawing Show Designers and Illustrators,* 2008, an exhibition of twelve contemporary graphic designers and illustrators, 10 September–11 October, 2008 (see http://davidkrutprojects.com/artworks/fuck-afrika-i-by-garth-walker-at-orange-juice-by-drawing-show-designers-and-illustrators). I would like to thank Garth Walker for generously supplying an image of his work for this chapter.

2. Magnus Bjørnsen's report for the Norwegian Council for Africa explains 'Not only is the image of Africa as a continent only characterized by shortcomings and lacks deeply hurtful to many Africans. It is also an obstacle to the continent's economic development. According to the report *Private Capital Flows to Africa: Perception and Reality*, Africa's widespread negative image among investors had two consequences: Firstly, that the continent lost out on investments and secondly, that the funds which were invested in Africa, had a tendency to end up in short-term, high-risk ventures with developmental impacts substantially smaller than from "normal" investments' (Bjørnsen 2008).

3. Lynn M. Thomas develops a detailed discussion of the ways in which 'modernity' can be addressed, not as a conceptual category to impose through analysis, but as a category to investigate how historical actors understand their modernity; she recommends, then, an historicist approach to investigating modernity (Thomas 2011: 734–740).

4. Research on 'early modern' African–Asian trade connections has recently sought to illuminate the agency of Swahili middlemen along the East African coast trading in commodities – the most significant being manufactured Gujarati cloth – confirming the Swahili as African, tracing their reach into Africa beyond the coast, and examining the failures of Portuguese traders to control this trade. (See Pearson 1998, who frames this large-scale trade as of the 'Afrasian Sea and its coasts' (9), to assert a study of it in its own terms.)

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