TRAVELLING OBJECTS, MASKING COMMERCE: THE SOCIAL LIFE OF AFRICAN OBJECTS IN CAPE TOWN

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Abstract

'Travelling objects, masking commerce' deals with the social life of handcrafted African objects such as masks and sculptures as well as objects of daily use, and the different phases they move through in their life cycles. The interrelationships between objects, the places where they are sold and the people selling and purchasing them are analysed. The core argument is that particular aspects of objects' lives as commodities work to mask their commodity nature. The work focuses on the processes that enable that masking to occur; processes that occur both in exchange relations and in the manner in which objects are related to as possessions.

The masking of objects' commodity nature is shown to be achieved by their non-commodity dimension, which include the stories constructed and told about them which, very broadly speaking, are the essence of marketing any product. Hence, it is argued that it is the non-commodity aspects that allow for the commodification of objects.

'Travelling objects' provides a detailed analysis not only of how the process of masking is achieved but also why it is attempted. An issue of major importance is to develop a more general and socialised picture of African objects, particularly those at the markets studied ethnographically in Cape Town during 1997-98.

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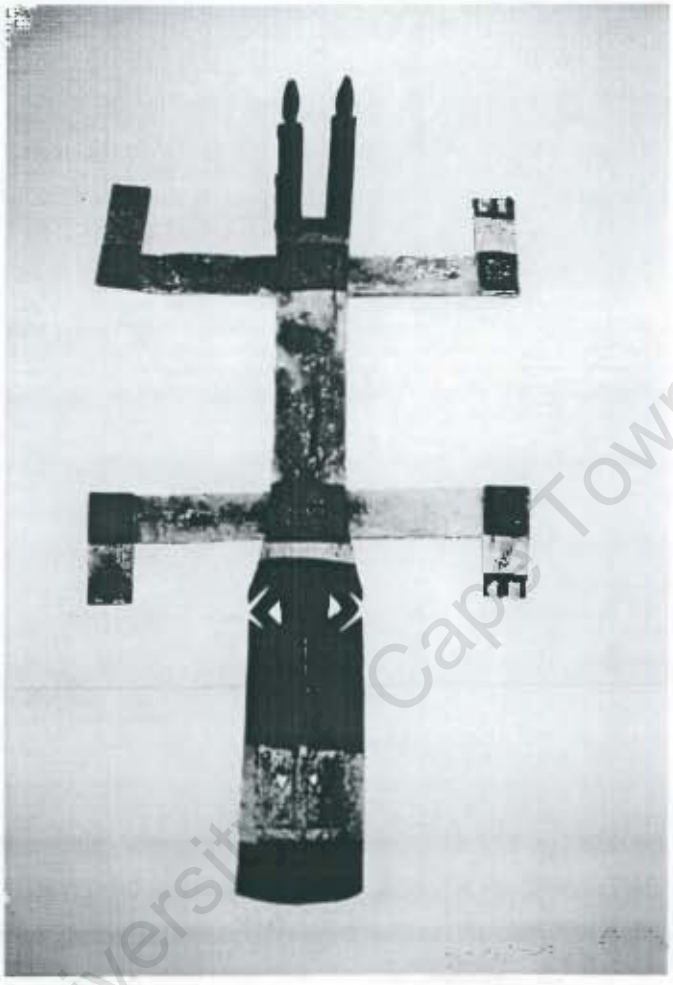


Picture 1: *Kanaga* mask

Prologue:

The Story of the *Kanaga* Mask

Here I am, a *kanaga* mask hanging on a white wall in Cape Town. It is 1997. My life story begins in Mali in a small town near Mopti in Dogon country in April 1997. Among many others I was carved, painted and smeared with fat by a local a carver in a small hut. Some of us stayed in Mopti and were sold to locals for the annual *kanaga* dance festival. I was sold, with 20 others of my kind, to a wholesale merchant from Mali, named Sourie. He packed us in a big box together with marionettes, Bamana masks and Bwa masks. If only he had used some paper or other padding to protect us from scratches! We arrived via Abidjan and Johannesburg in Cape Town on a cold day in June. That was the first time that I saw the sunlight again, after many days of travelling across Africa.

Together with my co-travellers in the box I was thrown on the floor of the balcony of the Pan African Market. We saw at least ten other boxes that were standing there waiting to be unpacked. I was displayed on the railings of the balcony; side by side with six other *kanaga* masks. We had survived the trip with only a few scratches. Some of the masks who'd come with us had to be repaired, glued together again and polished.

So there I was, waiting for my new destination. The possibilities were many. I could have been purchased by a trader from Greenmarket Square, where I would have been displayed on the floor under a big table. Every morning I would have been unpacked from a plastic box in the hope of being sold. In the afternoon I would have had to go back to the box. I could also have been bought by a gallery owner who would have displayed me on the shop wall along with other masks from all over Africa. That would have increased my exchange value quite a lot. Or I could have ended up with a trader at the Pan African Market. That would have saved me from being squashed into a box every evening and my exchange value would have been slightly higher than on the street. I am one of many and I have not danced in a ritual so I am disqualified from being

bought by a museum or a collector of African art. It is a pity because had that happened I would probably have ended up in a nice clean place.

Standing there on the railings and waiting, I wondered what the people who looked at me or might buy me, thought about me? Was I merchandise, an object of decoration, a copy, a fake, a ritual object, a souvenir from Africa, or even a piece of art? I further asked myself what Sourie would tell the customers about me? Would he tell them that I did dance in a *kanaga* festival? Would he tell them stories about the Dogon people and Mali? Later I wondered why I was here. Why would people want to buy me anyway? What was so special about me?

And then she came, the social anthropologist, who saw me on the railing and bought me, on the very day of my arrival. I do not know why, but I suppose that she, as an anthropologist, might at least understand that I have been taken out of my previous context and that my meaning [hanging] on her wall is considerably changed from what it was at earlier points in my life.

Chapter one: Introduction

Why do I begin with this little story? I am an anthropologist, not a poet. However, the story summarises my work. 'Travelling objects' is about the social life of African objects, such as the mask in my story. Objects, like people, move through life cycles. They can be prolonged and complex for some objects such as artworks. They can be rather short for other objects, such as packaging, which is often discarded after its use. Hence, objects which make up the material world that surrounds us can be approached from a biographical perspective (Kopytoff 1986). Like the mask in the story some objects change hands many times during their life span. They move through different social, cultural and economic contexts and acquire different meanings as they do so. Therefore it can be argued that objects have life histories.

This work is about objects, such as handcrafted masks, sculptures or objects of daily use, and about their social life in Cape Town, South Africa[1]. The objects' observed 'living environments' (social, cultural and economic contexts) include street markets, curio shops, art galleries, national museums as well as the homes of purchasers of objects. I have explored the plurality of participants taking part in the social lives of the objects. They have included traders and sales personnel as well as purchasers of the objects. I analyse and describe the different social environments in which the objects are found and the ways in which the objects communicate in those changing social environments.

I use the term 'African object' despite the implicit value-ladenness of the word African (see chapter 8), because it is frequently necessary to distinguish these objects from others that are used and transacted as souvenirs and collectibles. Where possible, however, I simply describe them as 'objects'. I am careful to avoid terms such as 'African art' because I wish to avoid implying that all objects found at the markets, galleries and homes of their owners are referred to

[1] Some of the findings of my work are similar to Steiner's work 'African Art in Transit' (1994) in which he explores the African art markets in Abidjan (Ivory Coast). I will refer to such similarities, for example, the ways in which traders act as cultural brokers (Steiner 1994: 154 -156) in my thesis. Yet many of my findings are different, especially in regard to the greater ethnic and religious diversity among traders in the Cape Town markets, the greater distance of most traders from their home country as well as the gender of the traders. For example, in the Abidjan art markets, men are the major role players (Steiner 1994: 40), whereas in Cape Town markets women play a significant role as traders and salespersons.

as 'art' and are (or have been) perceived as such in all the contexts in which they are found. To use a term such as art would contradict the very nature of my work in which I aim to show that African objects have different meanings in diverse contexts. It is trite to say that an object's meaning is perceived differently when found in an African village or at a street market, or when it is found in an art gallery. However, saying so does not explain the concrete reasons for the differences in perception. For that one needs to analyse the different contexts in which the objects are imbued with meaning and by whom.

I am aware that by using the term African I make use of a socially constructed idea. It is people who relate to the objects as African for reasons such as that they are produced, used, or sold in Africa. Yet, the object as such does not have an inherent quality of being African. Some people might almost habitually recognise these objects as African, but not all do. An example from my fieldwork provides evidence. When a saleswoman at one of the markets I studied was asked where a *Guro* mask (produced in the Ivory Coast) came from, she replied India. According to the saleswoman, the colourful mask reminded her of what she perceived Indian things to be like.

I use the term African to circumscribe the objects I talk about in this work. The term object alone would be too broad. Yet that is not to say that my investigations and analysis could not be applied to any other object which is transacted. But, for my present study, I have decided to focus on a certain category of objects that has been commonly described as African art, tourist art and African artefacts, both by my research participants and in the vast literature about these kinds of objects (Fagg 1964, Jules-Rosette 1984, Schmalenbach 1989, Vogel 1988, 1991, Shiner 1994, Steiner 1994, Meyer 1995, Phillips 1995).

The idea that objects have social lives and life histories was developed by Appadurai and others (Appadurai 1986). Appadurai argues that focusing on objects, and following the path they take through different environments or contexts, enables us to understand 'glimpses of the ways in which desire and demand, reciprocal sacrifice and power interact to create economic value in specific social situations' (Appadurai 1986: 4). By explicitly directing attention to objects and their socio-cultural context one can begin to comprehend both how objects influence the lives of

people and how objects act as carriers of meaning (Appadurai 1986: 5, Marcus & Myers 1995: 34).

Marcus and Myers (1995) take Appadurai's concept of following objects—'their circulation in diverse contexts'— and use it to analyse and negotiate boundary sustaining efforts of the art world in a cross-cultural environment. Accounting for the circulation of 'objects, money, ideas and people' they take what they call a 'relativicing look' at the way the art world appropriates objects 'cross-culturally for its own purposes (Marcus & Myers 1995:34).

Appadurai's work represents a theoretical base Marcus & Myers (1995) and has to be understood in terms of his argument 'that economic exchange creates value' and that 'value is embodied in *commodities* that are exchanged'[2] (my italics) (Appadurai 1986: 3). Appadurai concentrates in his work on commodities; or rather on the commodity potential of all objects (Appadurai 1986: 13). According to Appadurai, being a commodity is only one state in an object's multiple social life. Objects move in and out of the commodity state (Appadurai 1986: 13, 17, Steiner 1994: 13). Appadurai emphasises the 'temporal perspective of the commoditization of things' (Appadurai 1986: 17). In doing so he appears to construct imaginary boundaries between the commodity state and other states in the objects' lives. Appadurai suggests that commodities are 'distinguishable from 'products', 'objects', 'goods', artefacts', and other sorts of things—but only in certain respects and from a certain point of view' (Appadurai 1986:6). Yet he does not elaborate what 'products', 'goods', 'artefacts' mean to him other than that they are opposed to commodities. Nor does he explain why and from which perspective the distinction can be drawn. In this regard Appadurai says, at a different point in his work, 'Let us approach commodities as things in a certain situation, a situation that can characterise many different kinds of thing, at different points in their social lives. This means looking at the commodity potential of all things rather than searching fruitlessly for the magic distinction between commodities and other sorts of things.' (Appadurai 1986: 13). Here he acknowledges the difficulty of distinguishing commodities from other things, yet he also circumscribes the characteristics of a commodity as comprising a singular and distinguishable status.

[2] See for example Marcus and Myers' analysis of how the art world creates value through economic exchange, but also through the movement of art through time and space (Marcus & Myers 1995:30-32).

Appadurai's distinction is heuristically useful and enables us to define the term commodity and to explain the process of commodification. However, during my fieldwork I noticed that the boundaries between commodity and 'other sorts of things' were diffuse. In other words the borders between different stages in an object's life were blurred. In some cases the African object's status as a commodity prevailed, hence the object predominantly established relationships to and among people that were characterised solely by market exchange. In other instances the object's status was predominantly that of a souvenir establishing relationships to and among people that went beyond the sphere of monetary market exchange. The object became a symbol of a place, a person or a reminder of a whole vacation. Therefore, I argue, African objects have a hybrid character. They are commodities as well as artefacts, souvenirs, collectibles, decorations, etc. All the latter characteristics refer to the non-commodity characteristics of objects. These non-commodity dimensions are not just terms in themselves. Each descriptive attribute, such as commodity, souvenir art, etc. marks a particular kind of relationship between people and material objects. Further, the attributes become protagonists in stories, part of the life stories of African objects. They are aspects of the stories told by participants in the objects' lives about the objects' production, their origin and use but also about their value as art, souvenir, ethnographic artefact, or, indeed, something else again. Marcus and Myers, for example, emphasise the importance of the narrative of art history in evaluating objects as art (Marcus & Myers 1995: 27).

My fieldwork revealed that the non-commodity characteristics of African objects, for example being an artefact from a culture different from that of the observer or potential purchaser, made the object desirable. Hence, I argue that it is the non-commodity aspects of some objects of the material world, such being seen as African objects, that create the value of, and demand for the objects and thereby enable their commodification. African objects found at markets, in galleries and with collectors are simultaneously both commodity and non-commodity. A mutual influence exists between their non-commodity and commodity aspects. This influence leaves room for the actors who participate in the social lives of African objects to construct a private realm around those objects that may be quite different from the realm of exchange and commodity per se (Kopytoff 1986: 88). I further argue that the non-commodity dimensions of African objects

determine the degree that their commodity nature can be and is masked. I propose that the more commodified an African object is, meaning the less its commodity nature is overshadowed by its non-commodity aspects, the lower its commercial value.

To develop my arguments has required following the paths of African objects to show how the meanings ascribed to them change in the process of their shifting social environments, and how those changes impact on their degree of commodification. I will show that their very identification as economic, or aesthetic, or as other things, depends on the contexts of their exchange and/or of consumption where they are often on display. I propose to approach the different social environments through which African objects travel as 'fields of struggle' between a number of attributes of African objects. These include their commodity, artefact, art, collectible, tourist art, authentic etc. attributes. In each such field of struggle certain attributes predominate, *ostensibly* imbuing the object with only one meaning, be it that of art, souvenir, commodity, ethnographic artefact or something else, and appearing to subdue its other attributes.

Marcus and Myers concentrate on the art world processes as one field of struggle, or in their words as 'arena of content', which they perceive as the 'main domain of value production in any society' (Marcus & Myers 1995: 10). Similar to my approach in this thesis they are not concerned with defining the attribute art but with the processes that are involved to transform an object into art, especially in regard to the assimilation of objects of non-western societies into institutions of the western art world (Marcus & Myers 1995: 4).

Following the objects through various different socio-cultural contexts has enabled me to demonstrate the hybrid character of African objects and to find ways to understand why and how certain attributes come to predominate in specific environments. Yet we must also realise that these various social environments do not exist in isolation from each other, and that mutual relationships exist between them. The internal struggles for supremacy of an object's attributes also takes place between the people in different environments, often resulting in competition among and between them in those environments. A curator at the National Gallery in Cape Town, for example, discussed with me an argument she had had with the Museum's shop owner. During the exhibition 'Forging Links with Ghana and its Neighbours' (1997) the Museum shop

had placed copies of some of the exhibits on its shelves, for sale. The curator demanded that the copies be removed, arguing that selling the copies in the shop would undermine the authenticity and uniqueness of the exhibits. However, seen from the perspective of the shop owner, the presence of the exhibits in the Gallery alongside enhanced the authenticity of the copies available for sale, making them more attractive to potential customers and hence increasing their saleability.

Quite a few participants in the different social environments in which I studied the social and economic circuits of African objects had a special interest in proclaiming that an object they had in their home, their gallery, their collection, their publication, or their stall was something special, and better than any other similar object found elsewhere. All attempted, to a greater or lesser extent, to undermine the potential commodity nature of the African objects in their possession by favouring the objects' non-commodity aspects such as its value as art, ethnographic artefact, collectible, souvenir, decoration, etc (Marcus & Myers 1995: 8-9, 21-24).

My fieldwork in various social environments revealed that the most contested attributes of most African objects were those relating to their commodity, art and authenticity characteristics. I also noticed that, among some research participants, certain meanings or attributes were attributed to objects simply by the contexts where they were found. For example, the same or virtually identical items were commodity in relation to a street market, art in relation to a gallery. Street market traders were perceived both by lay persons and by experts in African objects, such as collectors, gallery owners and curators, as rather uninformed agents selling trivial, mass-produced and inauthentic commodities. However, fieldwork showed that one could find similar objects in markets, galleries and museum exhibitions, and as high a degree of expertise at street markets as in those more formal institutions. The prejudices that so-called connoisseurs, curators, collectors, art critics, and many lay persons held about traders and their objects of sale, seem to be symptomatic of two related concerns about the material word and people's relationships to it. First, there is a general tendency in western thought to perceive commodities as evil per se. Secondly, there is a tendency to perceive art and commodity as quite separate and opposing entities, occupying quite distinct socio-cultural spaces.

Such negative perceptions towards commodities have been discussed at length by various social theorists who have adopted quite diverse perspectives in their studies to material culture and consumption. Include among them are Miller (1987, 1995), McCracken (1988), Baudrillard (1968), Bourdieu (1996), Appadurai (1986), and Pearce (1992), and various others.

Both Miller and Appadurai claim that much of the literature that draws on and uses Marx's notion of commodity associates commodities with capitalist modes of production (Appadurai 1986:11, Miller 1995: 144). Miller further argues that part of that literature[3] provided the foundation for conceiving commodities as embodiments of evil (Miller 1987: 6, 1995: 145). Popular opinion, much which takes Marxist theory in very simplistic terms, suggests that Marx distinguished between producing for one's own use and producing something for exchange in markets, the latter production process being linked to an alienating division of labour and the production of commodities. Such commodity production is thus not associated, in that view, with pre-industrialist societies which, according to Miller, are perceived as 'free of the burden' of materialism because their members are thought to have lived in more direct relationships with nature and each other than do people in capitalist societies (Miller 1987: 11). This romanticised view of pre-industrialist societies, Miller points out, results in an anti-materialistic attitude which, he goes on to say, can be found on all 'sides of the political spectrum' of contemporary society (Miller 1987:3). The attitude can also be found in anthropological literature that investigates the impact that commodities had on pre-industrialised societies (Howes 1996).

The growth of consumer culture is frequently also associated with what Miller (1987: 16) calls a fetishist attitude towards objects of the material world (Miller 1987: 16)—an attitude that derives from a particular reading of Marx's ([1867] 1993: 85) notion of commodity fetishism. Before I discuss that notion and how I draw upon it for my own work, it may be useful, in order to avoid later confusions as to what I mean when I use it, to explain the diverse ways and contexts in which fetishism and fetish have been understood in the literature. I should also mention the recent criticism of Marxist approaches. Taylor, for example, claims that Marx and Marxism have become inadequate in analysing contemporary social practices. Taylor argues that Marx's

[3] Miller (1987) mentions Galbraith (1979) and Ewen and Ewen (1982) in this context.

analysis of socio-economic problems is based on an industrial society and its corresponding mechanical processes of production. He suggests such processes are surpassed by electronic processes of reproduction and need new forms of analysis (Taylor 2002: 100). Taylor is correct to say that the socio-economic environment has changed since Marx wrote 'Capital' (1867) but I question whether 'the complexity of network culture' (Taylor 2002) or in other words globalisation necessarily requires new social theories (Mintz, 1998, Haugerud, Stone & Little 2000: 19). I am suggesting that contemporary social dynamics present methodological challenges, such to extend existing social theories into a more global frame. By using a part of Marx' social theories, for example commodity fetishism, I attempt to place them within the context of more complex contemporary times.

Broadly speaking the concept of fetishism has been used in three main areas: anthropological, Freudian or psychological and Marxian (Foster 1993: 252), all three of which have seen fetishism as involving a form of substitution of an object for something else, whether it is a spirit (anthropology), a phallus (Freudian) or a social relationship (Marx) (Apter 1993, Nye 1993, Pietz 1993).

Originating from the Portuguese word *fetisso*, meaning charm or magically active (Apter 1993: 5), the term was used by sixteenth century Portuguese travellers to refer to Christian relics. Only later did they apply it to African artefacts that they found in West Africa. Perceiving such artefacts, for example wooden statues, as magical charms in which animistic spirits resided (Foster 1993: 254), they provided the basis on which late nineteenth century anthropologists such as Tylor (1891) and McLennan (1896) came to use the term to describe material objects found in non-western societies and that were objects of veneration because magical powers were said to inhere in them (Pietz 1993: 132). A parallel development and use of the term occurred with the development of early psychology at the end of the nineteenth century. In that context, the term was used to describe erotic fixations on material objects and parts of the body, almost always in relation to what were seen as perverse sexual urges (Nye 1993: 13). By the early twentieth century, however, Freud (1927) had revised this use, declaring a fetish to be a representation of a castration anxiety (Apter 1993: 4).

Marx linked the notion of fetish as substitute to the processes of commodity production by coining the phrase commodity fetishism ([1867] 1993: 85). He used the phrase to suggest that commodities were particularly contaminated because their very nature both masked the circumstances of their production and the relationship between those who had produced them, and stood in for the relationships between people involved in their circuits of exchange (Miller 1987: 18, Apter 1993: 2, Pietz 1993: 127). Appadurai and Miller have shown that it is very simplistic to interpret Marx's argument here to mean that the extreme commodity nature of consumerism means that it is driven by a fetishist attitude. Such an interpretation, they point out, neglects Marx's own analysis of small-scale societies in that it fails to acknowledge Marx's own thoughts on the existence of commodities in precapitalist small-scale societies (Marx 1993: 93). It further neglects the specific historical moment in which Marx wrote his work (Appadurai 1986, Miller 1993).

Pearce (1992) takes a rather different, more historical-ethical approach towards understanding contemporary societal processes. It is one that rejects the idea that commodities have value simply because of their commodity nature. She argues that 'modern western thought places a low value on the material world and its products, paralleling traditional Christian morality: both are at odds with modern capitalism, which places an inordinately high value upon the possession of material' (Pearce 1992: 17, Taylor 2002). Pearce traces the history of the dualism[4] that distinguishes between the creator and the created, object and subject, thought and thing, all the way back to Plato. She shows how that dualism conceptualises the creator, the subject, the thought as superior to the created, the object, the thing. The result, she argues, is that the 'material world is deprived of any independence, primary reality or possibility of active intervention' (Pearce 1992: 21).

This kind of subject-object duality was developed and became most influential in western philosophy through the writings of Hegel, in particular in his *Phenomenology of Mind*, which

[4] Taylor extends the criticism of dualism into the realm of social theory and maintains that contemporary social theories are based upon the thinking in structural oppositions and that such thinking presupposes culture and its social context as bounded (Taylor 2002:15). Bounded social contexts, he argues do not exist today and therefore contemporary social theories are inadequate (Taylor 2002: 23).

also influenced Marx (Miller 1987: 5, Taylor 2002: 49, 93). The subject-object duality of western thought, as well as some one-sided analyses of Marx's works, are, Miller argues, together responsible for the generally negative view of commodities as, in a strong sense, immoral in contemporary modern Euro-American societies. Such societies are thus portrayed by some critics (Adorno and Horkheimer 1972, Marcuse 1964) as being characterised by a principle that satisfaction can be found only in material goods, which have 'brought the West to a state of moral and social decay' (Howes 1996: 180).

Such negative attitudes towards commodities appear to be the underlying reasons for the prejudices I discovered, amongst other participants in my research, about traders in African objects and about the very objects of their trade. Traders in African objects at street markets were often perceived as uneducated and their trade objects as trite and superficial commodities. These negative perceptions, I argue, resulted partly from the more general perception that commodities are symbols of contamination. However, as I go on to demonstrate, is not the object per se, or the trader, that suggests that the objects are commodities, but the market environment. I will show in chapter three that it is in this environment that the object's character as commodity appears to be the most obvious. It is there that the object appears to miss the proper frame to imbue it with non-commodity aspects such as they might obtain from association with art.

According to art historian Gombrich (1979) a frame is a means to focus our attention on the object inside it. Miller (1987), discussing material culture and mass consumption, extends Gombrich's notion of the frame, noting that 'it might be suggested that it is only through the presence of the frame that we recognise the work of art for what it is, perceiving and responding to it in the appropriate way...Placed in another context, such as the billboard, the work of art might well fail to attract either appreciation or interest' (Miller 1987: 101)[5].

[5] See Errington's (1997) opposing analysis of the literal framing of art. Errington suggests that the frame as such is the major device that allows for the commodification of objects because the frame increases the portability and durability of the framed object (Errington 1997: 83). For a social history of the framing of art objects see Brettell & Starling (19860 and Baxandall (1987).

Both Gombrich and Miller focus on the material and spatial arrangements in which objects are found and appear to have based the concept frame on theories developed by Bateson (1972) and further applied by Goffman (1975). Goffman described frames as products of human action and interaction, hence an interactive system in which social actors perform their roles (Goffman 1975: 573). The frame according to Goffman allows us to define a situation 'in accordance with principles of organisation which govern events—at least social ones—and our social involvement in them…' (Goffman 1975: 10-11). The concept of frame both spatial and social can also be applied to galleries and museums and the social actors therein, all of which function to draw attention to the object as art, or as something unique and worth exhibiting. However, one can also apply the frame concept to commodity markets. The spatial frame provided by the market environment draws attention to the object as commodity rather than as art. The social frame (consisting of traders of African objects) draws attention to the objects as art rather than commodity (Chapter five).

Miller explains that the predicament of the object and its appreciation results from 'our image of the artefact [which] is constantly dominated, not only by linguistic analogies, but also by the concept of art and the uniqueness of the object of art' (Miller 1987: 100). The concept of art resists the commercial value of the art objects as well as their mass production and reproduction (Benjamin 1963). Art is thus repeatedly represented by art historians (Greenberg 1965, Fry 1920) and critics of aesthetics (Hegel 1840, Kant 1787) as non-commodity, despite its place in auction houses and galleries. The idea that the art object is unique leads to what Miller describes as the humiliation of the common object, a term he uses to describe objects of mass or popular culture (Miller 1987: 101).

Hence, commodity and art have come to be perceived as two distinct and opposing entities. Yet that distinction relates not only to the above discussion of the 'evil of commodities'. It is also the outcome of the perception that *art is antithesis of the commodity.*

I mentioned earlier that one feature of markets trading such commodities as the African objects with which I am concerned is that the stories of those objects' production are masked, and that the objects are then used to stand in for relationships between people. Yet such objects are also

often perceived as symbols of cultural homogenisation. Kopytoff claims '...that commoditization homogenises value, while the essence of culture is discrimination, excessive commoditization is anti-cultural...' Drawing from Durkheim (1912), he continues: 'societies need to set apart a certain portion of their environment, marking it as 'sacred', singularisation is one means to this end' (Kopytoff 1986: 73). I suggest that art functions as an opposing concept, constructed to 'save' the world from the evils of consumption. Art is seen as sacred, refined and unique, commodity is seen as secular, brute and mass-produced. Yet such distinctions are more ideological than real. They result partly from modernist aestheticism and elitism.

The difficulty of distinguishing art from commodity is clear from descriptions of Renaissance times when the so-called 'genius-artists' were living and when their product—art—was all commodity, in the sense that it was all commissioned work. The works of DaVinci, Botticelli and others was commodified to such an extent that the money spent by the patron not only determined what was depicted but also what colours were used to paint a fresco or a painting; different colours had different prices (Baxandall 1987). Yet, the nature of the contract for commissioned work implies a relationship between producer and commissioner where reciprocities prevail. Such relationships, particularly if those reciprocities are generalised by being delayed and marked by friendship, mask the commodity nature of artworks.

It would go beyond the scope of the present work to enter into a fuller discussion of the development of the concept of art and artists in Euro-American societies. But it is worth looking at some of the approaches that have been taken to gain an understanding of what constitutes art, and at theories underlying them.

Harrison (1983: 19), for example, has argued that modernist art theory constitutes an ideology used by certain groups in western society (the 'art community' and members of a dominant class) to demonstrate and maintain their elitist position in society (Harrison 1983: 19). According to Harrison (1983: 20), modernist art theory should be seen in the light of what he refers to as 'the intellectual tradition of liberalism' which perceives culture as distinct from material life and the everyday. This concept of culture as high culture regards culture as comprising fine art, opera, literature, etc. rather than being associated with relationships between people, the material

world and nature. All the latter do, however, constitute parts of a different, more all-encompassing understanding of the notion of culture (Harrison 1983: 20). Errington analysing the social practices that separate high culture from life uses the concept of frame as a boundary-creating device, which sets high culture apart from material life and the everyday. The frame (a picture frame, a pedestal or a stage) 'pronounces what it encloses to be not "real" life, but something different from it' (Errington 1997: 84). Thus from a modernist art theory perspective the essential function of art is regarded as being to provide the beholder with access to spiritual experience that is quite distinct from everyday experiences and certainly from commercialism. As Bell puts it: 'to understand art we need nothing whatever about history...to appreciate fully a work of art we require nothing but sensibility. To those that can hear, Art speaks for itself.' (Bell [1914] 1958: 98). Implicitly such a construction of what constitutes art is underpinned by a Kantian belief (1787) that art has transcendent spiritual value (Taylor 2002: 31). And it is precisely that characteristic of art that enables masking of art's economic value and of the ways in which art is produced. The emphasis laid by such theorists on the sensibility of 'those that can hear Art speak' also has the effect of excluding all those who lack the 'cultural capital', to use Bourdieu's term (1996), to appreciate art spiritually.

The key process through which, according to Bourdieu, people develop cultural capital is education. Bourdieu thus argues that the better and longer one's education, the greater the cultural capital one acquires, and hence the greater one's competence to make value-judgements between art and non-art (Bourdieu 1996: 12, 53). For Bourdieu art becomes grounded in the social distinction that such education brings precisely at that time in the social evolutionary process when the social distinction of the upper class can no longer be realised simply in financial terms. By now there is an affluent middle class which can also acquire wealth and property. The apparent sensibility of 'those that could hear Art speak' that could not previously be earned or bought is now increasingly accessible to others who are able to obtain the education that develops the disposition of the cultured and sensitive person ((Taylor 2002: 244, Harrison 1983: 63). McEvilley (1992) puts the above in somewhat different words, when he writes:

> In the first century AD, Strabo recorded [7.3.12] a Scythian initiation rite in which youths would dance in forest clearings clothed in wolf skins. After bonding in this new identity they would regard non-initiates as

> wolves' prey. It was an effective preparation for power struggles and war, as members of the clan or tribal cult universalised their claim on power by identifying with forces of nature. In the Modernist era, with its claims to universal standards of quality, the elite community of taste might have seemed such a group; certain artworks, especially those abstract and sublime, were cultic emblems, like wolf skins. The group for whom the work was made was bonded around its secret meanings; and other groups - profani, non-initiates, interlopers - were rendered its social, economic and cultural prey. While seeming to emphasise universality or sameness, art in the West became a force for divisiveness and exclusion (McEvilley 1992: 9).

Today the wolf skin bearers are no longer safe. In present times when artworks are readily reproduced through the technologies of mass production and consumption (Benjamin 1963), and when what Veblen (1975 [1899]) called the new leisure class has emerged, a process of emulation has occurred, lower classes in the social hierarchy having increasingly imitated the higher classes (Veblen 1975: 81, 85, Lury 1996: 46). Members of the leisure class had sought to demonstrate its good taste and status by the use and display of objects of material culture (Taylor 2002: 243, Veblen 1975: 74-5). Their aesthetisised lifestyle and demands led to changes in production processes and to an ever-growing number of objects of material culture generated through mass-production. Bourdieu (1996: 310) claims that the taste of the middle class was predominantly influenced by an 'hedonistic morality of consumption, based on credit, spending and enjoyment'. When members of the middle class, according to Bourdieu, showed interest in works of art, theatre or literature, they tended to prefer works which were directly accessible and close to everyday life (Bourdieu 1996: 32). Hence, themes and objects that became popular were those that evoked passions, emotions and pleasure. But because the middle class's preferences were in direct opposition to those of art historians such as Bell, the latter were able to portray themselves as aesthetes who could appreciate and give effect to the 'ascetic ethic of production and accumulation' (Bourdieu 1996: 310) as well as to the aesthete's preference of pure form over function and iconography.

The aesthetic lifestyle was thus opposed to the popular middle class lifestyle, and it was confined by and to elitist groups (the wolf skin bearers) whose members sought to secure it by activities such as collecting, connoiseurship and the creation of artificial scarcities of objects, as well as by looking for new objects of art (including African objects) which the masses would not appreciate (Taylor 2002: 244, Harrison 1983: 64). The process led to a hierarchy of value in what Clifford

(1988: 224) referred to as an art-culture system and a clear distinction between high and popular culture. High culture, says Clifford, was now related to uniqueness, originality and authenticity, popular culture to reproduction, commercialism, inauthenticity, and, hence, mass-production (Plattner 2000).

The distinction between high and popular culture, or fine art and popular art has today become increasingly blurred through the effect of a number of historic events. One was the rise of artists' movements, such as Dada and Surrealism, which sought to collapse the boundaries between art and everyday life by showing that the most banal commodity, for example an urinal, could be placed in a gallery as an object of art (Taylor 2002: 7-8, McEvilley 1992: 9-10). Post-modern art, opposing itself to modernism and avant-garde, went a step further by promoting the concept of anti-work or anti-art, by mixing art styles and materials from contemporary and historic sources and by emphasising iconography instead of pure form (Plattner 2000: 124, Mc Evilley 1992: 13). However, despite the blurring category of boundaries, the ghost of modernism, and with it the distinctions between art and everyday life, art and commodity, popular and fine art, still haunt us today. That is particularly clear in the simultaneous humiliation of African objects at street markets in places such as Cape Town and their sacralisation in many galleries both in those places and elsewhere.

An example of the persistence of the modernist art theoretical distinction between art and the everyday comes from my discussions with a collector I met at a Cape Town street market. He claimed that 'it is disgusting to find all these cheap copies here in Cape Town'. And a gallery owner I interviewed said that: 'All that [traded] stuff is worth nothing. The traders do not know what they are selling. It is all produced to be sold.' Quite a few tourists to whom I talked reflected the same attitude when they said that the objects on sale at the street markets were best described as 'African kitsch' and that they found it a pity that one could get only 'reproductions' and not the 'real thing'. And reflecting the attitude yet again, Grundy comments, in his introduction to Levinsohn's *Art and Craft of Southern Africa* (1984: 13; my italics) '... authentic forms and designs may become prostituted in the tourist trade... Quality suffers. Authenticity is compromised. "Traditional" is maimed. Who cares! The immediate return may be greater as the

volume of sales grows. Bad art may make good short-run economic sense. And *today's merchants are hardly sticklers for accuracy and authenticity*'.

Street traders in African objects appear to be the anathema of the 'art world' in that they most clearly appear to accentuate the objects' status and role as a commodity. Kopytoff (1986: 78) has noticed a widely held attitude, among 'professional and occupational groups which subscribe to a common cultural code and specially focused morality' that African objects become contaminated when they enter the monetized spheres of markets and should therefore be protected from commodification (Errington 1997:115, 137, Kopytoff 1986: 78). He gives an example of American Africanists who, having themselves collected African objects from 'their tribes' during periods of fieldwork research in Africa, perceive it as improper to acquire such objects from African or European traders through a monetary market (Kopytoff 1986: 78-9). Such attitudes are symptomatic of a type of cultural hegemony exercised by certain members of western societies, such as so-called 'art connoisseurs', curators, collectors, art critics and art historians. The paradox is that, while asserting that objects are contaminated by the monetary market, the same people are willing to acquire objects at auctions which express the commodity dimension of the object in virtually the same way as street markets do. However the 'art world' apparently rejects any idea that so-called connoisseurs, curators, collectors and art critics are brokers in the same way that they and others see traders to be although all of them operate more or less within the context of commodity exchange.

One of the objectives of this dissertation is to demonstrate that dealing in and selling African objects, as street traders do, puts them in a powerful as well as an authoritative position that has long been occupied virtually exclusively by gallery owners and collectors, although the differences between them remain quite stark. Gallery owners and art aficionados determine taste and transform the commodity 'painting', for example, into a masterpiece of art by mystifying its meaning. It is my argument that the value of African objects also relies heavily on their being imbued with a kind of mystery. It may derive from the aestheticism of modernism which presupposes the uniqueness and autonomy of 'art' as mentioned above (Bell [1914] 1958, Fry 1920, Collingwood 1959, Greenberg 1965, 1972). It may also derive from the story of 'the death of authentic African art' due to the 'mysterious demise' of the so called natives who produced

the objects (Alsop 1982: 22, Sweeney 1935: 12) constructed by museum curators and collectors and their claim to possess the 'real' valuable object in their museums[6] or their collections (Errington 1997: 118). It may equally be through the stories and myths told by African traders about the objects they sell and about their origins. That is why I have focused so intensely in this work on the traders of African objects. I concentrated, among other aspects, on the traders' life histories; their reasons for choosing to sell the objects they have up for sale; their relation to the objects they sell; and how the meanings of the African objects they sell are accentuated in the traders' actions and interactions with those objects, with other traders, with saleswomen and with potential customers.

Consumers of African objects have been another focal point of my work. Purchasers of African objects on sale in Cape Town included Capetonians, local and overseas visitors, local collectors of African objects, curators and gallery owners. Each category mentioned assigned a vast diversity of cultural meaning to African objects. Overseas tourists appeared to show a quite different attitude to the objects purchased than local collectors. Many tourists perceived the African object as a token from a foreign culture which they could take home, as did explorers a century ago: exotic pieces from exotic people (van Schalkwyk 1991). Yet, their perceptions about African objects are partly shaped by the stories the traders tell them and partly by the tourists' own preconceived images of Africa. These images are shaped by western representations of Africa, such as in TV films, documentaries, movies, travel guides etc. (Little 1991). This point relates to another important aspect of my work. The question of how African objects, and the stories told about them, fashion and perpetuate cultural constructions of 'otherness' and at the same time create distinct borders between African and non-African. The African object becomes a cultural broker 'it is the medium through which diverse cultures come into contact with another and are transmitted and preserved' (Jules-Rosette 1984: 3).

When the African object leaves South Africa and travels overseas, for example to England, it becomes a representative in various ways. It may represent the holiday in the form of a souvenir or a gift given to a friend, relative or colleague. At the same time it may represent African

[6] Errington speaks of 'High Primitive Art' when she refers to museum objects and describes them as prototypes of African art objects which are collected today (Errington 1997: 95-96).

material culture, in that the African object receives an enormous power to sustain and to justify images of Africa. When the object is displayed, among others, on museum walls or showcases, or on private walls or shelves, it is imbued with whatever meaning the beholder or owner will give to it, according to her or his local cultural context (Howes 1996: 5). In many cases, therefore, the meaning of the African object becomes more complex when it changes its context. The object may carry the meaning of its former sphere of life into the new one Taylor 2002: 214, Marcus & Myers 1995:34, Steiner 1994: 13). In its new context, the home of the tourist, for example, it might be imbued with a meaning that results from the interpretational and perceptual framework of its owner or beholder, a framework embedded in the socio-cultural context of the beholder or owner. Hence the meaning assigned to the object not only says something about the individual owner but also about the relationship between people in a cross-cultural context. The almost ever-present notion of the African object's qualities, as being simple in form and crude in production and therefore attractive, offers evidence of a still persistent image of the 'primitive other living in a savage golden age' where life was simple and unconstrained (Hall 1997). Taking some examples of these images I argue (chapters 6 and 8) that this and many other images of Africa and Africans are partly invented by the non-African 'other' and simultaneously accentuated and perpetuated by the objects and the traders who sell the objects.

My work then is about African objects and their social life in Cape Town. My fieldwork followed the paths of African objects through different social environments such as street markets, galleries, museums and the homes of their owners. My aim has been to explore the multitude of attributes or cultural meanings assigned to African objects and to find reasons why, how and by whom African objects are imbued with particular meanings. I argue that it is the African objects' non-commodity characteristics that create their value and demand and allow for their commodification. The non-commodity dimensions of African objects determine or even mask their degree of commodification. The non-commodity characteristics of African objects are the attributes assigned to them, such as art, artefact, souvenir, collectible, etc. They mark the relationships between people and objects. Each of these attributes is the substance of the stories composed about the objects. The stories include 'grand narratives' such as the object-subject dualism in western thought or in modernist art theory, and more private stories about their origin, their producers, their sellers and their purchasers. I suggest that, by analysing and comparing

these stories composed and told about African objects, one can find an understanding of their commodification, through analysing how it is masked in various different contexts.

My argument becomes twofold. It proposes that the stories not only more or less mask the objects' commodity nature, they also perpetuate and transport images, prejudices of Africa, its people and its objects around the world. As my argument develops in the chapters that follow, we will see that images of Africa played a major role in the commodification of the objects I studied and in the process of their masking. Hence, I argue, investigation of the different social environments of African objects not only provides insights into the processes of their commodification. It also reveals processes of cross-cultural exchange in which images of Africa, its people and its objects are constantly refashioned and recontextualised by producers, traders and buyers across the world. Traders move constantly from local into global contexts and vice versa. As they move, they transfer objects which again convey meanings, prejudices and stereotypes across the globe (Steiner 1994: 154-156). It is therefore relevant to the ever-growing debates about globalism and globalisation to examine these travelling objects and explain them as one as means of communication.

In the following chapters I take the reader on a journey through the different contexts in which the process of masking the commodified nature of African objects occurs. This introduction, which constitutes chapter one has introduced the reader to the development of my argument and the theoretical background on which the work is based. It contains among others, discussions of works of Appadurai (1986), Kopytoff (1986) and Miller (1987, 1995, 1998), who have devoted their work to the analysis of material culture and consumption. Chapter two contains the basis of the journey that comprises the dissertation. The chapter comprises detailed descriptions and discussion of my fieldwork methods and techniques. I analyse why I applied, adopted and sometimes discarded particular research methods. It further contains a description and discussion of my fieldwork universe. In chapter three I investigate African objects at three markets in Cape Town. I analyse the commodification of the objects and the various means whereby the objects' commodity nature is masked. Two aspects concern me here: one is the place and the other the nature of the display of objects at the markets. I argue that the place and the nature of the display can visually suggest the object's commodity nature, hence preclude its masking, or alternatively

be such as to de-emphasise that commodity nature. In chapter four I focus on persons selling African objects. I give a detailed analysis of traders' and sellers' socio-cultural backgrounds and of their relationships with the objects they purvey. The argument of chapter four is that traders' and sellers' relationships with the objects potentially mask or reveal the objects' commodity nature. In chapter five I focus on the stories told about the objects during the interaction between sellers and purchasers. I argue that the stories not only have the potential to mask the objects' commodity nature but they also establish special relationships between trader and client beyond that of commodity consumption.

After having taken the reader through the contexts in which African objects are purveyed, I then concentrate on the consumer contexts. Chapter six contains an analysis of potential customers at the markets. I focus on customers' motivations for purchasing African objects and their expectation about the objects and markets. I show that consumers' perceptions of, and also their enchantment with, African objects potentially mask the commodity nature of the object they have obtained. Chapter seven deals with a special kind of purchaser of African objects, the collector. Like other research participants they create their own stories about African objects. I analyse collectors' stories and argue that they are often influenced by concepts that they draw from theories of art or to be found in some anthropology. The concepts collectors employ, combined with their passionate relationships with the objects, hide the commodity nature of (and their investment in) the objects in their collection. Chapter eight contains an analysis of the objects' perceived Africanness which was an all-powerful constituent in the meaning of the objects and in the stories composed about them. The chapter sets the previous chapters in the broader context of the socially constructed nature of concepts such as African art and Africanness.

In the following chapters my argument is posed and further developed in a range of different ways and focuses of various aspects of the moving world of African objects. I hope that, by reading to the end, the reader will have been convinced by my analyses of not only how the process of masking has been achieved but also why it has been attempted by my various and widely heterogenous research participants.

Chapter two: Research design, -method and sample

The aim of my work has been to describe and analyse the processes whereby African objects' commodification has been masked in a range of contexts around Cape Town. To meet that aim I have had to examine the networks of market personnel, and of potential customers within which the African objects with which I have been concerned circulated. In this chapter I discuss my research design and the methods used to achieve that aim.

1. Time and place

My dissertation is based on field data obtained during three fieldwork periods[7] that totalled a full thirteen months.

Period I	mid April to mid June 1997	(2 months)
Period II	early September to mid October 1997	(1 ½ months)
Period III	mid December to end September 1998	(9 ½ months)

A major characteristic of the research was that it was urban based, and conducted in a city that offered very many trading outlets for African objects at a range of street markets, shops and galleries scattered across the Cape Metropolitan area. The limited scope of a single researcher's work meant that I had to select just a few. I chose on the basis of the following principles of representivity.

I placed particular priority on informal street trading, concentrating on the informal economy[8] because I assumed it to represent the foundation of local trade in African objects. I also assumed, following some indications from earlier personal interest, that African objects offered for sale in

[7] The fragmented nature of my fieldwork was due to the tragic death of my father in July 1997 and the subsequent severe illness of my mother.

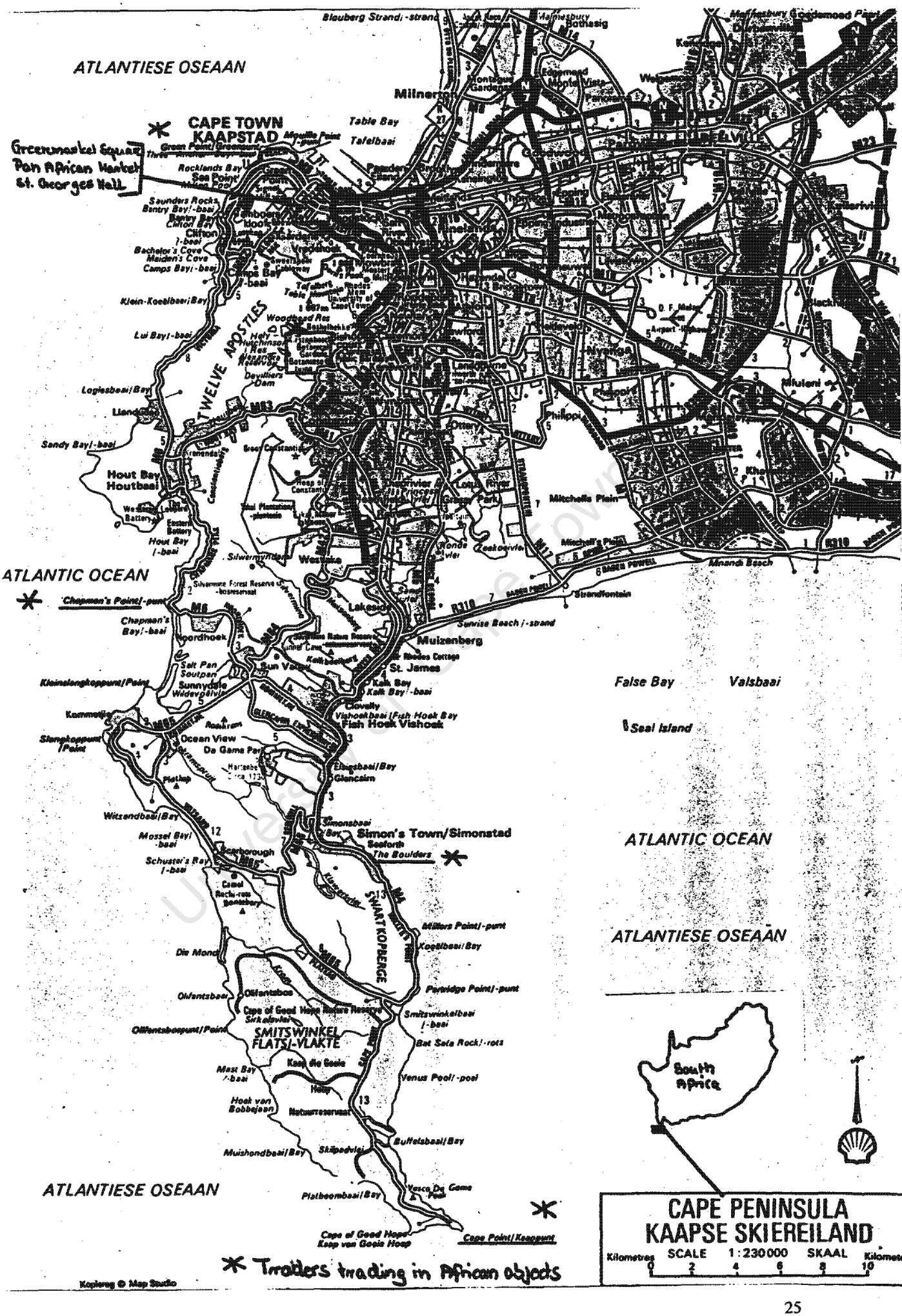
[8] I use the term informal economy in terms of Sassen (1991). Sassen suggests that informal economy comprises 'income generating activities that take place outside the framework of public regulation, where similar activities are regulated' (Sassen 1991:79, Castells & Portes 1989:12). It is not necessarily the activity as such that leads to informalisation but the institutional framework in which the activities take place (Castells 1991:80).

formal galleries or shops often reached them via the informal economy. As my brief research forays among shop and gallery owners proceeded, that assumption was confirmed.

Based on that assumption, I first visited various street markets in the Cape Metropolitan area. They included those located at Oudekraal and on Chapman Peak's Drive, both of which were roadside markets on very popular scenic tourist routes, as was another alongside the entrance of the Cape Point Nature Reserve. Others were at Boulders Beach, a favourite tourist spot for the penguins that populate the beach, and opposite Kirstenbosch Botanical Garden, on the eastern slopes of Table Mountain, and celebrated for its botanical collections and displays that are another significant tourist attraction. Yet others were in the leafy suburb of Constantia and at Greenpoint, in a vast area where a weekly Sunday market was held in the shadow of a major sports stadium situated en route from the city centre and the increasingly popular Waterfront complex in the old harbour to the scenic coastal drive towards Oudekraal and eventually to Cape Point. Three other markets I visited were at the city centre's historic Greenmarket Square, at the neighbouring St. George's Mall and at the Pan African Market (hereafter PAM), also in the city centre, but not a street market (see below). (All the place names listed are underlined on map 1).

My aim in undertaking this first set of overview visits was to gain a first impression of the nature of the trading places, and of the traders' target populations, of the local sales personnel, and of the purchasers and those who had simply come to look at the African objects that were on display. I focused primarily on the people involved because I wanted to understand how those various people might enliven the objects as they went through their various phases of life, and how those people might imbue the objects with socio-cultural meaning. During this early phase in the study I took the role of a potential customer, walking around the markets, looking at objects and talking very informally to both market personnel and purchasers about the objects that they were selling, buying or looking at. Having done that I made the decision to concentrate my study on street markets in the Cape Town city centre—primarily the last three mentioned above. I did so to take advantage of the fact that the three were close to one another so that I could easily move between them. A further advantage was that I could observe possible interactions between market personnel at the various sites and that I could follow clients on foot as they visited the different trading places.

Map1: Cape Peninsula (source: Shell Road Atlas of Southern Africa 1995)

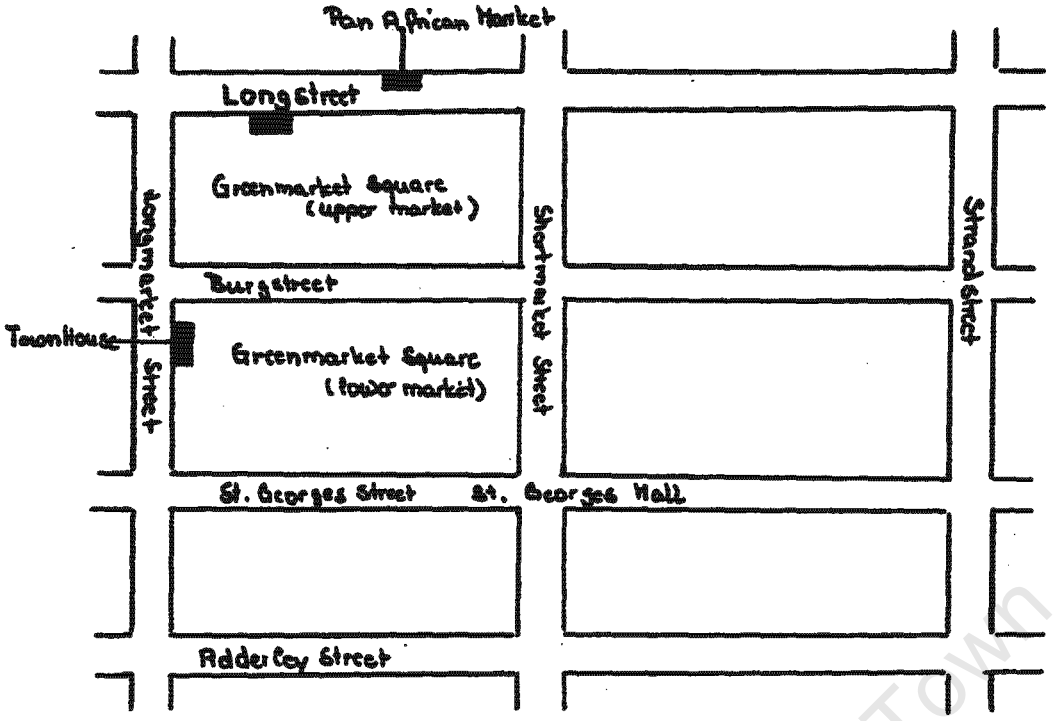


The major research sites were Greenmarket Square and St. George's Mall, both open-air markets and the indoor PAM. All three operate for six days a week the whole year around. Other street markets, such as at Greenpoint or Kirstenbosch take place weekly or monthly. Yet others at Cape Point or Oudekraal are weather dependent. I planned from the start that I would repeatedly re-visit my research participants at the three markets so that I could develop rapport through establishing an informal relationship with them, and also, when I began the study, to ensure that the individuals I had chosen to focus on were people I could be reasonably sure to find at or in the vicinity of the three markets on a regular basis.

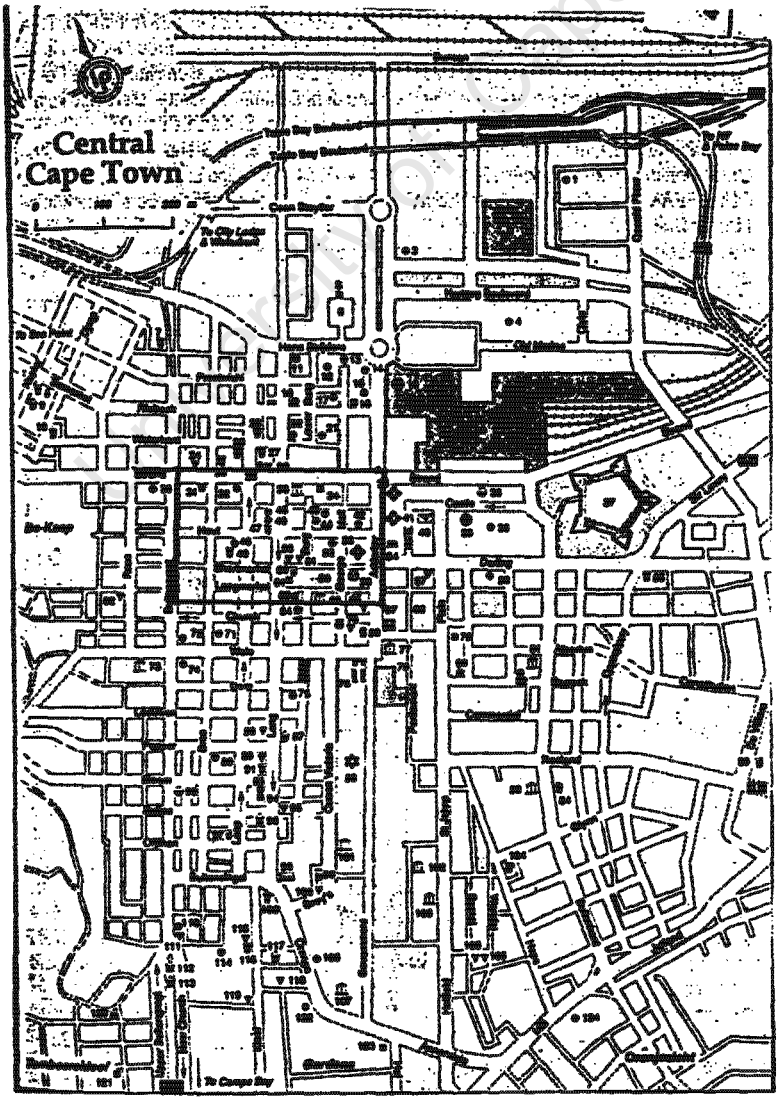
A further consideration for my choice of markets was their size and the numbers of stalls from which African objects were sold at each. Apart from the weekly Greenpoint market, the market at Greenmarket Square included the largest number of stalls selling African objects at the time (it still is as I complete writing in 2002). Working from an assumption that the larger the number of stalls at a market, the greater the diversity of the research population would be, I chose to focus closely on Greenmarket Square. I also chose the neighbouring market at St. George's Mall, this time because its side-walk layout was so very different from that of Greenmarket Square with its stalls situated side by side on both sides of the street. A greater proportion of traders of African objects (75%) was to be found in the Mall than at Greenmarket Square (30% at the time of my fieldwork). The composition of traders, and the layout of St George's Mall market, represents many smaller side street markets in the Cape Metropolitan area.

The PAM was chosen because of its unique character and its close proximity to the other two markets I had selected. The PAM is housed in the first and second floors of a former YWCA building in Cape Town's then increasingly trendy Long Street, and it almost resembles an indoor 'mini shopping mall' for African objects. Each trader there is allocated an individual space, either in one of the rooms or in the corridors of the building. The PAM represented a good site to start intensive fieldwork because the composition of the market personnel was rather small and easy to grasp. A further advantage was that the market included a coffee shop, a good venue from which to approach traders and purchasers in an informal way.

Map 2: city centre (own map)



Map 3: city centre (source: Everist, Murray 1996)



My research also took me to various other sites, such as shops and galleries, the homes or places of accommodation (hotels and guest houses) of participants of the research, in coffee shops around Greenmarket Square and to Cape Town International Airport. The nature of my work at these various sites, and at the markets themselves, will become clearer below.

2. Research population

My main research population included traders, sellers and wholesale merchants and their potential customers[9]. City centre shops and gallery owners' perceptions about African objects and their trade were important for comparative analysis. I have found it useful to distinguish between what I call traders, sellers and wholesale merchants. Traders were the brokers in African objects. They were people who dealt mainly with the importation of the various objects and with their distribution to various market places. Sellers were people who were employed by traders and whose sole function in terms of the objects was as sales persons. Some traders functioned as both traders and sellers. In addition to these two categories, there were also wholesale merchants, people who were either permanently situated in Cape Town or who travelled to Cape Town accompanying their merchandise of African objects which they sold predominantly to retail traders. Strictly speaking, wholesale merchants too should be regarded as traders. However, most informants who referred to themselves as traders implied thereby that they were retail traders and quite distinct, in their perception of wholesalers, from wholesale merchants.

The number of traders of African objects in and around the markets at the time I conducted fieldwork was somewhat fluid although it remained around the figure of 130. The number fluctuated somewhat, depending as much on the season as on weather conditions. I conducted four counts of the traders (see table 1). The highest number of traders (135) was counted in December 1998, the lowest (128) in June 1998, for which more detailed data are offered in table 2. December and January are the best months for trade in African objects. The Christmas festivities and southern hemisphere summer holidays attracted many local buyers to the markets at that time, all in search of presents. During these months the number of overseas visitors to

[9] I also interacted with various museum curators. But since there are few of them in Cape Town, I have not concentrated on their understanding of the nature and value of what I describe as African objects.

Cape Town also reaches a peak (see appendix C and D for data), further increasing the number of potential customers at the various markets.

Table1. No of traders at various times in and around the three markets

Date of Survey	No. of traders counted
May 1997	126
October 1997	132
June 1998	128
December 1998	135

Table 2. Approximate* number of traders and their distribution at markets during June 1998

	No. of traders at market places			
Country of origin	Greenmarket Square	Pan African Market	St. George's Mall	Total
Angola	1	1	1	3
Cameroon	0	2	0	2
Dem. Rep. of Congo	11	1	0	12
Ethiopia	5	0	2	7
Guinea	0	1	0	1
Kenya	13	2	2	17
Malawi	6	0	0	6
Mali	6	3	1	10
Mozambique	0	1	0	1
Nigeria	0	1	0	1
Senegal	6	6	0	12
Somalia	0	1	0	1
South Africa	3	4	2	9
Sudan	6	0	0	6
Swaziland	10	1	3	14
Tanzania	2	0	0	2
Zambia	1	0	0	1
Zimbabwe	8	0	0	8
No data	11	0	4	15
Total	89	24	15	128

*Note that the numbers of traders are never constant, even over quite short periods of time (see table 1).

During the winter months, when the market places were usually quieter, some traders suspended trading and used the time to visit their home countries. Or they traded different items. I met three traders who worked with African objects over the busy summer months and in winter sold belts, ties and other more conventional clothing items at Greenmarket Square because, they explained, that kind of items caters better for the local market than African objects, which are bought predominantly by visitors to Cape Town.

As table 2 shows traders came from 16 African countries. The largest numbers were from Kenya, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Senegal and Mali. It appears that non-African traders did not operate directly in street trading. While there were some white South Africans who participated in the trade in African objects, they did so in a more formal capacity, a finding that my interviews with shop owners confirmed.

68% of 54 traders and 2 wholesale merchants I interviewed formally (see below) were male, single and had no children (see Appendix A for demographic data). Most traders were between 26 and 35 years old. Two male and four female non-South African traders who were married had brought their spouses and children to live with them in South Africa. The other non-South African traders lived separately from their families.

Traders' reasons varied for choosing South Africa as a place to live and to start a business selling African objects. Just over 80% mentioned that they had been attracted by the apparent strength of the South African economy and currency. They claimed that they had left their home countries for economic reasons. 30% of them arrived in South Africa hoping to start their own business, which they perceived as impossible or harder to achieve in their home country. Some 15% had already traded in African objects in their respective home countries or in many other countries and, they said, they had come to South Africa to expand their businesses. Another 15% of the traders had arrived in South Africa with the aim of starting a new business after having closed down businesses of their own in their home countries. Such prior businesses included retailing of food, clothing and paraffin. About 15% of the non- South African traders I interviewed claimed that they had come to South Africa to search for formal employment, while a further 6% said they had come to study in South Africa. Some 15% said that they had learned about South

Africa in school and in newspapers and were attracted by the images they gained there of the country as well as by its new democracy. As a trader from Sudan put it: 'South Africa is a free country and that's what I like. I am a Christian and I was not free at home.' 20% of the traders I interviewed said they had come to South Africa because friends or relatives from their home country were already living in the country.

During my census of traders and sellers in June 1997 (see below) I counted 72 sellers employed by traders of African objects at the three markets. All but two were South African women, the two exceptions being male sellers from Kenya and Angola. I interviewed 42 of them in some depth (see appendix B for data). My fieldwork among sales personnel confirmed a finding of various other researchers about informal economic activities, such as street trading, that many women entered this sector as a survival strategy, because they were not able to find formal employment, or as means to support the household income (Seymour 1992: 2, Clammer 1987, Preston-Whyte and Rogerson 1991). The findings of a 1995 household survey, *Living in the Western Cape* (CSS 1995), showed that 74% of African as well as 74% of Coloured workers in the informal sector were female (CSS 1995: 22). The study further indicated that 76% of women worked in occupations such as street trading and domestic services, of which the latter dominated (CSS 1995: 23).

Others among my research participants were potential customers at the markets. They included Capetonians, South African and overseas tourists, and collectors of African objects (see appendix C and D for data). I interviewed people from these various categories, both formally and informally and, in the case of overseas tourists, attempted to use a self-administered questionnaire to generate responses. I also undertook some aspects of my fieldwork among and with officials working for the National Gallery in Cape Town, for the South African Tourism Board (hereafter referred to as SATOUR), for the Cape Town City Council's Informal Trading Unit and among the organisers of the markets.

3. The African object

Throughout my research, my quest to follow African objects has guided my way through the different contact spaces I explored. However, even as I write this, and as I said to myself as I

undertook the work, I know that there was in fact no such thing as *the* African object, certainly not in any stereotypical form. The category 'African object' is rather one comprising objects such as wooden masks and sculptures, pottery, woven baskets, recycling objects, wire works, jewellery, fabric, clothes, drums etc. whose places of origin and manufacture are said to be West Africa (especially Mali, Ivory Coast), Cameroon, Tanzania, Malawi, Kenya, Swaziland, Angola, Zimbabwe and South Africa. Broadly speaking I found it possible to distinguish three major sub-categories of such objects at the three markets. First were the objects of daily or ritual use in their country of origin such as masks and statues or wooden bowls, milk containers, doors, beds, etc. Second were objects that were copies of the first, and that had never been used but had been produced for the sole purpose of selling them. The third category of objects included those which were recent 'inventions' such as wooden animals or Victory masks[10] carved by Akamba carvers in Kenya; wireworks and soapstone carvings from Zimbabwe; or South African recycling objects, such as chickens made out of plastic bags, flowers made out of beverage cans, collages made out of waste material or small bowls made out of paper. Characteristically all were, or were said to be, handcrafted and produced in Africa.

Picture 2: Kissing mask from Kenya

Picture 3: 'Plastic bag' chicken

[10]The mask is a recent invention and represents the facial painting of Maasai warriors. The carvers were inspired by Maasai facial painting and transferred it into a mask. The 'Victory' mask itself is a new form of mask but it represents features of Maasai people.

That said, one could, of course, claim that T-shirts sold at the markets and produced in South Africa are also African objects. Strictly speaking they are and, as they also travel, in some way or other their meanings too can change from just a shirt to wear to a souvenir from South Africa. However, it would have been impossible for me to include everything that is produced in South Africa or Africa in my category that I have called 'African objects'. Moreover, to have done so would not have served the purpose of my work, which is not a work on general consumer goods. One of my main concerns is how the nature of certain objects may lead to their being used or imagined to represent a 'pristine' or primitive' Africa (see chapter 6). It is for that reason that I have focused only on what for the moment I shall describe as handcrafted objects produced or said to have been to have been produced in Africa for and by Africans.

The majority of African objects found at Cape Town markets were imported, although some of the apparently non-South African objects were actually produced in Cape Town. A Kenyan trader, for example, employed a South African to produce Kenyan batiks in Khayelitsha, the newest and largest of Cape Town's apartheid-created African areas[11], and presently the home of about half a million people. A trader from Zimbabwe had brought her relatives to Cape Town to produce wire works locally. South African-made objects were, however, rare at the street markets, most non-South African traders preferring to sell objects from their respective home regions. As they explained, they knew the objects from their homes place and also knew what kinds of stories could be told about them. As one trader from the Democratic Republic of Congo said: 'why should I sell South African objects? They have nothing to do with me. I have no stories for them to tell my customers.' Yet South African traders at the markets also sold imported objects, which suggests that the sense of the exotic that tourists seek—see chapter six—is shared to some extent by local traders. It was only at the PAM that I found two traders who had chosen to sell local products almost exclusively.

[11]The term 'township' is used quite specifically in South Africa to refer to densely settled residential areas that, during apartheid years, were established for black people on the outskirts of cities and towns. Despite its use internationally to describe a small town or village forming part of a larger whole, the term's use in South Africa has not been so general. The term 'township' in South Africa describes areas planned for exclusive residential occupation by people classified as Black or African. Apartheid's Population Registration Act defined three broad social categories (or 'population groups' in local and legislative parlance) that were generally (but not exclusively) distinguished on the basis of racial difference. The social categories were described as White, Black and Coloured. According to the Group Areas Act people in South Africa had to occupy residential areas according to their defined social category (West 1988).

There is another reason that South African objects are not so often on sale at local street markets, and that is that they are indeed rare, and hard to find, in comparison to objects from other African countries. The reason for this is twofold. First, according to various gallery and shop owners, South African objects of ritual or daily use, such as beadwork or Zulu meat platters or spoons are hard to find among former or present users. And reproductions of these objects are scarce, other that is than beadwork in the form of Zulu and Ndebele dolls and aprons, the production of which has been encouraged by non-governmental organisations as means of generating income for impoverished populations. The numbers of these items is far fewer than the numbers of objects available for sale from other countries. Secondly, it appears that no established wholesale network exists in Cape Town to distribute South African-style products. Traders and shop owners who sell South African objects usually buy them directly from producers or from users which requires good sources of information about where to find the producers and users, efforts to stay in contact with them and means of transport to visit them regularly.

Picture 4: Wire work motorbike

Most traders, themselves not being South African and being relatively new in the country, lack such sources of information and, as one South African trader who had recognised the demand for items from afar said, 'I do not want to be bothered running after them' [South African producers]. Another reason that South African objects are rare on the markets is that their prices, when the objects are available, tend to be higher than the market can easily bear. According to shop owners and collectors, the scarcity of objects of ritual or daily use in people's homes, and the difficulty of finding them nowadays, has increased their commercial value considerably. A

carved Zulu spoon, I learned, could cost up to R800[12]. Several traders at Greenmarket Square told me that they believed it to be too risky to try to sell these kind of objects because they did not know how they could justify their high prices to customers at the market.

The commercial value of African objects depended very much on the place and stations of their travel. Further factors which determined an object's price include its source, the season of the year that it was on sale (during summer months, when demand grew, the prices too increased) and the trader's financial situation. As one collector explained to me, 'African art has no price; its prices are artificially made by its dealers, consumers and critics'. Whether the objects on sale at the markets constituted art or not (see chapters 1 and 8) there is much truth in this statement in relation to prices, because even the most humble 'curio piece's' price can vary drastically, depending on where, when and by whom it is sold. The price of the same type of object can vary greatly between the street markets, the Pan African Market, and curio shops and galleries. To give an example, in 1998 I purchased a wooden animal sculpture representing a rather abstract, comic cat. I bought it on the roadside close to Pigg's Peak in Swaziland and paid R45 to the carver. Not much later I found similar sculptures for sale at the Pan African Market at a cost of R120 and at a gallery in Claremont, an upmarket shopping precinct in Cape Town, priced at R750. The quality of the two examples was pretty much the same as that of the one I had bought close to its place of production in Swaziland. All three had been sculpted by carvers in Swaziland and none bore the signature of its carver. One of the objectives of the present work has been to understand and to explain the reasons for such price differences which seem even greater than simply the differences between the site, stall or shop rents paid by the various suppliers, or the costs of transport.

Having said that prices of similar objects differed considerably, it is notable that, within each market place and at particular times of the year, prices for the same types of objects did not differ very much amongst different traders who tended to accept that collusion was necessary for all to survive. For example, a Kenyan banana leaf collage cost R25 at most tables at Greenmarket Square in April 1998. Sometimes a trader did undersell others, usually when he or she was

[12] 1Rand = 2.95 German marks; 6,7 US dollars; 9,9 UK pounds during period of fieldwork. Its exchange value has depreciated considerably since then.

desperate for money. Competition among traders to get customers was strong at the markets, because the merchandise did not differ very much among traders from the same region of Africa. Yet if traders discovered that someone had 'broken' the price limit it was noted and discussed amongst them with great discontent because, as they pointed out, such undercutting can easily 'spoil the price' of the particular type of African objects for all traders selling it at that time. Yet if a trader achieved a higher price by what they described as 'trying her/his luck' with a customer, it was usually acknowledged positively amongst the other traders.

As an object changes hands from producer to wholesale merchant to trader, its commercial value increases. Agnes from Kenya told me that she was paying R12 for a pair of wooden carved salad spoons from a Cape Town wholesaler who, she said, had paid R4 for the same pair of spoons when purchasing them from the producer in Kenya. Agnes in turn was selling the spoons at Greenmarket Square for R25. The profit margins[13] achieved by selling African objects were, in general, quite high but varied across the various kinds of objects for sale. Margins were usually higher for slow-moving larger pieces than for small pieces which usually sold faster. Some traders preferred to sell large objects such as masks and sculptures, precisely because of the high margins they could make on such sales. But they tended always also to have a few smaller items on sale, such as key rings or jewellery, simply to maintain some turnover. Some traders tried to have a variety of goods of different sizes, styles and from different countries (See Appendix F for inventories of four stalls). Other traders, especially those from Kenyan traders tended to specialise almost exclusively on objects from their own country.

Objects from outside South Africa travelled to the markets in Cape Town along a range of routes and by diverse means. Most traders either had established relationships with suppliers in their home countries who sent them objects regularly by air, rail and road, or they purchased African objects from wholesalers who either travelled to, or who were located in, Cape Town. Some

[13] Most traders try to operate on at least between 100% to 150% profit margin. However when traders talk about their profit margin, they often mean the mark-up, i.e. that percentage by which the wholesale price is increased for retail. Obviously, the actual profit margin, i.e. the percentage of the revenue that represents the nett profit is much less.

traders also travelled to the objects' places of origin and brought stocks to Cape Town themselves.

Once the objects entered Cape Town they either arrived at the trading outlets of wholesalers who sold them to traders, or they arrived directly at the traders' trading outlets or at their homes. Objects usually travelled in large boxes or plastic bags. They were often not wrapped individually and almost inevitably some were broken or scratched en route. Once unpacked, they were repaired, polished or smeared with fat, shoe polish or kaolin to give them a nice patina, and later displayed for sale. Although they have had what I have called a social life before this point, the object's social life at Cape Town's markets themselves began now. Before I turn to discuss that social life at the markets, I need to outline the methods I used to gather data.

4. Fieldwork Methodology

> The personal explorations scattered throughout are not revelations from an autobiography but glimpses of a specific path among others. I include them in the belief that a degree of self-location is possible and valuable, particularly when it points beyond the individual toward ongoing webs of relationship. Hence, the struggle to perceive certain borders of my own perspective is not an end in itself but a precondition for efforts of attentiveness, translation and alliance (Clifford 1997:12).

The personal character of much anthropological research creates a need for each anthropological researcher to discuss the methods she has used. I use this section to introduce readers to my fieldwork methods and techniques. They included participant observation, surveys and formal and informal interviews. I analyse why and how I applied, adapted or even discarded particular methods. I present the problems and challenges of doing fieldwork in an urban environment, especially in regard to the ever-changing research environment which resulted in my having almost constantly to adapt and re-adapt my methods and to re-position myself. I perceive this section as a dialogue between my formally discussing my fieldwork methods and my offering a self-reflective account of the experiences I had during the period of my fieldwork.

When I first entered the market at Greenmarket Square I thought I would never understand what was going on around me. Hundreds of African objects were displayed on tables and on the

ground in the market space, side by side with stalls displaying contemporary fashion clothing, jewellery, tablecloths and many other goods. I wondered who owned all the African objects and if the owners were present at the market. People from many different countries gathered together at Greenmarket Square, speaking Wolof, Xhosa, Swahili, Hausa, French, English and many other languages. People squeezed their way through the narrow passages between the many stalls; others looked at the displayed goods. A few were bargaining with traders about the price of an African object that they might have wanted to buy. Some people sat together in groups talking to each other. One man, dressed very sophisticatedly, pushed his way along a pathway carrying a large plastic bag from which I could see the heads of wooden sculptures sticking out. Was he a wholesale merchant trying to sell the sculptures to traders at the market? I asked myself who all these people were. Who were the traders, the sellers, the customers? How would I communicate with all of them? How would I understand them? I was confused, but I let myself flow within this 'Tower of Babel'. The universe eventually became more permeable, and the clouds of confusion lifted, the longer I was there.

Most of my fieldwork took the form of repeated visits to, and interactions with, my research participants. Thus, fieldwork was characterised by a systematic 'hanging out' at different places in Cape Town for a few hours each time rather than by my dwelling in one place (Stoller 2002: IX-X, Desjarlais 1997: 40-41, MacGaffey & Bazenguissa-Ganga 2000: 25). Taking this into account, my field can best be described in terms of Clifford's (1997: 68) 'contact space[s]'. The markets, the airport, hotels, shops and galleries were all contact spaces, each produced by an array of people from all over the world. Each contact space had to be explored from the perspective of the traders, the sellers and their clients, with special attention being given to the social backgrounds of each of the participants in the research, in particular their life histories and social networks.

To examine the networks of traders and potential purchasers in these contact spaces, along with the circulation of objects, presented a challenge in developing a research design that moved beyond the boundaries and paradigms of conventional ethnographic research in small and relatively closed 'communities'. Following the paths of objects through diverse contact spaces meant that I was moving in and out of different locations and levels of society. Reflexivity, in

this regard, demanded not only a critical understanding of myself within the fieldwork process but ultimately positioning myself as ethnographer in a constantly changing field situation that required me to shift according to what Marcus (1995: 113) has called my 'affinities for, affiliation with, as well as alienation from' those with whom I interacted at different sites. For example, I was at some moments a German immigrant, hence an insider when talking to German tourists; and at other moments I was a foreigner when interacting with South African informants. Or sometimes I was just the naive observer coming to grips with the complexity of social life by which I felt I was surrounded.

Positioning myself in the various contact spaces of my research, and finding appropriate fieldwork methods for each of these spaces, were among the major challenges of my fieldwork. For example, to work with visitors to the markets who included Capetonians as well as other South African and overseas tourists, is different from working with traders and saleswomen, if only in respect of the space and the time in which to approach them. Traders and saleswomen stayed at the markets during most of the day. Visitors passed by. Doing participant observation at the market, in the form of 'hanging out', which entailed sitting with the traders behind or beside their tables and talking to them and to saleswomen, made my presence known to the market personnel. They became ever less suspicious, and I built up ever greater rapport, so that many were eventually willing to interact with me. To the visitors who passed by, however, I was a complete stranger and stayed that way, unable to make or find the time to create the rapport needed for intensive interaction. They only spent a short time at the markets and they came there to shop. Talking to tourists at the markets was thus not easy because, despite the fact that they were on a holiday, they appeared to be in a hurry. Approaching them at coffee shops or restaurants was also not easy. They went to these venues to relax, write postcards and to have a meal or a drink. Only a few were willing to talk to an anthropologist studying the markets. I had to find a place where they would be relaxed and willing to sit around.

One such place was the departure lounge of Cape Town International Airport. People waiting to board their flights are usually bored. During the period of my fieldwork travellers were required to check in at least one hour ahead of departure time, but most seemed to arrive two hours ahead and found that there was not much for them to do at the airport. I thus found that many people

were not only happy to talk to me but quite a few who saw me interviewing others then requested that I interview them too. Conducting interviews with people leaving South Africa had the further advantage that some had bought African objects and I could discuss those with them. Approaching visitors at the markets themselves often meant that I found many who had just arrived and had not bought anything yet, although they did tell me that they would buy at a later stage.

In March 1998 I conducted 104 structured interviews with tourists at the airport, speaking to 128 people in five days. Only 10 people I approached refused to be interviewed. The difference between interview number and individuals results from the fact that 19 interviews were conducted with couples or groups of between three and six people. My sampling was haphazard and opportunistic. Yet, since I did want to include participants of different ages and nationalities, I alternately approached people whom I thought were below age 40 and those above 40. Listening to the languages people were speaking also offered a vague criterion to determine what nationality they might be, as did checking the flight schedules about the majority of people present in the lounge at a particular time. I am aware that this sounds rather unsystematic, but when I compared my data with official SATOUR data that lists visitors according to nationality, I was pleased to discover that my sample represented a similar distribution (Appendix C and D).

The interviews were conducted by use of a questionnaire containing 10 open-ended questions (see Appendix I). The main data I wanted to elicit, apart from nationality and age, was whether the informant had bought African objects and, if so, why and where they had done so, and what kind of objects they had purchased. I also wanted to engage informants in short open-ended discussions about the meaning such objects had for them. Conducting the interviews took an average of 20 minutes each. I was later quite amazed how much information could be exchanged in such a short period of time. Conducting these interviews was mentally tiring for me because I had to change the language medium constantly and I had to answer many questions about South Africa and myself. In fact, many of the interviews were reciprocal in that many informants drew as much information from me as I did from them. Using the same questionnaire, I also conducted interviews with 148 potential customers at the markets, 58 of whom were South African. Conducting the interviews at the markets thus enabled me to increase the number of local

customers in my research population, albeit that sampling was as opportunistic as that generated through my airport interview process.

Further data that I obtained amongst and from potential customers for African objects represents a mix of observation, informal talk, semi-structured interviews and survey material. Participant observation in its fullest sense was very limited among potential purchasers because most passed through the contact spaces of the markets very quickly. However, having, as part of my research activities, been a saleswoman at PAM for four weeks, and a couple of times for a few hours each at Greenmarket Square, gave me the chance to interact more directly with customers. Selling African objects was also a great opportunity to learn about the different aspects of trading. Being a saleswoman transformed my role from that of being an observer to that of being a performer. While performing as a saleswoman, I was able to obtain new insights into the perceptions of clients about the objects they were interested in that my role as just another viewer and potential purchaser at the markets had not allowed.

My major method of research amongst traders and sellers was participant observation, an interactive approach that enabled me, as researcher, to arrive at a detailed perspective on people's views and actions. Participant observation is a matter of experience which entails interacting, observing, and listening. It is more a 'strategy' than a method (Bernard 1989: 6). It enables the researcher to establish rapport with the people studied and facilitates an informal situation which allows for the collection of both quantitative and qualitative data. Participant observation, for me, included being present at various market sites to communicate and to interact with the market personnel and to observe the interactions between traders, wholesale merchants, sellers and clients as well as their interactions with (handling or treatment of) African objects. I usually sat behind or beside the tables with the traders or saleswomen, exchanged stories and talked to customers. Quite often I became involved in the trading interaction as a translator for German or French speaking customers. I also spent many hours at the coffee shop at the PAM. The coffee shop is a meeting place of many West African traders, especially during lunchtime. Sitting there I talked to and listened to the traders or played the *Woaley* game[14] with

[14] Woaley is a common game in western Africa, similar to backgammon.

one or other of the traders. I further accompanied traders as they visited their different market sites, their depots, to observe the traders' actions and interactions on a day-to-day basis.

At the beginning of my fieldwork it was rather difficult to approach the traders and sellers of African objects. At first traders and sellers assumed that I was a potential customer and wanted to sell their objects to me. I immediately tried to make it clear that I was a university student working on a social anthropology research project, and explained the nature of my study. After a couple of days people started to realise that I was really not a customer, but at the same time I noticed very strong suspicion towards me. People were hesitant to talk to me and impart information. Their reluctance appeared to have various reasons. One seemed to be fear of competition. It was not easy to make it clear to informants that I was indeed an anthropologist, 'crazy enough to study the market and its people' (in the words of some informants). At first many assumed - some still do - that I wanted to become a trader myself and that I was trying to find out which objects sell well and where to obtain them. Competition is strong at the markets. One trader from Tanzania told me that some former saleswomen, 'opened their own tables'[15] once they had learned the trade. Another reason for their suspicion towards me appeared to be that an undocumented number of traders were in South Africa and were trading illegally. They did not want to have attention drawn to them in case it aroused the interest of the South African authorities (Stoller 2002: X, MacGaffey & Bazenguissa-Ganga 2000: 25-27). I frequently heard comments that my questions sounded like those of Department of Home Affairs officials. Some traders told me they thought I was a government spy. In this respect it was an advantage to be a foreigner, whose accent clearly distinguished me as non-South African. In fact, many traders became more talkative once they found I was not South African. My foreigner status also enabled me to talk about various procedures I have had to follow to be able to stay in South Africa. The latter seemed to evoke a feeling of 'being in the same boat', at least among some traders and in relation to this issue.

Through my constantly visiting the markets and hanging out there for a couple of hours each time and explaining the nature of my research again and again, the traders and sellers became

[15] 'To open a table' is the term used for starting one's own business.

increasingly less suspicious. Some began to invite me to sit with them at their tables and to talk to them about themselves, the trade and the objects. By the end of my second fieldwork period, special relationships with some informants had emerged: our interaction became less formal and we talked about many private issues and interacted beyond the immediate scope of my research. Reciprocities developed between some traders and me. One Kenyan trader, a very religious person, asked me to accompany her to church as reciprocal gesture for her having answered all my questions. Two traders invited me to their homes to show me their depots. A trader from Zaire asked me to bring her a special kind of non-alcoholic drink from Germany when I visited. Four traders asked me to create inventories of the African objects at their stalls, after they saw me counting the number of objects at one stall. Quite often traders asked me to watch their stalls for them when they had to go away for a while. Sometimes I was even introduced by some traders to people who were visiting them at the markets as their friend who studies the markets.

During the second period of my research I mapped the markets and drew up inventories of the types of objects found at the different markets. The inventories entailed investigating the objects' places of origin, their styles, their prices and their categories (sculpture, mask, and pottery) etc. I drew maps of the markets sites to locate the traders and sellers at each of the three markets. Mapping helped me to trace both a person's and an object's movement. It further provided a means of indicating who works where, and whether a spatial distribution of various types of objects existed at the different market sites.

Part of the data I gathered were obtained through semi-structured interviews conducted with a schedule comprising checklists of topics I found I needed to gather data about (Bernard 1989: 205). These interviews were used to elicit data on, for example, the socio-economic situation of the traders, their perceptions of the objects they were selling, their perceptions of potential buyers, etc. Semi-structured interviews served to clarify my observations and were useful to check the validity of my survey material. The interviews were recorded by my making notes, usually during and after the interviews, and very rarely by means of a tape recorder. I found that many informants became wary when they saw a tape recorder. I also found that taping created a very formal and distracting atmosphere.

The majority of my semi-structured interviews were performed as part of everyday interaction with traders, sellers and customers. From July to August 1998 I conducted a set of formal semi-structured interviews at Greenmarket Square and St. George's Mall using my shorter questionnaire (see appendix G). The sampled population included 42 traders and 38 sellers of African objects.

I also interviewed gallery and shop owners, museum curators, and collectors of African objects, employees at SATOUR, the City Council, the informal trade unit at the City Hall as well as traders of other items at the markets and the tenders of the markets (who held the contracts with the City Council for overseeing the markets and their operations, see chapter 3). Many of these interviews were arranged with the participants through formal appointments. Once some initial contact had been made with some informants through formal interviews, I established more informal relationships by repeatedly visiting some. They included the curator of African objects at the National Gallery, and some collectors.

I also conducted two surveys through deploying a self-administered questionnaire. The first was designed for traders and sellers (see Appendix F) to be handed to informants at the PAM and collected later. This exercise proved impractical because many of the informants could not read English or French well. Therefore I decided to conduct interviews with each informant myself, in English or French. The sampled population included 12 traders, 4 sellers and 2 wholesalers operating from the PAM in October 1997. Despite my testing the questionnaire beforehand, it proved to be too long and tiring for many informants. I consequently abandoned the plan to repeat it at other markets and designed a much shorter questionnaire concentrating more on demographic, and educational and job training data and less on trade and trading interaction and the meaning of the object (see Appendix G). I felt that the latter could, in any case, be better studied through daily interactions and conversations with the informants.

My second survey was conducted in January 1998 among local and overseas tourists in places other than the airport. The aim was to elicit data from potential customers. I wanted to find out who the customers were and what kinds of African objects they had bought, as well as where and why they had purchased them. I also included questions about how to define art and authenticity

(see Appendix H). The survey comprised a self-administered questionnaire which I distributed in three different places of accommodation in Cape Town (Holiday Inn at Greenmarket Square, Traveller's Lodge in Long Street, Panorama Guesthouse in Newlands). No systematic sampling procedures were followed. I simply distributed the questionnaires at three differently priced places of holiday accommodation in order to achieve a diverse sample of potential buyers. I am aware that it is problematic to categorise tourists according to the cost of their accommodation. However, using different categories of accommodation increases the possibility of involving people of different ages and socio-economic statuses. This strategy too proved relatively unsuccessful, because I received few responses: only 12 out of 150 questionnaires distributed, although at most places all the questionnaires had been taken. The major problem appears to be that people had taken the questionnaires because they were curious to see what they were. They then either kept them or threw them away. I also gave the questionnaire to 10 customers I met at the markets. I had talked to them about my work and they agreed to take the time to complete the questionnaire and to return it me.

It was difficult to establish systematic sampling frames because my universe was diverse in terms of locations, and the composition of the participants was fluid. Potential customers, for example, could only be approached when they were encountered. It was impossible to determine their number beforehand. However to have some kind of control frame for tourists I used SATOUR statistics about the number of visitors to South Africa in general and to Cape Town in particular. Regarding traders and sellers, it was equally difficult to perform systematic sampling procedures. Some traders moved in and out of the country and some sellers worked at the markets for a short period of time only. The only way to establish a more or less adequate sampling frame among traders and sellers was to count the stalls at Greenmarket Square and the trading spaces at the PAM from which traders and sellers operated. I counted the stalls at regular intervals.

My methods of sampling could thus best be described as a combination of purposive sampling and snowball sampling (Bernard 1989: 80). Purposive sampling meant that I decided the purpose the informant should serve and then interviewed her or him. Snowball sampling meant that some informants would refer me to other informants, who they thought could be helpful with my

research. Despite Bernard's recommendation that one should use probability sampling whenever possible because such samples are more representative than others, non-probability sampling can be justified for this research (Bernard 1989: 82). Its use arose from the circumstance that the survey and interview data were not intended to be the sole data for my work but were backed up by other ethnographic data. My intention with the surveys and formal interviews was to obtain a broad overview of the socio-cultural environment I was dealing with during fieldwork and to check the validity of data obtained during my other daily interactions with market participants.

I conclude this sub-section of my work with brief comments about ethics. Anthropological research takes place in a field of complex human relations. Hence, conflicting attitudes and values are bound to be present and these can generate ethical dilemmas. The socio-economic aspects of my dissertation touch on sensitive areas such as illegal procedures of trade and travel. Identities have thus been concealed so that confidentiality is retained. All the names are pseudonyms.

My work meant 'peeking into' areas considered by some participants, especially traders, as mysterious. To publicise insights into a market that rests partly on its mystery and secrecy is contentious. I relied heavily on the trust of informants to reveal some of their trading practices to me. It places a great burden on me that I have had to write about this information which forms a major part of my dissertation. It was therefore of great importance, when 'writing up', to find a style that would not leave the traders exposed and the magic of their trade completely demystified. The danger exists that the data may be used against the traders and in support of western arguments that the objects they sell are 'fakes'. The aim of this study was not to prove or disprove whether the objects currently sold in Cape Town are 'fakes' (as defined by the art world). It is to show how the social and economic spheres in which these so-called 'fakes' are sold influence the ways they are valued. My endeavour has been to show that all objects have many meanings that derive from the social contexts in which they are found and from the ways in which people perceive them.

In addition to elaborating on fieldwork methods and techniques, it is also necessary to acknowledge how my writing an ethnographic text has transformed the nature of the original

field data. My rather unsystematic and diverse observations of action, inter-action, thoughts and feelings had to be arranged in a systematic representational form, and set in relation to the aims and arguments of my study as well as to anthropological theory. The process of writing an ethnographic text entails the re-construction of fragments of social life (Ellen 1984, Geertz 1988). The text represents facts and interpretations of gathered data, but it does not represent the whole picture of the social life taking place 'out there', beyond the text. It has been filtered through my gaze, because this work is part of myself and part of what I observed during fieldwork. Everything is seen through my lens and, no matter how objective I try to be, in the end my work will include my own gaze. That is why it is important for the reader to understand how my gaze was constructed, which is why I have offered the description I have of the methods and techniques that I applied.

Chapter three: The African object at Cape Town's markets

1. Introduction

In my introductory chapter I proposed to observe and comment on the various stages through which African objects travel and to see them as fields of struggle over the assignation to them as objects of various attributes. During fieldwork I became aware of the fact that different attributes and exchange values were assigned to diverse objects, the assignations depending on the places where the objects were traded and sold. Many traders confirmed this. Abdullah from Senegal (case 6)[16], traded at the PAM. He mentioned that: 'you can't sell [just] anything on the street...the street decreases the value of the object' (23.05.97). Another PAM trader had previously displayed objects in the museum shop at the National Gallery in Cape Town. He remarked: 'There they put price tags on. The rich go there and they pay R3,000 for the same piece I sell at the Pan African Market for R1,000. I took my objects away because they spoil our business. People think we are selling the wrong stuff because we sell it cheaper' (17.2.1998). These two traders' statements summarise some of the issues discussed in this chapter. They substantiate and reinforce my argument that the place where an object is displayed and sold imbues that object with various qualities such as fake, kitsch, commodity or art and authentic as well as associating it with a particular price.

Table 3: Examples of price differences of objects sold at different places (all prices are in S.A. Rands in June 1997)

	Greenmarket Square	Pan African Market	Curio Shop
Banana leaf painting	25	30	30
Victory mask	45	55	60
Guro mask	250	350-600	400-700
Ashanti fertility doll	50	65	65
Bakuba cloth	50	50-65	65-80
Skeleton figure	90	110-140	100-130
Nail fetish	650	900	1200
Passport mask	35	45	45
Colon man	120	150	180

[16] When referring to informants by name I cross reference to case studies (below) where other aspects of their lives are considered. I do this to enable the reader to trace my various references to particular informants to reconstruct, if they will, a larger picture of each as an individual.

Collectors expressed to me their sense of revulsion of the street markets' flea market characteristics and the African objects sold there (see also chapter 7). They claimed that the objects available there were bad copies and worth nothing. An employee at one of Cape Town's museums, which exhibited African objects, told me that she would buy objects from street markets for her own collection but certainly not for the public one. According to her 'they have be authentic to be displayed in public'. Other people I met during fieldwork had positive attitudes towards the street markets and the objects found there. Some tourists went as far as to say that they would only buy at the markets because, they claimed, the objects there were more authentic than those sold in shops.

Having heard such diverse opinions about the objects, I wondered what were the underlying principles for the differences in perceptions and prices of the objects. I assumed that it had to be a function of the places where the objects were sold and their mode of display, as well as of the characteristics of the persons selling them. I therefore now turn to examining whether that assumption about place and display mode is correct before proceeding, in chapter four, to focus on the assumption as regards sellers' characteristics.

I use this chapter, therefore, to comprehend the various trading places within the context of my argument about commodification and the processes whereby it is masked. I consider the physical forms of the three selected markets as frames (Gombrich 1979, Miller 1987) that focus people's attention and influence their perceptions of and, hence, the meanings they assign to the objects they see there. I argue that each place's nature as a 'playground' for commodity exchange provides the means for the commodification of the African objects displayed and transacted there and simultaneously offers the potential for the commodity nature of those objects to be masked to a greater or lesser extent. Hence I suggest that the more obvious the commodity nature of these objects is at any particular trading place, in other words, the less its commodity nature is masked there by non-commodity dimensions, the lower its commercial and prestige value.

In order to substantiate that argument, I investigate the reasons for the varying degrees to which the commodity nature of African objects is masked by the nature of the places where they are bought and sold. Three aspects are considered. One is the physical form of the markets: their

layout and the distribution of traders in the market space. A second is their social form: the relationships between sellers and buyers, sellers and sellers, professionals and laymen, and how they are regulated. Third is their social dynamics and the characteristics of activities and roles played by the different participants at the markets.

I provide a general description of the three market places in an effort to show how organisational and compositional differences between three markets were responsible for the diverse meanings ascribed to the African objects displayed there for sale. To offer a comprehensive portrait of the markets I include seven case studies of traders and sellers of African objects who operated at the three markets I studied. I refer to some of them again in subsequent chapters.

2. Greenmarket Square

Greenmarket Square was the largest of the three markets where I undertook intensive fieldwork. It comprised approximately 290 stalls. African objects were sold at about one third of them. Greenmarket Square dates back to 1696 when the *Burgher Wacht Huys*, which then served as a police station, was built there. After 1750 it was commonly known as the *Burgher Watch Square* and later as Town House Square. From 1840 to 1905 the Town House served as city hall and the square was used as a civic centre and popular meeting place for the people of Cape Town. From the early 19th century the site was a market place, which became known as Greenmarket Square (South African Cultural History Museum display, September 1997). The market place first served as an outlet for farmers from outside Cape Town to sell their products (Everist & Murray 1996: 446).

In conversations with older Cape Town citizens I learned that Greenmarket Square was once a little park with wooden benches where city dwellers and workers could enjoy their lunchtime under the old oak trees. In the 1970s the area was transformed into a parking lot and lost its attractiveness. In 1982 a private initiative led to the establishment there of an open-air market. The market became a venue for many different traders with a large variety of products being offered for sale. The products included imported and locally produced clothing, jewellery, pottery, candles, cosmetics, music records (more recently compact discs), books, antiques and, more recently, African objects.

During the time of my fieldwork one was confronted with a buzzing market vibe. Colourful displays of African objects and clothing caught the eye as one followed the narrow passages between the stalls. Traders sat in groups and discussed diverse subjects. Thembi from South Africa would greet the visitor with 'come and look, I'll give you a good price'. Salomon from Ethiopia offered 'the best Ethiopian jewellery available in Cape Town'. Lungiswa sat behind an assembly of the African 'big five' carved out of stone and polished a black soapstone elephant from Zimbabwe to give it the scintillating shine of Cobra[17] wax. Francoise from the Republic of Congo (hereafter DRC) attracted visitors with her African attire, a friendly smile and many large masks on display.

Picture 5: Scene of stalls at Greenmarket Square

The market site was controlled by the Cape Town City Council, which leased it to three different parties who administered it, sub-leasing the individual sites to traders. The rent for the stalls (R25-35 per day) was collected on a daily basis; monthly rent, including stall structure, amounted to about R900. The City Council's lessees were responsible for the allocation of the stalls to stall holders, for provision of the stall structure and for collection of waste during market hours as well as for the daily cleaning of the square before and after marketing took place.

[17] Cobra is a brand name that has gained an almost generic meaning in South Africa.

The market was divided by Burg Street into an upper and a lower section. The upper market, which faced the Holiday Inn Hotel was managed by one party, consisting of two lessees. One lessee was the son of the initiator of the flea market. He explained that no African objects had been sold there when the market was founded, the objects having first arrived in 1990 in the form of Zimbabwean soap stone carvings. He said he had noticed a significant increase in African objects from Central and West Africa at the market around 1996. The changing South African political climate appeared to be one reason for the influx of immigrants from other African countries.

The upper market consisted of approximately 120 stalls, including 27 (June 1998) from which African objects were sold. The lessees at the upper market charged R25 per day for a site. According to the lessees they paid R25,000 to the city council each month. The lessees worked together with Tom, who provided stall structures for each of which he charged traders R10. Tom employed four people who set up the stalls in the mornings and removed them in the evenings.

Picture 6: The Greenmarket Square market. Old Town House on top right of photograph

The lower market was divided into two sections. Section one comprised 48 stalls and was leased from the city council by a non-profit organisation, the 'Greenmarket Traders Association'. The Association charged R35 per site including a stall structure. According to the treasurer of the

Association the lease for both sections of the lower market is R21,000 per month. The association used part of the income generated from the traders' rent to upgrade the stalls and to pay workers to clean the market area.

A private individual leased section two of the lower market. His section comprised approximately 115 stalls. He too charged R35 per stall per day including a stall structure. Of sections one and two's 163 stalls, 62 were allocated to traders specialising in African objects. In total, of the 283 stalls at Greenmarket Square some 89 stalls specialised in African objects during June 1998.

The market, which from a visitor's perspective seemed a single functional entity, was usually open from 09h30 to 16h30, Monday through Saturday. Business hours depended on the season and the weather, traders tending to leave earlier in winter. The number of operating stalls as well as the business hours were fluid. Some traders did not open a stall for a couple days and then they appeared again; other traders always left very early.

Anybody selling objects which met the lessees' notions about the market's characteristic could apply to open a stall. New traders had to register with the lessees. No trading licenses were needed during the time of fieldwork.[18] However, the traders needed to present South African identification papers or (for non-South Africans) valid work permits. All three leasing parties indicated that they were aware that quite a few traders had no work permits and had sent South African citizens, usually the saleswomen they employed, to register on their behalf.

I asked the lessees about their criteria for selecting traders. All three parties indicated that they preferred to give priority to South Africans. They also said they tried to limit the number of permanent stalls from which African objects were sold because they feared that the square could

[18] South Africa's hawkers trading permit policy was abolished in 1994, being seen as a product of the apartheid regime. It was re-introduced in a new format in February 1999. According to the *Cape Times* (January 28, 1999, p.15) 'it was the traders who asked to be monitored more strictly'. The trading permit costs R 125 per annum. According to the *Cape Times*, 658 traders were operating in Cape Town's Central Business District, and, with the re-introduction of permits, '298 traders will be without trading bays'.

become a market for African objects only and would then attract only tourists. Interviews with the lessees revealed a rather negative attitude towards African objects which they referred to as 'curios and cheap tourist stuff', commenting, in addition, that 'if they take over, they would spoil the market'. Some traders of other objects at the market displayed a similarly negative attitude, claiming that there were too many traders there selling African objects, and blaming them for a decrease in the numbers of local customers.

Many African object traders complained about the stall allocation policy, perceiving it as unfair. One South African trader told me that she had been at the market for two years but had still to move around from stall to stall each day. She claimed that 'the curio traders kept the market going during winter because many of the other traders [selling other objects] would stop trading during the winter months, or even when it rains'. According to her claims, not however borne out by my own observations, African object traders were always at the market to fill the empty spaces left by other stallholders who did not show regularly. Hence they guaranteed a regular income to the lessees, which the others did not. Yet, she said, in the summer months when the 'other traders' returned, quite a few casual traders in African objects went without a trading space.

2. 1. A typical day at Greenmarket Square

Early in the morning Greenmarket Square was busy, the trading stalls being set up by workers employed by the three lessees while salespeople and traders unpacked and set up displays of the items they had for sale that day. The trading stalls themselves comprised metal poles that held a plastic sheet that functioned as 'roofing', and a wooden door on trestles which functioned as a table. Each trading space was approximately 2.3 by 0.80 meters in area.

Agnes arrived at the market place at 7.45 a.m. each morning, having come from her suburban Parow (see map 1) bachelor flat, usually by taxi to Cape Town City centre. Agnes' regular stall was at the lower market. When she arrived, her stall was just being set up. Agnes then sat down on a bench opposite her stall and waited for her 'pusher', John, one of 10 to 15 men who earned

their income fetching and returning the trader's goods from storerooms[19] nearby, in Burg and Church Streets. John earned R2.50 per trip. Not all traders employed pushers. Sandile, a South African who worked as a saleswoman for trader Jabu from Swaziland, arrived at the market carrying heavy boxes filled with African objects. She started to unpack them a few stalls away from Agnes's. Agnes's friend Lisa went to the upper market to ask the lessees if they could allocate her a stall for the day.

Case I: Agnes—from accountancy to trade in African objects

Agnes was born on 2 November 1972 in Kenya. Her home language was *Kikuyu*. She was a Christian. Agnes had come to South Africa in January 1996. Her father was a farmer in Kenya. Agnes had six siblings. She was single. Her brother also lived in Cape Town. He was a wholesale merchant in African objects. Agnes had finished high school and had studied accountancy in Kenya. She had worked as an accountant for two years prior to leaving Kenya. According to Agnes, her work as an accountant did not satisfy her needs.

Agnes rented a bachelor flat in Parow. She had started selling African objects in 1996. At first she had had one stall at Greenmarket Square. A year later she had opened another. She employed one saleswoman to sell for her. She perceived her income as adequate and claimed that she earned the same amount of money in one week that she had previously earned in one month working as an accountant in Kenya. Most of the objects Agnes sold were from Kenya. She said she liked the objects she sold. She received most of them from her brother and from Kenyan wholesale merchants travelling regularly to Cape Town with their merchandise (see appendix F for an inventory of her goods).

Picture 7: Traders setting up their stalls at Greenmarket Square

[19] Private individuals operated the storerooms. The rent was R 100-150 per month, depending on the storage space required for the merchandise.

Case 2: Lisa—in search of a better life

Lisa was born in 1974, also in Kenya. She too had come to South Africa early in 1996. First she had gone to Port Elizabeth, where she had worked as a waitress for a year. However, being without a work permit, she had been exploited by her employer.

She had come to Cape Town in 1997 and had soon found employment selling 'love bugs'[20] for a South African trader at Greenmarket Square. At the market she had met other Kenyans, including Agnes, who had by then started earning quite a good income selling African objects. So Lisa had decided to start her own business with money saved during her time as a waitress. She had started at Greenmarket Square as a casual trader on 19 August 1998 with 97 items worth R1,600 (retail value). Two weeks later she had already increased the value of her merchandise by 25%. Lisa explained: 'I came to South Africa because the living and working conditions in Kenya are bad. I finished high school, but my parents did not have the money to pay for further education. I hoped that the job at the market will be good but I am already worried because I do not sell much' (24.8.98).

Like Lisa, most traders had had to start out using small amounts of capital generated by saving income from paid employment, and had gradually increased their stock holding as business developed. Data of inventories of established traders such as Agnes (case1) or Francoise (case 3) indicate that the retail value of the merchandise could amount to R97,000 per table (see Appendix E for inventories).

Because Lisa was a casual trader she had not yet been allocated a permanent stall. She arrived every morning neither knowing if she would get a stall nor where she would be trading. Casual stalls were allocated on a 'first-come-first-served' basis. Casual traders usually became permanent traders after 6 to 8 months of trading at the market. Only then might the trader be allocated the same spot every day. Not all sites were equally good for trading. Lisa and other casual traders disliked being the only stall selling African objects amidst stalls selling other items such as contemporary clothing. The traders feared that potential customers would overlook them. They also liked to be close to traders from their home country. This particular day Lisa was allotted a stall next to Demba from Mali, who sold objects from Zimbabwe, reflecting the lessees' preference for arranging stalls selling similar objects in clusters of five to ten stalls. Such clustering of stalls, I was told, made it easier and quicker for customers to find what they sought.

[20] The outside shape of a 'love bug' resembles a walnut. The wooden 'shell' is filled with a little colourful wooden bug.

While Lisa was waiting to be allocated a stall, John had arrived with Agnes's three boxes of goods. Now Agnes's daily routine of unpacking started. Colourful Kissing and Victory masks were unwrapped and placed on a plastic sheet underneath the table. Agnes placed a whole pile of (about fifty) Banana Leaf paintings on the table. Piece by piece her boxes were unpacked. She decorated her stall by hanging some Tanzanian batiks from the metal poles. Then she took bundles of necklaces, some made of wooden pearls with little carved animals, others of brass beads, and hung them from the edge of the stall's canopy.

Meanwhile, Agnes's neighbours had arrived. They were Isabelle from Zimbabwe, Francoise and Marianne, from the DRC, Tom and Marie from Malawi and Alexis from Greece. All were permanent traders and all, apart from Alexis who sold Greek clothing, traded in African objects. They too busied themselves getting their stalls ready. Isabelle sold Zimbabwean wireworks produced by her husband's brothers in Zimbabwe. She was joyful that day, because she was soon to go to Zimbabwe where she had established a chicken farm with income earned at the market. Taking electrical appliances to Zimbabwe and selling them there generated a further part of her income. Isabelle drove to her home country by car every six weeks to sell items from South Africa and to pick up new stock to sell at Greenmarket Square.

Case 3: Francoise—the queen of the markets

Francoise was born on 6 June 1967 in Angola. She was divorced and had two daughters. Her home language was Kikongo. She was a Christian. She rented an apartment in the city centre, where she lived with her two daughters. Francoise had grown up in the former Zaire. Her parents had left Angola when she was three years old. She had come to South Africa in 1992 with her brother. For two and half years she had stayed in Johannesburg where she had joined her uncle's business, selling African objects. In 1994 she had come to Cape Town and had started her own business selling African objects at Greenmarket Square. For six months in 1996 she had rented a trading space at Pan African Market. But, she complained, the Pan African Market was not busy enough and she found it boring to sit there by herself. She preferred the busy open-air market at Greenmarket Square, where, as she puts it: 'It is more African than Pan African Market because it is outside, like most African markets are' (7. 10. 1998).

Francoise was a trained beautician, but claimed that trading in African objects provided her with a better income than working as a beautician might have done. She had learned the trade from her uncle and she could have stayed with him in Johannesburg. But she wanted to be independent and was attracted by Cape Town where she experienced less danger and hostility towards foreigners than she had done in Johannesburg.

Francoise said that she loved her work and what she sold, and was herself a collector. With no intention to return to her home country, she perceived her work as permanent and her income as more than adequate. She received most of the objects she sold from family members and friends, and others from travelling wholesalers from West Africa (See appendix E for an inventory of her goods). Francoise supported six people on her income. Most of what she then was selling – masks, beads and cloths—had originated in DRC, Angola and Cameroon. The majority of her customers were tourists and overseas collectors. She was also well known among local collectors and shop owners. One collector I met referred to her as the 'Queen of the Market'. Francoise mentioned to me that only five people from West Africa had been selling African objects at Greenmarket Square in 1994 and that it had been much easier then to make a good income (24.8.98).

About an hour after activity had begun, all the stalls were decorated and the traders were now awaiting customers. Each small trading space was now fully utilised, objects being displayed on and beneath the tables, and hung from the metal poles of the stalls. Each stall's decorations betrayed the individual preferences of the traders. Some were very inventive. Francoise, for example, decorated her stall with leaves and branches, to emphasise the wooden material from which the objects were made. Thembi from South Africa arranged the objects according to their type. She placed all the stone elephant figures in one row, resembling an army formation in a battlefield.

Picture 8: Stalls at Greenmarket Square

The first customers started to arrive. An American couple, recognisable by their Texan accent, stopped at Agnes's stall and looked at her Banana Leaf paintings. They asked about the price. Agnes told them that they cost R25 each. She showed them the different designs and explained their meaning. After they had spent about 10 minutes at her stall looking at the various African objects, Agnes proposed that they make an offer. But they simply asked again about prices, and then, left, Agnes commenting as they went that 'everybody is just looking'. She sat down on the bench opposite her stall alongside Mida, a South African who was working for Tom from Malawi, and Isabelle from Zimbabwe. Isabelle was having her hair done by Eve from the DRC. A vendor selling fruits passed by and Agnes bought a plastic bag of apples and offered them to the others. Quite a few visitors squeezed their way through the passages between the stalls, looking at the displayed objects, touching them and asking for their prices. Francoise was busy explaining to a couple from Germany, whose English was limited, the use and origin of *Bakuba* cloths. She told them: 'the cloth is made from the bark of a tree. *Bakuba* cloths are used as currency in Zaire. If a man wants to get married he will pay for his wife with the cloth. They make very nice place mats or one could make pillowcases out of them'. After looking at the different designs, the couple bought two cloths, telling Francoise that they would give them to their daughters in Germany.

The morning passed by quickly and Agnes had made four sales. She had sold six banana leaf paintings and two Victory masks. Her neighbours had had a quieter morning. Francoise told Agnes that she was bored and asked her to watch her stall for a while. Agnes agreed and Francoise went shopping. Around lunchtime Mickey, one of the lessees of the lower market, arrived to collect the rent from the traders. Agnes gave him R35. She said that she was in a good mood that day because she had already earned more than the amount she had to pay for the rent of the stall. However on other days, especially in winter, she often left the market without making a sale and then still had to pay the R35. A male customer approached Agnes's stall. He picked up one of her skeleton figures from Tanzania and looked at it. Agnes got up from the bench and greeted him. She told him: 'The figure is a hungry man. See how thin he is. It is made of ebony'. She took a piece of unfinished wood and showed it to him. She explained: 'See, only the inside of the wood is black, the outside is white. It is very hard wood'. The customer asked if he could buy the unfinished wood. She told him that it was not for sale. He left.

Later Peter, a wholesale merchant from Kenya, came to visit Agnes. They sat on the bench, talking Swahili. Peter travelled from Kenya to Cape Town every two months to deliver goods at the market. Agnes had not seen him for a long time. Peter told her the latest news from home. She ordered 100 Banana Leaf paintings and 50 Tanzanian batiks. A Spanish-speaking couple walked by and stopped at Agnes's stall, looking at wooden salad spoons with animal designs. Agnes approached them and they started discussing the price in English. The woman offered R20 for one pair of spoons. Agnes smiled and said that they cost R25. The woman replies: 'I will take ten, so give me a good price'. Agnes said that she wanted R250 for ten. The woman laughed, and said that she would pay R210. Agnes smiled and said: 'R235'. After some discussion with the man accompanying her, the Spanish woman agreed to Agnes's price. Agnes wrapped the spoons in newspaper and put them in a plastic bag. She added a little wooden key ring and thanked her customers. Isabelle watched the interaction between Agnes and the customers. Her day had been bad. She had not made one sale yet and it was nearly time to pack up. Francoise returned with a number of Woolworths[21] bags and showed the other traders what she had bought. At 15h30 the traders started to pack up. Agnes needed approximately 45 minutes to do so. When she was finished, she simply left her stall. She knew that John, her pusher, would come and collect the boxes. He had been working for her for a year and she could rely on him. She no longer had to accompany him to make sure that the objects arrived at the storeroom. Thembi, who had packed all her stone sculptures into big plastic bags, made her first trip to the storeroom. She had to walk three times to transport all the heavy bags there. She was tired. Having earned R25 as a daily salary, she returned to Khayelitsha by train. Soon the market place was unrecognisable: the stalls were dismantled and the place was cleaned. It was an empty space, filled with parked cars at night.

Case 4: Thembi—desperate for work

Thembi was born in 1976 in Port Elizabeth. She had come to Cape Town in 1994 with her uncle. She had finished standard five (seventh grade) in school. Thembi was unmarried and had two children aged four and six. She had to support her children herself because the father of the children had left her shortly after the second had been born. She stayed with her uncle's family in Khayelitsha. Thembi had found her job at Greenmarket Square through a friend who also sold African objects, for a trader from Mali. She disliked her work but could not find any other in

[21] Woolworths is the name of a chain of department stores in South Africa.

Cape Town. She had previously worked at a fish factory but lost the job. As she put it: 'I had to find some work, so came here and the Swazi gave me a job. But I don't like it. It is hard work and it is not secure to work outside. It is very cold in winter and the money I get is too little'.

3. St. George's Mall

St. George's Mall was situated between Burg Street and Adderley Street (see map 2). As a pedestrian street, it was a notable shopping centre in Cape Town central business district. Many restaurants and shops attracted people who worked in the city centre to spend their lunchtime breaks there. The street led to the Company Gardens where the parliament, the National Gallery, Museum of Africa and the botanical gardens were situated. Many people passed along this busy street each day. St. George's Mall street market was small (approximately 35 traders) and arranged as a sidewalk market. It was less dense and the spaces between the stalls much wider than at Greenmarket Square. The market was organised by the city's traffic department. The rent was R200 per week for a stall.

The stall's structures were similar to those at Greenmarket Square, although many were larger. During the time of my fieldwork approximately 25 stalls there were selling African objects. According to non-South African traders it was impossible for them to obtain a stall at St. George's Mall market so they had to sublease stalls from South Africans who had leased the stalls from the traffic department.

4. A visit to the Pan African Market (PAM)

The PAM was situated in Long Street, corner Longmarket Street, in a former YWCA building, built in 1920. Being inside a large building the PAM resembled a small shopping mall for African objects. The PAM had been officially opened in December 1996. It had been initiated by a white South African who had managed an art gallery in Cape Town before founding the PAM. He rented two floors of the building.

30 traders from 15 different African countries displayed their objects at the PAM. The majority came from West Africa, in particular Ivory Coast, Senegal and Mali. Each trader rented a distinct, albeit not clearly demarcated space. The rent ranged from R800 to R1,400 per month,

depending on the area required by the trader. Most traders there also had one or two additional sites at Greenmarket Square, in St. Georges's Mall, or at the street market close to Cape Town's main railway station.

Every space in the PAM was utilised to its full potential and a visitor was confronted with a mixture of masks, musical instruments, headrests, sculptures, fabrics, jewellery and objects of daily use. Each trader designed and decorated her or his own space according to their individual taste, although the lack of clear distinction of traders' spaces meant that the market evoked the image of a large undifferentiated warehouse of African objects, at least to a first-time visitor.

The visitor was greeted by Keita who watched over the PAM entrance and encouraged people to come inside. A large *Colon* figure at the entrance also advertised the market. Once inside, two large *Senufo* figures greeted the visitor. The market was situated on the first and second floor of the building. As one walked up the stairway to the first floor one passed more C*olon* figures. Left of the stairway, Peter from Cameroon sat on a large *Senufo* bed and greeted one. Peter's objects were displayed in the corridor where he used the space available to him to display small figures and utensils on wooden shelves, stretched along both the sides of corridor. Larger figures stood on the floor and various masks hung side by side on the wall above the shelves.

The music of Ishmael Lo played in the background and one could hear laughter from the coffee shop in the next room where Abdullah from Senegal offered meals and drinks. Some traders sat around the table playing *Woaley*, reading the newspaper, discussing the latest politics and sport events, or quarrelling lightheartedly about who sold the best pieces. A smell of cuisine, coffee and tobacco lay in the air. Outside on the terrace two tables were taken by a group of American tourists discussing the menu with Abdullah. Part of the same room was used by John from Mali. John was absent most of the time. Thandi from South Africa, who had been working for him for a year, ran his shop.

Picture 9: Trading space at PAM

Case 5: John the traveller

John was born in 1962 in Mali. He was Muslim. His home language was Mandinko. He had arrived in South Africa in July 1996. He had stayed for one month in Johannesburg and then moved to Cape Town. His wife and his son were in Mali. He hoped to return home soon. He lived near Cape Town's city centre. He ran his business from a stall at Greenmarket Square and from one room in the PAM. His brother Mohammed also had a stall at Greenmarket Square.

John had left his home country because he perceived the economic conditions in Mali as being unsatisfying. He had travelled much before arriving in South Africa. He had studied agriculture in Israel for two years. Afterwards he had travelled through Egypt, India, and Bangkok, and had then stayed for five years in Japan. In Japan he had finished his studies and had started trading African objects in 1993.

He said he enjoyed his work because he liked to travel and he enjoyed the freedom of being his own boss, which is why he had become a trader of African objects. John employed two South African saleswomen. He specialised in African mud cloth and Mali drums. He got most of his objects from a producer in his home country. John employed a tailor from Mali, who made pillowcases, blankets, and clothing out of mud cloth, according to John's designs. The tailor worked in a small room in the PAM.

John liked the objects he sold. He said that they reminded him of home. He perceived his income as adequate. His potential customers, he said, were both local and overseas tourists. As he put it: 'My customers are most interested in antiques and traditional objects but also in something cheap and small'.

John found it strange that people always asked him if people in Mali still used the traditional masks and dresses that he had up for sale. He explained: 'They are ignoring the new. They have seen the traditional on TV and expect it be like that. They do not consider us Africans to change at all' (25.9.97).[22]

Alongside John's space one found Sam from Kenya (case 8), trying hard to convince a female customer to buy a Maasai bracelet. Sam sold objects most of which came from Kenya. He had two trading outlets at the PAM. In the room beside the coffee shop, Sheikh and Abdullah, who also ran the coffee shop, displayed their objects for sale. They sold objects from the whole African continent: among them were wooden carved giraffes from Zimbabwe, snake skin bags, belts, bowls and jewellery from the DRC, masks from Mozambique and malachite carved animals from Malawi.

Case 6: Abdullah—the trader and cook

Abdullah was born in 1967 in Mbour, Senegal. He was Muslim and his home language was Wolof. He had finished standard eight (tenth grade). Abdullah had arrived in South Africa in October 1995 together with a group of Senegalese friends. He had stayed in Johannesburg for two months, living with friends from home. He then left for Cape Town late in November 1995. He shared a flat with a friend in Woodstock. His reason for travelling to South Africa had been to start a business selling African objects. As Abdullah put it: 'I was born into a trading family and it was always my wish to become self-employed like my mother'. His mother traded in African dresses. Abdullah had travelled with his mother to trade fairs in Tunisia and Morocco when he was 17 years old. He enjoyed travelling. He had learned trading from his mother and from a Senegalese friend.

When I asked him how he perceived the economic conditions in his home country, he said that they were very dissatisfying. However, he perceived the social conditions at his home as better than in South Africa. He felt very isolated in South Africa. Abdullah had come to South Africa as a refugee. His status allowed him to work but he had to renew his work permit every six months: 'I never know when they are going to throw me out.'

Abdullah had started his business selling African objects at the main railway station in Cape Town. He had moved into the PAM in January 1996. He also employed a saleswoman who sold for him at the railway station market, and sold African objects at the weekly Greenpoint market on Sundays. Abdullah received most of his stock from friends in his home country who airfreighted the objects to him.

[22] I return to the way those images of static Africa play out in chapters five and six.

Abdullah liked his work, he said, because he liked to meet people and be independent. Abdullah regarded his income as more than adequate. He supported family members in his home country with the money he earned in South Africa. Most of what he sold came from Cameroon, Ivory Coast and Nigeria. Abdullah sold primarily to overseas tourists and to local and overseas collectors. He said that his customers were most interested in antiques and traditional objects and the stories he told them. Abdullah referred to the objects he sold as pieces of art, traditional pieces, copies and curios. (6.6.97) According to Abdullah, most of the things he sold were fakes: 'The originals do not exist anymore, if one finds them they go straight to Paris or New York. In Cameroon they fake all the masks found in Africa' (10.5.97). In May 1998 he took over the restaurant at the PAM.

David, the PAM initiator, had his room on the first floor. It was rather empty by comparison with the other PAM traders' spaces. He sold mainly southern African objects. On the walls he displayed paintings by township artists Kangelani and Zumana opposite ten Mozambican body masks. Having managed a gallery selling African objects before he founded the PAM, David had wanted to create a venue with 'more vibe and more liveliness than a gallery'. He regarded the market as a cultural centre where visitors could experience the flair of Africa and its people. From our discussions, it was apparent that his main aim had been to establish a centre where individual African traders could offer their merchandise for sale and bypass white gallery owners. David perceived the PAM as a bazaar with 'bustling vibes' rather than as a 'sterile aloof' art gallery.

Case 7: David—the initiator

David was born in 1969 in Kimberley, South Africa. He had come to Cape Town in 1988 to study English and Art at the University of Cape Town. He was married with two children. His wife worked together with him at the PAM.

He decided to open the PAM as a venue to introduce people to African objects; and give traders a chance to sell their objects in a more 'upmarket yet not sterile atmosphere' (27.9.97). A further motivation for opening the market was 'to help others to help themselves and set an example of how people's initiative can make a difference in the new South Africa'.

He was an artist himself and also exhibited his own art at the market. David enjoyed the work because he regarded his place of work as a place of social interaction with other people. David had financed his business with a bank loan. He had bought most of the objects directly from the producers.

Picture 10: Trader unpacking objects at PAM

Visitors proceeding upstairs to the second floor would find Kangelani a South African creating township scenes out of waste material (beverage cans, shoe soles, plastic, etc.) by, for example, cutting a small man out of a rubber shoe sole and glueing him onto a board on which he had painted streets and sky. The second floor display rooms housed various workshops including two potteries, a goldsmith, a leather craft workshop and a hairdresser and drumming workshop. Keita from Mali was busy unpacking boxes which had arrived that morning from Mali. His brother had sent him tablecloths, clothing and various other objects. His room was one of the fullest in the market. More than a hundred *Colon* men were displayed on a table, resembling an army of tin soldiers. *Colon* figures represented colonial officers, doctors, businessmen carrying briefcases, tourists with cameras around their neck, etc. In the middle of the room, on the floor, a huge pile of clothing and tablecloths was waiting to be counted and displayed.

Marc and Steve, both South Africans, had rented the room beside Keita's. It had a very different appearance from that of the other PAM rooms. First, it was rather empty. The African objects were displayed on metal shelves; some small masks were mounted. All objects carried a price tag, with the logo of their shop, the *Colon Man*. Most price tags also briefly explained the origin

Picture 11: Colon men from the Ivory Coast, displayed at PAM

and meaning of the object. Two large brass objects were displayed in the middle of the room. They had been trade currencies in Cameroon. A large wedding blanket from Mali was displayed on one wall, opposite which ten *Guro* masks were exhibited. The room reminded one of a gallery, especially in that the displays emphasised the individuality of each object on sale.

5. Analysis of the trading place

So far I have described the markets where I conducted fieldwork. Those descriptions reveal that the market places represented a small universe where diverse informal economic[23] activities took place, ranging from sales and production of various items to services such as hairdressing. As Geertz has shown, the informal economy is a 'cultural form, a social institution' (Geertz 1979: 123). 'It is a distinctive system of social relationships centring around production and consumption of goods and services' (Geertz 1979: 124).

I have earlier suggested that one can treat the places where African objects were sold as frames which attract our cognisance of, and influence our responses to, the objects found inside them.

[23] The term informal economy is used here as a convenience and describes informal economic activities in basic terms, such as unregistered businesses, whose earnings are often not included in national accounts and statistics and whose activities are usually not regulated by official rules and regulations (Kirsten 1991: 148).

My field data suggest that the frame provided by the informal market environment appeared to draw attention away from the commodity nature of the objects. I now compare and analyse the different structures found at the markets to show how and why the places where the objects were sold masked or revealed their commodity nature (Plattner 2000: 123, Steiner 1994: 19).

If we consider the market places described above, the PAM's compositional structure was like that of the street markets with a series of traders each operating independently yet sociably. That, after all, was one of the PAM founder's initiating ideas and he had managed to keep the rents at about the same level as those charged at street markets—although he did set them at a monthly rather than a daily rate.[24] Yet, the layout, with traders having spaces that seemed to flow into one another, rather than demarcated stalls, gave the impression that it might be a single enterprise arranged as a department store. During the period that I was selling at the PAM, I was frequently asked if all the objects in the market were owned by one person and who s/he was. The objects sold at PAM did not differ much from those available at the street markets although the prices at the PAM were approximately 10% to 30% higher than at Greenmarket Square (see table 3). Large objects such as *Senufo* beds and *Dogon* doors, or ladders that were too big to be displayed in the crammed market space of Greenmarket Square, were usually only found at the PAM.

The most obvious difference between the street markets and the PAM was that the latter was inside a building and the other two outdoors. This may at first be a banal observation, but it had two significant consequences for the commodification of African objects and their masking. Both resulted, first, from the different possibilities of display of objects at the markets, and, second, from what I assert are the common perceptions some people have about people selling on the street and people selling in a built structure.

Trading inside or outside a built structure determines the way objects are displayed, which influences the attributes assigned to objects on sale, which again influences the degree to which the object's commodity nature is masked. The space available to traders at the street markets was limited. The average trading space was 2,3 by 0.80 metres. To display as many objects as

[24] Street market operators who did not also have a PAM space had, in addition, to pay for overnight storage place.

possible, traders had to place them close together with some objects displayed on the ground below the tables. The close display of similar objects concealed the individuality of any single object. The customer had to look closely to identify the individual character of each piece. The close display of many similar objects, and their abundance, suggest mass-production, which is in strong opposition to art and individuality because it appeals to the image of conveyor belt production, hence commodity production.

Trading indoors gave PAM traders better opportunities and space to display objects, such as hanging them on the walls, placing them on shelves or on window sills and thereby pointing to their decorative qualities and emphasising their future possible uses. Some even hung objects from the ceiling of their trading spaces. Yet, although PAM traders had more display space, the majority of their displays resembled those at Greenmarket Square and St. George's Mall. However, some PAM traders, like David, Marc and Steve, kept their rooms rather empty, with objects neatly displayed on shelves or walls, and with much space between them. The objects were of the same kind as those on sale at other PAM trading spaces and at the street markets. Yet, the uncluttered sense of the two rooms underlined the individuality of each piece displayed, diminishing the image of mass-production and at the same time masking the objects' commodity nature. The spacious layouts of these rooms also created distance between the beholder and the objects or as Plattner suggests these layouts 'connote to a sacred space' (Plattner 2000: 123, Steiner 1994: 28). Customers could step away from the objects and look at each from a distance. The latter is characteristic of art museums and art galleries. Consequently, these displays had the potential to imbue each object as art. While I was selling in Marc and Steve's PAM room, I often heard customers remark that the room was attractive and that they could finally discern the objects. Others entered the room and said that here they were delighted to see all the space.

Being indoors also bestowed the PAM with particular qualities to authenticate the objects. First, the coffee shop functioned as a place where personal relationships between customers and traders could be established. I often observed traders having a cup of coffee with their customers, discussing all sorts of subjects. Second, the flair: the music, the smells of fire and goats milk which emanated from some objects, the West African attire of many of the traders, provided the African objects with a lively and interactive context beyond commodity consumption. David

(case 7), the PAM's organiser, told me that he wanted to create a distinctively non-European 'shebeen atmosphere'[25], to give the visitor the feeling of being in Africa. The PAM thus represented an attempt to authenticate the object with the ambience of the place and disguise the fact that it was just like a market or shop, a place of commodity exchange. In addition, the presence of workshops at the PAM intensified the liveliness and authenticity. Customers could see how objects such as pots, jewellery and township pictures were produced. For example, the drum workshop, where the purchaser of a drum could learn to play it, gave clients a chance to experience the purchased object in what they might have perceived as its 'original context': played by an African who also showed the purchaser how to play it.

Apart from the display, the diverse perceptions people had towards indoor or outdoor trading also conjured different images of the African object trade. I was often asked by fellow students and friends, and also by visitors to the markets (who knew that I was studying them), whether the traders, particularly those at street markets, could really survive from their sales of African objects, or if they had additional sources of income. Traders also mentioned to me that people treated them with less respect when they traded on the street. As Agnes from Kenya (case 1) put it: 'If I tell people in church what I am doing, they think that I am poor' (23.5.97). Tom, a trader from Malawi who ran two stalls at Greenmarket Square, explained: 'People look down on us. They come to the market and expect that we sell cheap stuff...My customers told me that their tour guides told them that they should not pay much for the things we sell, because it would be cheap tourist stuff...They were always surprised that the things were not that cheap' (13.8.98).

Hence, it seems as if selling on the street conjures an image of unconstrained activities: bargains, hawkers, noise, dirt and chaos, and merchandise of low quality and without fixed prices. The informal character of the market situation also seems to evoke a notion of the destitute poor living on the margins of society and searching for survival strategies in activities unregulated by state institutions, hence of trying to earn money which they otherwise cannot, as well as of people who are rather uninformed and uneducated hoping to earn a 'penny for their bread at night'. Field data showed that, to some, the apparently unconstrained character of the street

[25] Shebeen describes a drinking house in African townships.

market was revulsive and the abundance of similar objects degraded the objects (see chapters 6 and 7). To them, the objects on display were primarily commodities: pieces of merchandise which, if exchanged for money, provided a minimal livelihood for the trader. Collectors and laymen alike expressed their revulsion for African objects found at the street markets, referring to them as mass-produced kitsch, tourist stuff, etc. and essentially worthless. And, as we have seen, traders in other objects at Greenmarket Square even claimed that the presence of African objects spoiled the market and would kept customers away.

Yet, I noticed, and this was confirmed by traders at both the PAM and Greenmarket Square, the same people who expressed dislike for an object at the latter would buy the same object at the PAM. Abdullah (case 6), for example, told me that he often sold the same objects on the street and inside the PAM. But, he said, collectors only bought at the PAM because, they told him, they did not trust the street markets. I was thus quite surprised, on a visit to a collector's home, to meet two Greenmarket Square traders there. The collector had previously told me he would not buy objects at the Square, because they were all fakes and traders there could not distinguish good pieces from bad. Yet, here were the same traders at his house with three bags filled with African objects, from which he chose four. The collector told me that they visited him regularly. This incident indicated to me that, as soon as the objects and traders move from the street into a building (in this case a private home), the apparent authenticity of the object and authority of the trader seems to be upgraded.

Yet, to various others among my informants, the unconstrained character of the outdoor markets appeared to have helped to mask the commodity nature of the objects, because it conjured an exotic image of African markets and imbued the object with authenticity. The colourful displays, the diversity of people and objects, the narrow passages, the chaotic ambience and buzzing vibes, and the proximity of African people and objects, especially at Greenmarket Square: all seemed to allow visitors to literally dive into the market place and experience it with all their senses (Steiner 1994: 20).

Fieldwork data indicates that visitors who had expected to find such markets in South Africa were attracted by their ambience and the abundance of African objects from which to select. 80%

of the 276 visitors I interviewed said that they had enjoyed the street markets. When asked why, the majority included reference to the diversity of objects to choose from, the friendliness of the traders and the relaxed atmosphere of the markets. When asked if the markets were as they had expected them, 75% replied 'yes'.

An Australian woman I interviewed at the airport told me that she had bought a pair of salad spoons from 'a poor woman selling on the street', who told her that she would be very happy because she could now buy bread for her children. The Australian said she preferred to buy at street markets because there she could see who receives the money and at the same time she could support some of South Africa's poor people (Interview number 20, Airport 3.3. 98). An English woman, who stayed at the Traveller's Lodge in Long Street (close to all three markets), told me that she went to Greenmarket Square every day, before or after her sightseeing tours in Cape Town. As she put it: 'It is nice to see all the places like Table Mountain, Cape Point, Boulder's Beach...But I hardly saw and met African people there. Cape Town is not African at all...it reminds me of London. The only place where I met African people is at the market. The vibe is great there, traders talk to me and some know me by now.' She had been in Cape Town five days when I met her (29.1.1998). While I was working at the PAM a German woman came to where I was selling. She looked at all kinds of objects for quite a while and then she said: 'People told me that I should not go to town [Cape Town's city centre] because there is nothing special to see and that it is too dangerous... But it is great. I saw so many nice things at Greenmarket Square, and in here. I talked to a trader from Mali at Greenmarket Square for almost an hour. He played the drum for me...My friends who stayed at the Waterfront[26] really missed out today' (7.6.1997).

Considering the diverse perceptions informants had of the markets, it seems as if the indoor-outdoor contrast of the space in which objects were sold allowed them to construct two senses of authenticity of the objects. For the traveller-tourist, like the three women mentioned above, the 'real Africa' of the outdoor street market, where one deals directly with the local person—preferably an (exotic looking) black African with whom one can communicate and from whom

[26] Waterfront refers to the very upmarket shopping mall constructed in recent years at the waterfront in Cape Town's harbour. It is a favourite tourist attraction.

one can gain a 'feel' of real sociable African life—is what constitutes authenticity. It may even provide the tourist with a story to take home with the object (see chapter 5). Yet, for the collector and the more 'sophisticated' tourist, the authenticity of an object has to come from its having been authorised as authentic by an established institution—a museum, gallery etc. For a collector, the street market traders can only be engaged with in private. If a collector were to be seen purchasing at the street markets, her ability to claim authority to attribute authenticity might be undermined—precisely because the authenticity s/he attributes is not be found in the street market. And so, the objects must be brought to the collectors' home so that s/he can select the best (most 'authentic') before the 'rubbish' goes out onto the street.

6. Conclusion

In this chapter I have argued that the characteristics of the places where the objects are sold and the nature of their display at those places help partially to determine the degree to which the commodity nature of African objects is masked. Depending on the individual visitor's point of view, the outdoor markets, for example, were perceived as places where one could experience the 'real' Africa and obtain an 'authentic' piece of Africa. Hence the objects' commodity nature was masked for them. Others perceived the street markets negatively, claiming that the objects sold there were inauthentic commodities. They preferred to buy indoors, for example, at the PAM. It is thus neither the objects' nor the markets' inherent quality that masks the commodity nature of the objects on sale. It depends on what kind of disguise customers seek in order to satisfy themselves of the objects' authenticity.

My analysis of these three trading places reveals an important principle underlying the process whereby the commodity nature of the objects I studied is masked: the stories which can be constructed about the Africanness and the 'arty' character of certain trading places. In the following chapters I consider in closer detail the way that attributions of an object as African and/or art helps to mask the commodity nature of those objects. And I develop that discussion into a more and more faceted story to link it to my main argument.

To do that I focus on the diverse mechanisms used to disguise the commodity nature of the objects, using field data to illustrate. I do so first in terms of the traders and sellers and their

personal relationships to the objects they sold, and second in terms of the interaction between traders and customers, and how the stories traders used helped to hide the commodity nature of the objects. In chapters six and seven I come back to the question of what kind of disguises customers implicitly sought as they endeavoured to satisfy their quest for an object's authenticity.

Chapter four: Traders, sellers and African objects

> Objects hang before the eyes of the imagination, continuously re-presenting us to ourselves, and telling the stories of our lives in ways, which would be impossible otherwise (Pearce 1992: 47).

1. Introduction

Having discussed the potential of the trading places that are the three markets to mask or reveal the commodity nature of the objects I studied, I now focus on the purveyors of African objects. In this chapter I develop my main argument in terms of the personal relationships between the purveyors of African objects and their objects of sale. I show that these relationships played a significant role in the commodification of African objects and the ways it was masked.

Traders and sellers are the mediators between production and consumption of all objects. Traders rather than sellers are crucial agents for both initiating and motivating supply of objects. However, they both link producers and suppliers of objects with consumers and collectors around the world (Marcus & Myers 1995: 8, Steiner 1994: 154-156). In the case of African objects, traders and sellers sell and transform objects into commodities by attributing them with exchange value through making them available for sale. Yet, I argue, individual traders and sellers also mask this process of transforming objects into commodities, doing so precisely because the masking process makes their commodification possible.

Just as the places where objects were sold and their display at these places imbued the objects with diverse characteristics, so did traders and sellers attribute them with non-commodity characteristics through the ways they related both to the objects and to their customers. Among some traders and sellers, particularly the less commercially successful, the objects' commodity nature was revealed by their emphasising the objects' prices during their trading interactions with customers. Among the more successful, the objects' commodity nature was masked by non-commodity aspects such as stories they told clients about the objects, about themselves and about their countries of origin. Seeking reasons for differences in their sales volumes, I noticed that there were differences between the various traders' and sellers' perceptions of, and their personal relationships to, the objects they purveyed. I further noticed that their perceptions were

significantly shaped by their motivations for entering the trade and, to a certain degree, by their educational and professional standards. I argue here that traders' and sellers' motivations for trading in African objects, and their personal relationships with the objects, played a crucial role in their ability to mask the commodity nature of African objects, and hence to be more or less successful as traders.

Sam (case 8 below) a trader from Kenya, explained to me at the PAM: 'you can't sell something that you don't like'. Sam's statement summarises my argument in this chapter in that I use the chapter to show that the more the traders or sellers relate personally to the objects they are selling, the more they are able to mask the objects' commodity nature, both for themselves and for their clients. I then go on in chapter five to show how the commodity masking process was pursued by traders and sellers during their interactions with clients.

How might one measure the success of a trader or seller? I did so primarily by observing the number of sales traders and sellers made during a day, hence their stock turnover. I noticed that some sold regularly and others did not. The numbers of objects traders displayed (see appendix E for inventories) and the number of trading spaces they operated from, also offered indication of success. The more successful traders usually had more than one trading space and could afford to buy large numbers of objects and pay a salesperson to sell on their behalf. Hence they had to have more working capital than other traders to operate on a larger scale. Since most traders' main working capital had been earned through previous trading, this is a measure of their trading success.

2. Education, training and motivations for becoming a trader or seller of African objects

2.1. Traders

Traders' formal training varied widely (see appendix A for demographic data). The educational and professional training standard of the majority of traders interviewed was high. 54% had at least eight years of schooling while another 25% had completed high school. 18% held university degrees. Only 13% claimed they had had no formal job training. Hence, 'conventional wisdom' which, according to Peberdy & Crush (1998: 1) suggests that people entering the

informal sector are poor, uneducated and desperate, is challenged by my data regarding Cape town's street and PAM traders in African objects.

I found a vast diversity of professions among traders at the markets. Among them were a taxi driver, cook, nurse, teacher and car mechanic. Moreover, 25% of the traders had professions which were either related to the business side of the trade, such as accountancy or bookkeeping, or to the artistic side of the trade, such as graphic design. No formal training was required to become a trader in African objects. Many traders at the Cape Town markets had learned their 'commercial acumen' only in Cape Town. I noticed that traders exchanged stories about the objects they sold and, by doing so, they informally taught each other the criteria for judging the quality and the value of African objects.

Case 8: Sam—the 'Maasai' business man

Sam was born in 1958 in Kenya. He was a Christian; his home language was Kikuyu. He had arrived in Cape Town in November 1996. His wife and two children had remained in Kenya. In 1997 he had brought his family to Cape Town and they now stayed together at the Skyline flats in the city centre's Long Street. Prior to his arrival in Cape Town he had stayed in Johannesburg for one month. He had left Kenya because of unsatisfying economic conditions there. Sam had arrived in South Africa as a tourist. As he put it: 'I first wanted to see whether I would like to start a business in South Africa or not'.

Sam had finished high school and had gone to several business colleges. He was also a trained car mechanic. Prior to his arrival in South Africa he had never been involved in the African object trade. He had had a garage where he repaired cars. He liked to be self-employed because he enjoyed being free. Sam had brought his savings from prior work to South Africa and used those as the starting capital for his business. Sam had two trading spaces at the PAM. To enhance his income potential, Sam also sold African objects at night at an African restaurant in Cape Town, and on Sundays at Greenpoint. He obtained most of his objects from local wholesalers in Cape Town and from Kenyan wholesalers who supplied him at his stall. Approximately eighty percent of the objects he sold were from Kenya; the rest were South African batiks and objects from Malawi, Senegal and Zimbabwe. He regarded his income as adequate to support his family. Sam was not sure if this work would be a lifelong career for him. He said he would like to return to Kenya some day and be able to open a different kind of business there.

Sam believed that most of his potential customers were from overseas. They were predominantly interested in traditional objects and the stories he told them. Sam said about his customers: 'Some people just do not say hello. They never reply to my greeting. They look around. Some handle the things, not very carefully; but I remain quiet unless they break something. I can usually tell what kind of customers they are. I can tell who will buy, who just

looks and in what they are interested...but I am the same to all. Some people buy and then take a picture, as if they only buy to take a picture' (3.10.97).

Sam was amused that, having learned he was from Kenya, customers often asked him if he was Maasai. As he put it: 'Look at me, do I look like a Maasai - I am much too short.' However, he usually told them that he was Maasai. He believed that the customers were more likely to buy from a Maasai than from a Kikuyu: 'If people hear that I am from Kenya all they think about is Maasai, that is all they know, from the movies and so on'.

Sam told me that he was prepared to trade in any kinds of items if doing so would enable him to get rich. But, he added, his instinct had told him to sell African objects, indicating that he was motivated to sell African objects by economic considerations, particularly since he felt the trade in African objects had huge potential because of Cape Town's expanding tourist industry. Hence, Sam is an example of a trader who related to selling African objects primarily economically. Having owned a business before, he claimed that he knew the essentials of running a business. Yet, despite lacking a close and personal relationship to the objects, he was a very successful trader. Sam said that he made between R300 to R600 per day in gross income. On a good trading day he could gross R2,000 or more. His nett profit was between 60% and 70% (after deducting the wholesale price paid for the object, the cost of the trading spaces and the wages for employees).

Sam related to his business as such ('I love to be a businessman'). According to him, liking the objects he sold was an asset that helped him to be successful. I noticed that Sam constantly improved the displays of his objects at his trading spaces in the PAM, and sought Maasai objects to attract customers. He used sales methods which, he said, he had learned at business college. Sam told me, for example, that it was important to greet the customer when s/he came to the trading space, but that one should then leave them alone for a moment, so they could look around. Only when he noticed that they looked at a particular object for a while would he start telling them about it. His sales tactics also included telling stories about the objects (he said that he had learned them out of books and from other traders) and exploiting ethnic images (Maasai). Such tactics allowed him to mask the commodity nature of African objects and convince customers to buy from him (see chapter 5 for more detail).

Motivations for opening a business selling African objects varied according to individual traders. Many criteria played a role in the decision. However, general field data and survey material suggest some tendencies. The fact that the majority (84%) of traders I met at the markets were non-South Africans had played a significant role in their decision. 64% of the non-South African traders came to South Africa during 1995 and 1996. Besides the most obvious reason, i.e. to make a living, aspects such as being in the country illegally[27] (case 2) or being a refugee (cases 6, 11), hence being a foreigner with all its negative aspects such as language problems and discrimination in job opportunities, were involved in the decision. Being self-employed was the most frequently mentioned reason traders interviewed gave for their having chosen to enter the African object trade. Some (57%) said that they enjoyed the freedom of being self-employed (case 5, 6, 8). 25%, most of them non-South Africans, had already previously been self-employed or had come from trading families. According to such traders, their family backgrounds motivated them to open a business themselves (case 6).

Case 9: Peter—the art trader

Peter was born in 1972 in Cameroon. He was Muslim and spoke Bamun. Peter was single. He had come to Johannesburg in December 1996 and came to Cape Town in March 1997. His brother, Dan, was already trading in African objects in Cape Town. The two brothers now ran their business in a room at the PAM. Before the PAM had opened, Dan had been a wholesaler, selling African objects to other traders from his house.

Peter and Dan stayed in Woodstock. Peter had studied mathematics for two years in Cameroon. However, he had thought he would not find work after university and quit his studies. He had started to sell African objects in 1992. His father was an African object trader in Cameroon who had taught the trade to his sons. Peter planned to return to Cameroon, which he missed a lot. Peter and Dan obtained most of their objects from their father who had middlemen who collected for him in Cameroon villages. They also bought from wholesalers who came to Cape Town.

[27] Not all traders residing in Cape Town during the time of my fieldwork had temporary or permanent residence and work permits. An unknown number of traders entered the country on tourist visas, which did not allow them to trade. Their residence status was a subject strictly avoided by some traders, because of the aspect of illegality. Illegality of residence status should be acknowledged as a social aspect of the lives of the traders - an aspect that created insecurity, fear and made life uneasy at times. Four traders mentioned that they had been harassed by the local police and by officials of the Department of Home Affairs. They felt that the only way to avoid further harassment was by resorting to bribery. The aspect of illegality also placed a burden on operating their businesses in terms of financing them and opening bank accounts—South African banks will not open an account for a non-resident.

Peter had travelled to France, Belgium and Holland prior to his arrival in South Africa. On his first trip to Europe he lost R10,000. He explained: 'I made many mistakes in the beginning. I bought 200 objects and just left for France. I had borrowed the money for the objects and aeroplane ticket from friends. I bought many objects, which were very expensive, because I thought that I could sell them easily in Paris. I did not know that the hotels and transport were that expensive in France. I had to pay so much for accommodation that I had to mark-up the already expensive objects even more. The prices were so high and therefore nobody wanted to buy them... I was afraid to go home because I owed a lot of money to some people. In the end I sold the objects for my purchase price. When I was back my father helped to pay back my debts. It was a bad experience. But here in South Africa things work out better.'

Peter and Dan also sold African objects at the railway station and at Greenpoint on Sundays and they supplied two shops in Knysna and a collector of African objects in Worcester (Western Cape towns some distance from Cape Town). Most of their customers were tourists and gallery owners, both local and from overseas. Peter said: 'Customers often say that the objects are not worth the price. But that is not true! I do not discuss my price - my price is the price. I have good pieces and some are worth more than R 6,000. Some customers say that the objects I sell are not old and are fakes. But what is a fake? All things are copies; nothing is real old in Africa, like for example art from Europe. Sure, sometimes one finds old pieces, which are maybe 60 to 90 years old... I was once offered an old piece for R28,000, which was old, but who would buy it?' (2.10.97).

Peter referred to the objects as *l'art*. He also collected African objects for himself. He said that artists and collectors in Cameroon were admired. 'I grew up with art, I always saw it. I read books on art. I have to because sometimes I forget the meaning of things and then I need to look it up. People want to know' (2.10.97).

According to Peter, South Africans did not know art from Africa. South African art was modern art. For example, he said, the giraffes, that were widely available and very popular as decorations, had no meaning to him. 'Our art has meaning. It is used for something'. Pointing to a large Fang mask (Gabon): 'it is used in ritual, the king sits besides it' (5.5. 1997).

Some 7% of the non-South African traders, like John from Mali (case 5) and Abdullah from Senegal (case 6), said that they enjoyed travelling and meeting people. A further 6% claimed, like Lisa from Kenya (case 2), that they had been motivated by friends who had told them that selling African objects would be a good way to make a living. 15%, like Salah from Ethiopia (case 11 below), said they were looking for formal employment and were in the trade only because they were foreigners and that, their qualifications notwithstanding, they could not find jobs.

'Love of art' or acquaintance with African objects was the most frequently mentioned driving force for the decision to become African object traders. Approximately 85% of the traders

claimed that they liked[28], and were familiar with, African objects. They claimed that this was the primary reason they were now selling African objects. This may certainly hold true for the traders that came from trading families who had been in the business for an extended period of time. But for many other traders, it is questionable if they had already been 'experts' in African objects before they had started their businesses. Some traders gave me the impression that they would not readily have admitted that they had had no other opportunities. It appears to be part of their trade to convince others that they have always been interested in African objects, especially among traders from West Africa. About 40% of the traders I talked to told me that they were uncertain if they would continue this kind of work all their lives. Two West African traders, one of them Abdullah (case 6), mentioned that they would not continue the work in their home country, saying that it belongs only to their Cape Town lives. They were both Muslims and claimed that their religion does not allow them to trade with these kinds of objects which, one of them said, are 'images of evil powers of animistic beliefs systems'.

Broadly speaking, one can divide the foreign born traders into two categories: those who came to South Africa either as refugees or on tourist visas hoping to earn money in some way or another; and those who were involved in the trade in their home country and were now hoping to extend their businesses in South Africa. The latter were in the minority. However, that is not to suggest that the former were necessarily less knowledgeable and less successful. Traders of the tourist/refugee category can be subdivided into traders who, in the language of the markets, had 'tried their luck', and traders who had come to do serious business.

Traders who 'tried their luck' were those who had hoped to jump into a business niche of which they became aware only after observing their fellow countrymen's successes. They often bought just a few objects and started to sell. Most other traders complained about them. According to the others, these very small traders spoiled the market because they were not really interested in the

[28] Some of my findings suggest different attitudes of West African traders towards African objects than the ones Stoller describes in his ethnography (Stoller 2002). West African traders in New York described African objects only as wood and disliked them. According to Stoller (2002: VII) for Muslim traders 'art is simply a commodity, like any other, that he hopes, will bring good return in the New York markets. Necessity compels him to sell idolatrous objects, which, according to a strict reading of the Qur'an, is forbidden' (see also Steiner 1994:53, 87, Ibrahim 1990: 5, 7, 75).

objects they were selling and did not acquire enough knowledge about the objects, their quality and their prices to promote African objects and run a successful business. More than half of those who had 'tried their luck' (I met 17 such traders) did not survive at the market for longer than two months.

Case 10: Ousmael—an unsuccessful 'try-one's-luck' trader

Ousmael came to Cape Town in January 1998. He had left Sudan because he felt that it was unsafe for him to live there. As he put it: 'I am a Christian and I could not practice my religion in Sudan'. Ousmael was born in 1976. He went to school for 5 years. He said: 'There was too much trouble where I come from. I could no longer go to school...I had to stay at home to protect my mother...In the end of 1997 things got so bad that I left. I first went to Johannesburg for two weeks and then to Cape Town, where I met Sudanese people who gave me a place to stay'.

In February 1998 Ousmael started to sell leather belts and bags at the main railway station in Cape Town. Claiming that there was no money to be made from belts he tried African objects. As he put it: 'I saw others selling these African things and I thought it would be good idea'. He opened a table in May 1998 at Greenmarket Square, selling a few objects from Ethiopia, mainly jewellery, and some Kenyan objects. He bought the Kenyan objects on a credit basis from a local Kenyan wholesale merchant. The Ethiopian objects were given to him to sell on commission by a friend.

Ousmael was motivated to become a trader of African objects by seeing others. He had no formal training that could have given him any insight into how to run a business. Ousmael's standard of education was also low; he could not read English. According to him, the competition was too strong at the markets.

Competition was certainly one reason for his failure in the trade, but Ousmael 's selection of objects appeared to be another. Due to his lack of starting capital and his lack of knowledge of the trade, he had bought objects of poor quality. Compared to other traders' tables, Ousmael's table looked unsophisticated and boring. A further disadvantage was his poor command of English which precluded him from engaging customers in conversations and creating a relationship with them beyond that of simple commodity exchange. I was told by one of Ousmael's acquaintances that he disappeared in August 1998, without having paid off his loans.

I observed that small 'try-one's-luck' traders, like Ousmael, talked to customers primarily about prices. When they were asked by customers to tell them more about the objects, their answers were usually short, just referring to their country of origin (which was often not precise) or just claiming that the object was a nice one and of good quality. I rarely saw them sell anything.

Observing the trading interaction between Ousmael and his potential customers revealed to me that trade in African objects involves more than just exchanging an object for money. I noticed

that customers were often put off by Ousmael's remark 'Come, I give you a good price'. In other commercial spheres, e.g. clothing, the sign 'sale', implying a good price, attracts consumers to buy. Yet in the African object trade, sales had to be motivated in other ways too.

As mentioned before, the majority of potential customers for African objects were holidaymakers in Cape Town. Shopping for these objects was not an isolated activity but one which took place within the context of other related activities. Making a purchase was part of their leisure activity and appeared to be perceived and enjoyed as an entertainment activity (c.f. Curtis & Pajaczkowska 1998). Hence trade in African objects involved communication and entertainment beyond its economic aspects. Traders who could not entertain through lack of language skills and knowledge about the objects tended to refer to prices only. They thus seemed to spoil the entertainment value expected of them at the markets. Curtis and Pajaczkowska (1998) point out that holidays are usually times to escape ordinary life, the latter often being characterised, to quite a large extent, by financial activities such as paying bills, calculating the cost of living, savings etc. It seemed to me that Cape Town tourists too did not want be reminded immediately of their finances whilst shopping during their holiday. Yet, 'I give you a good price' bluntly points to economic exchange only, and stresses the commodity nature of the objects being purveyed. The latter, combined with a poor quality of objects and their display, appeared to be the reason why customers did not buy often from traders like Ousmael.

In addition to the 'try one's luck' subcategory, there were also those foreign traders who had arrived as refugees or tourists and who were attracted to the trade by seeing others selling African objects. But traders belonging to this second subcategory, like Sam (case 8), appeared to have recognised the opportunity to start a serious business of their own rather than simply to make quick money. I noticed that such traders had become very involved with the African objects sold. They studied the objects, learned all about the trade and often became strong advocates for their home countries, like Salah from Ethiopia (case 11 below). Many had realised the potential of African objects as a source of income as well as the richness of their own material culture only once they had left their home countries. They also became storytellers, thereby improving their chances of standing out among the many others selling African objects.

Case 11: Salah—a 'culture as resource' trader

Salah had come to Johannesburg in 1993 as a refugee. Salah was born in 1971 in Ethiopia. His home language was Amharic. He had studied public administration and international politics for two years in Ethiopia. Before he left his home country he had worked as an accountant for one year. About his home country he said: 'Ethiopia is not right for me. It has all the history but nothing is left' (19.8.98).

Salah had come to Cape Town in 1994, having worked in a storeroom in Johannesburg for six months. An Indian friend helped him to come to Cape Town and accommodated him for some months, promising that they would start a business in clothing. However, his friend did not fulfill his promise, because his wife wanted Salah to be their 'house boy'. When he had worked as a domestic worker in their house for six months, he moved out. With the help of an Ethiopian friend, and R150 of savings, he started his business selling African objects in July 1994 at St. George's Mall. Salah commented on his decision: 'I would have liked to get formal employment but, as a refugee, I get a work permit only for six months, so who would employ me?'

Salah did not know much about the objects from his home country prior to his arrival in Cape Town. As he put it: 'I did not know much about African art... I did not think that people would pay so much for that stuff'. According to Salah the objects he sold did not interest him much at first. 'I did not like the stuff I was selling, I am not an artist. But I had to arrange myself with the stuff' (19.8.98). However, after he had started his business, his interest in the objects increased. His heightened interest, he said, was at first purely economic. He had to learn about the objects to be able to judge their quality when he purchased them. But he also needed to know what the objects were used for, where they came from as well as something about the history of his home country to be able to sell them successfully. Later on, Salah started to enjoy his own material culture. He read about the objects and, as he put it: 'I only now appreciate the richness of my culture...In Ethiopia I never looked at the things. I did not even know that people would want to buy them...I am glad I started the business, the objects remind me of home...I miss Ethiopia '. At the time he made use of his culture as a resource to survive. By the time I met him he had become adept in Ethiopian material culture.

As the case shows, Salah's motivation for entering the African object trade was driven by his need to survive because, as a refugee, he could not find formal employment. Similar to Sam from Kenya (case 8) and Ousmael from Sudan (case 10) he first related to the objects economically rather than through liking them. Yet he subsequently developed an intense personal relationship to them that included using them to construct a sense of his own identity that provided the basis for a personal network of friends. Salah explained to me that the objects reminded him of his home, adding: 'When I started selling things from Ethiopia I noticed that other Ethiopians stopped at my stall. They recognised the objects from home... I met a lot of other Ethiopians through the trade. They all come to visit me now at my stall. We sit around and talk' (19.8.98).

During fieldwork I often heard traders associate the objects' appearances, feel and smells with their home country thereby echoing a point made by Seremetakis (1994) regarding smells (and taste) where she says that smells and tastes evoke memories of a particular place or home. As Peter from Cameroon (case 9) put it: 'It [a mask] smells like home'. Or as Francoise from the DRC (case 3) explained: 'I like to come to the market [Greenmarket Square] to sell my objects... Sitting among them reminds me of my childhood and my parents ... When I was young we saw much of these objects' (20.1.98) (see also case 5).

Connections with home were also maintained through travelling wholesale merchants who often brought with them news, money and letters from home and delivered objects to the markets in Cape Town. Considering that many traders were foreigners and might, like Abdullah from Senegal (case 6), have felt isolated in South Africa, being surrounded by and handling familiar objects appeared to help overcome their feelings of loss and give direction to their nostalgia. The objects thus represented a kind of symbolic anchor, evoking memory connecting them with their home countries and with their relict families. The objects simultaneously became imbued with personal qualities, almost of the status of an heirloom, and no longer just commodities. They helped bridge the feeling of being a foreigner with the sense of one's own 'community' back home ('it reminds me of home') as well with the sense of one's own 'community' in the new place ('I met a lot of other Ethiopians through the trade').

In addition to traders who first started out as refugees or tourists seeking an income-generating niche, serious experienced traders who aimed to expand their business in South Africa constituted a further category of traders. Most came from trading families. The father, the uncle or another close relative was already trading when they started their own business, mostly in their home or a neighbouring country. These people came predominantly from West Africa where, according to my informants, trade in African objects has been long established. Bohannan points out that a long established market system exists in Northern and Central Africa but was most developed in Western Africa (Bohannan 1964: 204, c.f. Steiner 1994). Gold trade existed well before the second century A. D. By the tenth century long distance trading networks between the savannah and the forest belt of Nigeria were established in West Africa (Stoller 2002: 31, Mac Gaffey & Bazenguissa-Ganga 2002: 14, Meillassoux 1991: 14, Hopkins 1973:

79). Long distance trading was a consequence of the limitations of local commerce in West Africa (Stoller 2002: 32). Like West African traders centuries ago who travelled far in search for new markets, Salif from the Ivory Coast (case 12 below), and other traders like him had come to South Africa after the demise of apartheid to seek new markets for their merchandise in South Africa's expanding tourist industry.

Case 12: Salif—the lover of art

Salif was born in 1968 in Abidjan, Ivory Coast. He was single. He was Muslim. His home language was Sonike. When on his monthly visit to Cape Town, he stayed in Downtown Lodge in Canterbury Street, Cape Town. He first came to South Africa in December 1996. His cousin, Keita, sold for him at the PAM. Salif had completed high school. He owned a gallery selling African objects in Abidjan. He referred to himself as an art dealer.

After graduating from school in 1993, Salif had followed the example of his father, a trader in African objects who had taught the business to his sons. Salif's father had run a gallery in Abidjan since 1954, and Salif took it over in 1994. In Abidjan, Salif had employed five people. Three sold and manufactured African objects (*il fait les copies*) and two travelled around the countryside in search of antiques and other pieces.

Salif had also sold African objects in the USA, Belgium, Holland and France. He had a huge variety of clients. Most, he said, were interested in antiques, traditional objects and the stories he told them. About trading he said: 'One must be a person, when one wants to sell. If you sit there tired, people do not want to buy; they want a companion when they buy. They want to trust you, so you must tell them about yourself, and you must act'.

He referred to the objects as art. Salif liked art. As he put it: 'Art is tradition; it is the life and the way people live, and that is great. I grew up with art; my father is a trader. One will always find art. It will change.' While talking to me he pointed to a banana leaf painting. 'See, people here are depicted doing African dance. This might change. But art will always exist. It is the way of life and expresses the customs'. Salif loves African art because, he says, it reflects his: 'African culture'.

Serious experienced traders were primarily motivated to trade in Cape Town for economic reasons: to expand their businesses. Most had considerable knowledge of the objects they sold and were gifted storytellers. All claimed that trade in African art (which is how they referred to the objects) was part of their life. Compared to many of the other traders I met, selling African objects was not a phase in their lives, nor a solution to unemployment, but a lifetime occupation. As Peter from Cameroon (case 9) put it: 'to be an art trader is family tradition', or as Salif from the Ivory Coast (case 12) put it: 'I grew up with art'. Traders, like Peter and Salif also had

straightforward perceptions about what their businesses represented: the art trade. They referred to the objects as art and to themselves as art traders or dealers.

No tourist/refugee trader used the term art as frequently as serious traders from trading families. As cases nine and twelve show, traders like Salif and Peter had quite distinct ideas about what art constitutes. As Salif put it: 'Art is tradition; it is the life and the way people live' or, as Peter put it: 'Our art has meaning...it is used in ritual...'. They made use of these ideas when selling. Observing such traders, I noticed that telling clients about African art, and being convincing that the objects they sold were indeed, art were most persuasive strategies, and often resulted in successful sales. By emphasising that the objects were art, the trader applied an antidote to the commodity nature of the objects, thus masking it with the concept of art (see also chapter 8).

Yet, I wondered, were they just using the term art as a masking device? Listening to them, and observing them handling the objects and dealing with clients, led me to conclude that their use of the term art was motivated partly by habit ('I grew up with art', 'my father is an art dealer'), partly by implicit efforts to mask the commodity nature of their objects, and partly in order to differentiate themselves from other traders. As Dan, Peter's brother explained: 'They are curio traders, we are art traders'. For him, curio traders came from eastern and southern Africa and they sold objects which had no meaning. Art traders were from West Africa. By using the device of calling themselves art traders, the more serious traders claimed that they sold better objects than others and thus that they ranked highest amongst traders. They appeared thus to attempt to mask, even in a sense for themselves, that what they sold might be a commodity. And, in doing so, they related to the objects as art and were more able to convince their clients that what they were selling was indeed art.

2.2 Sellers

Approximately 66% of the traders operating at Greenmarket Square and St. George's Mall employed sales-persons while 30% of PAM traders employed sales-persons. All but two sales-persons were South African women (see appendix B for demographic data). 19% had completed high school with matriculation certificates, while 43% had completed up to ten years of schooling. Sellers' stated reasons for seeking this kind of work varied, but I noticed three trends.

First, as the largest proportion (47%) explained, they had been unemployed prior to finding a job at the market and they could find no other work. Second, 38% had started their employment at the markets directly after leaving school, mainly hoping to save money for further schooling. Third, about 15% said that they were doing the work to learn the trade and to generate savings to become self-employed as African object traders in their own right. Most had found the work opportunity through the recommendation of a friend who was already working at one of the markets.

Employing a salesperson had far reaching consequences for a trader's marketing tactics. Most salespersons were just desperately searching for a job, and had no knowledge about the trade. Often their language abilities were limited so that they could not communicate fluently with customers. Yet, most traders I met did not spend much time training their employees, apart from telling them the prices of the objects. According to the traders, it would have been a waste of time to train their employees because most worked for them only for a short time (one to three months on average). Quite a few saleswomen I met thus did not know the origin of the objects they were selling, nor did they have any repertoire of stories about the objects to tell to customers. The saleswomen thus emerged as inferior to traders, and often customers knew more about the objects than the women selling them. In one incident at the PAM a saleswoman told a customer that what was clearly a *Guro* mask from the Ivory Coast was from India. *Guro* masks are very colourful and do, in some ways, resemble objects from India. The saleswoman did not know the difference. The customer left without buying the mask but with a smile on her face. The saleswoman was laid off the same day.

Data about sales personnel suggest that most related to African objects as commodities *per se,* claiming that they would sell anything to make some money. Different from many traders, the sales-persons displayed a rather detached attitude towards the objects. However, their lack of attachment is unsurprising. They did not own the objects and most felt that they were underpaid to sell them. Most saleswomen earned between R20 and R30 per day.

Observing the saleswomen I noticed that most were not very successful when selling African objects. Yet, one wonders had the traders trained their sellers and paid them better, as John (case

5) did with his saleswoman (who was a successful seller), would this not have increased their sales and hence been more cost effective? Similar to Ousmael from Sudan (case 10) who was simply trading as a stop-gap, most saleswomen approached the customers with words like: 'I give you a good price', thereby emphasising only the object's exchange value. And, like Ousmael, they lacked the skills to mask the object's commodity nature with non-commodity aspects such as stories.

Having said that, it needs to be noted that customers could not immediately distinguish between traders and sellers at Greenmarket Square and St. George's Mall. At the PAM the distinction was even more difficult as the individual trading spaces flowed into each other, evoking the warehouse character, where all present might be just sellers. Yet at the street markets, all customers saw was a person behind a stall, and most, at least initially, appeared to assume that s/he was the owner. I noticed too that, when asked, some saleswomen pretended to be owners of the object they were selling. Saleswomen told me that their employers had told them to do so. I asked various traders for the reason and most gave me an answer similar to Agnes's from Kenya (case 1) who employed a saleswoman at Greenmarket Square: 'Customers like to buy from the owners or producers... they also don't need to know that I have enough money to employ somebody'. Yet, if the saleswomen had then to explain more about the objects 'they own', they could say little. When I observed such interactions between saleswomen and customers I noticed that many ended without any sale.

3. Traders' perceptions of and attitudes towards the objects

Talking and listening to traders about African objects revealed much of their personal relationships to the objects they purveyed. The most important, of course, was the object's potential to provide an income for them. But there was more to the objects than just that. Indeed, it became increasingly clear to me that traders who could demonstrate a personal relationship with the objects they were selling were better equipped to mask the commodity nature of those objects and hence were more able to sell them.

Many traders referred to the objects in quite an abstract and personified way. Francoise from the DRC (case 3), for example, frequently referred to the objects she was selling as 'her husband'.

As she put it: 'I don't need a husband. I have plenty of husbands at my stall and I love them all' (20.1.98)[29]. Francoise was divorced. She took care of two daughters without the support of their father. The generic African object as 'her husband' supplied her with an income such as a husband might have provided. Keita from Mali referred to the objects as 'his children', in a kind of symbolism that also suggests family ties and support. Children are commonly expected to care for the old or to perpetuate 'tradition'. I also observed that traders who used this kind of family symbolism when referring to the objects appeared to take good care of their stock. Francoise and Keita were constantly preoccupied with their objects at their Greenmarket Square stalls. They polished and dusted them regularly, and placed them back in order after customers had picked them up. They also displayed objects to look their best. Francoise went out of her way to find branches and leaves for her displays in order to draw attention to her objects and to emphasise their materials. She and Keita also wrapped the objects carefully before packing them in their boxes after trading. Not all traders and sellers took such good care of their objects as did those who seemed to have caring kin-like relationships with their objects. Husbands and children not only care for their wives and parents, they also need to be cared about.

It is also noteworthy that traders with such relationships to their objects were commonly also those who saw trading in African objects as a lifetime occupation. They claimed that they would never work with anything but as traders of African objects. Hence the objects were not just a means to provide an income and, as such, exchangeable for just any other objects. It was as if the objects and their passage through the trader's lives were, just like husbands and children, considered to be lifelong companions. In perceiving and treating them in this way, the traders constructed relationships with the objects that masked, but did not wholly undermine the objects' commodity nature. Traders' allusions to their sale objects as family members point to an association of the objects with personal life in more general terms. Such associations indicate some traders' personal attachment to African objects (not exchangeable for other objects of trade) as well as to a very particular kind of distinctively non-commodity social relationship (care) with the object. The object is imbued with social values in ways reflected in the epigram to

[29] Here I am reminded on Clark's study 'Onions are my husband' (1994) in which she investigates survival strategies of market women in Kumasi (Ghana). Avoiding marriage was one of the major survival tactics; Clark claims (1994: 32). The commodity (onion for example) replaced the husband as supplier of income.

the chapter. It is a form of personification of objects, similar to giving cars human names - the car is no longer just a vehicle, it has a name, hence it becomes a symbol of the self (McCracken 1988, Baudrillard 1968).

The objects' quality to 're-present ourselves' (Pearce 1992: 47) was also disclosed in the pride some traders expressed in and about their objects. I discovered that many traders seemed to prefer to sell objects that originated from their home or neighbouring countries rather than just any African object. For example, Kenyan traders sold objects from Kenya and Tanzania, and Senegalese traders sold objects from Senegal and the Ivory Coast. Initially I considered practicality as the most obvious reason for such country-related choice of objects. First, trading relations exist among neighbouring countries. Second, some traders had started their businesses at home or knew suppliers there or from the wider region. But, apart from practicality, it also became clear that many traders' choice of objects was an expression of national pride. When I asked traders why they sold objects from their home country, many answered in terms such as: 'I am Kenyan so I sell Kenyan things'; 'this is my culture'; 'they belong to me'; or 'I am proud of my objects'. Traders from Kenya told me that being Kenyan obliged them to sell Kenyan objects and hence to support people in Kenya. Agnes (case 1) and Thomas (also from Kenya) explained that they were 'representing' Kenya at the market. Both said they hoped tourists would visit Kenya after they had seen the Kenyan objects and had talked to them about the country. Similarly, John from Mali (case 5) said: 'My country is unknown to many people. People might know the musicians such as Salif Keita. But they don't know our culture, and here [at the market] I can show it to them and tell them about it'. John also said that he would never sell South African or Kenyan objects. 'They have nothing to do with me. I could not tell anything about them'. Hence, to traders like Agnes, John and Thomas, the objects they sold were a symbol of their home country or region. They sold not just an object but items that signified to them part of their culture. The objects were thus imbued with cultural values beyond that of a commodity. The objects represented them to themselves and to others, particularly their clients. To both, each object became a piece which related the trader to a place and the people at that place. I will have more to say about this in chapter six.

4.Conclusion

My field data suggest that ideas such as Sam's, when he said 'you can't sell something that you don't like', play a major role in the commodification of African objects. Traders who related to the African objects beyond their capacity as commodities which, once sold, can provide a means of economic survival, and hence who had a personal relationship to African objects and the trade, appeared to be the more successful traders. Their personal relationships to the objects imbued the objects with various qualities. They included connecting traders with their home place; perpetuating a family tradition of being an art trader; enabling a distinction being made between traders in terms of curio trader and art trader; demonstrating national pride; and creating a caring and lasting relationship to the object in terms of its being a 'family member'. Traders who related to those qualities of the objects (or maybe one should say who constructed those qualities) masked for themselves that what they were selling were simply commodities, and consequently were more likely to be able to mask the commodity nature of the objects during their interaction with clients. They sold a piece from home, a piece of art or an object they cared about, not just an item of exchange. Hence they sold an object about which a story could be told, be it the story of their home place, the story of their concept of art, or the story of their personal relationship with the object. Most traders and sellers who lacked such a sense of a personal relationship with the objects they sold perceived of them purely as sources of income, and hence had little material to construct such stories. Their interaction with clients centred on the price of the object and they were often less successful in selling.

Those traders whose motivations to enter the trade were their 'love of art' (as some traders put it), or the enjoyment they derived from being a trader of the objects, stimulated their interest in the objects and gave them an incentive to study the objects. Doing that further enabled them to emphasise the socio-cultural values of the objects when selling them. It was thus evident that the more motivated traders, who told the object's life history, stories about their home country and/or about themselves to their clients, were able to imbue the objects with non-commodity meanings that masked the commodity nature (and therefore the exchange value) of the African object and, paradoxically, increased the likelihood of a successful commodity transaction. The paradox is precisely that the masking of the objects' commodity nature makes the commodification process successful.

Having discussed the personal relationships between purveyors of African objects and their objects of sale I now develop my main argument further by focusing on the relationship between the purveyors of these objects and their customers. In the following chapter I show that the establishment of relationships between purveyors and customers of the African objects also has the potential to mask the commodity nature of the objects. The relationships between purveyors and customers were established by means of story telling and within the bargaining process—both performances that had entertaining qualities for the customers. I found that many customers enjoyed the performative aspect of the sales process, and that such performances seemed to encourage them to buy objects. The reasons for this are many, and I consider them in chapters five and six. Here it is sufficient to say that trade in African objects requires communication and entertainment that goes beyond the stark economic aspects of ordinary commodities exchange, and demands the full involvement of traders and sellers if they are to be successful in the competitive environment of markets such as those I studied.

Chapter five: Performative shopping

Stories told and bargains made as masking processes

1. Introduction

I have so far concentrated on the representation and commodification of African objects at the various markets as well as on the perceptions of traders towards the African objects that they sold. In this chapter I focus on the actual trading interactions between purveyors and potential purchasers of African objects. My aim is to reveal the patterns of behaviour within the interactive processes between sellers and buyers. The interaction between trader and customers has one primary goal, that is to sell and buy African objects. However, much more can be seen to occur within the interaction between purchaser and the purveyor and recognising what that is allows us to understand the commodification of African objects and the manner in which it can be and is masked.

My aim, thus, is to develop my argument by analysing the commodification of the objects I studied, and its masking, in terms of the interactions between the objects' purveyors and consumers. I analyse which kinds of non-commodity aspect were at play during these interactions. This chapter links the discussion of the purveying side (trading places [chapter 3] and traders and sellers [chapter 4]) with the discussion of the consumer side (tourists [chapter 6] and collectors [chapter 7). It exemplifies how the relationships between the two are established and simultaneously reveals some of the expectations purveyors and consumers have of each other. As I show, these expectations were important for the constructions of stories about African objects and subsequently became interwoven as non-commodity aspects within the processes whereby the commodity nature of the objects was masked.

During fieldwork I observed repeatedly that 'pure economic' transactions (the exchange of an object solely for money) hardly ever took place. I consequently refer to the consumption of African objects at the markets as socialised or performed shopping. The performance aspect of the shopping interaction was a major means used to mask the commodity nature of African objects. Buying or looking at African objects at Greenmarket Square or at the PAM had an

entertaining quality, which Jules-Rosette (1984: 139) and Steiner (1994) also comment about in their analysis of African markets.

All three markets on which I focused were on some regular sightseeing routes through Cape Town. My survey conducted with tourists leaving Cape Town International Airport showed that, for many of them, the markets were places to meet and talk to people 'from Africa'. Some tourists claimed that the actual purchase of African objects was not their most important reason for visiting such a market. What many tourists wanted was to talk to the traders and listen to the stories they told about the objects, about the traders' lives, and about their attitudes towards Africa. Most tourists met locals only as waiters, receptionists, tour guides, etc. Their interactions thus took place in rather formal and hierarchically structured environments. The market places gave visitors an informal surrounding in which they could interact with people they would not otherwise meet.[30] It thus authenticated their holiday in Africa by providing opportunities to meet 'real' Africans.

Performative shopping included both bargaining and storytelling. In most of the cases I observed, storytelling initiated the bargaining process. A story told about objects heightened a client's interest in the objects on display for sale and masked their commodity nature. The main sequence of such performative shopping was as follows:

Initial phase: The customer stopped at a stall and looked around. S/he either picked up one of the objects or pointed to one, asking the trader what it was and how much it cost. Traders often avoided the question of the price at this stage by answering that they would give the customer 'a good price'.

[30] The tourists' wishes to meet locals in a rather informal environment can also be seen in the increase of tourist accommodation in South African townships and township tour operators. Township accommodation and tours, for example, to Khayelitsha and Langa (townships in Cape Town) are advertised as opportunities to experience a 'realistic impression of townships and people' or to 'gain insight into township life, to experience *ubuntu*—the natural tradition of African hospitality' (see the Portfolio's Bed and Breakfast collection, a brochure of guesthouses in South Africa which is distributed internationally, Portfolio 2000: 106-107).

Story telling phase: The trader told a story about the object to create interest and a relationship between the customer and the object, and between the customer and the trader.

Bargaining phase: The trader asked the customer how much s/he wanted to pay for the object, or the customer again asked for the price. Then haggling about the price took place, the traders using various strategies to reinforce the relationship between trader and customer that had been initiated in the story telling phase.

Exchange phase: The object was exchanged for money. The interaction between customer and trader often ended with a photograph being taken by the customer of the trader and the object, or by a third party of the customer, trader and object all together against the backdrop of the stall.

Of course, not all shopping interactions followed the above sequence in exactly the same way. Sometimes stories were included in the bargaining process. In other interactions no stories were told. Sometimes the interaction ended after the storytelling or bargaining phase. Yet, no matter in which sequence the interaction took place, the various components of the interaction helped mask the commodity nature of the objects. The point is particularly interesting in regard to bargaining because one could claim that bargaining is an economic interaction *per se* which deals with the price of an object and hence reveals the object's commodity nature in a most blatant way. Yet, I argue, it masks the object's commodity nature precisely because it creates a social relationship between people, and between people and objects. The price becomes a symbolic unit that is discussed in order both to entertain and to convince the customer eventually to purchase the object (Steiner 1994: 71-75). It is not so much the actual exchange value of an object that is at stake here but how its exchange value is masked and enhanced by social values, such as the prestige a customer obtains from purchasing a special object. It is precisely during such performative shopping interactions that African objects are singularised. The process of singularisation is one that both Kopytoff (1986) and Miller (1998) have identified. Both authors have pointed out that, in the process of consumption or shopping, objects can become special

objects among many others of their kind through their being extracted from the sphere of market exchange and being personalised by the purchaser.

The focal point of the first part of this chapter is the many stories told at the markets by participants in the transactions that are the sine qua non of those markets as trading places. The second part is devoted to the bargaining interaction between sellers and buyers. The field data used in this chapter were obtained by my observing and listening to trading interactions, by my interviewing visitors at the markets and at Cape Town International Airport as they were departing the city, and from my experiences as a seller at the PAM. It should be noted, moreover, that the vast majority of purchasers of African objects I observed were overseas visitors (See Appendix C and D).

2. Stories told as part of the masking process

2.1 Reasons for storytelling

Shopping at markets like Greenmarket Square or the PAM differs from shopping at a local supermarket. First, the venue and its feel is often unfamiliar to customers visiting these markets. Second, the interaction between customer and salesperson differs from what the customer is used to. In the supermarket, the interaction between customer and sales person is limited and confined to the man or woman at the till with whom money is exchanged against goods, and where the interaction is more formal and less personalised than at the markets I studied. Third, customers visiting markets such as the PAM do not to go there simply to satisfy basic household needs.[31] They go there to buy a souvenir or gift to take back home.

Many customers came to the markets I studied without an explicit idea of whether they were going to buy something and, if so, what precisely they were going to buy. The shopping appeared to be less goal oriented than at a supermarket, and involved extensive looking around at the things offered for sale. Traders and salespersons were well aware of this aspect, because one

[31] That is not to say that customers at supermarkets always shop to satisfy their basic household needs. Miller has shown that aspects such love and caring entices shoppers to purchase objects well beyond the scope of just satisfying basic household needs (Miller 1998).

of the most frequently used phrase by customers when a trader or a salesperson approached them was 'I am just looking'.

In fact traders heard this phrase so often that they had come to refer to it as 'the song of the market'. The lack of goal oriented shopping, hence of customers strolling at leisure, for example, through the narrow passages of Greenmarket Square, had to be compensated for by the traders. One way of doing so was to create demand; hence to ensure that African objects were of special interest to the customers. Often this was achieved by means of storytelling about the objects on sale. In this regard one has to keep in mind that, beside the fact that customers lacked a goal as to what to shop for, they also often lacked much knowledge about African material culture. Jules-Rosette (1984) maintains that this lack of knowledge has led to modifications in the production styles of some of the objects that have become available on the African object market generally, modification introduced precisely to make the objects more accessible to their foreign consumers (1984: 221). Yet, I noticed that even modified objects or objects such as 'Kissing masks' from Kenya which were in fact invented for the tourist market (see chapter 2), still needed some explanations to be appreciated by the customer. Sometimes a mask displayed on the wall or on a table seemed able to speak to some for itself. But much of the time it spoke to customers only if they were told a story about it. Customers appeared reluctant to judge the quality and cultural meanings of the objects because they had no conventional aesthetic standards whereby to do so. The customers' knowledge about African objects seemed significantly based on media and public display of the objects, especially in museums. Once potential customers were confronted with such objects outside these official arenas, and found them displayed there without labels describing their use, origin etc., they appeared confused and needed to be persuaded by traders to purchase the objects by having explained to them what they were for, where they came from etc. Hence traders had to provide sometimes quite elaborate stories to justify the aesthetic and the exchange value of objects they had on sale.

2.2. The stories

One culture's truth may be another culture's fantasy (Turner 1986: 4).

Traders' stories about African objects were told to enliven them, to satisfy customers' apparent expectations that the objects carried a sense of enchantment. The stories, and their telling thus functioned to lubricate the selling and bargaining processes. In this part of my discussion I analyse the stories in order to show that they were central to the process of masking the objects' commodity nature while simultaneously making their sale possible. I look closely at how the stories were incorporated into the overall transactions between trader and buyer in order to meet the buyers' demands and their preconceptions of Africa and its people. As we will see, many stereotypes about Africa and its people were employed by the traders to attract their customers to their merchandise.

The stories told by traders at the markets were manifold; they dealt with the African objects, with the buyers and with the traders themselves. Stories about buyers often included stereotypic images of buyers such as 'the Americans will buy anything' or 'the Germans all look for bargains'. Stories that dealt with the traders' lives were manifold and included, among many other issues, traders' perceptions of and their relationships towards African objects. However, my primary concern in this chapter is the stories told about the African objects themselves. Their content deals with the objects' origin, their use and (often imputed) their meaning.

Some might claim that the stories told by traders are simply a 'trick of the trade', meaning that the stories were only told for the purpose of initiating sales. As Sam from Kenya once told me: 'You do not sell an object but a story.' It is true that stories function to channel sales. But to say this does not imply that the stories are not worth analytical investigation, nor that their sole function is to initiate sales. Most objects for sale today have stories that can be told about them. This truism represents the foundation for advertisement. Recall the many cigarette advertisements, such as the Marlboro advertisement in which healthy looking cowboys are smoking cigarettes, sitting around the fire in the prairie after a long day chasing cattle; or the advertisement of the beautiful woman sitting in a bath tub with a piece of 'creamy Lux soap'. To some, these advertisements tell a story about the freedom that comes with smoking Marlboro, or

of being beautiful and soft skinned when bathing with Lux soap. To others they might tell the story of an addicted smoker or a woman pressurised by society to have a beautiful appearance. Stories about objects have the capacity to shift objects on which they focus into a world of fantasy (Scheub 1998: 17).

All stories, whether about people or about objects, are multi-layered and hence have various meanings. Stories told while selling African objects may function in the same way as stories told in advertisements. But, like the latter, they have more than one specific meaning and beneath their primary function of initiating and stimulating sales, they may have diverse other purposes and consequences. Such stories may be, and often are emblems of identity, carriers of truth, myth, history, images etc. In short, they are expressions of diverse aspects of social life.

Most of the stories I observed and heard being told during interactions between African object traders and their customers followed a rather strict pattern. One has to keep in mind that the stories were told once the customer had shown interest in particular objects, either by asking questions about them or by just looking at or touching them. Given that the stories offered were often in response to questions potential customers asked, it useful to record what those questions were. The questions I heard being asked most frequently by customers about African objects at the markets were the following, often asked in the order below,

- Where does the object come from?
- Who made it?
- What is it made from?
- What does it mean?
- What is it used for?
- How much does it cost?

I found it unsurprising therefore that the composition of many of the stories I heard told actually followed this sequence of questions. It is interesting to note that this pattern is also found in many catalogues about museum displays of African objects (Vogel 1988, Schmalenbach 1989, Phillips 1995). However, depending on the individual storyteller, the pattern was often quite

elaborate and extended. Some stories contained descriptions of the people who made the object, others included some historic elements, and yet others referred to the object's present use. And last, some stories incorporated personalised elements of the storyteller him/herself.

Some of the stories told about African objects were invented at the moment of interaction between trader and customers, like the following story of the ebony ashtray. Agnes from Kenya (case 1) told this story to a German customer who had been looking at various items on her stall. The customer asked Agnes about ebony wood. Agnes took an ebony ashtray and told her:

Story 1: The story of the ebony ashtray

This ashtray is from Kenya. It is made out of ebony wood. Ebony is very hard wood. I made this ashtray myself. I scratched the little holes for the cigarettes into the wood with my nails. African women have strong nails. African woman have strong hands, stronger hands than white men. It took me a week to make the ashtray. See the wood, the black wood is inside, that is Africa. The white wood is on the outside. The black wood pushes the white away. I got the wood for this ashtray from an ebony tree, which grows behind my house where my grandmother is buried (7.10.97).

A continuum may be drawn from invented to factual stories. The story of the ashtray is on the far extreme of invented stories. As Agnes put it: 'I like to invent stories'. Agnes did not carve the ashtray nor was it made with fingernails or from wood which grows in her garden. Agnes did not have a garden. She employed stereotypes and metaphor. She expected that customers liked to hear such stories. She once mentioned to me: 'People coming here want to hear about Africa, about primitive people who carve with their hands. They go home and tell their friends: I met a woman in Cape Town, she carved the ashtray with her hands from the wood which grows on her grandmother's grave'. Agnes included personal elements such as 'I made it myself' and then personalised the wood used, by saying it came from a tree which grows behind her house where her grandmother is buried. According to Agnes, the content of her story satisfies her customers' stereotypic images of African people. The object is handmade by a woman with strong hands, hence by a woman who still works with her hands all day. The relationship to the ancestors is close because they are buried in the garden. But Agnes had also included an ironic metaphor into her story. It is the metaphor about the black and white wood of Africa, and the rest of the white

world. She had mingled invented images with an ironic political overtone, challenging colonialism: the black wood is pushing the white to the margins of the tree.

The customer was laughing when she listened to the story. Agnes asked her if she did not believe her. The customer replied: 'Oh, I do believe you' and then asked for the price of the object. The price of R50 was acceptable to the customer and she bought the ashtray without the interaction entering the bargaining phase. During this trading interaction the customer had participated in the selling performance by pretending to believe Agnes's story, as I discovered, later, when I had the chance to interview her elsewhere. She then told me that she had not believed the story but had found it amusing, especially the part about the white and black wood. The customer claimed that she had bought the ashtray because it showed how ebony wood grows and because it had become a symbol to her for the ongoing power struggle between black and white people. Clearly then, the story Agnes told had realised its goal—to give the ashtray meaning beyond its simple material existence by connecting it to the social world. Whatever the interpretation glossed onto ashtray by the story, it succeeded in masking the commodity nature of the 'ashtray' by transforming it into something in the symbolic sphere where it was able to represent human struggle. The customer had reconstituted Agnes's story and, in doing so, had further masked the commodity nature of her purchased ashtray.

The content and context in which this story was told points to two aspects of storytelling that I observed at the markets. First, is the aspect of entertainment and fun. Second, is the aspect of truth. It appeared to me that quite a few customers were actually not visiting the market to be taught about African objects but to hear interesting stories, no matter if they were invented or had their roots in precise history. The important aspect appeared to be that the story met some of the customers' expectations of Africa, its objects and its people (see chapter 6).

The following story, of a skeleton figure from Tanzania, belongs in a similar category. Anthony, a trader from Kenya, had told the story while holding a skeleton figure and a carving knife in his hands. His customer was a woman from France who had looked at and touched the different skeleton figures. She asked Anthony what they represented. He told her:

Story 2: The story of the skeleton figure[32]

This sculpture is from Tanzania. It shows how hungry the people are there. They are all very thin, because they have not enough food. Carving does not make them rich. The people from Tanzania carve with two knives: one with a sharp thin blade and one with a sharp wide edge. The Makonde people live from wood and with wood. What they carve cannot be copied by anyone. They carve their dreams. When they wake up in the morning they go to the forest and get a piece of wood and start to carve. The male figures show the man's heat and some of them have stomach pains, see how they bend forward. Before they carve, they wonder how people look like when they have pain or when the devils have sent them heat. The Makonde are good people but all they think about is sex, they have too much heat (21.5.97).

Anthony's customer thanked him for the information and left. She returned later that day and bought two skeleton figures from him, after a short bargaining process.

Anthony's story commenced with references to hunger and starvation which resonated with the shape and name of the figures, and also with the many contemporary media reports of starvation and hunger in Africa. The story closed with hints of sexuality, 'all they think about is sex'. When I asked Anthony about the content of his story, he told me that all whites want to hear about Africans and sex. He showed me some wooden figurines which revealed breasts and genitals, claiming that such figurines would sell better than those without such appearances. Agnes (case 1) also remarked to me that when she sees figurines which show breasts or genitals[33] among those on offer by wholesalers she usually buys them all from the wholesalers, knowing that they will sell very fast.

It appears then as if the nudity of the figurines satisfies many customers' preconceptions about the African other and her/his sexuality. Judging by the amusement of customers when Anthony

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[32] Skeleton figure is another name for *shetani* figures, which are carved by Makonde carvers in Tanzania. The figures are elongated and slim which is why they are commonly referred to as skeleton figures. They are said to represent ancient Makonde myths and beliefs in the form of frightening spirits, ancestors and demons (Jules-Rosette 1984: 107). Vogel has claimed that carvers reproduce stereotypes about ancient Africa to meet the customers' expectation of Africans as being 'superstitious and spirit-ridden' (Vogel 1988: 238).

[33] The mention of sexuality and depictions thereof has often led to adaptations in styles of woodcarving. The latter has been recorded by Vogel (1988) Steiner (1994) and Hall (1997). Steiner has mentioned changes in style of *Baule* figurines after traders had noticed that most customers were more likely to buy nude figures than those carved with loincloths. According to Steiner, traders 'systematically removed the loincloths with a chisel or a knife' (Steiner 1994: 143).

told them his stories, which all related to sexuality in some or other way, and by the choices made by many customers at the markets, a certain attraction to African nudity cannot be denied (Price 1989: 47). The sheer presence of the many nude figurines speaks for itself. During fieldwork I approached various customers who had purchased nude figurines. I asked them why they had chosen such figures. They replied that they like them, that they represented African art or that they portrayed Africa. No mention was made of the fact that the figures they had just bought were nude. When approached about this subject the replies were insignificant and hardly ever generated more than a polite smile.

Not to wear clothing draws upon an image of unfettered and primordial life untouched by the restrictions and obligations of civilisation. Spiegel has noted how the depiction of semi-nude African women on postcards sold in South Africa (see Appendix K for some examples of such postcards), and their popularity among foreigners creates and reflects an image of 'Africans as 'traditional' and living in the pristine state of an idealised 'natural' past...' (Spiegel 1994: 192). The choice of nude figurines too appeared to be motivated by stereotypic images held by many non-Africans, who perceived or wished to perceive African life as traditional and close to nature. The stories of sexuality and some of the objects' depictions thereof imbued African objects with an exotic image of African traditional life, and hence helped to mask their commodity nature on markets. The story told about it transformed it into an object that allowed one to peek into and to fantasise about a 'culture so different' from one's own (Torgovnick 1990:6-11, Price 1989: 48).

Stories at the other more factual extreme of the continuum usually followed a rather strict pattern of composition, resembling those of catalogue descriptions of African objects or labels on museum displays. Some, such as the following two, referred to the past. The first, about a *bakuba* cloth[34] was often told by Francoise from the DRC (case 3) to her customers at Greenmarket Square. While telling the story she usually displayed some of the *bakuba* cloths on her table to show the customers the different designs on the cloths. Sometimes she took a long

[34] According to Meyer (1995) *bakuba* cloths were made by men and embroidered by women in the former Zaire. The square cloth panels were sewn together and used at the court of the king as ceremonial dress and covers for royal stools. *Bakuba* cloths were also used as dowries and currency or were buried to honour the deceased (Meyer 1995: 81, Vogel 1988: 120).

raffia cloth and wrapped it around her own body to demonstrate to the customer how they were used as dresses. The version I reproduce below was told by Francoise to two American customers who looked at about 20 different cloths, and bought five after they had listened to her tell it, also asking more questions, especially about Francoise's personal life. No bargaining took place. The American couple spent approximately 40 minutes at Francoise's stall.

Story 3: The story about the bakuba *cloth*

That's a *bakuba* cloth. It is from Zaire. That's also where I am from. It is made out of raffia, which is the bark of a tree. Mostly men make the cloths. Before the foreigners came to our country, we did not have money. But we used these cloths as money. The *bakuba* cloths were used in exchange for women. Before a marriage the husband must give something to the father of the bride, so that he allows him to marry his daughter. The more the woman is worth, the more cloths he has to provide to her father. If the bride belongs to a royal family the groom has to pay a lot. Today you can use the mats as place mats or pillowcases.

Some of the *bakuba* cloths are still used during meetings of the elders in a village, to sit on. The elders never sit on chairs. We use the very long cloths for the king. When the king enters the room, the cloth is rolled out in front of him so that he can walk on it. See here, [holding a *bakuba* cloth] the more elaborate the design of the cloth, the more valuable they are. All the ornaments on the cloths have a meaning, but only the old people know them and they do not tell them to strangers Some of the long raffia cloths were also wrapped around the body as dresses (3.2.1998).

Francoise often ended the story, variations of which I heard her relate on various occasions, by mentioning that *bakuba* cloths were good gifts or souvenirs to take back home, because they fit very well into the travellers' suitcases and do not break.

A second story that made explicit reference to the past was about 'passport masks'[35], it was told by Keita from Senegal at the PAM. The masks had been placed on a shelf in his trading space in the corridor. Keita told the story to a Spanish customer. The customer carried two plastic bags which were filled with African objects. Keita approached the customer by saying: 'Oh, you have

[35] Passport masks are small masks carved of wood or made out of clay in Cameroon. They originated in the area of Sierra Leone/Liberia (Girshick pers.Comm.) Passport masks are reproductions of prototypes of larger masks. Fischer and Himmelheber have asserted that miniature masks were used for spiritual guidance and protection (Fischer and Himmelheber 1984: 107, c.f. Steiner 1994: 139).

bought a lot. You must be a traveller. I have something small and very special for you.' Pointing to the masks, he then said: 'This will still fit in your suitcase.' Holding one mask he continued:

Story 4: The story about the passport mask

This is a passport mask from Cameroon. It is made out of clay. They protect the traveller and they are his passport. In the early years, and even today, people in Africa did not have passports. But each tribe had a different mask. If someone travelled, they used the mask as a passport. When a person arrived at a different tribe, the people knew where he was from because they could recognise the pattern of the mask, which he wore around his neck. Some people still use them today.

The Spanish customer bought one mask from Keita. After hearing the story she commented that it was a nice idea to use a mask for a passport and she asked for the price. Keita and she bargained about the price for a short while and agreed on a price of R45, which was above the average price for such masks then being sold at the PAM. The trader wrapped the mask in some paper and the customer then put it into a plastic bag together with the other objects she had already bought. She told Keita that they were all woodcarvings of African animals that she had bought for her children.

Keita and Francoise emphasised the sizes of the objects they were trying to sell. The size is an important matter for overseas visitors who have only limited space available for extras to be carried home in their suitcases. I noticed that the size of an object, and mention of its size, were often the determining factor leading a customer to buy an object. *Bakuba* cloths and passport masks were often bought because of the limited space they take up in a suitcase (see chart 3 below for detailed information on objects purchased).

Both of the last two stories contained facts about the objects they recounted. Francoise's story of the *bakuba* cloth offered a summary of most of their uses, but she also included the aspect of their being used to pay for women as wives. 'Paying for women in Africa' was a facet of many of the stories I heard told by traders about the African objects they were selling. Agnes drew on that imagery to explain some of the scenes of people depicted on banana leaf paintings. A trader from Zambia, telling customers about wooden carvings depicting men sitting around a table,

explained that they were discussing bride price. He chose that image because, like many other traders, he believed that many non-Africans believe that bride-wealth payments for wives is common in Africa and that it transforms women into commodities in African societies. Francoise and other traders exploited this belief and thereby reaffirmed their presumed customers' sense of socio-cultural superiority as people who do not trade in women. The story then might have provided an 'amusing' tale with which to return home precisely because it resonated with existing prejudices.

The stories about the *bakuba* cloths and the passport masks placed the objects in a context of 'traditional' usage. An object that has been used by another person is often perceived as a token from that person. It can represent a bridge to other people, places and times. The fact that an object has been used, in Baudrillard's (1990: 39) terms that it has become a 'bygone object', signifies the passing of time and that it has existed and been socially salient previously, in other peoples' lives (Corrigan 1997: 47 see also McCracken 1988). Hence the used object can function as a witness of their lives and their history. It differs from a commodity bought in a supermarket in that is shows signs of its former usage and user. It thus allows the purchaser to imagine the object in its original or earlier contexts and hides the possibility that the object was made exclusively for sale on a tourist-curio market. In this regard it needs to be noted that most of the customers who visited and made purchases at Cape Town's street markets never saw or met the people who had actually made or used the objects they viewed and purchased. Traders were consequently rather unconstrained about using images of 'traditional' contexts and uses, and did so in terms of their own understanding of their customers' expectations about Africa, its people and its objects. The stories they told reflected the trader-storytellers' understanding of their customers' expectations, and they therefore revealed the traders' perceptions of what their customers might like to hear. As Salif from the Ivory Coast (case 12) put it: 'There is mystique and mystery about African people and things. People, white ones, want to know how things were passed on from generation to generation. Take a bowl; say it was used for food, to spit kola nuts in or to keep medicine in it. It is the mystery of the use of the object. That is why the whites like the antiques. They do not know the culture but imagine it as mysterious' (10.10.97).

The next two stories represent a genre that deals with African beliefs in fetishism. The first tells a story about a fetish from the former Zaire, and was told by a trader from the DRC. The second story is about a *bamileke* figure and was told by a trader from Mali. The story about the fetish[36] was told by Francoise (case 3) to a female customer from England. She was among the many customers whose attention was caught by the 1.1 metre wooden figure that was perforated by a large number of metal nails that virtually covered its surface. Francoise had brought the figure to her Greenmarket Square stall from her room at the PAM, where she also traded. She had hoped that she could sell it more quickly at Greenmarket Square than she had managed to do at the PAM. But after three weeks, during which nobody chose to buy it there either, she took the fetish back to her PAM room. During the three weeks that I watched, the fetish attracted many curious customers to Francoise's stall. In one instance I saw a woman stepping away from the fetish after she had heard the story. She seemed scared of it, claiming that she would not want to have such a figure in her house. The English customer also just listened to the story and, after hearing it, asked Francoise if she had any harmless things for sale. Francoise told her that she should not be afraid of the fetish: 'He is nice and friendly'. But the woman was not convinced and she eventually left without buying anything. In many other cases, however, customers who had been attracted to the stall by the fetish and had listened to Francoise's story about it did buy some other object from her, albeit not the fetish itself.

Story 5: The story about a fetish from Zaire

This is a fetish from Zaire. See all the nails? Each nail tells a story of a dead person. People in Zaire go to a witch doctor when they want to kill somebody. The witch doctor hits a nail in a fetish like this one. This particular fetish was used by a powerful witch doctor. You can recognise his power, because the fetish has many nails in it. The person who should die would feel pain at the same spot where the witch doctor hit the fetish. It does not matter how far away the person is, he will feel it. Later the person dies from the pain. The people in Zaire still do this today. I have seen somebody dying because of this magic. But don't worry, the fetish is not dangerous to white people. You

[36] Schmalenbach (1989) refers to this kind of fetish as *nkondi*-figure. He has claimed that these figures are among the most misinterpreted objects found in African art history (Schmalenbach 1989: 245). Schmalenbach suggests that the figures were used to punish persons with evil intent and those who had done evil deeds. In the former Zaire, he says, such *nkondi*-figures were figures made out of wood and were believed to be inhabited by a spirit that could be activated by hitting nails, needles and thin blades into the figure. The *nkondi* spirit would then identify the transgressor and inflict harm on her/him as punishment for her/his misdemeanours. Each nail in the figure relates to a particular person being pointed out for punishment by the *nkondi*-spirit (Schmalenbach 1989: 246).

can buy it. It is a good collectible. They are very hard to find, because people still use them. It is an original piece (17.6.1997).

The next story, about a *bamilike* figure[37], was told by Ismael, a trader from Mali operating from the PAM. I observed the customer, a woman, taking the figure from the shelf and looking at it from all angles, sticking her finger inside the little hole in the back. When Ismael approached her, she asked him what the figure was. He told her:

Story 6: Story about a bamileke *figure*

This doll is a pygmy doll. They are small people who live in the bush. The doll is made out of clay. It is used for medicine. It has a little hole in the back. The medicine is put there. People in Mali still use it today, but mostly people who live in villages. If someone is ill they go to a traditional healer with the figure. The healer will put some medicine in the figure and talk to the ancestors. The ill person takes the figure home and places it near the bed. The person usually gets better within a day. Some people in the cities also use the dolls because to go to hospital is much more expensive than to visit a traditional healer (29.5. 1997).

After the customer had listened to Ismael's the story she immediately placed the figure back on the shelf, saying that she did not like anything with medical power. Ismael tried to reassure her, telling her that the figure's power was a good power that would not harm her. But still she did not want to buy it. However she looked at the various other objects he had on display and bought a Colon figure depicting a colonial officer.

Both stories exploit images of fetishes, the first in an evil way, the second in a healing way. Fetishes and magic are topics that are often raised in discussions of African material culture (Meyer 1995, Phillips 1995, Christoph & Oberländer 1995). It is certainly true that fetishism and magic are part of many African religions (Müller 2000: 21) But it is also true that they are often perceived simply and crudely as 'the evil beliefs of the 'dark continent', a continent that has yet to be fully enlightened by Christianity (McClintock 1998: 22). As storytellers, both Francoise and Ismael employed what they were sure were their customers' perceptions of magic and

[37] According to Picton (1995) *bamileke* healers and soothsayers in Cameroon used the figures to store magical substance to treat their patients. Each depicts a pregnant woman holding her hands over her chest (Picton 1995: 359).

exploited their unease about objects associated with that attribute. It was clear from the interest many tourists showed in both Francoise's fetish and Ismael's *bamileke* figure that many were interested in the cultural meaning of these objects as fetishes. Yet, no one among them seemed to want to buy such an object. Indeed the concern tourists had about the possibility of magic residing in any figure or figurine was revealed by the fact that many customers, on seeing any sculpture on sale at the markets, enquired almost immediately whether it might be a fetish. And if they were told the sculpture was indeed such a fetish, they usually did not buy it unless the trader concerned had successfully managed to convince them that it could and would do them no harm.

The stories about the Zaire fetish and the *bamileke* figure also reveal an interesting point concerning the processes whereby of the commodity nature of African objects can be masked. These two stories masked the commodity nature of the two objects so perfectly that, judging by the reaction of almost all potential customers, such woodcarvings and clay figurines had so lost their commodity status that it was very difficult to sell them at all. They appeared to have become, and to be treated as objects belonging to a sacred realm (Kopytoff 1986). Being seen as part of sacred realm had transformed them into objects that resisted moving into the commodity sphere because of their religious or mystical context. Such objects were sought almost exclusively by collectors of African objects, and hardly ever by visiting tourists to South Africa. Stories about fetishes and magic appeared to touch the tourist-customers' deepest fears of the unknown[38] and simultaneously seemed to satisfy their voyeuristic appetite for exotica and for what they regarded as an archaic way of life. In this manner, the presence of fetishes, and the stories relating them to magical power, served their purpose in that the traders' telling of the stories encouraged customers to spend some time with trader and, in many cases, to buy something else from the story-telling trader.

[38]Regarding the above, a story of a Cape Town anthropologist comes to my mind. The anthropologist had bought a fetish figure in Accra, Ghana and then travelled to Benin where she had her purse stolen. Later, her flight back home was delayed and, once home, her car broke down. Indeed all her bad luck led had her to feel that she should part with the figure which seemed to have brought 'bad luck' into her life. She gave it to one of her colleagues who claims to have remained immune to the figure's power, if it has any. Clearly there is no proof that the figure was responsible for the 'bad luck' the first anthropologist experienced. But her reaction shows uncertainty about and possibly fear of the power of such fetishes.

Does this not then imply that the story as such is not a commodity? Telling such a story can create a sense of obligations in those who have been entertained by it that they need to reciprocate by reimbursing the trader through purchasing something else on her or his stall. That other item then comes to represent the moment of the story and, in a sense the fetish too—albeit in a sanitised form. Hence one could argue that the story that masks the commercialised nature of an object itself becomes a commodity.

The last two stories that I re-tell here include elements about the traders themselves. They were told by traders at the PAM. The first, a story about a *kanaga* mask[39], was told by Sourie from Mali. The second, about a prince, was told by Peter from Cameroon (case 9). Sourie told his story to a customer on the balcony at the PAM. He was unpacking the masks which had just arrived from Mali. We both stood outside and he was showing me the masks when a customer peeked out onto the balcony. Sourie invited him to step outside and have a look the 'special pieces' that had just arrived. The customer pointed to a particular *kanaga* mask and asked what kind of mask it was. Sourie explained:

Story 7: A second story of the kanaga *mask*

This is a very good piece. It is very seldom to be found at the markets in Cape Town. I am the only trader who sells this kind of mask. It is a *kanaga* mask from Mali. The little holes on the side are for grass. Long red-dyed grasses are stuck through the holes, so that the dancer's face is fully covered. The *kanaga* mask is used once a year in Dogon country. Each dancer makes his own mask. They carve for many days. It is used in a sacred dance which only men dance. They dance one after the other in a long line through the village and its surrounding. It looks like a large snake. The Dogon are really African people. They still live in the old ways. Each mask is only used one time and afterwards it is kept in the dancer's home. I got this mask myself in a small village. The Dogon people do not want money for the masks. They live so far away from the next city that they cannot buy much. I stayed for five days in the village. The chief invited me. Each day I bought chicken and goats so that the people had something to eat. We celebrated all night. When I left, the chief gave me two masks. This is one of them. It is very special to me. I find it hard to sell it, but I need the money to eat. This mask is one of its kind (4.6.1997).

[39]Van Beek (1991) has given a detailed description of Dogon mask festivals in Mali. According to him the *kanaga* mask is used at harvesting and death rituals. The *kanaga* mask resembles a wooden cross (van Beek 1991: 56-74, c.f. Griaule 1938).

Picture 12: Newly arrived objects on the balcony at PAM

The customer took the mask and held it against his face, commenting that the mask did not cover his face properly. Sourie explained again that the dancers decorate the masks with grass around their sides which then covers their faces completely. The grass, he said, had fallen off, out of the holes which had been carved for it—and he showed the customer the carved out grass holes on the mask. On this occasion Sourie could not convince his customer to buy the mask. But the same customer did come back a week later and he then bought a *kanaga* mask, telling Sourie that he was happy to find that there was still one left.

The personal aspects of Sourie's life imbedded into his story imbued the object and the story he told about it with an authenticity derived from his construction of cultural history. As had the stories of the *bakuba* cloth and the passport mask, Sourie's story hid the possibility that the *kanaga* mask might have been produced for sale, and he thereby masked its commodity nature. But Sourie took the masking process even further when he claimed that he had obtained the mask himself, after celebrating in the village, and that it was special to him because he had stayed in the village from where it had come. The story triggered the customer's imagination of village life, constructed to seem pristine and unspoiled by modern civilisation (they need no money) and where the masks were handcrafted individually by each of the dancers. The attribute of being

individually handcrafted further emphasises the idea of primitivism and the lack of technological sophistication. It is accompanied by an image of the village as a centre of production.

The story of the prince was told by Peter from Cameroon (case 9) to a German customer who had spent at least ten minutes looking at and touching many of the African objects Peter had on display in his room at the PAM, and asking about their prices. Peter observed the customer for a while and then approached him to tell him:

Story 8: The story of the prince

I am a prince from Bamun. Bamun is the last kingdom of Cameroon. Most of the art from Cameroon is royal art. My grandfather was the King of Bamun. When we were a German colony, my grandfather gave the German King Wilhelm a royal chair as a present. The chair is now in the Völkerkunde Museum of Berlin. Here, I can show you a picture of the chair and the German king sitting on it. All my objects are from the royal court. I've got some which belonged to my grandfather, but I don't sell those. I collect African art myself (23.1. 1998).

The customer looked at the photocopies Peter showed him of the chair in Berlin. The customer asked him when he had come to South Africa and why. Peter told him that he could sell his objects better in Cape Town than in Cameroon. The customer, who then seemingly became more interested in the objects Peter had to sell, asked him many more questions about the different objects. The interaction lasted for about an hour and a half. In the end the customer bought a Fang mask. The bargaining process was intense. As Peter put it to me: 'You Germans always haggle. But anyway I made a good profit'.

Peter's story heightened his credibility as a trader of authentic goods when he explained he was of royal descent and a collector himself. Therefore, it was implied, his objects must be of good quality. By placing the objects into the context of a collection, he distracted the customer from the fact that he might be buying a simple commodity. Peter always mentioned to his customers that he was himself a collector, and he always used this fact as a means to justify the rather high prices he asked for his objects. However, I noticed that Peter told his prince story mainly to

German customers, probably because he wanted to create a special relationship between him, his objects and Germany, Cameroon's earlier colonial possessor.[40]

Similar to Peter's story are other stories that employed ethnicity or other symbols of identity as a means of authenticating objects by creating a special relationship between the traders and an object. Traders thus quite frequently became the countryman or woman of the objects they were selling. As we have seen earlier, Sam from Kenya (case 8) always told his customers that he was Maasai because he sold Maasai objects. Yet, Sam was Kikuyu. He claimed that nobody knows the Kikuyu but that everybody seems to know the Maasai, either from television or from movies such as 'Out of Africa': 'So I tell them that I am a Maasai, and they buy' (12. 6. 1997). A trader's claim to belonging to the 'tribe' which produced the object being sold also added to the sense of the object's authenticity. It created a relationship between the trader and the object that tended almost to enchant the object.

I also observed many instances of customers taking photographs of the traders, together with the object they had purchased. Indeed many traders were not only willing to pose for such photographs but sometimes encouraged their customers to photograph them with what they had just purchased—sometimes asking a third party to take the photograph and then including the customer in the portrayal. A photograph of a Maasai holding a Maasai object imbues both the shopping experience and the object with authenticity in terms of having obtained the object from the 'real' person (not any African) and having 'really been there'. Moreover, taking a photograph of the trader and the object, and even more of the trader, object and oneself, represents a sign of a shopping experience that is beyond commodity or market exchange. The photograph is a sign of a relationship between people, objects and places. It is an indication that what had just been bought is not just a commodity but an object imbued with the ambience of social interaction. And so such photographs help, yet again, to mask the commodity nature of the transaction and of the objects transacted.

[40] Cameroon was a German colonial territory until the end of World War I when Germany's colonial possessions were parcelled out as League of Nations mandate to be administered by various other colonial powers. Cameroon was split into a French- and an English-mandated area which were formally reunited after the country gained its independence.

The stories told by traders at the markets were abundant and had an enchanting quality. I have used the above section to show how the stories about African objects imbued those objects with life and how they pleased the customers' anticipation for a sense of enchantment. At the same time, the stories masked the objects' commercial dimension and made their sale possible. In the next section I show how the bargaining process further heightened the entertainment quality of selling and buying African objects.

3. Bargains made – another way to hide commodification

It was a clear day at Greenmarket Square. Lungiswa, Mida and Betty, three saleswomen, sat together on a bench opposite their stalls. A woman dressed in khaki approached Mida's stall. She looked at the things offered for sale. Mida got up. The woman took a fertility doll and inspected it. She asked Mida if she was selling these things. Mida replied: 'Yes'. Mida said: 'Do you like it? I can give you a good price'. The woman asked: 'What is this? Where is this from?' Mida explained: 'The doll is from Ghana. This doll is used like a baby. You know how African women carry their babies with a blanket on their back. If a woman is pregnant in Ghana she places the doll on her back, just like she would do with her baby. The doll will protect the pregnant mother and the child she is carrying. It will also give the woman a lot of strength'. The customer asked: 'How much is it?' Mida replied: 'I'll give you a good price, it is R180'. The customer said: 'I give you R150'. Mida replied: 'It is a nice figure, give me R160 and you make me happy'. The customer agreed. Mida smiled. She wrapped the figure into a piece of newspaper and handed it to the customer (10.5.1997).

After having discussed some of the stories used to discuss the commodity nature of African objects, I now devote my attention to the bargaining process which often followed the storytelling. The bargaining process too is part of the performative shopping experience (Steiner 1994: 71-75). Like the stories, it has the ability to mask an object's commodity nature. Bargaining is the process in which an object's price is established. Seen from a conventional neo-classical economic perspective, the establishment of the price according to supply and demand is a major characteristic of commodity exchange (Erikson 1995: 165). Hence it might seem paradoxical that I now argue that the process of bargaining can mask the commodity nature of African objects. My argument is that the process of bargaining establishes social relationships between people (trader and customer) that are missing in most conventional commodity transactions, and thereby hides the economic process of establishing a price, even as that process is occurring.

According to economic-anthropological theory, processes of bargaining characterise economies which lack fixed price systems, standard weights and measurements, and a complex information network concerning the general market demand and supply of goods (Geertz 1979; Alexander and Alexander 1978). Geertz has claimed that, in such economies, and due to a lack of standardisation and information networks, sellers and buyers need to gain knowledge about the market structures. According to Geertz, in view of the lack of bond pricing, it is almost impossible for the customer to discern the prices of goods s/he may want to purchase. The value of goods can thus only be established during a bargaining process between trading partners. Therefore the major function of bargaining is to overcome the lack of knowledge (Geertz 1979, Steiner 1994: 76). The same applies to transactions in African objects.

Bargaining can and often does take place at various stages in the social lives of African objects. First, it takes place at village level, where the object is elicited from its indigenous setting by middlemen searching for objects for traders. Second, bargaining takes place at wholesale level where the object moves from wholesale trader to retail trader. Third, the bargaining process takes place at retail level where the object is exchanged between sellers and customers shopping at the markets. And there may be a further process of bargaining when collectors sell or exchange items from their collections. My concern here is the third stage of retail bargaining which is usually characterised by the co-existence of different value systems amongst bargaining parties. The worth of an African object is constructed by the selling party according to principles of supply and demand, whereas the buying party evaluates the object's worth in terms of their taste and their liking (Steiner 1994: 68, Appadurai 1986).

During the interactions I observed between seller and customer, the customer was usually in a disadvantaged position, lacking the essential knowledge of bargaining conventions as well as the pricing policies and a means to judge the value of the object of her or his desire. As mentioned in chapter two, I noticed that many customers compensated for their lack of knowledge by looking around first, asking and comparing the prices of objects they were interested in buying, and often returning to the stall only after looking around elsewhere for a while first. Customers also often went by galleries and shops where objects usually have price tags to establish a price in their

own minds for items they wanted. In doing so they attempted to gain the market information essential for buying an object at what they considered to be a fair price.

A good trader's major concern during the bargaining process was to be able to judge how much a buyer was willing to pay for the object s/he appeared to want. The initial asking price had therefore to be carefully chosen. If it was too low the seller could not then give a discount to the customer and thereby reinforce the idea that they had established a friendly relationship that was marked by such gestures. But if the initial asking price was too high it could easily scare the customer away and lose the sale completely. One tactic that many traders used to begin the bargaining process at a price that was within the customer's reach was to insist that the customer proposed the price first. In doing so, the trader got a rough idea of how much the buyer was willing to pay for the object and knew how much leeway s/he had relative to the object's stock value. I noticed regularly that if the price proposed by a buyer was not below that which would allow the trader to maintain her or his accepted profit margin, s/he would usually then respond by topping the price by up to 50% and then later reduce it again, so that the price proposed by the buyer and that of the trader seemed to meet half way.

During the bargaining process it was further important for the trader to keep the price high, without annoying the customer. The most common way to do this was for the seller to divert the customers' attention from the price by involving them in an entertaining dialogue. Such a dialogue could include asking the customer where he was from, if s/he liked Cape Town, etc. and telling stories about the object's origin, its traditional use or the way the object was acquired by the trader.

Traders also employed various other tactics aimed at keeping the asking price up. One was to mention that the customer was the trader's first customer of the day and therefore was to be given a special price. Another such tactic was to divert the customer's attention by inventing a fictive owner of the object. One example from my field notes, typical of many others, may serve to illustrate this kind of tactic.

A German tourist was discussing the price of a drum with a trader from Mali at the PAM. The trader had said he wanted R1000 for the drum but the buyer wanted to pay only R600. Suddenly the trader said: 'I know the price is very high and I have a problem. See, the drum is not my own. It belongs to my brother'. The tourist asked where the brother was. The trader replied that he was not at the market but that he could 'phone him'. The tourist said that the trader should do so and that he would wait. The trader went away with his cellular phone and came back after a few minutes. He said that his brother had said that he could sell the drum for R700. The tourist agreed (3. 10. 1997).

The invention of a fictive owner was a kind of apology about the price: 'It is not me who is asking such a high price, but my brother'. The trader could then admit that the fictional owner's asking price of was too high and simultaneously construct a bond between himself and the buyer, implying that they both had the same problem with the owner of the object. During such trading interactions the trader usually lowered the price by telling the buyer that the owner's asking price was too high.

Another tactic traders applied was to compare the prices of African objects they were selling with their prices in shops selling African objects, or by claiming that somebody else had offered a higher price for the same object which a customer was interested in buying. By comparing the price, the trader created an image of a set price; by suggesting that someone had offered more for the object, the trader pretended that someone else wanted the object and was willing to pay even more for it. Hence the trader affirmed the buyer's choice of object. Traders often claimed that the other person who wanted to buy the object was a collector who had already bought similar objects and taken them to Europe or the United States. The latter was intended to affirm the customer's choice. Strengthening the customer's sense that s/he has made the right choice was also achieved by traders praising the customer for showing good taste in their selection of an object, as well as by persuading the buyer that the choice of object suited the buyer. Last, a further tactic traders applied in order to keep their asking prices high was to mention the price the trader had paid her/himself for the object. The latter appeared to demonstrate the honesty of the trader and served to create a relationship of mutual confidence between seller and buyer.

To conclude my discussion of bargaining, I now offer a description of a rather characteristic example of a bargaining interaction observed at Greenmarket Square. It shows that bargaining is more than a matter of determining a transacted object's price. It is a performance in which the seller slips into the roles of entertainer and advertising agent, persuading the customer by means of affirming her/his choice and by establishing a bond with her/him.

Some traders followed a tactic of enticing their potential customers by making use of hidden objects. Hidden objects were kept in a bag or somewhere behind the seller's counter or underneath their table (Steiner 1994: 131-134). Once potential buyers looked at objects at a trader's stall and the trader noticed that the customer did not really want to buy, s/he suddenly mentioned to customer that s/he would like to show her/him something special. The trader claimed that s/he was only showing these objects to that particular customer, and that the objects were very rare and expensive collector's items which s/he hid so that nobody could see them to steal. Then the trader started to unpack her/his hidden treasures.

This was a tactic I observed on a number of occasions. I now describe briefly how it was applied by a trader from Senegal who was working from Greenmarket Square. Having noted a visitor inspecting the goods on his table but showing no special interest in any of them, he unpacked a number of large bronze bangles from Chad and Benin which he had, until then, stored in a bag underneath his table. As he did so he told his customer about their use, the way they were made and the meanings of their different patterns. Noticing now that the customer had become interested, he announced that he was selling the bangles for R800 each. By this stage, the trader already knew that the customer would only spend R200, because it has been revealed to him during the preceding trading interaction, when the customer was looking at different objects and had told the trader that all she could spend was R200. Object by object the trader continued to unpack hidden bronze items, including Akan gold weights, all the time explaining that his treasures were real collector's items, worth at least R1,000 per piece. The customer touched each of the objects and examined them all very carefully. At last the trader unpacked four smaller bangles of the same style as the large ones that he had said were on sale for R 800 each. The customer now put one of them on her arm and asked for the price, to which the trader replied: 'You choose a very good piece, it looks nice on your arm. I give you a good price. You are my

first customer', and continued telling her about the different bangle styles, but not the price. The customer again asked for the bangle's price and again the trader ignored the question, replying this time by asking the customer where she came from. During the course of the whole interaction the customer inquired five times about the price, having her questions ignored three times and responded to twice by the words 'I give you a good price'. Then, rather suddenly, the trader asked his customer what she would like to pay. She replied: 'Well if the large bangles are R1,000, I'll give you R100 for the small one'. The trader laughed and replied that he wanted R300. The customer said that this was too much. The trader told her that she could have the bangle for R250. After looking at the bangle for a while the customer took it off her arm and said that she was just looking anyway. To stop her from leaving the trader whispered something into her ear and put the bangle back on her arm. She smiled, gave him R170 and left with the bangle on her arm. Later, once she had gone, I asked the trader what he had told her. He replied: 'I told her that she can have the bangle for R170 but that she must not tell anybody about the price she had paid for it, because the price is too low and other traders would be upset if they find out that I sold it for a such price' (13. 8. 1998).

The interaction just described took about 45 minutes and contained many of the major tactics used by traders to convince customers to buy an object and to get the price they wanted for an object. The hidden object gets the customer interested, the attempt to let the customer nominate a price first gives the trader an idea how high s/he can bargain and, in the end, a bond is established by whispering, hence making the customer a friend and an ally with whom the trader shares a secret. In doing so the trader creates a sense of a very personal relationship which masks the commodity-exchange nature of their interaction.

The idea of the hidden object is fascinating within the context of the process whereby the commodity nature of African objects is hidden from the purchasing partner in the transaction. The hidden object becomes a treasure, it gives the customer the feeling of a found object, that is 'actually not for sale' and, if it is for sale, it is only offered to special people. In this case the process of actually hiding the object from sight works to hide the object's commodity nature.

4. Conclusion

Performative shopping interactions between traders of and customers buying African objects are characterised by two major elements: bargaining and storytelling. I have shown in this chapter that bargaining entails more than settlement on a price for an African object. Bargaining has an entertainment quality for both customers and traders. It appears more like a negotiating game, in which one player (the trader) tries to sell for as much as possible and in which the other player (the customer) tries to purchase for as little as possible. During the game both players try to receive as much information about each other as possible. One player, the trader, applies various tactics to achieve her/his aim. They include distraction from the aspect of money involved in the game, deepening of the customers' interest by the use of storytelling and bringing out previously hidden objects, and creating a relationship of trust with her/his counterpart. The other player, the customer, tries to increase her/his knowledge about the objects and the trader so that s/he reaches the goal of having made an informed decision when buying an object and having paid an appropriate price.

In regard to customers' informed decisions, however, an interesting contradiction is revealed: there is a drive to information on the one hand, and to be enchanted on the other. It is crucial in modern western life that one acts and decides in a rational way and that that can occur only after one has been properly informed. Yet, the foreign tourist is here in South Africa looking for an enchanted kind of transaction and object that has the least kind of commodity characteristic possible. Such enchantment will deny the possibility of adequate information being made available for the tourist to make a properly rational and informed decision. The negotiating game that constitutes bargaining is thus played to close the perceived gap between information and enchantment and to overcome the apparent contraction, the tourist leaving with a feeling that s/he has been is sufficiently informed to make a good decision, but not so thoroughly informed as to destroy the sense of enchantment that s/he has sought in the interaction.

Like bargaining, stories also distract the customer from the commodity-exchange nature of her or his interaction with the trader. But, apart from this, an important aspect of storytelling is its capacity to trigger the customers' interest in the objects that are on sale. The stories imbue the objects with a life of their own. As Sourie once explained to me: 'All these objects are out of

wood. We use wood to make floors, to build houses and to carve figurines. The only difference between the woods is that the latter have stories to be told about their meaning' (23.1.1998). While bargaining constitutes a relation between people, the stories establish a connection between people and objects. Both parts of the performative shopping experience mask the commodity nature of African objects. The Fang mask bought by the German customer at the PAM became a mask bought from a prince from an ex-German colony who is now a collector, and with whom the customer spent an hour and a half of his holiday in Africa.

In this chapter I have illustrated how diverse stereotypes of the African other were employed in the stories told about African objects. The stereotypes represented the key elements in most of the stories (Steiner 1994: 138). Despite contemporary media reports of Africa and its people which show the modern side of Africa—and the extremes of poverty that go with it—the images of Africa and the African as primitive and inferior still seem to persist (Hall 1997: 245). Representations of the changes that have occurred for a long time in Africa are neglected by people in the West who appear to put much effort into upholding their image of the African 'other' as exotic and creating and maintaining a perception of that 'other' that imbues it with power and attractiveness.. In this regard, a comment made by John from Mali is pertinent: 'The whites always ask me about my traditions and if we still use the drums and the traditional clothing. They sometimes even ask me if why I am wearing western clothing. They just don't want to believe that we are also changing' (23. 1. 1998). I return to the issue that these points when I discuss the construction of images of Africa in chapter eight.

For now it seems sufficient to conclude by saying that it appears that within tourism, as in wider social life too, 'what is in demand today is [still] a picture of a way of life that no longer survives' (Hunter 1979, quoted in Spiegel 1989: 48). The point is reinforced by the many complaints I heard from many visitors during interviews: that they had not been able to see the 'real' Africa during their stay in South Africa and particularly in Cape Town. When I asked what they had expected the real Africa to be, my tourist interviewees' answers recreated images of people living in bush huts, of people being barely dressed, of people undertaking mysterious rituals and of wild animals and dirt roads. By telling stories of the past, and by selling so-called traditional objects, that kind of past was projected into the present by African objects traders at

the markets I studied. By telling these stories, traders ingrained the African objects with the kinds of mystique and enchantment that they believed tourists might feel was lacking in their lives as modern western people.

As I have already suggested in my earlier chapters, it is precisely that ingraining of the objects I studied with the mystique of the 'real' Africa (Africanness) that helps to mask their commodity while simultaneously creating a demand for them and thus enabling their commodification. Consequently, one needs to analyse the customers' demand, and whence it derives, to fully understand the commodification of the objects. I do so in chapter six.

Chapter six: Travellers and objects—the quest for African objects

1. Introduction

In chapter five I focused on the performative shopping interaction between traders and consumers of African objects. I argued that the performative shopping interaction, which includes bargaining and storytelling, masks the commodity nature of the transacted objects. In this chapter I concentrate on the consumers of the African objects which are the central concern of my study. I focus on the consumers' quest for African objects because, without it, there would be no markets for such objects in Cape Town or anywhere else in the world. It is consumers' demand for these objects that makes their commodification possible. Yet it is from the very ways in which that demand is manifested that their commodity nature comes to be masked.

Focusing on how consumers' demand for African objects was constituted reveals some of the reasons for the tendency among purveyors and consumers to mask the commodity nature of those objects. As I have indicated in previous chapters, potential customers at the markets included local and overseas tourists and collectors, as well as local Capetonians, both collectors and others. Observing and interviewing these various consumers of African objects, at the markets and at Cape Town's airport, I found that the majority of purchasers were from overseas (see appendix C for demographic data). Moreover, of the tourists and other foreign visitors to the markets whom I interviewed, 83% had purchased some African objects in South Africa. This datum led me to conclude that, at least in the context of travel to Cape Town, foreign tourists and travellers tend to regard the purchase of objects in the place where they are holidaying as an essential part of their tourist experience.

Chart 1: Proportions of overseas visitors viewing and buying African objects
(March 1998- September 1998)

Chart 2: Proportions of South Africans viewing and buying African objects
(March 1998- September 1998)

As discussed in chapter five, shopping experiences can create a special relationship between objects, people and places. Moreover, as I show there, this special relationship, established by African object traders through their selling performances (story telling and bargaining), functioned quite effectively to mask the commercial nature of the transactions that result in the sale and purchase of such objects.

Observing tourists looking at, selecting and purchasing objects, and asking them what they had purchased during the course of their stay in the country, led me to realise that most bought items, such as handcrafted masks, sculpture, pots etc., that I refer to as African objects. My interviews revealed that only a few tourists had bought other South African products, such as wine, special soaps, candles or herb teas or, for example, contemporary handcraft, such as jewellery, pottery and cutlery. The two potters and the goldsmith at the PAM sold mainly to locals. As Cathy, the (white South African) goldsmith, explained: 'I cater for the local market. Tourists want something typically African, like the masks the traders sell. They come in here and look at my jewellery. But they hardly ever buy from me' (1.6. 98). Cathy's jewellery was rather unusual: She used trade beads, pieces of small dolls and various little pieces of scrap metal in creating it. But it did not fit what the vast majority of tourists wanted to buy because it did not represent to them what they perceived as typically African. Contemporary handcraft, although made in South Africa (even before the eyes of the PAM customer), did not appear to satisfy the foreign tourists' demand for what they regarded as the typically African. But what was it that they regarded as typically African? By what criteria did they make that judgement, and why? To find answers I sought reasons why some objects were perceived as more readily signifying what was understood as African than did others.

I thus now analyse how the quest for African objects was constituted by tourists who came to the markets with the intention not of buying a simple commodity, but of finding what they might eventually select because it was, for them, an authentic piece of African culture. Having done that does not, however, mean that their search for cultural authenticity involved establishing the actual circumstances in which the selected object was produced, used or even bought. The authenticity they sought was simply a characteristic that, in one or another way, masked the commercialised context in which the object was obtained. As indicated at the end of chapter five,

too much precise factual information about African objects has the potential to undermine the extent of their ability to enchant. Thus tourists had to maintain sufficient distance from the objects they selected for purchase to be enchanted by them and thus to be able to overlook the commodity transaction that took place when they were acquired. Enchanted by traders' stories about African objects, as well as by their own stories (often in the form of expectations), the tourist-consumers thus participated in masking the commodity nature of the very objects that they purchased. The descriptions and discussions that follow illustrate these processes.

2. Travellers and objects

Both tourism and the tourist demand for African objects in the West can be explained in many ways. Most significantly, it can be understood in terms of a general interest in the 'other' and a compelling interest in 'difference'. Tourism is one of the contemporary world's largest industries. 800 million people travel each year (Breidenbach & Zugkrigel 1998: 177). Tourism has been referred to as 'a sacred journey' in which tourists attempt to escape ordinary life by going in search of experiences different from what they have at home (Graburn 1976). They find pleasure in being in places where people look, dress, eat, drink and behave differently from what they are used to (Clifford 1997: 66, 90-91, Torgovnick 1990:26, Price 1989: 23). Yet, shopping, itself a core feature of modern consumer society, is an integral part of tourism. Purchasing objects from a different place allows for the fantasy to extend to acquisition of a fragment of the 'other' through following a version of a very familiar process. Curtis and Pajaczkowska point out that 'the delights of shopping in another culture can be compared with the pleasurable disorientation of a child offered access to the playthings of another household' (Curtis and Pajaczkowska 1994: 208, Littrel, Anderson & Brown 1993: 198). Yet, apart from its 'playful' character, shopping, as well as tourism itself, are both forms of consumption. Tourism involves the commodification of space and time, shopping involves the commodification of material objects.

Tourists seek cultural authenticity and simultaneously have to accept that the very item they are buying, the cultural symbol, is transformed into a commodity by the very act of buying it. Jules-Rosette has claimed that the latter presents a dilemma for the tourist, because there is 'always the doubt if the authentic can be found' (Jules-Rosette 1984: 4). The dilemma of tourism is similar to

the dilemma for the consumer of African objects, because it is tourism itself that has the potential to destroy the possibility of the authentic touristic experience. However, here, as with the search for authentic African objects, the authentic tourist experience is not a search for the chance to experience, other than possibly very temporarily and with a ready escape route, the actual socio-economic conditions of the host country. The realities of the tourist hosts' sometimes quite harsh living conditions must be overlooked, because too much information of that kind would eventually also spoil the enchantment of the holiday experience. Authenticity is thus itself filtered through the tourist's gaze: one only looks at what one wants to see.

Three couples, all of whom I interviewed at Cape Town's airport, had looked 'too far' and too deep during their travel to South Africa. An English couple said: 'You have a lot of problems here...the poverty, the crime, the social differences, all of this is too depressing...We will not travel to South Africa again' (Interview no. 94, airport 5.3.98). All claimed, as did the English couple, that the living conditions of the people staying in Cape Town's townships, as well as the high crime rates in the country, had reduced their holiday enjoyment and therefore they would not come back to South Africa.

Most tourists I interviewed seemed to seek what might be called the authentic through a search for things 'traditional', 'tribal' and/or 'primitive' and not so much in things expressing the contemporary social reality of the tourist hosts. In the detailed questionnaire that I distributed at hotels, I asked respondents to tick what they felt was the most appropriate definition of authenticity (see appendix H for questionnaire). The three most commonly chosen answers were:

- 'An object that is produced by a traditional artist for a traditional purpose and conforms to traditional forms': 15 out of 22 respondents
- 'Something traditional': 13 out of 22 respondents
- 'An object that has been used in ritual, e.g. a mask that has been danced': 12 out of 22 respondents

The actual term 'authentic' was, however, used only by four informants during interviews at the airport and markets. Tourists spoke of primitive art, traditional pieces, traditional handcraft or native craft when referring to the objects they had bought.

I noted that some tourists arrived in South Africa with stereotypic images and expectations about the way the host country should be (cf. Little 1991 who shows the same for tourists in Kenya). As mentioned in chapter five, I discovered these stereotypes especially in tourists' complaints about Cape Town and South Africa not being 'the real' Africa. I often heard remarks such as: 'I expected South Africa to be less developed'; 'Cape Town is like any other city in the world'; 'I expected that people live more traditionally' or 'I liked Swaziland better than South Africa...it is more African'.

Many tourists' stereotypic images portrayed the African 'other' as a never-changing primitive, living in a society with static traditions.[41] Hence they seemed deliberately to deny the 'other' the potential for cultural change (Silver 1993: 306, see also Cohen 1988). It is noteworthy moreover that it is precisely these stereotypic images of the 'other' as traditional or primitive that allowed tourists to fantasise about the host country and to imagine a place in which production of objects take place at village level.

Yet, once tourists have arrived in South Africa, they have to come to terms with the fact that the place is less apparently primitive and much more civilised than they had expected it would be. Some tourists tried to overcome their apparent disappointment over not having found the 'real Africa' by purchasing objects that enabled them to reminisce about this imagined primitive and static life. As one a male tourist from Italy, age 32, who stayed in South Africa for 10 days said when I interviewed him at Greenmarket Square: 'The pieces I have bought and seen represent the idea of old times. It's real Africa...The past is present in Africa. It is different from Italy. It is very interesting' (Interview No. 57, Greenmarket Square 14.9.98). He had bought two masks. The masks appeared to function for the Italian tourist as a signifier of authentic Africa (Errington 1997: 146).

[41] In this regard I am reminded of my own experiences with friends after I moved from Germany to Swaziland 10 years ago. When I sent pictures from the house where I lived in Mbabane, the country's capital, they always wrote back to me about their surprise at how developed everything seemed to be. In fact, some mentioned that they had actually expected that I was living in a kind of mud hut. When some of them visited Swaziland they were as disappointed as the tourist mentioned above, and I noticed the satisfaction they derived from seeing Swazi men coming to town in traditional clothing.

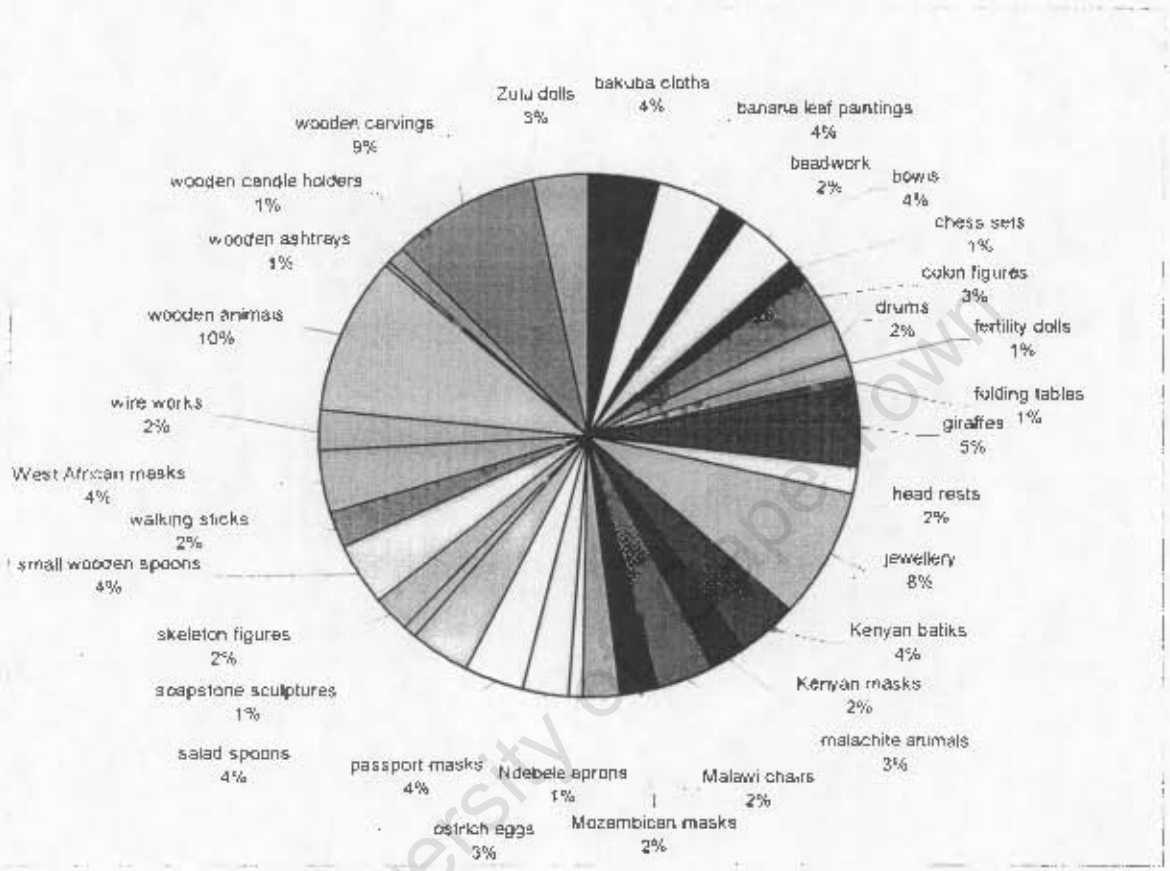
While working at the PAM, I spoke to a woman who had bought a wooden bowl from me. She said: 'It is amazing. I wonder how long it takes to make such a bowl... but people in Africa still have the time to make such things... Life is much slower in Africa than it is in Europe' (29.5.97, c.f. Errington 1997: 149). Considering that the woman must have made her way to the PAM right through the busy centre of Cape Town made me wonder why she perceived African life as slow. I should have asked her but, at that particular moment of my fieldwork I was there to sell, and a discussion about the issue might have destroyed her enchanted image of 'slow' Africa and she might have left without buying the bowl. Given my role then as an observing participant, I too had to perform African traditionality in much the way other traders did.

3. The Quest for African objects

The three most commonly purchased objects during my period of fieldwork were wooden carved sculptures, wooden carved animals and masks. These three categories of objects appeared to be what was frequently identified as typically African, as the following statements indicate. A female tourist from Norway, who had spent 2 weeks in South Africa, said: 'The things are beautiful carvings, they are pieces of Africa...I want to have them in my room at home' (Interview no. 72, Greenmarket Square 17.9.98). She had bought a wooden figurine and a Fang mask. A male Austrian tourist, who had spent three weeks in South Africa, explained, when I asked him describe to the objects he had bought: 'They are African pieces, I would have liked to buy more, but I had no space in my suitcase. One cannot buy such beautiful things at home' (Interview no. 66, Airport 4.3.98). He had bought a giraffe, a small Mozambican mask and a little Zulu doll, all of which he proudly unpacked to show me. Another tourist, this one from France, told me during an interview at the airport: 'I am a sales representative. I travel a lot. My wife collects souvenirs from all the places I have been to. I had to bring her something really African. I bought her a Kenyan mask and a very finely carved sculpture of a thin man, which the trader called skeleton figure' (Interview no. 68, Airport 4.3.98) (see earlier discussion of skeleton figures in chapter 5). A male tourist from Austria, whom I met at the PAM, told me: 'I was looking for something typically African in Cape Town to take back home. I looked at a lot of things. I bought the 'big five' carved out of wood, because I have been to Kruger Park (a game reserve in the country's far north-east). They will remind me of that. I also bought a wooden

stick for my father. He still likes to hike in the mountains and I am sure none of his hiking friends has an African walking stick' (19.9.97).

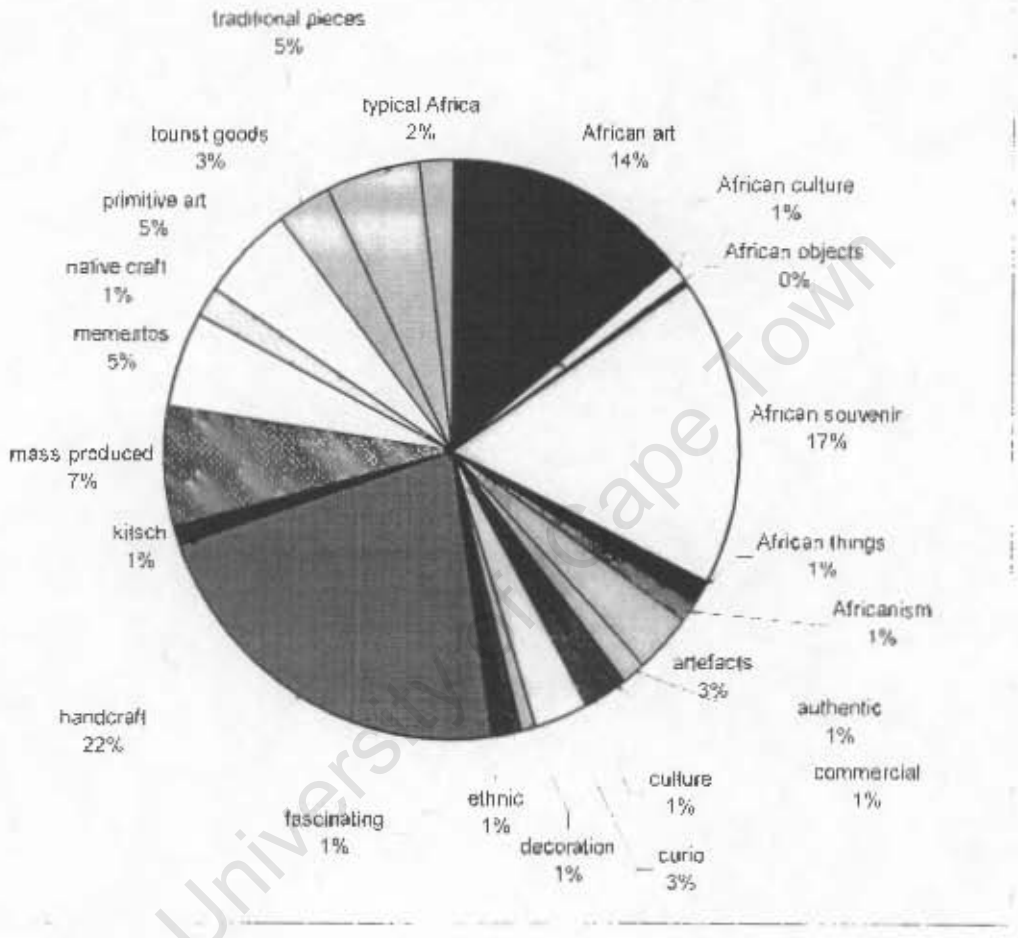
Chart 3: African objects bought by foreign tourists (own records)



When I was working as a saleswoman at the PAM, clients often approached me to ask what I thought would be a typically African thing to take back home. Such questions, the statements above and the following tourists' descriptions, were quite revealing of the perceptions many tourists carried about the objects. A question in my extended questionnaire (see appendix H) asked respondents to tick how they would describe the objects they had bought or seen at the markets. Many of the 22 respondents chose more than one answer, 14 categorising them as traditional pieces, 12 as handcraft and 11 as souvenirs. Of other informants interviewed at the airport and at the markets, 17% referred to the objects as African souvenirs, 22% as handcraft and 14% as African art. The objects were further described as primitive art (5%), traditional

pieces (5%) and typically African (2%). These answers indicate that the tourists labelled the objects they had purchased and seen at the markets as mainly African and/or 'other'.

Chart 4: References made by tourists to the objects (own records)



Other terms used by tourists to describe the objects were 'traditional', 'native' and 'primitive'. These terms reveal many tourists' stereotypic images, as they do their expectations that to arrive in Africa/South Africa is to find a 'traditional' way of life. Regarding the objects they saw at the markets as 'traditional', 'native' or 'primitive' enabled tourists to construct images of a never changing Africa such as are represented in phrases quoted earlier ('past is present in Africa', 'life is much slower in Africa', 'people still have time to produce such things'). It is also implied in

the words of another tourist-informant who quite bluntly explained: 'All Africans do is sit under trees and carve'. At the same time the tourists' acceptance of what was purchased as 'traditional', 'native' or 'primitive' was precisely what imbued the objects with the authenticity and inspired enchantment that they sought. Contemporary jewellery, for example, which the PAM's goldsmith, Cathy, sold, seemed unlikely to be imbued with such qualities. One reason for this is that the jewellery is not as easily discerned as typically African. Similar jewellery can be found in Europe. The second reason, which relates directly to the first, is that Cathy is a white South African and hence as the producer—who in her case is on display as she works—she is not as exotic and foreign to the mainly white tourist customer as her black counterparts[42].

The terms handcraft (22%) and art (African art 14%, primitive art 5%) were also frequently used by tourists to describe the objects they had seen or purchased. Most tourists explicitly appreciated the handcrafted quality of the objects. A female German tourist who had spent two weeks in South Africa commented: 'At home nobody would make such beautiful things anymore. Handcraft is no longer appreciated. The people here should ask higher prices for their craft' (Interview no. 77, airport 4.3.98). She had bought a wooden rhinoceros and a West Africa mask. Another female tourist who had visited 'my' room at the PAM, said, while talking about the objects: 'That is art, handcrafted, it's part of African tradition' (12.6.97), and another, a woman from England, talked to me about the markets and said: 'I enjoy all these handcrafted objects at the markets. There are still so many good artists in Africa' (28.5.97).

My field notes include many more such statements, all of them revealing that the handcrafted nature of the objects seemed to be what visitors desired because it represented a form of production that they believed no longer exists in large-scale western economies (Errington 1997: 146). Of course one can find handcrafted objects in industrialised countries—indeed they are very popular amongst certain classes and in some areas, but their prices are usually high and beyond the spending power of most people. The handcrafted furniture, cutlery and sculpture available in most industrial economies tends to be there to satisfy the demands of the upper economic strata of society only, while much of what was available at Cape Town market was

[42] Since there was no black jewellery manufacturer at the PAM, one can only speculate about whether her/his work might have been more readily accepted as authentically African.

accessible to less well-off people from those countries. As one visitor from the Netherlands remarked: 'I love all the South African handcraft. It is beautiful. It is art that even people like me can afford' (28.8.98). Another tourist, this one from Germany, said: 'Imagine that you would ask a carver in Germany to carve you salad spoons such as these [referring to Kenyan salad spoons decorated with animal design]. They would cost at least 100 mark [approx. R300 at that time]. Here I paid R25' (30.5.97). Hence, handcrafted objects from Africa were also perceived as reasonable in price by the customers and could therefore satisfy the demands of a larger public.

The market customers' statements above reveal two dimensions of the objects' hand made quality. First, they point to their commodity value, in terms of their affordable price. Second, they point to their aesthetic value ('that is art', 'it is beautiful'). The aesthetic value, which is what is valorised by their being handcrafted, has the potential to mask the simple commercial value of the object. The fact that in industrialised countries handcrafted items (as well as most art) satisfy the demands of the upper economic strata of society only, makes these items elite goods. Hence the commercial nature of handcrafted objects at the markets in Cape Town was further masked by virtue of the fact that the items there could also carry an elite label, because they were handcrafted.

Another dimension of the objects' hand made quality at the markets in Cape Town was revealed by various tourist-respondents' remarks in terms similar to those of the German tourist visitor, who when talking about a mask from Mozambique that he had bought, said: 'This is great... I imagine a black man sitting under a tree carving this mask...what a life!...I wish I could live like this...'(3.6.97). Another, this one from America, remarked: 'Life in Africa is still easy...all you need is a chisel and wood...you can survive by creating something beautiful.' (28.1.98). Remarks like these show that the handcrafted nature of the object not only appealed to the elitist aspirations of some purchasers. It also enabled them to construct narratives about the processes of production of the objects, and about their places of origin. In many cases these narratives made references such as that 'Life in Africa is *still* easy' and that the continent offers opportunities for ordinary people to survive by producing 'beautiful things' or 'art'—something apparently possible for only the select few in their home countries. It seemed also as if some of those I interviewed were longing to be able to live that kind of life—'I wish I could live like this'

was something I heard often. McGuckin (1997: 292) has noted that the significant quality of handmade objects is that the purchasers can identify with them more easily than they can with mass-produced objects. From the various statements quoted above, and from many similar ones I noted, it is evident that many tourists did precisely that, and for that reason valued the fact that many of the objects they saw were handcrafted. Together with the construction of stories about the production and the place of origin of the purchased object, that factor enabled purchasers of African objects to relate to those objects as signifiers of a desire for the chance to experience a different life-style from what they were used to. Yet it also tended to romanticise the putative lifestyles of those they imagined were the producers of the objets.

The idea of African art was another constitutive part in the tourist quest for African objects. Tourists' comprehension of what constitutes art were not all the same, however. An American tourist who came to 'my' room at the PAM gave me an interesting lecture on her understanding of African art. She bought one plastic chicken and two wire work cars and explained: 'This is contemporary South African art. The masks are fakes and copies anyway. There is no artistic expression in those objects. They are dead' (11.6.97). Yet the same American woman wanted to know exactly where the objects she had bought had come from and she asked me for the names of the artists, information I did not have been able to give to her, much to her disappointment.

Her question about the artists' names is another characteristic of how art is understood in terms of what we might call a western canon. One only needs to visit an art museum to realise that western art tends almost always to carry the signature of the artist, hence it has a name attached to it. The artist's name guarantees genuineness or authenticity (Baxandall 1987). To the American tourist, then, knowing the names of the producers of the plastic chicken and the cars would have reinforced for her the artistic authenticity of the objects she had bought. Yet, knowing an artist's name is yet another device for masking the commodity nature of an item of art, which is thereby hidden behind the assumed personal relationship between the artist and the art object.

Other tourists understood art differently. They did not perceive the masks on sale as fakes or copies, but as art. To them it did not matter what the name of the producer was. A customer I met

at Greenmarket Square, explained: 'It is the artistic quality of the mask that attracts me...nothing else' (8.10.97). By saying this, the customer was referring to the aesthetically pleasing aspect of the mask. However, no matter how the perceptions of what constitutes art differed among consumers, as mentioned above art was commonly perceived as distinct from commodity and therefore describing the objects as art was a means of masking the commodity nature of the objects.

4 .The African object as a souvenir or gift

If one looks back and asks what characteristics an object has to have to qualify as typically African, it appears that the most important is that it is easily recognisable by purchasers as being different from what they were used to seeing and being able to purchase at home (Littrel, Anderson & Brown 1993: 198). Wooden carved animals, sculptures, masks and Zulu dolls were thus perceived as typically African and hence as signs of Africa. Culler (1981: 127 quoted in Rojek & Urry 1997: 9) maintains that tourists are searching less for an essential authenticity than for signs of the authentic when he notes that 'all over the world the unsung armies of semioticians, the tourists, are fanning out in search of signs of Frenchness, typical Italian behaviour, exemplary Oriental scenes, typical American thruways, traditional English pubs'. At the Cape Town markets, the objects' apparent 'Africanness' related more to their exotic and foreign qualities and to the place where they were purchased—in Africa—than to any inherent qualities. The reasons that tourists selected certain objects that signified their origin became clear to me when I examined the purposes for which they said they had bought them. My interviews revealed that 56% of the objects were purchased with the intention of keeping them as souvenirs, while 44% were purchased with the intention of giving them to family members, friends and colleagues as gifts.

In order to qualify as souvenir, an object has to reveal a relation to the place where it has been obtained: it has to signify this special location. Recall the Austrian tourist, quoted earlier, who had bought the wooden carved 'big five' because they reminded him of his trip to Kruger Park. And consider what various other tourists gave me as reasons for having purchased the objects they had: 'I bought a mask, it will remind me of my holiday'; 'When I look at it later it will remind me of Africa'; 'I wanted to take a piece of Africa home, so I will always remember the

good time I had in Africa'. These examples show that, for example, a sculpture of a lion is not primarily important because it depicts a lion but as a reminder of the location where it was bought. As Steward has noted ' the souvenir speaks to a context of origin through a language of longing, for it is not an object out of need or use value; it is an object arising out of the necessarily insatiable demands of nostalgia' (Steward 1993: 135).

An English tourist explained, in response to my question about where and why he had bought certain objects during his stay in South Africa: 'During my whole holiday I bought something small from all the places I went to. I do this instead of taking photographs. I bought a small mask at Boulders Beach,...the mask will remind me of the day I spent there...I saw a lot of African penguins...it was great' (Interview no. 81, Airport 5.3.98). Another tourist, this one from France, told me, at Greenmarket Square: 'I bought a Zulu doll at Cape Point. It was very expensive. I could have bought the same one for a much better price here [at Greenmarket Square]...but I wanted something from the southernmost tip of Africa'[43] (20.1.98). But how can a Zulu doll signify Cape Point? Nothing of the doll as Zulu doll inheres in it that helps to signify Cape Point. The doll's signifying meaning is imposed on it by the external context of purchase—Cape Point—and the place's dramatic land- and seascapes. The French tourist was purchasing an object at Cape Point to objectify the place in memory.

The importance of the relation of objects purchased to their places of purchase was emphasised by many of my tourist-respondents. When asked how she selected objects for purchase on her travels, a Dutch women at Greenmarket Square remarked: 'Things have to be in their context. I would not buy a Swazi candle in South Africa' (6.2.98). A female American tourist, who had spent one week in South Africa, told me at the PAM that: 'The things are souvenirs and interesting craft. One can buy them in the States but it is more original to buy them here'(11.6.97). She then went on to buy a small wooden Fang mask from me—an object that had been transported to Cape Town from Gabon in West Africa. Similarly, a female German tourist I met at the PAM coffee shop said: 'You know that we can buy many of these things in Frankfurt

[43] Note that Cape Aghulas, rather than Cape Point, is the southernmost point of the continent. But many tourists (and guides too) prefer to identify Cape Point in that way, because of its accessibility to Cape Town and the very dramatic landscape and seascape there, by comparison with Cape Aghulas, quite a long distance from the city.

now, especially at the flea market. But I wonder why people buy them there? I would never buy them in Frankfurt. Here I bought a lot'. I asked her why and she answered: 'It is more authentic to buy them in Africa. If I want to have something foreign I buy it in the country where it is from. Otherwise I don't buy it'. I asked: 'But would you not buy a pair of jeans, which are made in America, in Germany?' She said: 'Yes, but that is not something special' (3.10.97). She bought a pair of Kenyan salad spoons, a mask and three batiks from Kenya, and a Tanzanian skeleton figure[44]. A female Scottish tourist, who had spent six days in South Africa, said: 'I saw South African guys selling wooden carved giraffes in Spain. I did not buy them there. It's out of context. Here I bought a giraffe because it is made in South Africa' (Interview no. 29 Airport 3.3.98). The woman had also bought four pairs of Kenyan salad spoons, one giraffe (most probably made in Zimbabwe) and a Tanzanian skeleton figure.

The above comments seem to suggest that an object that is purchased at a tourist's home place is no longer able to function as a souvenir. For the purchaser to say that 'it is more original', 'more authentic' to buy such objects in Africa suggests that the object loses some of its African ambience and its enchantment when its purchase occurs outside Africa (Littrel, Anderson & Brown 1993: 198). Buying an object conventionally associated with Africa in Europe or in America affects the relationship the purchaser has to the object, increasing its commodity nature through destabilising, and even destroying the stories it might have carried had it come home from a tourist trip in foreign climes. Indeed, the stories that inhere in souvenirs are reminiscent of the *hau* of the Maori gift—its 'spirit'—or the essence of the gift, which Mauss (1954) brought to the attention of the anthropological world as a means of directing attention to the social nature of gift exchange. Similarly, a souvenir purchased by a tourist or traveller somewhere in Africa is not 'inert'. It carries with it, and within it, the 'spirit of Africa'.

Saying of an African sculpture displayed at home: 'I bought it myself in Africa' can also signify 'I have been there'. The object thus signals personal movement in space and simultaneously authenticates the tourist's holiday through being material proof of travel. Yet, tourists' claims that it is 'more authentic' to purchase the objects in Africa is also a form of 'othering' which

[44] When I was in Frankfurt in September 1998, I saw all the kinds of objects she had bought on sale at Frankfurt's flea market.

presupposes that cultures and cultural objects are 'spatially territorialized' (Gupta & Ferguson 1997a: 5). The idea of spatially bounded cultures is the essence of tourism—why travel if only to find the familiar?—and the core of much earlier anthropological theory (Lury 1997: 75, see Clifford 1988 for his critique of anthropology's own spatial fixing of culture). For a tourist to claim it is more authentic to purchase the objects s/he desires while in Africa represents her or his attempt to fix certain kinds of objects to particular places on the world map. It is to uphold as natural what is actually a constructed idea of culturally specific material objects, a notion that a world of travelling objects and 'travelling cultures' (Clifford 1992) necessarily undermines (cf. Rojek & Urry 1997).

Yet, noting the countries of origin of the objects tourists had bought made me wonder about their claim about the importance of context. While people were selective in their choices when seeking to find something typically African, most were not very concerned if these objects actually originated in Cape Town or even in South Africa, the city and country where they were spending their holiday. Many tourists I observed in Cape Town purchased objects made in West Africa, Mozambique or Kenya[45]. Yet, had I argued with the Scottish woman that, according to her earlier statement, the objects she had bought were just as out of context in South Africa as a giraffe in Spain, the enchantment of the objects would have been lost. It thus appeared that tourists perceived Africa as a unity, and needed to maintain that perception so that any object from anywhere on the continent, at least the continent south of the Sahara, was enough to qualify it as a souvenir.

As mentioned, obtaining gifts during the holiday was another reason why objects had been sought out for purchase. Yet the issue of the object's African authenticity persisted along with the purchaser's perception of the intended recipients' characteristics: 'I did not want to bring just anything back home for my daughter. I wanted something that she would really like and that is [also] very African. I bought her a banana leaf painting. She likes African art'. Or 'It was not easy to find something for my girlfriend. She does not like jewellery much…I wanted something from Africa which she can use. I bought her a pair of salad spoons and a batik which we can

[45] I have deliberately blurred national and regional boundaries to emphasise my point.

hang in our apartment'. A gift brought back from a holiday thus simultaneously represents something special, given to the receiver to show that s/he was remembered during the journey, and chosen with the intention of both pleasing the receiver and being something typically African. At the point of the purchase at the market, the object's planned use as a personal gift enhances its already established African authenticity as a means to mask the moment of commodity exchange that occurs during purchase (Steward 1993: 144). The purchaser relates to the object via the person to whom the gift is to be given: most people I met during fieldwork did not buy just any object as a gift but considered the likely response the intended recipient might have to the object. Putting that characteristic alongside the other—its authenticity that derived from its place of purchase—helped to mask the commodity nature of the object's exchange relation.

While observing customers at the market selecting various objects, I noted two major categories of shopper: the rapid shopper and the leisurely shopper. For the rapid shopper, the object selected was spotted, picked up, looked at closely and bought, with or without a story told by the trader. An American woman I met at the airport said: 'I quickly bought all kinds of things on my last day at Greenmarket Square. At home I [will] decide which ones I keep and which ones I will give away to friends and family' (Interview no. 31, Airport 3.3.98). A male American tourist who came to my room at the PAM said: 'I hate shopping during my holiday, but my friends heard that I am going to Africa and now they all want something really African' (2.6.97). From these and other similar responses it would appear that rapid shopping was a process engaged in by tourists looking for gifts which they felt obliged to obtain for their friends or work colleagues, often to reciprocate a gift received from those friends or colleagues when they returned from a holiday or a trip abroad.

What I have called the leisurely shopper compared the objects on display, often going from stall to stall, looked at the objects for quite a long time, selected a few and compared again, until what was considered to be the best piece was found. Leisurely shoppers smelled, touched and inspected objects from all angles. Indeed the extent to which people actually smelled the objects they had seen on display is quite remarkable. I have seen this elsewhere only at markets in Italy and Spain where customers smelled leather goods to detect whether they are of genuine leather.

Yet an analogy can be drawn between smelling African objects and leather goods. In both cases the genuineness of the piece is checked through its smell. Classen, Howes and Synnott (1994: 193) point out that 'perhaps stemming from the original use of smell to tell whether something is good to eat or not, odour is an important means by which consumers judge the value and effectiveness of a product'.

While I was selling African objects at the PAM, 12 Maasai calabash containers and 13 Zambian wooden bowls were displayed in 'my' room. These objects had a very strong odour. The trader for whom I was acting as a salesperson had told me that it came from residues of goat's milk and dried blood which had been carried in the containers when they were still in regular use in their places of origin. The odour, which filled the whole room, intrigued many customers, some of whom inquired about it. When told what the smell was, and from which objects it came, most then took the objects in their hands to get an even closer sense of the scent. Their reactions was always one of enchantment, particularly when they saw minute signs of repair on some of the objects, revealing in their minds' eyes that these were authentic because they had clearly been used and were not simply items produced for sale. One woman cried out:' that's what I wanted, that is a real piece of Africa. You can smell that it was used and it will always remind [me] of Africa' (6.6.97). A Swedish man was so attracted by the objects' odour that he bought three wooden pots. He remarked: 'It is amazing that the pots still smell like milk and fire. I hope they will still smell when I am at home. My friends must see and smell this. It's Africa' (12.6.97).

The examples show how the scent or odour of an object helps to create a social relationship between the beholder and the object through an assumption about the object's earlier social life. Moreover it also hints at a relationship between potential purchaser and previous user, for both of whom the object is or has been a possession. The object carries 'sensory memory' (Seremetakis 1994: 10-11) Seremetakis remarks: 'The sensory connection between perceiver and artifact completes the latter in an unexpected and non-prescribed fashion because the perceiver is also the recipient of the unintended after-effect of the artifacts presence...' (Seremetakis 1994: 11). That characteristic of the object then mediates the relationship between purchaser and previous

owner in much the same way as it occurs in the relationship between successive owners of a famous artwork in what might be described as its 'genealogy of possession'[46].

Returning to the issues of odour: To relate to something by smelling it is quite widely regarded as a rather intimate means of encountering the world (Howes 1991). While I was harassed by the 'stink' in 'my' PAM room most of the day, tourists who entered the room (themselves smelling of all kinds of perfumes and deodorants) were attracted by the objects' odour. Yet, if one considers the above remarks, and they represent many other cases, to the 'clean' smelling tourist, the scent of natural decay and fire seemed part of what they had expected of Africa. Classen, Howes and Synnott (1994: 2) note that 'the perception of smell, thus, consists not only of the sensation of the odours themselves, but of experiences and emotions associated with them' (see also chapter 4). Moreover, the scent or odour of the objects with which we are concerned here pointed to its former usage and thereby authenticated it while helping to mask the fact that it might have been produced simply for sale. The scent thus helped to hide the commodity nature of the object and allowed the tourist to believe s/he had obtained an authentic 'piece of Africa'.

Touching objects was another sensory form I observed many customers using, particularly those I have called leisurely shoppers. It was as if many such people had to touch every object, lift it up or softly move their hands over the objects' surfaces. Soapstone figures with their smooth surfaces were most preferred, but customers also stroked *bakuba* cloths to feel their texture, or let their fingers flow through the many necklaces hanging off the canopies of many stalls. One woman combed her fingers through the hairy edges of a mask before holding it onto her face. Another followed the outlines of wooden sculptures with her fingers.

This tendency to touch African objects resonates with the way many national monuments are touched: the Liberty Bell in Philadelphia which, when touched, is said to promise good luck; or the black Madonna in Montserat in Spain which has been touched so often by pilgrims in hope of revelation that the ivory has turned black. While customers at the markets did not appear to touch the African objects on display there in the hope of attaining good luck or revelation, what they

[46] The term was suggested to me by my supervisor Dr. Spiegel during his thorough revision of my thesis.

were doing was making tactile contact, through an object, with what they understood to be a different culture. They thus enhanced and personalised their relationship with items they had previously seen only in a museum show case, catalogue or other graphic representation. By touching the objects the shopper attempted to get behind the representation creating a personal, even physical, relationship with it, a relation beyond its consumption as a mere commodity. Leisurely shoppers also looked at objects for many minutes, inspecting each angle and comparing those with the angles of the various similar objects all displayed side by side, to find what was, for them, the unique one among them. The behaviour of one American woman offers a rather extreme example of a form of behaviour I observed played out repeatedly by others. Attempting to select an item for purchase, she picked 20 lion figures, carved out of soapstone, from the stall of three neighbouring traders at Greenmarket Square. They were all pretty much the same size, colour and price. She displayed them side by side on the ground. Touching and looking at each, she first chose ten, and then reduced them to five, until she had just two left. The traders who tried to convince her that one of the lions from their particular stall was the best of the 20 did not distract her. Eventually she decided to take just one of the remaining two lions, but without bargaining over the price of R45 with the trader to whom she believed it belonged. The selection process took about 30 minutes, at the end of which she left the three traders arguing about whose stock the lion she had bought had come from. To the traders, with their penchant normally for using various means to make an item appear unique and therefore worth the purchase, all these lions had looked fairly much the same: soapstone objects representing a lion. However, the customer's careful selection of one transformed it into an inalienable possession to be taken home, as a form of artwork.

I was fortunate to meet up with this same American woman later and I asked her how she had decided which one to choose. She answered: 'I don't really know, I was simply looking for the best, I shall display it in my living room'. And so I pursued the issue by asking her how she would to refer to the object. Her response: 'art'. And then, after a moment of further thinking: 'African souvenir' (24.8.98).

Differences in purchasers' selection methods indicate different degrees of masking of the commodity nature of the purchased objects. The rapid shopper seeking gifts and souvenirs to

take back home placed little importance on the objects' history, quality or place of purchase. The leisurely shoppers, who were the majority (75% of those whose shopping behaviour I observed), spent time with the object before purchasing it, thereby creating a personal relationship with it by smelling, touching and looking at it, as well as by listening to the stories traders told.

To sum up, the tourist quest for African objects was variously constituted by the tourist's interest in difference, and her/his expectations, often in the form of stereotypic images of the host country/continent and its material culture. The tourist's image of the traditional, handcrafted or art object had the potential to mask the commodity nature of the African objects s/he was purchasing, and hence to hide the possibility that the objects were produced simply for sale to such tourists. While many tourists realised that many such objects were produced for sale, they allowed themselves to be enchanted by traders' stories, thereby overshadowing the commodity nature of the objects they purchased. Tourists thus overcame the dilemma of knowing that the objects they were buying were commodities by granting what they were seeing a particular kind of authenticity. They related to the object as a piece of Africa, a souvenir or a gift in ways that all helped to transport the object into spheres of social life, beyond that of commodity consumption.

5. Conclusion -The travelling object

Tuesday 3 March 1998. I am standing with my field notebook in the international departure terminal of Cape Town International Airport, close to the South African Airways check-in counter. Many people are queuing there. Most are carrying loads of luggage. A man stands beside a huge wooden giraffe (approximately 1.50m high). Empty toilet paper rolls protect the giraffe's ears. Its body is engulfed in bubble wrap. The man in front of him sits on an African drum, also carefully bubble-wrapped. Both watch what is happening before them at the counter where a woman, also with a huge wooden giraffe, is checking in with an unwrapped giraffe. The check-in clerk tells her that she may not take it into the cabin with her. She responds angrily, complaining that such a restriction is ridiculous. South African Airways *must* allow tourists to take home the objects they have bought in South Africa. The giraffe will surely break if she must check it in with the suitcases. She begs the clerk to allow her to take it on board with her as cabin luggage, explaining loudly she has carried the giraffe around for nearly her whole South African holiday. The agent, unable to sympathise, tells her that it is against security regulations about which she can do nothing. Eventually, the woman, looking very worried, hands in the unwrapped

giraffe with her suitcase. Shaking her head, she leaves the counter, but not before those behind her in the queue, having observed what was happening, have become involved, all saying that the ruling is ridiculous. The man with the drum now tells the woman queuing in front of him that he has searched Cape Town for five days to find his drum, and that he would hold South African Airways responsible if the drum were to break in the aircraft's hold or in the handling process en route.

Later, in the departure hall where passengers waited after checking in, I observe various people carrying giraffes of the same size as that which had been the subject of the woman's earlier dispute. I then observed her approaching one man with such a giraffe, and talking to him. Nearby, various other people are sitting waiting to be called to board their flights. One young man embraces the large Fang mask that he has placed on his legs and is now leaning on. A nearby group of Austrian tourists relate their holiday experiences and show each other the objects they had bought. I now approach the first woman. She repeats for me her check-in counter ordeal, saying that she could cry because, up till that point, she had really taken so much care to assure that the giraffe would not break. Yet now, she is sure, it will indeed be broken and through no fault of her own. 'It is just not fair' she complains, other airlines allow you to carry such big objects onto the aeroplane. You see all the other people here with big pieces and giraffes. If I had known that they are so strict I would have at least wrapped the giraffe'. What, I then asked does she plan to do with the giraffe once she is at home: 'I had planned to put it in my garden, to be reminded of a beautiful holiday. I do not know if I will ever have the chance to come to Africa again and now my best piece might get broken'. The woman's disappointment is palpable. She seems close to tears despite the reassurances of a Scottish couple in their late sixties who say that they have had the same experience when travelling the previous year, and that nothing had been broken.

Why was this woman so bitterly distraught? She had selected her special piece of Africa and taken great care of it. Now, at the final stage of her journey, she had to take the risk that her valuable token might be broken, or lost. Such incidents reveal much about consumers' perceptions of the objects they have purchased during their travels, as do the careful ways that

travellers handled the objects they have bought, and the manner in which they show the objects off to fellow travellers (and to me, during my interviews with them).

Such behaviour reveals the tourist's sense of a personal relationship with the objects s/he has selected to take home, a relationship confirmed by the fact that most people I observed at the airport carried their newly purchased African objects in their hand luggage. I saw such objects sticking out of their bags and in specially protected packages. As one Austrian woman explained: 'I've got everything I bought in South Africa here in my bag. I am afraid my suitcase might be lost and I would lose all the nice African things. I can buy new clothes at home, but not such things' (Interview no. 49, Airport 4.3.98). To her, as to many others, the most valuable possessions to take home were their African objects.

To conclude: I have argued that tourists did not generally arrive at the markets with the intention of simply buying a commodity, a point that is supported by the fact that some tourists were disappointed about what they perceived as the commercial nature of the markets. Eight out of 22 respondents who completed the detailed questionnaire I had left at various hotels and guesthouses wrote that they had found the markets too commercialised (six of the eight bought African objects there nevertheless). From the informants interviewed at the markets and at the airport, 13% referred to the African objects as mass-produced, kitsch, commercial and tourist goods and 25% disliked them because they had expected the markets to be more original and had hoped to find more individual pieces. A male tourist from England interviewed at the airport, commented about the markets: 'They are too commercialised, ...they could be anywhere in the world...if one wants to buy such tourist stuff one should buy it in Indonesia...they know at least how to carve properly. The things I saw are rubbish'. He had spent three weeks in South Africa (Interview no. 93, Airport 7.3.98). Another male tourist, this one from Germany and who had spent three weeks in South Africa, said about the objects he saw at Greenmarket Square that: 'It is all mass produced stuff, probably not even from Africa but from Taiwan. The masks are like Venetian gondolas...I do not buy such kitsch in Venice, so why should buy it here?' (Interview no. 82 Greenmarket Square 17.9.98.) Others remarked: 'There are no unique pieces here. It is all the same tourist stuff wherever one goes'; or 'I hoped to find something more unique', or 'It is all mass-produced...I was looking for real African art, like I saw in Brussels in galleries...It

seems that all African art is in Europe and in the States'. Such remarks show that some tourists felt cheated by having found an economy that closely resembles the one they had left behind at home. For them, the commodity nature of African objects could not be masked by the enchantment of the markets as they saw them operating. Curtis and Pajaczkowska (1994: 208-209) note that 'the complexity of the [shopping] relationship may account for cynical dismay [by the tourist] at the sight of 'inauthentic' souvenirs—mass-produced versions of regional artefacts'. The cynical tourist's sense of the 'real Africa', and its enchanting nature, required a stronger kind of masking of the commodity nature of the tourist industry in which they were consumers.

However, three quarters (75%) of the tourists interviewed had enjoyed the markets, and they all claimed that their expectations of an African market had been met. Such tourists said to me that they liked the markets because of the large variety of African objects displayed there, the friendliness of the traders and sales-persons, and the many interesting people they had met there. A female tourist from Germany, whom I met at the PAM, called the markets '*heimlich*' (literally 'homely' but with a strong connotation of intimacy in a place where one enjoys privacy). '*Heimlich*' was followed by the remark: 'I saw a woman breast feeding her child', revealing a sense that she had gained access into the private life of the saleswoman, something less than likely to have occurred had the market been more openly commercialised (as she understood the notion). The insight she gained into the private life of another person extended her personal shopping experience beyond the consumption of objects as commodities and helped mask for her the market's commercial nature. Such 'privileged insights' into the lives of traders, which many tourists felt they gained when visiting the markets, functioned as 'truth markers' which, according to MacCannell, 'function to cement the bond of tourist and [tourist] attraction by elevating the information possessed by the tourist to privileged insights' (1976: 137-138).

In this chapter I have focused on the tourist as a customer at the markets where I conducted fieldwork. I have done that in order to understand their demand for the goods on sale at the markets, and place that understanding into the maim argument of my dissertation. I have looked at the choices made by consumers to discover what motivated their quest for African objects and how they realised that quest. The major reasons customers purchased African objects were that the objects represented what they perceived as being typically African or African art, that the

object was handcrafted, and that it had been produced according to traditional prototypes and revealed signs of use in ritual or daily life of the people who had produced it—including smells. All of these were qualities that helped to enchant the tourist and mask the commercial circumstances under which s/he had obtained the object purchased.

Analysing consumers' demands for African objects also gives us insights into the reasons for the masking process of the commodity nature of the objects I studied, particularly during the interactions between traders and customers. A significant reason for that masking process was that customers did not come to the markets simply to buy a commodity. Rather, they wished to obtain what they perceived as an 'authentic' piece of Africa or African art. Analysing how the consumer's demand was constituted in terms of stereotypes of Africa gives us insights into the perceptions of consumers, mainly non-African, about what constitutes 'authentic' Africa or African art for them. This is an issue I return to in chapter eight. Before I do that, however, I focus attention on a special kind of consumer of African objects—the collector, and I use the chapter that follows to do that and to show how collectors' relationships with the objects in their private collections were another means of masking the commodity nature of African objects.

Chapter seven: The Collectible—an object of passion

> For a while the object is a resistant material body, it is also, simultaneously, a mental realm over which I hold sway, a thing whose meaning is governed by myself alone. It is all my own, the object of my passion (Baudrillard 1968: 110).

1. Introduction

So far I have investigated African objects in the world of the three Cape Town markets on which much of my study focused. I have been concerned with how, and the extent to which, the commodity nature of African objects was masked by their non-commodity characteristics, characteristics they derived from such attributes as the places where they were sold, market participants' relationships towards to the objects, and the stories those market participants told about the objects. In this chapter I focus on collectors as the archtypical consumers of African objects.[47] I look closely at how they too masked these objects' commodity nature, and how, in seeing themselves as superior to tourists-consumers, they reinforced that masking. Three issues concern us here: First, collectors' denials that their collections were investments. Second, the way collectors differentiated themselves from other purchasers of African objects. Third collectors' 'passionate' relationships with their objects. All three demonstrate how collectors convinced themselves (and others) that collecting is not simply hoarding commodities but a sophisticated passion for 'pieces of art' that are clearly, therefore, not simple commodities.

My fieldwork brought me into contact with twelve collectors (nine South Africans and three Germans). Seven said they had been collectors, not necessarily of African objects, from a young age. The remaining five had started collecting as adults, all with African objects. They were variously motivated to collect. Helga (German) had lived in Senegal for six years with her husband and there experienced African dances and began to collect African masks. Irene (German) inherited her deceased husband's collection and felt she should maintain it. Joyce and Barbara (both South African) became interested in the objects during university studies in history

[47] Collectors both in the private and public sphere and their networks or relationships with each other play an important role in determining the authenticity and the value of African objects. They were among the first to appropriate the African object into the realm of art (Taylor 2003, Plattner 2000, Errington 1997, Torgovnick, 1990, Price 1989).

of art, an interest that developed into collecting. Bernd (South African) did perceive his collection as an investment. He said: 'I started to collect African art because I had read in many papers that collecting would be a good investment…I am retired. Collecting gives me something to do… Living in Africa I have good opportunities to obtain African art for a good price' (3.6.97)[48].

Table 4: Demographic data about collectors interviewed

Name	Gender	age	country of residence	education	job training	Employment	Description of collection
Andrew	M	40	South Africa	university	Engineer	Gallery owner	Diverse objects from all over Africa (approx.450 pieces)
Barbara	F	51	South Africa	university	history of art	None	Zulu spoons and diverse objects (approx.300)
Bernd	M	68	South Africa	university	Engineer	Retired	Weapons (approx. 400 pieces)
Eric	M	54	South Africa	no data	sales representative	Gallery owner	Diverse objects from all over Africa (approx.1000 pieces)
Helga	F	45	Germany	high school	graphic design	Gallery owner	West African masks (approx.300 pieces)
Irene	F	58	Germany	high school	Merical	Gallery owner	Diverse objects from all over Africa (approx. 1000 pieces)
Jacques	M	56	South Africa	university	Surveyor	None	Diverse objects from all over Africa (approx. 3000 pieces)
Jan	M	34	South Africa	university	Craftsman	None	Beadwork (approx. 200 pieces)
Joyce	F	46	South Africa	university	history of art	Curator	Beadwork (approx. 200 pieces)
Sebastian	M	55	Germany	university	Physics	gallery owner	West African masks (approx. 400 pieces)
Thomas	M	52	South Africa	university	Architect	architect	Diverse objects from all over Africa (approx. 250 pieces)
Zandile	F	30	South Africa	high school	None	none	Trade beads and diverse objects (approx. 200 pieces)

Pearce (1992) argues that to collect is an instinctual human characteristic. Children collect stamps, coins, shells, dinky toys, etc., and so develop the urge for exchanging and trading their collected treasures (Pearce 1992: 47). Yet, not everyone is a collector nor can everyone afford to be one. According to Alsop (1982), 'to collect is to gather objects belonging to a category the collector happens to fancy; and art collecting is a form of collecting, in which the category is, broadly speaking, works of art' (Alsop 1982: 76). Hence, collections comprise objects taken out

[48] He refers to the objects as art not as commodities, despite his awareness that his collection is a potential investment. I return to this point below.

of their former contexts and grouped with other similarly categorised objects in a self-contained and self-referential unit, the collection. In the case of African objects, which are often objects of daily use such wooden bowls or spoons, their original functions are substituted by others, for example, their aesthectics (Steiner 1994: 13).

In this chapter I aim to understand collecting in the context of my argument about the commodification, and its masking, of African objects. I use field data to show and analyse how and why collectors masked the commodity nature of the objects in their collections and shops, and to compare their masking devices with those used by other market participants.

2. Collecting—the masking of an investment?

All twelve collectors seemed to have spent large sums on their collections of between 200 and 3,000 pieces. Yet, when I asked them: 'Do you perceive your collection as an investment?' All but two answered: 'No', explaining in words similar to Thomas's: 'I buy what appeals to my senses and not what appeals to my bank account' (7.6.97). Or as Jacques, who had the largest collection, put it: 'Collecting is my life, the cost of objects is unimportant to me' (17.2.98). As Jan, who collects South African beadwork, said: 'If it were an investment, I would be very wealthy man, which I am not' (8.8.98). Why, I was led to wonder, did these collectors deny that their collections were investments? Was it because recognising their collections as investments would also mean accepting the objects' commercial values as potential commodities?

Most collectors in the research sample did not perceive the objects in their collections as commodities (Steiner 1994: 163). Andrew, a collector and a gallery owner who sometimes took items from his collection to sell in his gallery, explained: 'I sell it in my gallery when it becomes a commodity to me'. His remark led me to ask him: 'How does it become a commodity?' His reply: 'I do not want to hoard things in my house. Sometimes pieces of my collection lose their personal value to me. I lose interest in them. Just recently, I sold two very valuable pieces [*Yoruba* figurines] from my collection because, when I looked at them, they were commodities, they had no meaning to me any more and I did not want be surrounded by them' (15.8.1998). Andrew's statement indicates that, when obtaining items for his collection, he did not regard them as commodities, and he therefore masked their commodity nature by reference to their

special meaning to him. As he said, 'The piece has to speak to me, it has to have a strong presence, so that I enjoy its aesthetic qualities'. Yet, that special meaning can be lost, particularly when objects are seen as being too common, even if only by their being copied, because that then revealed their commodity nature: 'The *Yoruba* figurines had lost this presence...Maybe I saw too many copies of them elsewhere' (15.8.98).

Andrew's statements reveal the personal nature of collecting and of the relationship between collector and object. It also reveals how their being personalised transforms the objects in a collection into non-commodities. As the African object enters the world of collectibles it leaves the world of the markets and circulating commodities, at least for the time it is part of a collection. Kopytoff (1986: 65) has described this process of removal from the market sphere as decommodification and singularisation. The African object is decommodified by the substitution of its exchange value with non-material, ideological values. Hence its commodity nature is masked. The object may be enhanced by the aesthetic evaluations imposed on it by the individual collector; it may become sacralised or fetishised. The object is singularised, in that it is no longer object X among a mass of objects found at the markets. It becomes unique in the eyes of the collector. But at the same time it becomes part of larger entity—a collection.

Singularisation involves all collector picking out a certain object and not another. Singularisation may, however, result in a paradox. As Kopytoff has noted: 'As one makes them more singular and more worthy of being collected, one makes them valuable; and if they are valuable they acquire a price and become a commodity and their singularisation is to that extent undermined' (1986: 81). The latter process was exactly what the collectors I interviewed seemed to want to hide, through denying the investment value of their collections. Instead of emphasising their exchange value, they emphasised the symbolic value, in terms of status and prestige, of their collections. As Eric explained: 'It helps me in my gallery that people know that I have been a collector for a long time. You are seen as an expert' (27.1.98). A unique piece in a collection, or an entire unique collection, exemplifies good taste, education, expertise and extended trading networks, rather than simply wealth. Talking to collectors revealed that their world was not free of competition and status orientation. All collectors were proud of their own personal collection and convinced that it was the best. As Eric remarked about another collector who had more

objects than he: 'It's quality not quantity that counts' (27.1.98). Or, as Irene said of one of the South African collectors: 'His pieces are of bad quality. He told me that he has collected for so many years and he has a gallery. [Yet] I cannot understand how he can collect such pieces, nor that he can actually sell them' (23.9.98).

Despite the emphasis collectors placed on the symbolic value of their collections, most kept records of the estimated market values of the objects they possessed. By doing so they revealed the blurred nature of the art-commodity boundary. Such records included price lists of similar objects obtained by major auction houses, and prices displayed at galleries or obtained by asking other collectors. Moreover, most collectors I met constantly bought and sold objects, some purchasing African objects solely to resell them. Table 4 indicates that five of the twelve collectors were owners of galleries that specialised in African objects. Hence, just like the market traders, their livelihoods depended on sales of such objects. Such gallery owners distinguished the objects to be sold from those they kept in their collections. Yet, as we have seen, they occasionally resold one of their prized objects. This occurred especially when they were promised enough return to purchase a yet better object so as to increase the standard of their whole collection.

That collectors kept lists of the objects' prices, and that they sometimes sold them, were clear indications of the exchange value of the objects in their collection, hence of their potential to be commodities.[49] Yet, when I talked to collectors about the matter, most were adamant that their collections did not comprise simple commodities. Just as the Nigerian *Tiv* (Bohannan 1959) ranked three spheres of exchange[50] across the boundaries of which exchanges were particular difficult, so, it seemed, did most of the collectors I met. They appeared to differentiate particularly clearly between ordinary (lowest sphere) commodities (which included street market objects) and the objects in their personal collections. Collectibles were ranked as highly prestigious, their commodity nature masked by the status they bestowed on their owners and by the fact that, when exchanged for cash (as commodities), it was primarily in order to generate the

[49] Knowledge of the market value of collectibles is also crucial for insurance purposes.
[50] The *Tiv*'s exchange spheres: the lowest is the commodity sphere, the second is the prestige sphere, the third is the sphere in which women and children are exchanged (Bohannan 1959).

means necessary to obtain an even more socially valuable object for the collection. In a sense, then, the collectibles formed a very highly prestigious sphere of items, exchangeable only for items of similar status yet often requiring commodification—through use of money—to effect those exchanges. The objects in galleries seemed to represent a middle sphere, in that collectors perceived the gallery objects as less commercialised than those at street markets, but more so than their collectibles. Hence, collectors appeared to construct a symbolic sphere of exchange of collectibles which differentiated them from things they perceived as commodities.

Within the symbolic sphere of exchange of collectibles, the most preferred yet infrequently possible form of exchange is to swop one object for another belonging to another collector, and thereby to avoid explicit money valuations. Most collectors had a few items in their collections which they had obtained through swops. Jacques, for example, had recently visited New York, to swop three of his objects for a piece that, he said, was too valuable to be obtained through a money-based purchase. The American collector exchanged his object for Jacques' objects because he could not find good enough examples of them in the States, and he desired them to complete his own collection[51]. Swopping collectibles is a form of exchange that not only keeps the objects in their appropriate sphere of exchange between persons of appropriate status—like the *kula* valuables in the Trobriand Islands (Malinowski 1922). It also creates and maintains interpersonal relationships between those of appropriate status and reinforces those statuses. Collectors' exchanges with one another imply recognising each other's collector status and create social networks through which imaginary boundaries between collectors and non-collectors are created. I return to the issue below.

[51] I was told that he had wanted them to 'complete' his collection. But observing the extent to which collectors were always keen to find additional items to improve their collection, the notion of completion seems inappropriate. Yet to say that one's collection is always in need of improvement is to say that it is not really as good as one would like it to be, and therefore not of the status that deserves to be acknowledged as a real collection. To say it needs an item or two to reach completion is less threatening of that status.

3. The collector

> Suddenly such collectors emerge alongside Noah, at the margin of human adventure, that pivotal point where man finds himself rivalling God and teeters between mastery and madness (Elsner and Cardinal 1994: 6).

Collectors I interviewed not only differentiated the objects in their collections from those other research participants purchased. They also differentiated themselves from others among my research participants. Collectors' self-definitions or, better, their descriptions of themselves as collectors and others as people who simply accumulate objects, contained within them devices for masking the commercial nature of collectibles. A major form of distinction was the collectors' assertions of authority to determine the authenticity of African objects.

Collectors' attitudes to non-collectors, and their claims of authority, were revealed by many of their statements. Eric said: 'There has been an influx of African traders coming in from all parts of Africa, bringing with them copies, copies and more copies, and very bad copies, to which they refer as antiques... tourists buy that cheap stuff. They do not know what they buy, and they have no eye to distinguish fakes from originals. They sometimes come to my shop and wonder why the things I sell are so much more expensive than the objects they see at Greenmarket Square. Tourists never buy from me. My clients are mainly collectors' (27.1. 98). Or, as Andrew put it: 'Tourists and laymen do not see the different quality of the things I sell. They get confused when they see the objects I keep upstairs [Andrew kept some objects on the second floor of his shop which, according him, were collector's items]. That is why I opened the gallery in the Waterfront where I only sell collector's items' (16.1.98). Jacques, talking about street traders, said: 'They sell rubbish. One can find the odd good piece among them. But most of it is faked and manufactured in Cameroon in large factories. Street traders cater for a different market; they sell to people who do not know a thing about African art. They do not know the difference. I would never buy such crap' (17.2.98). Yet, Jacques was involved in ongoing relationships with traders, when I visited him two market traders came to his house to offer their objects to him. Such remarks reveal collectors' sceptical and sneering attitudes towards street market traders, tourists and laypersons who, collectors said, lack the ability to judge the quality and ascertain the authenticity of African objects (Errington 1997: 138). Yet, the remarks also reveal that collectors

are just as much performers as market traders are. In chapter five I showed how traders used stories to persuade their customers to purchase objects from them. Collectors perform in a similar way. They also tell stories about themselves and their collections to persuade other collectors, friends, scholars or the visiting anthropologist that the objects in their collections are authentic. Similar to traders, collectors construct stories about the object's life history either by reciting a genealogy of ownership or the ethnographic data of the objects in their collections (Errington 1997: 98-101, Gershick Pers. Comm.).

What were the reasons for the collectors' sense of superiority? It seemed as if collectors used the claim that others sell and buy cheap copies and fakes, made for the sole purpose of sale, to reassure themselves of the authenticity and the essentially non-commodified nature of the objects in their collections (Errington !997: 115, 137). Constructing stories which pronounce the collectors superiority over other enabled them to mask the commodity character of their collectibles by maintaining that it is others who buy commodities, not real collectors.

Yet, the collectors' claim about the authenticity of their collectibles appears frail, indeed motivated by their awareness, and fear, of the presence of inauthentic objects. As Eric explained: 'To find the right piece is like walking in a minefield. There are so many good fakes and copies around' (27.1.1998). Orvell (1989: xvii) says that: 'One might imagine that the concept of authenticity begins in any society when the possibility of fraud arises, and that fraud is at least possible whenever transactions...routinely occur, especially when the society becomes so large that one usually deals with strangers, not with neighbours'. By constructing a negative image of non-collectors and their objects, and by establishing their own closed trading networks, collectors construct an imaginary boundary which enables them to reassure themselves that 'strangers' and their undesirable, inauthentic objects are kept on the other side of the boundary. In a sense, the highly preferred exchange of objects between 'reputable' collectors was a means of maintaining that very boundary.

Another means to differentiate themselves from others and to reinforce their superior status as collectors was to claim 'a trained eye'. Eric explained: 'I have a well-trained eye. I can distinguish a fake from an original. I look, for example, for signs of use. I know that they fake

them as well. However, if you know what to look for, you can see that it is faked' (27.1.98). In our discussions, all English-speaking collectors used the phrases 'trained eye' or 'develop an eye'. These phrases are unusual in the German language. German-speaking collectors used the phrase 'I had to develop a feeling for the objects' [*Ich mußte ein Gefühl für die Objekte entwickeln*]. The phrases 'trained eye' and 'develop a feeling' refer to collectors' ability to distinguish a fake from an authentic object, to determine its origin and age and whether it represents a traditional prototype (Errington 1997: 101). Significantly, they also refer to the collectors' ability to appreciate an object's aesthetic value, exemplified in the comment that: 'the object has to speak to me, it has to have a strong presence'.

Those phrases are based on modernist art historical theory. Recall my discussion in chapter one about modernist art historians' claims that 'art speaks to those who can hear art speak' (Bell 1958: 98, cf. Fry 1920, Collingwood 1959, Greenberg 1965). Collectors too saw themselves as those who 'can hear art speak' ['the object has to speak to me'] and thereby distinct from others who lack the competence to 'spiritually' appreciate art. The collected African object is, like art, thus embroiled in a social status distinction, enabling collectors to construct an image of themselves as a distinct social category, with a superior understanding and appreciation of the objects' aesthetic qualities. The process of social distinction helped collectors to mask the commodity nature of their collectibles. As Crain (1997: 292) points out, 'domination [or differentiation] proceeds through the appropriation of significations of other groups [traders and tourists] as elites [collectors] strive to control signification through the monopoly of the code [art]'.

Yet, comparing the characteristics of tourists and other laypersons with collectors reveals significant similarities to those of collectors. Like collectors when they had just begun to collect,[52] most tourists were 'novices' who had never before confronted such an abundance of African objects. Tourists needed to obtain information about the objects they encountered at the

[52] Comments of some collectors about beginning to collect: Jacques: 'As a beginner, it is very hard to tell if a piece is really authentic. I was always afraid that I would buy a fake'. Eric: 'I found the objects ugly and could not believe anyone would like to own them'. Zandile: 'After I got this fetish I became very interested in African art. I bought books, catalogues and magazines about African art and studied them. I also went to art galleries frequently to get an eye for the objects. At first it was not easy to know what to buy'.

markets and did so from traders. Tourists took in the traders' stories and compared different objects, thereby 'training their eyes,' seeking the one piece that would fit their expectations of an object representing Africa, and their journey. Collectors had to 'train their eyes' to be able to find an object representing the overall status of their collection. Both collectors' and tourists' reasons for 'training the eyes' arose from their search for authentic African objects.

Collectors' criteria for selecting a particular object were also similar to those tourists or other laypersons applied. As mentioned in chapter six, tourists and other customers selected objects that were handcrafted, exotic and produced according to traditional prototypes, or items previously used in ritual or in the daily life of the people who had produced them. These were the criteria used to ensure that the object purchased represented a typical piece of Africa. Most collectors mentioned the same criteria[53] for their choices of African objects. And, similar to tourists when selecting objects, collectors also smelled, touched and inspected the object carefully. Jacques explained: 'The scent of a piece is important. If it has a strong smell of fire, you know that it could be faked...They bury the pieces in the ground and make a fire above them, so that they look old' (17.2. 98). Jacques' remark is revealing of the constructed constitution of authenticity. In chapter six I showed how some tourists enjoyed the strong smell of objects and perceived odour as an indication of an object's authenticity. Yet, according to Jacques, a strong smell can indicate a faked object. The different interpretations of an object's scent show there is no absolute way to define authenticity. Tourists and collectors both sought authenticity, but they constituted it differently. Indeed, as Cohen (1988: 374) notes: 'authenticity is a socially constructed concept and its social connotations are therefore not given but negotiable'.

Collectors' definitions of authenticity were quite erudite since they based their knowledge on books, catalogues and magazines about African art. All possessed libraries of books about their

[53] Irene: 'The object has to be authentic. Authentic pieces are pieces that were made for traditional purposes, traditional use and were also of high artistic values. The most obvious difference between a copy and an authentic piece is quality of their carving, which is poor and the fact that they are new'. Irene's statement summarises the statements made by most collectors regarding authenticity and the criteria for selecting objects.

objects, although some told me that their interest in the meanings and historical backgrounds of the objects had developed seriously only after their first acquisitions of African objects. They did not read much about objects before they started to collect. But thereafter they had turned to literature to help 'train their eyes'. Although tourists based their knowledge of the objects they had purchased mainly on the stories traders told them, those very stories often elaborated items in books and catalogues traders read about African objects, books and catalogues that collectors too consulted.

What, then, really underlay the collectors' claims that they were different and superior to tourists? Perhaps it was based on a common belief in western thought in the authority of the written word over the oral (Finnegan 1998: 170). Collectors fetishised the intellectual endeavour of becoming knowledgeable from textual sources; tourists fetishised the oral source, which they understood to represent the 'real' Africa of non-literacy performance, rather than written information transfer. Yet, no matter whether it was the written or the oral story, all had the potential to place the object into a context beyond that of commodity consumption.

4. Passion for the object

Especially after having visited Jacques at his home where he housed his collection, I wondered why people actually gather so many objects of the same kind. Jacques is an extreme example of a collector. I had never seen so many African objects in one place, apart from at the PAM. They were everywhere: in the kitchen, the bathroom, the three bedrooms, the lounge and even in the toilet. One could move only very carefully through the rooms and passages to avoid stepping on the objects. Jacques admitted he could not clean his house because of lack of space. His house truly reflected his passion for the objects and for collecting. He explained: 'I live with my objects. There is no space for a woman in my house' (17.2.98)[54].

Case 13: A visit to a collector's home—'The sultan of African objects'

Jacques' house was situated in upmarket Camps Bay, Cape Town. Entering his garden I noticed the remains of his former collection, around 200 cacti. He told me he his collection had numbered some 5000 cacti before he had

[54] Whether that refers to a woman as companion or as cleaner was not altogether clear.

started collecting African objects. He had also previously collected various other things, including Cape Dutch garden furniture, minerals, shells and indigenous plants. His house and garden bore the traces of all these collections. Jacques was in his mid-fifties. He was divorced and lived alone.

Jacques had started collecting African objects five years earlier. His collection included over 3,000 pieces from all over Africa, and at least 100 books about African objects. He began by collecting southern African objects, concentrating on headrests and weapons. Later he included objects from central and east Africa and, at the time of my fieldwork, he was concentrating on West African objects. He explained that starting to collect in southern Africa is convenient for a beginner, because, he said, objects there are not faked as often as in other regions: 'As a beginner, it is very hard to tell if a piece is really authentic. I was always afraid that I would buy a fake'.

Jacques obtained his objects through various sources. Sometimes he travelled to the people using and producing the objects. He showed me photographs of a trip to Namibia, where he sought to acquire objects from the Himba people. He knew only a few words in the Himba language. Communication thus took the form of his drawing in the sand the objects he wanted. The Himba, he said, were very willing to exchange objects with him for money and for goods, such as maize meal, sugar and tobacco. Other objects he owned had belonged to an old collection from a Belgian woman who had lived in Rwanda. Her missionary grandfather had collected the objects, but she had no interest in the collection after leaving Rwanda and asked a dealer in Paris to sell it. He offered the collection to Jacques who, unlike some others, frequently bought whole collections. According to Jacques, to just take the good pieces would be to 'decapitate' a collection. Some other items in his collection had come from a museum in Dubai, where, for R500, he had acquired two boxes of objects the museum had no use for. Jacques also bought at local galleries and acquired objects from traders who operated from the PAM, although he insisted that they bring their wares to him. Two traders visited him regularly to offer their objects for sale. In addition, Jacques obtained African objects by swopping them with other collectors.

I asked Jacques how he decided what kinds of objects to buy. He replied that he was at first only interested in 'very primitive and crudely executed objects' but had later started 'to develop a taste for the more refined works'. On the whole, he said, it was intuition, taste and knowledge that led him to his decisions. Jacques studied his books about African objects, compared the objects' styles, and analysed their patinas and their signs of use: 'The objects have to fit a traditional canon. The patina must be carefully inspected for marks of usage. A knife handle will have a much lighter patina at the spot where it was handled. Or a stool will show patina not only at the seat but also on the part on which it was carried around'. He mentioned that old patina would 'sweat out' of the wood if objects were left in the sun for a long time. The age of the object was important to him. But, he said, an object could be 200 years old and still show no signs of patina because it was never used. He preferred more recent objects, if they showed signs of usage, which appeared to be one of his major criteria for choosing an object. Personal taste also influenced his selections: 'The piece must speak to me and have a strong presence'. Objects' prices concerned him little. According to Jacques, African objects' prices vary according to age and the place where they are sold. Jacques explained: 'Some good pieces I got very cheap, others were very expensive. However, if they are expensive, they

must convince me. Because if I do not like a piece a hundred percent and would buy it for a lot of money, I am sure that I would not be able to resell it later on, if I wanted to'. Jacques' livelihood depended on his collection and he sold objects to Waterfront galleries. To him, collecting meant constant selling and reselling because as a collector becomes more experienced and starts to discover better pieces, s/he needs to exchange them for fewer objects to increase the overall standard of her or his collection.

Jacques clearly distinguished himself from traders who sold on the streets. He maintained: 'They sell rubbish'. However, he was equally critical of the African objects displayed at the National Gallery and at some commercial galleries in Cape Town. Most objects in the National Gallery, he said, were not authentic, because they had never been used. He also criticised the National Gallery for not doing enough to foster public awareness of African Art. And, he emphasised: 'The commercial galleries price rubbish objects at very high prices among a few good pieces'. Jacques planned to establish a cultural centre in Cape Town where his objects would be displayed. He said that an expert from the Museum of Man in Paris would assist him in setting up the project.

Jacques' house reminded me of Baudrillard's comparison of a collection with a harem and the collector with a sultan (Baudrillard 1968: 10-11). In his living room, Jacques sat surrounded by all his objects, taking one and then another, showing it to me, explaining its use and its distinctiveness. Like the sultan who has power to control his harem, the collector has the power to control her/his collection. Jacques said that he derived pleasure from deciding what is good to collect and how to arrange the collection. Jacques explained: 'The collection is mine. If I want to, I can even throw it all away...which I did with my cacti'. (17.2.98). As a collector, he can exercise an almost absolute form of control: destruction (Elsner and Cardinal 1994: 3).

In Jacques I saw (what I perceived as) a passionate man. The words he used to describe his objects reminded me of words used to describe a human being. He never used the pronoun 'it', but always she or he. The mask: 'she comes from the Ivory Coast. Look how refined her features are'. Touching 'her' features with his fingers. The walking stick: 'look how beautifully he is carved'. As did some of the traders mentioned in chapter four, Jacques appeared to have personified the objects with which he had surrounded himself. His entire life appeared to revolve around his objects for which he was seeking an even larger house. Such a passion for objects indicates a form of fetishism, the fundamental aspect of which, according to Marx, is that the objects or 'commodities appear as independent beings endowed with life and entering into

relation with one another and the human race. . . . This I call fetishism...'[55] (Marx [1867] 1993: 86-87). Objects enter into personal relationships with humans and in this way they become fetishes—object of human desire and worship.

Not all collectors were as passionate as Jacques. But all claimed that collecting was their way of life. As Zandile put it: 'I am African. I want to be surrounded by African artefacts. I love to collect them. In fact I could spend all my spare time with my collection. But my husband gets angry if I spend too much time and money on my artefacts' (19.7.98). Eric too explained: 'I have collected from a young age. I started with insects and stamps. I have collected African art for 30 years. My collection is my life' (27.1.98). Andrew recognised that collecting might be 'unhealthy...I am too passionate about some objects, collecting gets under your skin' (16.1.98).

Such statements indicate that collecting now occupied so large a part of the collectors' lives, that their status as collectors, and their collections themselves, had become markers of their identity as persons. 'I am what I own' says Pearce (1992: 47), while Clifford (1988: 218) notes that: 'In the West ...collecting has long been a strategy for the deployment of a possessive self ...' Collectors' passion for their objects, in the sense that the objects became part of their 'possessive' selves, appeared to be major reason for their collecting. Yet, collectors' passionate relationships with the objects also appeared to mask the fact that they had actually spent money to acquire them. Whenever I referred to the financial side of collecting it was as if I had antagonised them. They shook their heads and claimed that the financial side of collecting plays no role, some saying that collecting was a form of addiction and if one gets 'hooked' one cannot but go on because there is always a missing piece to complete their collection. Collectors told me that I could not understand them or their passionate behaviour without myself becoming a collector. As Sebastian said: 'You cannot understand a drug addict, unless you have been one yourself'.

[55] Original:'Hier scheinen die Produkte des menschlichen Kopfes mit eigenem Leben begabte, untereinander und mit dem Menschen in Verhältnis stehende selbständige Gestalten... Das nenne ich den Fetischismus...'(Marx [1867] 1993: 86-87).

Another reason for collecting was the apparent pleasure collectors derived from satisfying what some saw as a peculiar hunting and gathering instinct: 'treasure hunting' or 'the thrill of the chase' for the missing piece. As Baudrillard (1968) argues, it is precisely the titillation that comes from finding a missing piece that is an important motivation to collect more and more objects. Jacques referred to collecting as 'treasure hunting. One never knows what one will find the next day. It is very exciting' (17.2.98). One is reminded here at the Dakar-Djibouti Mission (1931-1933) which Leiris describes in L'Afrique Fantome (1934). Leiris and Griaule were members of the mission which was funded by the French government. Its aim was to 'hunt' for African objects in 13 African countries for display in French museums. The mission acquired 3600 objects (Torgovnick 1990: 267, n1, Clifford1988: 169). The hunting instinct appears to be part of the ethos of museums and follows the model of natural history collecting in its endeavour to collect as many species as possible of the same kind (Hall 1997: 155-156, Errington 1997: 25, Stoller Pers. Comm....).

Certain African objects, such as the *Zulu* spoons which Barbara collected, 'are rare today'. Seeking them to fill a gap in her collection seemed to provide her with excitement, thrill and pride. 'The thrill of the chase' included travelling to auctions, to places where the object might still be found in use, and convincing other collectors to part with a desired piece. Jacques said: 'The search is the greatest when you collect...one day you may find a real treasure' (17.2.98). According to Barbara, once a person has decided to collect a certain category of objects, she is seduced by the objects that fit into that category. Collectors' passionate relationships with the objects draw them to the places where they might be discovered, in Barbara's case all the way to Belgium. She explained to me: 'At first I had one Zulu spoon, now I have 152 spoons. It might sound crazy, but I love them. I even went to Brussels to buy three spoons there. I read in *Africques Noire* or some other magazine that they were selling them in a gallery in Brussels. I had to go...my husband nearly divorced me for that' (21.7.98).

Hence, objects no longer arrived by chance. They were sought after (cf. Pearce 1992). Yet, the very fact that collectors were seduced by the objects had the function of masking from themselves the financial side of their collecting habit. The absent object, and how to find it, were

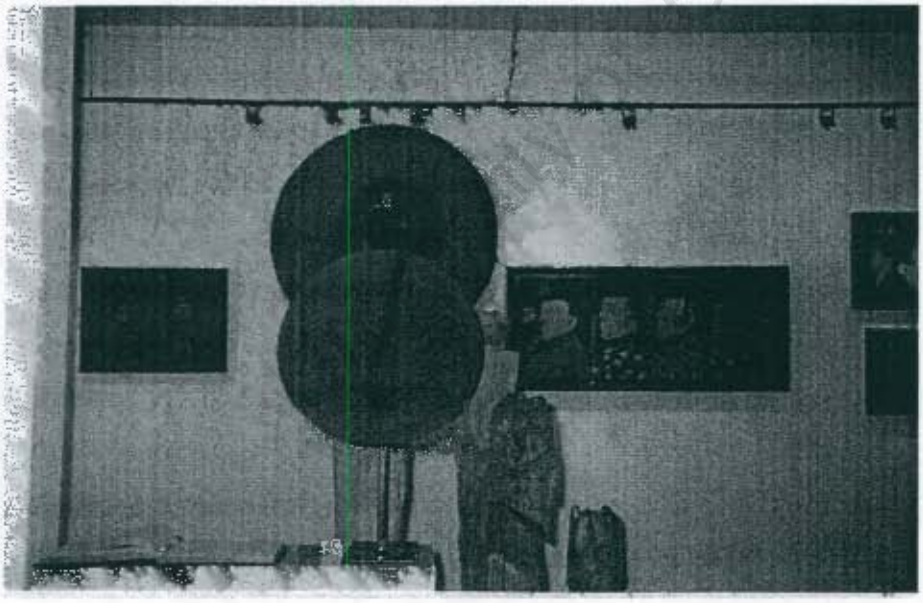
prime considerations. The cost to obtain it appeared to be of less concern (Akin 1996:114), although in some cases collector's spouses did attempt to control the collectors' urges.

I also observed how the collectors' hunting instinct, which masked the financial side of collecting, was motivated in addition by a belief that their collections could 'save' African objects from their destruction or from their complete disappearance. Just as 'salvage ethnography' (Errington 1997: 159, Clifford 1986: 112) aims to save the 'other' in text, so does collecting salvage the objects of the 'other' in collections. As Eric explained: 'The Africans have lost all their pride in their culture. They exchange beautiful wooden bowls for plastic containers. It is important that we collect their objects' (17.2.98). And Jan, who collected beadwork, claimed that his work has become ever more urgent because, he said, people no longer use the beaded objects in rituals and therefore no longer keep or produce them.

Clifford (1986: 113) points out that 'salvage ethnography' results from an assumption that 'the other society is weak and 'needs' to be represented by an outsider [and that what matters in its life is its past, not present or future]'. Interest in other people's lives, and in saving their material objects from destruction, helps to mask the objects' commodity nature. Salvation appears to be in distinct contrast to commodity consumption, because salvation points to the saviours' altruistic motives and not to her bank account. Yet, salvage collecting—in the sense of collectors perceiving themselves as keepers of others' pasts—enables collectors to further differentiate themselves from non-collectors, who usually do not claim to perform 'salvage shopping'. Concurrently, salvage collecting heightens the collectors' status. In this regard it is noteworthy that private collectors have earlier donated many of the African objects found in museums today. Such donations then immortalise the collector as indicated by the names of famous collections, such as Rockefeller (New York), Barbier-Mueller (Geneva) or Jonathan Lowen (Brenthurst /Johannesburg) (Akin 1996: 113). Eric, Helga, and Irene all planned to donate their collections to a museum. Jacques planned to open his own museum. Collectors might deny that collecting was an investment in financial terms. But they can hardly deny that they gain 'symbolic capital' (Bourdieu 1996: 291) in terms of status, prestige and immortality (cf. Davison 1991, Pearce 1992, Clifford 1988, 1997).

5. Conclusion

I began this chapter with an epigrammatic quote from Baudrillard (1968) which summarises much of the above. I have shown that, when African objects enter the world of collectibles, they become 'a thing whose meaning is governed' by the collector alone, a collector who removes the objects from their former context of the market, the village (of users) or other collectors and then redefines it. Sebastian, a collector and gallery owner in Frankfurt, Germany, displayed a collection of 60 hairdresser signs from Nigeria, the Ivory Coast and Burkina Faso in his gallery. These were signs formerly used to advertise a hairdresser's place and to display a range of hairstyles that the hairdressers could do for her or his clients. In the gallery the signs were placed on white walls, light falling on them from small spotlights above. They were now up for sale as 'Contemporary West African Art'. In a collection, objects become part of a larger entity and their single meanings are subordinated to the meaning of the collection. The hairdresser signs, having been placed within the context of an art gallery, were categorised as art. In that process their aesthetic value was stressed, with the likely consequence that their commercial value was masked.



Picture 13: Travelling objects: Hairdresser signs and Zulu hats in a gallery in Frankfurt

Baudrillard (1968:7) continues: 'It is all my own, the object of my passion'. Passion appeared to be the major drive behind collecting, and was mentioned to me by all the collectors whom I interviewed. Their passion for the objects could also be felt beyond words, by just listening to their voices and watching them handle their objects. Jacques talked about his objects as if they were human beings. As he put it: 'They are my life. They occupy my space. I share my house with them' (17.02.98). Andrew spoke of his collection as a form of addiction. That is why I have argued that the collectors' passion for the objects masked the commodity nature of African objects by hiding the objects' commodity aspect beneath their personal relationships with the objects and the apparent pleasure and satisfaction which they derived from their collections.

I have further shown that, at the very moments when the objects' commodity nature was most obvious to me, that is, when they were reselling them, most of the collectors denied their apparent commodity nature. I have explained this in terms of separate spheres of exchange which collectors appeared to construct; similar to those observed by Bohannan (1959) among the *Tiv*.

To conclude, I have argued that collectors, more than other research participants were convinced and tried to convince others (gallery owners' clients) that the objects in their collections were art. McEvilley (1988) has noted that: 'One thing we mean when we call something art is to confer honour to it' (McEvilley 1988: 202). Yet, I would argue another thing we mean when we call something art is to confer commercial value to it. But saying that returns us to the paradox Kopytoff (1986) identified and that I have referred to earlier: 'As one makes them [objects] more singular and more worthy of being collected, one makes them valuable; and if they are valuable they acquire a price and become a commodity and their singularisation is to that extent undermined' (1986: 81). My field data suggest that collectors had almost constantly to live with this paradox which they attempted to resolve through stressing their personal relationships to, and valorisation of the objects which seemed to act like a shield, called 'art', to ward off their commodity nature.

Yet, as we have seen in the previous chapters, my other research participants had also to live with that paradox. Many tourist-consumers who desired to obtain African objects had to do so by purchasing them at the various trading places of the markets I studied, and elsewhere. The very

act of buying the objects transformed the objects into commodities, a status for the objects that most consumers attempted to ward off by making reference to a shield that we may describe as 'authentic Africa'.

My discussion of collectors has been the last stage in my journey in the social life of African objects. What has accompanied me during this journey are two concerns: what constitutes Africanness and what should we understand as art/African art. These concerns have appeared and reappeared in almost every chapter where I have described them as the primary non-commodity aspects of the objects of my study, aspects that were used to mask the commodity nature of those objects. I therefore devote my final chapter to a more theoretical analysis of the social constructions of Africanness and art/ African art. I do that in order to seek answers to questions about the socio-cultural sources of the various perceptions and stories I have related about what I have, throughout the dissertation, described as African objects. Do they exist anywhere outside my research universe?

Chapter eight: Out of Africa—Tales of African art and its Africanness

What unites these objects as African, in short, is not a shared nature, not the shared character of the cultures from which they came, but our ideas of Africa...(Appiah 1995: 24).

1. Introduction

In previous chapters I have explained how the contexts through which African objects move in their social biographies lead to their commodity nature being masked (or revealed) to a greater or lesser extent. I have followed the paths of African objects through various social environments to show that, as they moved between contexts, they acquired various meanings, such as art, souvenir, artefact, collectible or commodity. Each of these meanings marked the relationships between the objects and the people that surrounded them in their various environments. The meanings also became the substance of, and reinforced, the many stories that those people told about the objects. Yet, despite the apparent diversity of contexts, meanings and stories, there was an omnipresent and almost omnipotent element in the construction of those meanings and in the stories related about the objects: the perception that all the objects were African and shared a common Africanness. A consequence of that element's presence is that the stories not only masked the objects' commodity nature, (see chapter 5) but that they also fashioned and perpetuated a cultural construction of the objects' 'otherness'. The stories did that by creating a distinct boundary around what is understood as African and, by extension therefore, identifying what is understood as non-African and creating a boundary around that category too.

My aim in this chapter is to set the previous chapters, and indeed my main argument, in the broader context of a discussion of the constructed nature of the idea of Africanness and African art. The chapter thus deals only indirectly with the ways African objects are commodified and how that commodification is masked. Yet, it is important because, as I have shown previously, a major reason for the objects being be purveyed and purchased was that they were perceived to be African by virtually all participants in the process of their being transacted. Their Africanness was thus a key element of their meaning, and was used in the processes of their being marketed, and of having their commodity nature masked during those marketing processes. Another such key element in their marketing was their supposed quality as art. Hence, to comprehend the

underlying principles of the commodification of these objects as African one needs to explore the multiple socially constituted meanings both of Africanness and of art, and to ask when, how and by whom they are and were constituted.

In this chapter I thus deal with two descriptive labels: African and art. Both suggest something special. In the opening chapter of my thesis I have shown how art is constructed as something special in the sense of being a contemplated objects distant from the affairs and utility of daily life (Errington 1997: 83). In the remaining chapters I have discussed how Africanness is constructed as something special in the sense that people and objects are othered when the label African is used to describe them. Here I bring these two labels together and argue that what is regarded as special about art generally does not apply in its fullest sense to the quite distinctive sub-category of African art, a sub-category of art that is perceived to be distinctive precisely because of its Africanness. My argument is that at least in the South African context today the Africanness[56] of African art overrides the 'artness' (the quality of useless contemplation) that is said to characterise art in general (Taylor 2003 :7, Errington 1997: 84, Greenberg 1965, 1972, Bell 1914, Kant 1787) and that it masks its nature as art.[57]

In the first part of the chapter I focus on the history of the construction of the Africanness of art that is regarded as being African. In the following parts I concentrate on how constructing objects as African art (that is art constructed by and reflecting a distinctive Africanness) undermines their nature and perceived value as art.

2. Fashioning the category 'African art'

Thus far I have concentrated on the more private stories constructed by sellers, purchasers and collectors about the objects and their Africanness. Here I focus on the 'grand narratives' constructed by social analysts—often outside Africa—about Africanness and African art. I do so because it is those grand narratives that percolate down to and inform the narratives that constitute the stories I have related earlier. I investigate the idea of Africanness to show that,

[56] Although increasing 'northern' country successes of African art auctions suggest that that may now be changing.

when the term African is applied to objects, to people and to the continent as a whole, it carries with it a load of images and stereotypes, all of which have been constructed during and since earlier periods of contact between people from the African continent and others from what might be called the western world (or occident).

Examining the terms used in the descriptions and analysis of what scholars have called African art, and as used also by some of my research participants, I found that terms such as tribal, primitive, archaic and traditional are used quite frequently (Fry 1920, Boas 1927, Himmelheber 1960, Fagg 1963, Thompson 1971, Rubin 1984, Danto 1988). Considering the history of how objects from Africa have been described in non-African contexts reveals that the earlier terminology used to describe visual expressions from Africa reflected the attitudes of nineteenth century European missionaries and colonialists whose interactions with 'the natives' were fashioned by evolutionistic and eurocentric nineteenth century social and political theory (Manning 1985: 170, Mudimbe 1988: 3, Jegede 1990: 32, Hall 1997: 187, Picton 1998: 282, Haustein 1998: 265).

It was those travellers, missionaries, explorers and scientists who gathered the first collections of African objects and carried them home to Europe as evidence of their experiences, together with their journals and letters[58]. At the end of the nineteenth century a substantial number of natural history museums opened in European and American cities to display to the public the material objects gathered from colonised people. The objects were often displayed with zoological, botanical and geological specimens, and sometimes with human specimens too[59] (Vogel 1988: 12, Hall 1997: 185). At about the same time, and with the establishment of colonial rule,

[57] This occurs for quite different reasons and in quite different ways from those that allow for the masking of the commodity nature of the objects at the markets I studied (see earlier chapters that consider how perceptions of these objects as art, as souvenirs and/or as authentic helped mask their commodity nature).

[58] Little documentation exists about the criteria used to select these early acquisitions (Hall 1997: 161; also see Thomas 1989). Hall (ibid.) maintains that the early explorers had little or no insights into indigenous social organisation and were predominantly looking for the most outstanding and peculiar objects, and those that most satisfied their curiosity. They collected primarily sculptures and masks made of wood, ivory and brass which came from sub-Saharan Africa. And, as Vansina (1984: 4) points out, visual expressions from Northern Africa and Egypt were excluded in their categorisation of the 'authentic' African.

[59] It needs to be noted that not only objects were displayed in European cities but also the people from the colonies. The *Exposition Universelle*, Paris 1889 was the first of many national and international exhibitions in major European cities to exhibit people as objects to be looked at (Hall 1997: 195).

colonialists perceived the study of indigenous people in the colonies as potentially beneficial for more efficient rule. The process helped to give rise to the establishment of anthropology (Hall 1997: 161). So called 'armchair' anthropologists, such as Sir James George Frazer using materials from the colonies in museums, illustrated, in graphic forms, their analyses of the evolutionary nature of culture and human history (Lewis 1985: 39, Hall 1997: 186). Simultaneously, some scientists used their collections and the evolutionist analyses in which they were cast to justify a discourse of European imperial superiority (Hall 1997: 186, see also Combes 1994). It is for this reason that Mudimbe (1994: xii) says that the scientific endeavour to study and decipher the African 'other' was a 'political project in which, supposedly, the object [the African 'other'] unveils its being, its secrets, and its potential to a master who could finally domesticate it'. In such a context the often arbitrarily collected objects became evidence—prototypes of the material expression of the social cultural complexities of other people[60], who were portrayed as lower down than modern people on the social evolutionary scale, often in terms of ideas about the 'African savage' (Jegede 1990: 32, see also Vogel 1988). Seen from the evolutionary perspective of such early social scientists, African art was perceived as a crude and fetishistic creation of the native mind and society, leading to the establishment of what has subsequently been described as the paradigm of 'primitivism' (Manning 1985: 170).

The paradigm of 'primitivism' gained prominence in the art world when, at the beginning of the twentieth century, a number of European artists, such as Klee, Braque, Leger and Picasso, chose African art as inspiration for their own, often counter hegemonic works[61] (Manning 1985: 167, Picton 1998: 282). Yet they were quite selective in their choice of objects from Africa. In their search for what they thought was the human emotive and unconscious, they sought African sculptures that represented what were, to them, communal, spiritual and unfettered values, rather than court art (for example from Benin). The latter would, of course, also have been accessible to

[60] For example, Pitt-Rivers used the artefacts collected to establish a historical sequence ostensibly showing the technological development of humankind and seeking common traits among people. The sequences of artefacts were set up to reveal that mankind had evolved from the conditions of lower animals (Hall 1997:187).
[61] The exhibition 'Primitivism in Twentieth Century Art: Affinity of the Tribal and Modern' (1984) at the museum of modern Art in New York was probably the most significant endeavour to portray the inspirational impact of 'primitive art' on modern art, especially on the development of Cubism (Rubin 1984, Errington 1997: 95-96).

them. But they regarded it as too representational, rational and close to their own artistic tradition to be useful for their purposes (Manning 1985:169).

As an example, consider Picasso's response to the various objects he viewed and was inspired by during his numerous visits to Paris's ethnographic museum, the Trocadero. He is quoted as having noted that: 'I felt my strongest artistic emotions when suddenly confronted with the sublime beauty of sculptures executed by the anonymous artists of Africa.... The Negro pieces were *intercesseurs*, mediators.... I always looked at fetishes' (Picasso quoted in Gates 1995: 27, 28). Similarly, Roger Fry noted in 1920, after he had visited the 'Negro sculpture' exhibition at London's Chelsea Book Club: 'It seems unfair to be forced to admit that certain nameless savages have possessed this power not only in a higher degree than we at the moment, but than we as a nation have ever possessed it' (Fry 1920, quoted in Danto 1988: 18). By simply ignoring other visual expressions from Africa, and celebrating the suggested spiritual, abstract, fetishistic and 'primitive' sculpture, Picasso and his colleagues and peers laid the cornerstone for what is now understood to constitute African art. These European artists translated what they saw as African art into their own artistic idiom and thereby constructed a model of African art with primitivism as its basic characteristic.

It appears that, still today, much African art is seen as if through the eyes of artists like Picasso and his friends. Irene, a gallery owner and collector from Frankfurt (see chapter 7) told me that most of her clients are primarily collectors of modern art who 'buy the odd object to have a *prototype* (emphasis added) of this kind of work which they can display together with their modern works'. Contemporary demand for so-called prototypes or for 'authentic' equivalents might have been fashioned to some extent by exhibitions such as the 1984 'Primitivism in the 20th century: Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern' exhibition at New York's Museum of Modern Art, where African objects were displayed side by side with modern European art, to portray the inspirational impact that African art had on modern art (Rubin 1984).

The titles of relatively recent publications such as Goldwater's (1972) *Primitivism in Modern Art* and of exhibitions such as the New York Museum of Modern Art's 'Primitivism in the 20th century' further reveal that terms such as 'primitive' have not disappeared from the taxonomy

used to describe material expressions of people in Africa. Similarly one finds that kind of description used in quite recent texts: for example Danto (1988: 32) writes, in his essay in the catalogue of the ART/artifact exhibition: 'These objects may indeed be Primitive, in the sense that, adequate as they may be for the purposes of the societies that use them, they are further back or further down in the scale of technological evolution than their counterparts in our own technology.'

Combing through a range of theoretical studies, exhibition catalogues and books that focus on Africa's traditional arts, particularly wooden sculptures and masks, I have found many that represent the object of their study in terms of its supposed authenticity, traditionality, primitivity and tribal nature (Fry 1920, Boas 1927, Himmelheber 1960, Fagg 1963, Thompson 1971, Rubin 1984, Danto 1988). This is consistent with many representations of Africa as unchanging[62]—a 'continent that is paradise unto itself' (Errington 1997: 149, Jegede 1990: 3), whose visual productions are based on an assumed communal essence and tribal spirit which leaves no room for individual creativity (Hassan 1996: 3). A substantial number of art historians, as well as public and private collectors, focus on, and seek to emphasise the continuities in visual expressions in Africa, rather than on their changes. To them continuity is often the most important criterion to judge the quality (authenticity) of African objects and African art. This tendency can be found in works such as Fagg's (1963) on Yoruba sculpture or Thompson's (1982) on sculpture in Congo (cf. Manning 1985: 177, Picton 1998: 285). Jegede (1990: 37) pointedly refers to Fagg's claim, in his *Nigerian Images* (1963), that contemporary African art is as false and as foreign to Africa as the skyscraper, precisely because it is not rooted in the past. During my visits to collectors' homes it was these kinds of publications that I found on their bookshelves, and on which, according to the collectors, they based their knowledge about which

[62] Changes in visual expressions and societies on the African continent occurred long before contact with Europeans in the fifteenth century. Migrations, changes in economic organisation and the development of states (such as the kingdoms of Ife, of Benin or of Great Zimbabwe) were internal transformations (Appiah 1995: 23, Picton 1998:282). Vansina has shown that trade routes between East Africa and the sub-Saharan region were developed as early as c. AD 900 (Vansina 1984: 159). Trade was probably the most powerful mechanism for spreading cultural objects over the continent. Hence objects were not exclusively produced for local use but were also traded and borrowed among different peoples. Within the process of mutual borrowing, objects inevitably acquired new usage and meanings. Other external influences such as European trade and Islamic influences, led to further considerable changes in terms of visual expressions and society before colonisation at the end of the nineteenth century (Vansina 1984: 159, Manning 1985: 178, Jegede 1990: 33).

kinds of objects to obtain and how to determine the authenticity of an object. Little wonder, then that their constructions of their collected objects as African art reflected a persistence of the paradigm of primitivism.

Looking back at the perceptions and choices of objects that I observed my research participants having made, it can readily be argued that the selfsame paradigm of 'primitivism' prevailed in the minds of many. Recall some of my research participants' disappointment about Cape Town not being the 'real Africa' (chapter 5). When asked what they thought the 'real' Africa is (or should be), they referred to people living in bush huts, barely dressed and engaging in 'mysterious' rituals, as well as to the presence of wild animals and dirt roads (Errington 1997: 269). Hence, despite present media reports which present modern images of Africa, images of African life as 'primitive' and exotic still persist. The popularity of nude figurines among customers at the market speaks for itself: as I argued in chapter five, to go about unclothed is consistent with an image of unspoiled and primordial life without the influence of modern 'civilisation'.

Influenced to some extent by representations of and publications about African art and Africa, some tourists, in their search for the 'authentic' Africa, were looking for what they regarded as the traditional, the tribal and the primitive. Recall how tourists claimed that 'the pieces I have bought and seen represent the idea of old times. It is real Africa...the past is present in Africa' or that 'life is much slower in Africa than it is in Europe' (page 126). Compare that with what I revealed in chapter six where I showed that the majority of objects purchased by foreign tourists were wooden sculptures, masks and animals. Those tourists' choices appear to have been induced by a common canon of what constitutes African art, a canon fashioned by collectors, art historians and curators who have themselves taken it uncritically from earlier evolutionist perspectives. Contemporary objects were hardly ever among those that tourists purchased, even though they could readily have been assured of a particular kind of authenticity through watching their manufacture at the Pan African Market. Tourists justified their choices by claiming what they had bought were 'beautiful carvings, they are pieces of Africa' or 'this is art, handcrafts: it's part of African traditions'.

To summarise, the subcategory African was constructed around a set of characteristics which draw on a series of images of Africa that reflect a whole series of prejudices about the continent and its people, that derive from the colonial encounter, and that continue to hold strong sway in the western world. By focusing on the continuity of themes, styles, materials and techniques of what are supposed to represent African art, Africa's past is emphasised over its present and future. It is for this reason that Jegede (1990: 30) says that 'the public perception of the attributes of African art has become the traditional to the exclusion of the contemporary'. The constructed set of characteristics of what constitutes African art have far reaching consequences for the production of material and graphic forms in Africa because, as I show in the following section, African material and graphic forms have to abide by the demands of such constructed characteristics to be recognised as African.

3. The tale of African art—the search for an African essence

Having discussed how a set of images of what constitutes African art (that is art characterised by its Africanness) has been constructed over time, and how deeply embedded those images still are in the minds of theorists, collectors and various others, including my research participants, I now continue to show their implications for the production of material and graphic forms in Africa. I do so by focusing on contemporary material and graphic forms, such as paintings, arguing that the construction of what African art constitutes undermines or even masks the 'artness' of some of those forms, most of which would otherwise simply fall into the general category of art. I develop the argument by introducing a case study, about a man called Valentim, an untrained 'painter of dreams'. The case reveals how being considered an African artist can hinder one's artistic development. It also offers revealing insights into the way the paradigm of primitivism is perpetuated and re-fashioned, as the essence of the sub-category African art.

Case 14: The untrained 'painter of dreams'

Valentim was born in 1965 in Lourenco Marques (now Maputo), Mozambique. His parents died in a bus accident in 1978. His older brother took care of him. Valentim and his brother came to Swaziland from Mozambique in 1990. Prior to his arrival in Swaziland Valentim had met a gallery owner from Swaziland in Maputo. She had bought some of his paintings and had promised to help him to sell his artwork in her gallery, if he would come to Swaziland.

He had never received a formal art education. Valentim started to paint when he was six years old. He collected old brown bags and made pencil drawings on them. When I first met him and spoke to him about his art,

he told me that he always painted his dreams, but could only do so when in a sexual relationship with a woman. Later, he told me that he was in fact joking, adding that the gallery owner, who had the sole right to sell his work in Swaziland, had told him to tell such stories because she believed that his work would sell better to Europeans if he did so. The gallery owner encouraged him to paint in an 'African style' (themes: love, nudity, village life; style: distorted body parts, emphasis on genitals, breasts and huge lips and eyes), and to use strong colours (blue, green, orange, yellow). Yet, Valentim explained, he personally disliked the colours he was expected to use. He did so, he said, because the gallery owner supplied him with those colours only. He added that he would also have liked to have changed the subjects of his work. But, because he needed money to survive, he painted what was expected from him. I asked him what kinds of subjects he preferred to paint. He responded that, when Samora Machel, then president of Mozambique, died in an aeroplane crash in 1986, he had painted an aeroplane crashing into a forest, the president's head above it and many people standing around the scene crying. 'This painting' he explained, 'is not for sale, because it is dear to me... It also represents the kind of work I would like to do... I like to portray what is happening in society in a realistic style. But I guess that nobody would buy this'. When I asked him which painters he liked, he replied: 'I like Van Gogh and that American who painted James Dean and Marilyn Monroe in a bar'[63]. He said that he dislikes Picasso because: 'He paints like I have to, he is *too African*' (emphasis added).

Valentim's case points to important issues that significantly affect the ways African art is socially constructed as a distinct sub-category of art. First, Valentim does not have formal training, he falls into the category self-taught artist [64] (untrained in fine art colleges or universities). Second, his patron encouraged him to paint within the paradigm of primitivism and to represent the kind of images of Africa and Africanness that tend to prevail amongst members of the European/western lower-priced art-buying public. Third, Valentim did not paint in this style because it was the way he wished to express himself. He did so for financial reasons. As he explained, he would have preferred to paint in a socially realistic style and to leave the 'African Picasso' behind him. But doing so would likely have precluded his work from being sold to a European/western expatriate market for which he painted predominantly.

Valentim's case is not unique. Powell (1993a: 37), for example, offers various examples of South African painters and their patrons whose experiences have been similar to Valentim's. And, if one looks at many examples of other contemporary African artists, many of them self

[63] Valentim was referring to E. Hopper who painted in a photo realistic style in the 1960s.
[64] Works collected under the category self-taught include the works of, for example, Twin Seven Seven (Nigeria, b.1944), Cheri Samba (DRC [Zaire], b. 1956) and Tokoudagba (Benin, b. 1939). For depictions of their and many other painters' works see Vogel (1991) and Hug (1996).

taught, similar cases can be found (Jegede 1990, Hug 1996, Ass 1996). Many African artists have, like Valentim, been encouraged to paint in a particular, often crude, manner in order to represent the kind of Africanness and 'primitivism' demanded by both local and overseas markets (Koloane 1989: 225). The search for economic fortune and the financially precarious situation of many painters, necessitated that many of them, like Valentim, have had to emulate whichever style was favoured in western markets. Hence we see, from on-the-ground cases, how the prejudices and ideologies of the non-African market have shaped local artists' work[65]. We also see how they have led 'to a detachment of many artists from their contours of reality' (Powell 1993c: 38) which often reduces the subjects, such as townships in South Africa, to 'stereotypical, picturesque or mere patterns' (ibid., also see Powell 1993a, Verstraete 1989). Such patterns conform to a constructed image of primitivism as the essence of Africanness (see earlier). They reduce African socio-cultural life to recognisable patterns on canvas, reminiscent of wooden sculptures and Picassoesque paintings.

What we see here is how an idiom, constructed by western scholars and artists of what constitutes African art, limits the possibilities open to African creative artists. To be seen as legitimate by those controlling the art world and its exhibitions, such artists are compelled to accept the dominant idiom or face the sanction of unpopularity or even outright dismissal of their works. Being described as a producer of African art, rather than simply an artist, prescribes the graphic and material forms one is expected to use. Yet, it is only in contexts where unequal power relations pertain that such prescription applies.

Today art is more generally seen as a very open concept. Indeed, its apparent openness has led Steiner (1994) to compare the category art with 'a container (such as a bag) into which objects are stuffed until there exists such tremendous diversity and quantity that the container threatens to burst' (1994: 111, see also Danto 1988, McEvilley 1988). Yet cases such as Valentim's reveal that the definition of what is in the sub-category African art cannot be so open and is dependent

[65] But as Paul Stoller (Pers. Comm.....) has pointed out, this pattern is now changing. The National museum of African Art in Washington Dc has a dedicated curator of contemporary African art. And there are galleries in New York that now feature such art work.

on the expectations of its patrons: collectors, curators, critiques, art historians of that particular sub-category.

Consider, a remark made by Bender, a German ethnologist and organiser of an exhibition of contemporary African art in Frankfurt, Germany, when he was referring to contemporary art from Africa that does not follow the primitivist canon:

> It seems like third-rate artwork to us because the art presented here emulates the western tradition—this is a criterion for selection, and because it is always lagging behind—regardless of how commendable the efforts might be basically. Every comparison with the present international art scene is therefore not in its favour. It cannot escape the critical eye of the western art world, thus it is superfluous—if I might put it so bluntly...It is...an open secret that museums have always refused to take such displays... (Bender 1989: 185 quoted in Hassan 1990: 5).[66]

Bender's statement clearly indicates that, at least for him, art from Africa must be African art in the primitivist mould, and should not show any supposed western influence. Consequently, contemporary visual expressions from Africa which reveal the influence of western art trends, such as minimalism, video art, assemblages etc., are regarded by those such as Bender as distorted copies of western art and therefore lacking African authenticity. Yet, I would argue, any distortedness in the contemporary visual expressions from Africa, and that Bender denigrates for their lack of supposed authenticity, derives from the fact that European/western artists and critics, having constructed an idiom of what constitutes African art, and produced artworks of their own according to that idiom, now expect artists in Africa to conform to that same idiom of African art.

The constructed idiom of what constitutes of African art presents many contradictions, primarily because it reflects a search for an African 'other' by non-African viewers. That search leads to

[66] Bender was among the organisers of the Cheri Samba exhibition at the Porticus art gallery in Frankfurt, Germany, which is devoted to exhibiting highly experiential art. Bender also published the catalogue. Selecting Cheri Samba who is a self-taught sign painter from the DRC whose work deals with morals, hygiene and obscenity shows that he must have been perceived by Bender as working outside European influences, for otherwise he would not have supported the selection of his works, according to the statement he made in 1989.

claims that western influences result in distortions of African visual expressions and in influences on art production in Africa that oblige the continent's constructed 'others' to work according to a canon, or to lose the chance of recognition by the 'experts'. Hence material and graphic forms from Africa have to represent easily recognisable patterns of what is perceived as essentially African, that essence being a kind of primitivism.

Consequently such demands undermine (or even mask) the artness of visual expressions categorised as African art, because the demands hinder free creative artistic expression. The latter is a sacred privilege of art in the western world, where art is constructed around a set of characteristics that proclaim art as individualistic, independent, breaking with conventions and traditions and being new or pioneering (Jegede 1990, Aas 1998). However, the parameters applied to what constitutes African art proclaim this art as communal, dependent on tradition and patronage, perpetuating tradition and representing the past. Hence African art appears to represent an antithetic kind of art to that of western art in general.

A further paradox in the art-historic discourse lies in the concept of self-taught artist and its significance for constituting African art. While western influences are seen by some art critics as distorting visual expressions from Africa, the concept self-taught artist itself has been fashioned by western influences. The popularity of the self-taught artist is closely related to the patronage of Europeans, who, as missionaries or through private initiatives such as Beier's in Nigeria or McEwen's in Zimbabwe[67], founded workshops to train African artists. The training was often based on European models and displayed a hegemonic and paternalistic attitude (Stanislaus 1990: 23, see also Powell 1993 a, 1993 b). As Aas (1998: 258) has pointed out, Beier's aim was to revive age-old African traditions, and he and his wife, Georgina Beier, studiously encouraged their students to paint 'traditional' themes and motifs of African rural life. Georgia Beier introduced a syllabus in 1965 according to which her students were required to produce six works per week on the subjects 'traditional feasts', 'history of Yoruba culture', 'traditional dances' and, while somewhat out of the line with the other three but still backward looking,

[67] In 1962 Beier founded the *Mbari Mbayo* Art club in Osogbo, Nigeria. In 1957 McEwen, an Englishman, founded the Workshop School and the Rhodes National Gallery of Salisbury, Rhodesia (now Harare, Zimbabwe) (Stanislaus 1990: 23).

'biblical stories' (Aas 1998:259). Just as 'salvage ethnography' (Clifford 1986:112) and 'salvage collecting' (chapter 7) aim to save the 'other' in text or the objects of the 'other' in collections, so does Beier's kind of 'salvage art teaching' aim to save the 'other' by reviving themes of the past through their art production. Assuming that what matters in the life of their students was in their past and not in their future and present, the Beiers encouraged them to portray the past and thereby assumed that they were able to revive and to save their past.

In what was then Southern Rhodesia, McEwen, too, sought an African aesthetic[68], this time going so far as to exclude any formal training in the hope that the lack thereof would define this kind of indigenous, traditional and authentically African aesthetic among Shona stone carvers (Stanislaus 1990: 23). Yet, Shona stone carving, which dates from around 1956, does not have any historical roots in Zimbabwe nor does it derive from indigenous object production (Mamimine 1998: 40, Mor 1987: 31, Winter-Irving 1991: 1). Shona stone carving was introduced by westerns, who paradoxically tried to get African art–craft producers to work 'authentically' in medium and form that itself was a western introduction.

Johannesburg's Polly Street Art Centre offers another example of excluding formal art training. The art centre was opened in 1948, and later placed under the directorship of Cecil Skotnes. Having initially introduced formal art classes, he soon eliminated them from the centre on the understanding that such formal education was not needed by his students because, according to Koloane (1989: 219), it 'would spoil the emergence of indigenous expressions' and because 'black artists have the natural ability to paint'.

Once again what appears here is an image of an unencumbered pristine Africa being sought, this time through the assumed characteristics of the producers of the works rather than simply in their works. The image reflects again that apparently ever-persistent image of Africa and its people as somehow distinct from the rest of the world's population—or at least from that of the modern

[68] It should be noted that the idea of an African aesthetic was also advocated by theorists from Africa. During the 50s and 60s writers such as Senghor and Caisare, who promoted the philosophy of 'negritude', were also searching for a specific African aesthetic. Haustein (1998: 263) pointed out that Senghor based much of his philosophy on the writings of the German Ethnologist Frobenius who had characterised 'the black' as emotional and 'the white' as rational.

industrialised world—and that any outside influence will spoil its innate and pure character. It also speaks of a wish to freeze the world of the 'other' and prevent it changing.

Thus far I have discussed how the characteristics of the sub-category African art have been constructed over time and shown how they persist today. I have focused on how the images constructed to characterise African art have shaped and influenced the production of certain material and graphic forms of Africa. In the next section I show how the set of constructed images that characterise the sub-category African art help to mask the commodity nature of the works in the sub-category.

4. Marketing the 'self-taught' artist

Concerning the self-taught artist, the French collector Andre Magnin has explained that the works of 'self-taught artists possess originality and *the untrained beauty of Africa*' (emphasis added) whereas the works of trained artists are perceived as imitations of European models and hence look too familiar to him (quoted in Hassan 1996: 9). The works of self-taught artists are appreciated precisely for their crudeness, their naivety, their unusual exoticism and their rootedness in what is thought to be African tradition and past[69].

The image of the self-taught African painter relates closely to images constructed about the Africanness of African art objects, including those images constructed by my research participants. Moreover, their Africanness is a key element of their meaning in the processes of their being marketed and in the masking of their commodity nature during those marketing processes. The Africanness of art relates not only to the kinds of themes inherent in the works but also to the artists' personal characteristics. In this section I argue that being perceived by potential clients as a 'natural' artist, unspoiled by education and commerce, and who produces primarily for her/his own community, helps to mask the commodity nature of the African artist's work.

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[69]Regarding 'African roots' the Sudanese art critique Musa (1996: 82) remarks, in a humorous way in his paper 'Ten hints on how to become an African artist', 'stop to always be searching for your identity in your roots, you are a human being not a vegetable!'

Consider the opening paragraph of an article published in the English supplement of the German art magazine *Art* (1991) about Cheri Samba, an artist from the former Zaire (now Democratic Republic of Congo), who is described by various art critics as a self-taught artist (Ströter-Bender & Bender 1991, Vogel 1991, Hug 1996). The article, entitled 'The great story teller from Zaire' (Ströter-Bender & Bender 1991: 1), begins:

> Kinshasa, October 10th, 1975: A crowd has gathered in front of house number 89 on Kasavubu Avenue. The people are gesticulating, and discussing a huge painting entitled 'Rebellion' that the 18-year-old painter Samba has hung next to the front door of his newly opened studio. Cars stop in front of the building, traffic grinds to a stand still, and the police attempt to restore order.

The paragraph points to two issues. First, Samba's art 'talks' to the people in their own social environment and hence appears to have been rooted in and created for his community. Second, the paragraph, although written in the present tense in 1991, starts with a story from the past, a story about an event that took place in 1975[70]. As discussed earlier, both processes, producing for the community and story telling, have the potential to mask the commodity nature of objects for sale. Asserting that artists produce for their own communities draws on an image of the artist as a messenger who depicts (hence tells the story of) the social reality of her/his environment for her/his community members. The image of communal art is part of the image of Africanness (and of the paradigm of primitivism) which implies bounded cultural units in which art is produced within a specific artistic tradition. I have shown in chapter five that purchasers' perceptions that an African object has been produced for use in the producer's community helped to authenticate such objects in the eyes of those purchasers and their peers. In this regard Linder (2001) has argued that one of the criteria by which something is regarded as authentic is that it is recognised by those amongst whom the producer has lived and is understood to be a 'natural' social part. For the most part Linder's analysis is about youth sub-cultures and how it is the others in the sub-culture who recognise certain leaders as being authentic because of their 'organic' links with those they lead. Drawing on Linder's analysis I argue that outsiders

[70] Also note that the article is entitled 'the great story teller from Zaire', implying that Samba is a story teller, rather than an artist occupied with form and structure, in the sense of western avantgarde art, whose protagonists distance themselves from any form of narrative or signifying art (Taylor 1995: 167).

(western scholars, collectors, tourists) also expect that kind of organic link with their 'origins' (in my case African origins represented in terms of primitivism) from those who produce the works that are constructed as African art. Likewise, the image that material or graphic forms are produced for the artist's community authenticates such forms as does their being symbolically opposed to an image of artists who produce for sale to outsiders. Hence the apparent communal nature of such art potentially masks its commercial nature, in part because such communal art allows for stories about its production and its producers, such as the one above (opening paragraph) to be told.

Other stories about the producers are more personal and relate to the producer's private lives. Recall, for example, Valentim's remark that he could paint only when he is in a sexual relationship. And compare it with remarks in the article about Cheri Samba: '...[Samba] now calls himself *Cheri* [my italics] Samba because of his success with women'; and a little later in the article: '...one year later the two [Samba and Nzila-Ngombe] were married, thus concluding a wild stage in his life full of amorous adventures recounted in many of his works' (Ströter-Bender, W. Bender 1991: 2). Such remarks reflect upon the sexuality of the artists and allow for fantasies and stories to be imagined and told about the painter's private life. And they are of the same order as the kinds of stories traders told about sexuality (see chapter 5), stories that were used to mask the commercialised nature of the objects they were selling.

Stories about artists' sexuality function similarly by constructing images of the artists as reflecting a kind of primordial primitivism. Emphasising the artists' sexuality places them conceptually in a realm of spontaneity ('wild stage of life') and instinct ('produce art only when in a sexual relationship'), rather than that of calculation and intellectual rationality (Price 1990: 44-46). The stories of the artists' sexuality and 'amorous adventures' work to place them outside the supposedly rational commercialised world. Those stories fit in well with the stories about the communal nature of African art and ideas about a kind of primitive communalism that were rife in all evolutionist conceptions of the development of human social systems. Thus, while Africa is perceived as primitive and somehow backward, the notion of communalism fits in with the perception of an African artist who is somewhat backward and who lives outside the rational world.

Constructed stories about self-taught artists' private lives thus reflect perceptions of an uncalculated, spontaneous being—an—artist, someone distant enough from the commercialised western world to present an authentic and non-commercial alternative to western art. The work of self-taught artists thus serves to meet the romantic illusion of western observers about the fascinating creativity of the poor and simple minded as well as those observers' persistent stereotyping of Africa. In this regard, the closing, almost plaintive sentence of Ströter-Bender's and Bender's (1991: 2) article about Cheri Samba, where they quote his words, speaks for itself in its appeal for what they regard as having been lost: 'People strive only for their own personal fame and fortune, and forget their fellow humans. If it were otherwise, wouldn't our planet be a paradise for its inhabitants?' By 1991 Samba had his own studio in Paris as well as an art dealer to sell his work there.

Visual expressions of self-taught artists that conform to the constructed idiom of the sub-category African continue to appeal to a particular segment of the western market. Recent exhibitions[71] of African art that have focused more on graphic than on sculptural forms bear witness to this demand in western markets. Catalogues of some of those exhibitions reveal that self-taught artists have been selected ahead of academic artists, 'traditional' themes before 'modern' ones. Moreover, as many commentators about the exhibitions have noted, there has been a eurocentric attitude in their curators' choice of works to exhibit (see Jegede 1990, Stanislaus 1990, Hassan 1996, Picton 1998, Ass 1998, Haustein 1998).

The content of some of these exhibitions shows that some western scholars and audiences of African art accept and appreciate predominantly material and graphic forms that represent, for them, easily recognisable patterns of what they perceive as essentially African. As Ebong (1991: 202) points out, the exhibitions' predominant themes and motifs have been of rural life, traditional mythology, folktales, imaginary spirits, masks, landscapes and wildlife. Hence one finds the image of an unencumbered pristine Africa being sought once again; or, phrased

[71] '*Les Magicians de la Terre*', Paris, 1989; 'Contemporary African Artist, Changing Tradition', Harlem 1990, 'Africa Explores', New York 1991; 'Seven Stories about Modern art in Africa', London, 1995; 'An Inside Story: African art of out time', Tokyo 1995; '*Neue Kunst aus Afrika*' Berlin 1996; 'Trader Routes', Johannesburg 1997.

differently, the demand for primitivism persists and is met now by a new formula of how to constitute it. As I have shown in previous chapters it was the kind of primitivism discussed here which, as an essential part of the market objects' Africanness, enabled the masking of the commodity nature of those objects. And just as the paradigm of primitivism helps to mask the commodity nature of African objects, it also helps to mask the commodity nature of artworks produced by self-taught artists, by drawing on stories that place her or him outside the rational and commercial world.

Yet, it needs to be pointed out also that within the art-historic discourse not every material or graphic form that fits the label African is treated equally. The producers of African objects found, for example, at the Cape Town markets, and that have been the focus of my study, have indeed done what is expected by the so-called aficionados of African artists. They have created and perpetuated images of pristine African village life by producing 'traditional' objects. Yet, precisely because those objects are available in large numbers in relatively unsophisticated street markets, those selfsame aficionados regard the objects as mass-produced fakes, reproductions, kitsch, hence unworthy of being collected, thus not worth subjecting to art historical inquiry (Goldwater 1972, Levisohn 1984, Grundy 1984, Vogel 1988). I would claim, however, that the objects the markets' traders sell are just like the paintings of self-taught painters: a response to economic forces and a commentary on the audiences for which they are produced (Jules-Rosette 1984: 3, also see Ben-Amos 1977: 128, Howes 1996: 186).

5. Conclusion

In this chapter I have shown how the sub-category African art has been created, over time, around a set of characteristics that draw on a series of images of Africa that, while quite out of line with the reality of everyday life in contemporary Africa, appeal to the imaginations of those who make up the market for works in the sub-category. I have further shown that the images draw on a whole series of prejudices about the continent and its people that derive, in turn, from the colonial encounter and continue to hold strong sway in the western world.

The prejudices of the non-African market have not only shaped the execution of certain material and graphic forms that are placed in the subcategory African art. They have also shaped the

commodification of African objects such as those on display at the markets I have studied. Recall the stories told by traders to their customers, as discussed in chapter five. They bear a close relation to the content of some 'primitivist' paintings. In their stories, traders often reduced African life to stereotypical images and patterns. They used topics such as fetishism, sexuality and traditional uses or contexts to trigger their customers' imagination of unspoiled and pristine village life in a similar way to that demanded of painters such as Samba and Valentim by their patrons. Like those painters' patrons, traders at the markets exploited images of what they understood their customers to perceive as 'traditional' contexts, developing those understandings by reflecting on what they found to be their customers' expectations about Africa, its people and its objects (see chapter 5). Both market traders and the patrons of African artists did (and do) so in the interest of commercial enterprise and to effect profitable commodity exchanges. Hence, just as in the early periods of the colonial encounter between westerners and people of the African continent, an African essence is still sought in African oral, material and graphic forms. In the next, concluding, chapter, I analyse some of the reasons why such images still persist.

Chapter nine: Conclusion

I started out this thesis with a story of a *kanaga* mask which, during its travels from Mali to its final destination in my home, moved through different social, cultural and economic contexts. I suggested that objects like the mask can be approached from a biographical perspective because, just like human beings they have life histories that involve other things, various spaces and places, and diverse people.

This work has been devoted to understanding the multiple and changing meanings of African objects, such as handcrafted masks, sculptures or objects of daily use, and their social life in Cape Town, South Africa. The objects' social life in Cape Town is unique and different from their social life in West Africa. Most objects, like my *kanaga* mask have travelled far to reach the market in Cape Town. Hence market in Cape Town are not essentially South African markets, their character today is Panafrican[72]. South Africa's years of isolation have resulted in a quite different type of market for African objects as for example in West Africa (Rankin & Hamilton 1999). The difference is noticeable in the absence of established wholesale networks for South African objects and in a shorter history of South African objects as high priced collector's items (Barritt n.d.: 16).

In my thesis I have described and analysed the objects at various places such as street markets, curio shops, art galleries and the homes of collectors. I have focused on the traders, sales personnel and purchasers of the objects. My main argument has been that certain non-commodity dimensions of some objects of the material world, such as being seen as *African* objects, create value and demand for them, and thereby enable their commodification. I have further argued and shown that the non-commodity aspects of objects, such as the stories told about them, have the potential to mask their commodity nature. To support my argument I have followed some of the social paths African objects travel in order to reveal how various meanings come to be ascribed to them in their changing social environments, and how those changes impact on their

[72] This, however, has enabled me to investigate the objects as African and with all the stereotypes that go with it.

commodification. I have also shown that their very identification as economic, or aesthetic, or valuable in some other way, depended on the contexts of their exchange and/or consumption.

My work builds on Appadurai's (1986) idea that objects have social lives and that life histories can be written about them by following their paths through different social environments. I have drawn on that idea in order to comprehend the material and social dimensions of a certain category of objects. According to Appadurai (1986: 4) objects move through various stages during their life span, being a commodity being only one state in an object's life. Hence objects can and do become commodified at times and then, at other times, they become de-commodified or, in Kopytoff's (1986) terms, singularised. In other words, objects removed from the market sphere, through a process of selection, become singularised (Kopytoff 1986: 69) and, in the process, they are imbued with the personal values of their owners, a process that replaces their simple exchange value with a set of more complex socio-cultural values.

The underlying reasons for our perceiving objects as more or less commodified can be found in how we relate to them. I have shown that some research participants related to the objects in very personal ways. Recall trader Francoise (case 3), who related to the objects she had on sale at the market as if they were her husband; or collector Jacques (case 13), who shared his house with so many of his collected objects that there was no space for another person to live there. Other research participants related to the objects that were in their possession by treating them as souvenirs, hence using them to reflect the place where they had spent a holiday and purchased the objects. Yet others related to the objects in purely commercialised ways, either in the sense of making a living from them (as traders did) or in perceiving them as mass-produced commodities which they did not like to purchase, an attitude to which some tourists and collectors subscribed. The way research participants related to the objects they saw, sold or bought at the markets imbued the objects with various meanings such as art, artefact, souvenir, gift, commodity, kitsch etc. The attributes they ascribed to the objects marked the differences in the way they related to the objects and thereby reflected on the extent to which they were contextually commodified.

As I have demonstrated, each of these attributes was reflected in the content of the many diverse stories composed about African objects. The stories included derivatives of 'grand narratives'

such as the object-subject dualism in western thought as discussed in chapter one, or that of 'othering' that was a feature of colonialism as discussed in chapter eight. They also included the more personal stories that sellers and the purchasers told about the objects' origins, their biographies of usage, their producers and their lives, and the diverse processes whereby objects were acquired and transacted.

What were the constitutive parts of the relationship between research participants and the objects they sold, purchased and collected? Or, to ask the question differently, what were those various human participants in the objects' biographies actually looking for to enable them to establish a relationship with those objects? I suggest that we can find answers to these questions in the outcomes of previous debates about what has sometimes been understood as cross-cultural exchange. Some such discussions offer a perspective that sees items such as African objects as able to act as cultural brokers, initiating contact between people of different places, and providing a potential basis for a mutually better understanding between people whose socio-cultural practices are quite different from one another (Jules-Rosette 1984). And it is that idea that I wish to consider as a means to bring my thesis to a close.

The idea of cross-cultural exchange is generally perceived by anthropologists as problematic, in that it derives its meaning from an assumption that bounded 'pure' culture exist in a cartographically fixed spaces (Rojek & Urry 1997: 1, Lurry 1997: 75). Much recent anthropological literature has focused on the presumably bounded nature of culture in an effort to show that, in a world of 'travelling cultures' (Said 1983, Clifford 1992), such distinct bounded cultural units no longer exist, and probably never did (Clifford 1988, Geertz 1995, Marcus 1995, Gupta & Ferguson 1997).

Yet, while I fully subscribe to the principle that 'pure cultures' do not exist, I still have to address the problem that, for traders, purchasers and collectors of African objects, their exchanges of these objects may often constitute, or be understood as, a process of cross-cultural exchange. For them, cross-cultural exchange and travel are grounded in cultural distinctions and a presumption of difference. From a theoretical point of view we analysts may all agree that the idea and the representations of bounded cultural units were constructed by ethnographers and geographers in

an effort to order the world, and that it remains debatable if they ever existed in such a way (Urry 1997). Yet, the empirical data represented in my work suggests a strong interest among research participants in the cultural objects of the 'other'—the typically African object, the authentic piece of the 'other'. And their perceptions pose a challenge for any theoretical understanding of cultural hybridisation and blurred cultural boundaries. This is because the blurredness of the boundaries often leads to an even stronger quest, among those such as my research participants, to restore 'cultural order' and thereby to come to grips with the 'infinite messiness of social life' (Geertz 1995: 140). As I have earlier demonstrated, interest in difference and cultural distinction was a major force in the constitution of the 'typically' African, both among my research participants and much more generally.

Stuart Hall offers an analysis of interest in linguistic, social, cultural and psychic differences which I summarise here. According to Hall, the linguistic perspective, especially that of Saussure, assumes that difference is necessary for the production of meaning, hence that meaning is relational and that we recognise the world through binary oppositions (Hall 1997: 234). Secondly, Hall points out that Bakhtin developed the same point in his assumption that we need the other 'because we are only able to construct meaning through the dialogue with the other' (Hall 1997: 235)[73]. Hall has explained that people draw symbolic cultural borders by attempting to keep out and stigmatise anything that is constructed as not fitting an accepted cultural order. Hall argues that, paradoxically, expelling the different from within the boundary of the familiar imbues difference with power and attraction, precisely by creating it (Hall 1997: 237). Last, says Hall (1997: 238), psychoanalytical accounts, drawing from Freud, assume that difference is necessary for the subjective self and 'that our subjectivities depend on our unconscious relations with significant others' such as our parents'.

The above explanations for an interest in difference are rather reductive and simplified, particularly when summarised so briefly. But they do indicate that interest in the 'other' can have positive outcomes such as the production of meaning and of social and self-identity. Yet, at the same time, it also carries negative implications. Difference can become the underlying factor for

[73] Bakhtin's point echoes Said's (1978) critical analysis of the complex dialectic process by which the 'West' constructs itself through ideological projections of the 'other'.

racialising the 'other' and creating stereotypes about the 'other'. 'Stereotyping reduces, essentialises, naturalises and fixes difference' (Hall 1997: 258). As I have shown earlier, stereotypes were often at play in consumers' demands for African objects and in their commodification, as in the way stories were constructed about them. This may seem paradoxical because many stories were told by African traders, who thereby confirmed tourists'stereotypes. But, as Hall has argued, 'victims can be trapped by the stereotype, unconsciously confirming it [even] by the very terms in which they try to oppose and resist it' (Hall 1997: 163). Therefore the traders' confirmations of the tourists' stereotypes indicate that traders realised that they would have to use their customers' stereotypes in stories they told so as to satisfy their customers' expectations. It also indicates that some of the images of Africa which were constructed by the non-African 'other' had moulded the African traders' own perceptions of themselves and of Africa (c.f. Mudimbe 1994, Escobar 1995).

Much of my work here has shown that the main quality of the African object which enabled its commodification by its being masked, was its perceived different and exotic quality and its having been produced, used and sold by an (African) 'other'. Most research participants made use of the concept of difference, albeit, in manifold ways and for diverse reasons.

Traders used the notion of difference in various ways when selling objects. Recall that some traders perceived themselves as representatives of their countries and displayed a distinct national or ethnic pride ('I am a Maasai', I am a prince of Bamun') towards their customers. Others engaged customers in rather long bargaining interactions, realising that the absence of such bargaining in many countries from which their customers came provided them an opportunity to exoticise the interaction for their customers. In doing so they gave customers a chance to participate in a distinctive and performative shopping experience. Other traders signalled difference by wearing African dress. Traders also used cultural difference in the way they constructed stories about African objects: Recall the story of 'the fetish from Zaire' or 'the story of the *Bamileke* figure' which, as I have shown in chapter five, both exploit stereotypic images of evil beliefs of the 'dark' continent—Africa. Or the trader's 'story of the *Kanaga* mask' which placed the production and acquisition of the mask in the context of a traditional African village in Mali. The content of many stories thus placed the objects in an essentialised and

different socio-cultural context from that of their purchasers. By constructing and telling such stories, traders ingrained into the objects a mystique and an enchantment of alterity. In doing so, the traders masked the objects' commodity nature by convincing customers that they had obtained a 'real' object of the 'other', and not just a simple commodity.

Tourists who purchased African objects also constructed images of difference to make meaning of their tourist encounter with the 'other'. Lury (1997: 75) describes tourists as 'wandering figures whose travels, paradoxically, fix places and cultures in ...ordered space'. The prime motivation for travel is to encounter difference—why travel, if only to find the same that has been left at home? As I have shown in chapter five, tourists were enchanted by alterity and took in only as much information about the 'other' and her objects as they needed to preclude destroying their enchantment. Tourists sought to find insights into the lives of the 'other'. Yet, obtaining a privileged insight into a different lifestyle makes meaning—through creating alterity—of their mundane lives back home as non-tourists (MacCannell 1976, Curtis & Pajaczkowska 1994).

Said (1978) has described this as a dialectical view in which the tourist makes meaning of her/his life through reference to a constructed 'other'. As Said points out, 'western culture' constitutes itself through the construction of images of the exotic 'other' (Said 1978: 132). Yet, this dialectical view not only makes meaning of the tourist's life back home. It also allows tourists, through enchantment by alterity during the course of their absence from home, to mask the commodity nature of their purchased objects and of their journey, both of which are virtually essential parts of the tourist industry.

Collectors too played on the concept of difference in various ways. Some perceived themselves as keepers of the 'others'' past, and thus engaged in what we might call salvage collecting in the face of what they saw as those others' distinctive and discreet cultures being destroyed by the presence of modernity and its appurtenances (Errington 1997: 159). Others among them drew distinct borders between themselves, as collectors, and non-collectors who, they perceived, lacked the ability to judge the quality of African objects. As shown in chapter seven, collectors constructed binary oppositions in the sense that they treated non-collectors' objects as

inauthentic commodities, and their own objects as authentic collectibles. Among collectors, the differentiation between art and commodity, and a negative attitude towards the latter, was most conspicuous. Claiming that their objects were African art, and that they possessed what Bourdieu (1996) calls the 'cultural capital' to appreciate art, they proclaimed their supremacy and their elitist position. Collectors' perceptions about themselves and others indicate, as suggested in chapter one, that the socially constructed distinctions between art/everyday life, art/commodity, high/low culture still exist among some and are used by them as a form of 'othering' in terms of social distinction.

But what of my main argument about the process of masking the commodity nature of African objects? I have shown that most of my research participants related to African objects in terms of a sense of difference. Traders and gallery owners/collectors both tried to convince themselves and others that the objects they had on sale were authentic objects of the African 'other'. Most tourists, laypersons and collectors were convinced that the objects they had purchased were authentic objects of the 'other'. Those that were not so convinced tended not to make any purchases and criticised the markets as not really African. Authenticity was thus constituted differently by various categories among my research participants. Yet they were all looking for it in terms of 'othering', hence difference. As we have seen, the 'other', as a construction of the self's alternate, enabled all the research participants to construct a multitude of stories about African objects and thereby masked their commodity nature. By giving the object a story, they imbued it with a spirit similar to the Maori *hau* (Mauss 1954) and allowed it to enter their lives to tell stories about others and themselves.

But it is not just they out there, that is my research participants, that do that. We all do it in a greater or lesser extent, and using various ruses and subterfuges for the purpose. The objects in our lives are not just commodities. They become markers of our very selves—in the sense that they evoke our memories and experiences (Baudrillard 1968, Pearce 1992, Steward 1993).

Examining the changing social environments of objects not only serves to allow us to gain insight into processes of their commodification and how that is hidden. It also enables us to

understand processes of so-called cross-cultural exchange in which the images of Africa[74] its people and its objects are continually constructed by producers, traders and buyers all over the globe. Hence, it is applicable to discussions about globalism. As objects travel they convey meanings, prejudices and stereotypes across the globe. To comprehend much of the current era's cultural contact or 'cross-cultural exchange' one needs to explore these travelling objects as means of communication.

[74]Of course it is not only Africa, its people and objects that are subjected to this kind of stereotyping. I refer here to Africa simply because my work has concentrated on objects valued for their Africanness.

Appendix A: Demographic data on traders

Table 5: Country of origin and gender of traders

Country of birth	female	male	total
Angola	1	1	2
Cameroon	0	2	2
Dem. Rep. of Congo	4	1	5
Ethiopia	0	4	4
Ivory Coast	0	3	3
Kenya	4	4	8
Malawi	0	1	1
Mali	0	5	5
Nigeria	0	2	2
Senegal	0	5	5
South Africa	7	2	9
Sudan	0	3	3
Swaziland	1	1	2
Zambia	1	0	1
Zimbabwe	1	1	2
Tanzania	0	2	2
total	19	37	56

Table 6: Country of birth and age of traders

Country of birth	15-19	20-25	26-30	31-35	36-40	41-45	total
Angola			1		1		2
Cameroon			1	1			2
Dem. Rep. of Congo		2		2	1		5
Ethiopia		2	1	1			4
Ivory Coast		1	1		1		3
Kenya		2	2	2	2		8
Malawi				1			1
Mali			3	2			5
Nigeria			1	1			2
Senegal			2	2	1		5
South Africa		2	5		1	1	9
Sudan			2	1			3
Swaziland				1		1	2
Zambia					1		1
Zimbabwe	1			1			2
Tanzania				1	1		2
total	1	9	19	16	9	2	56

Table 7: Marital status of traders

	single	married	divorced	living with partner	widowed	total
male	23	13	0	0	1	37
female	7	8	2	1	1	19
total	30	21	2	1	2	56

Table 8: Number of traders' children

	none	one	two	three	four	total
male	23	3	8	3	0	37
female	6	3	4	6	0	19
total	29	6	12	9	0	56

Table 9: Number of years of traders' schooling

years of schooling	numbers
no schooling	1
5 years	1
6 years	0
7 years	2
8 years	13
9 years	2
10 years	5
11 years	2
12 years	12
13 years	18
total	56

Table 10: List of traders' university degrees

University degrees	Numbers
Agriculture	1
Anthropology	1
Business admin.	2
Economy	1
Fashion design	1
Graphic design	2
Political Science	2
total	10

Table 11: List of traders' professions

Professions	Numbers
Accountant	3
Advertising	1
Auto mechanic	2
Beautician	1
Builder	1
Cook	1
Gallery owner	1
Job trainer	1
Nurse	1
Radio station	2
Sales person	3
Tailor	1
Taxi driver	1
Teacher	1
total	20

Appendix B: Demographic data on sales persons

Table 12: Age and gender of sales persons

	female	male
15-19	7	
20-25	18	
26-30	12	1
31-35	3	
36-40	1	
total	41	1

Table 13: Marital status of sales persons

	single	married	divorced	living with partner	widowed	total
Male	0	0	0	1	0	1
Female	22	10	1	8	0	41
total	22	10	1	9	0	42

Table 14: Number of sales persons' children

	none	one	two	three	four	total
Male	0	0	1	0	0	1
Female	14	12	10	5	0	41
total	14	12	11	5	0	42

Table 15: Standard of education of sales persons

Years of schooling	Numbers
no schooling	0
4 years	1
5 years	1
6 years	4
7 years	8
8 years	10
9 years	2
10 years	8
11 years	0
12 years	8

Table 16: List of sales persons' professions

Professions	Numbers
cleaner	6
domestic	9
night club waitress	1
selling cloths	2
selling belts	1
worker in factory	7
shop cleaner	2
Total	28

Appendix C: Demographic data on potential customers

Table 17: Country of origin of potential customers (foreign visitors)

Country of origin	Numbers
Argentina	1
Australia	5
Austria	7
Belgium	4
Canada	3
Denmark	3
England	54
France	11
Germany	40
Ireland	3
Israel	2
Italy	7
Japan	3
Kenya	1
Namibia	2
Netherlands	13
New Zealand	3
Norway	6
Poland	2
Spain	3
Sweden	7
Switzerland	8
Taiwan	1
Turkey	2
US	25
Zimbabwe	2
total	218

Table 18: Gender of potential customers (foreign visitors)

female	117
male	101
total	218

Table 19: Ages of potential customers (foreign visitors)

age	Numbers	Age	Numbers	age	numbers	total
18	1	38	8	58	2	
19	1	39	3	59	1	
20	2	40	5	60	6	
21	4	41	2	61	2	
22	7	42	3	62	1	
23	8	43	2	63	3	
24	7	44	5	64	0	
25	8	45	4	65	3	
26	10	46	1	66	1	
27	9	47	3	67	1	
28	12	48	5	68	0	
29	8	49	2	69	1	
30	7	50	9	70	2	
31	6	51	1	71	0	
32	6	52	2	72	2	
33	6	53	5	73	1	
34	6	54	2	74	0	
35	2	55	3	75	0	
36	3	56	5	76	1	
37	6	57	2	77	0	
total	119	Total	72	total	27	218

Table 20: Number of purchases of African objects made by foreign visitors

bought	181
not bought	37
total	218

Table 21: Use of African objects among foreign visitors

use of objects	numbers
self	101
gift	80
total	181

Table 22: African objects purchased by foreign visitors

Object	numbers
Bakuba cloths	15
Banana leaf paintings	14
Beadwork	6
Bowls	14
Chess set	5
Colon figures	11
Drums	8
Fertility dolls	5
Folding tables	2
Giraffes	18
Head rests	6
Jewelry	29
Kenyan batik	14
Kenyan mask	8
Malachite animals	12
Malawi chairs	8
Mozambican masks	8
Ndebele aprons	3
Ostrich eggs	10
Passport masks	13
Salad spoons	13
Shona sculpture	3
Skeleton figures	9
Small wooden spoon	14
Walking stick	8
West African masks	14
Wire work	9
Wooden animals	35
Wooden ashtray	1
[illegible]	5
Wooden carvings	32
Zulu dolls	12
Total	364

Table 23: References made by foreign visitors to African objects

Reference to objects	numbers
African art	38
African culture	3
African objects	1
African souvenir	47
African things	4
Africanism	3
Artifacts	9
Authentic	4
Commercial	4
Culture	3
Curio	8
Decoration	2
Ethnic	2
Fascinating	3
Handcraft	60
Kitsch	3
Mass produced	18
Mementos	15
Native craft	4
Primitive art	15
Tourist goods	8
Traditional pieces	15
Typical Africa	5
Total	274

Table 24: Places of purchase of African objects among foreign visitors

places of purchase	number
All over Cape Town	35
Boulder's Beach	11
Cape Point	8
Green point	13
Greenmarket Square	55
Outside south Africa	4
Pan African Market	10
Shops only	21
St George's Mall	5
Waterfront	19
Total	181

Table 25: Places of residence of potential South African customers

Places of residence	Numbers
Cape Town	38
Johannesburg	8
Durban	3
Eastern Cape	3
Franshoek	2
Pretoria	4
Total	58

Table 26: Gender of South African potential customers

Female	35
Male	23
Total	58

Table 27: Ages of South African potential customers

Age	Numbers	age	Numbers	age	numbers	
18	1	38	0	58	0	
19	5	39	0	59	2	
20	5	40	1	60	2	
21	5	41	0	61	0	
22	6	42	1	62	0	
23	4	43	0	63	0	
24	2	44	2	64	0	
25	5	45	2	65	0	
26	1	46	0	66	0	
27	1	47	0	67	0	
28	2	48	0	68	0	
29	1	49	0	69	0	
30	1	50	1	70	0	
31	2	51	1	71	0	
32	0	52	0	72	0	
33	1	53	0	73	0	
34	2	54	0	74	0	
35	0	55	0	75	0	
36	1	56	0	76	0	
37	1	57	0	77	0	
Total	46	total	8	total	4	58

Table 28: Number of purchases made of African objects by South Africans

bought	25
not bought	33
total	58

Table 29: Use of African objects among South African

Use of objects	numbers
self	12
gift	13
total	25

Table 30: Places of purchase of African objects among South Africans

Places of purchase	numbers
All over Cape town	4
Boulder's beach	0
Cape Point	0
Green point	5
Greenmarket Square	8
Outside South Africa	2
Pan African Market	3
Shops only	0
St George's Mall	2
Waterfront	1
Total	25

Table 31: African objects purchased by South Africans

African object	Numbers
Object	
Bakuba cloths	
Banana leaf paintings	
Beadwork	7
Bowls	5
Chess set	
Colon figures	
Drums	2
Fertility dolls	
Folding tables	
Giraffes	3
Head rests	
Jewelry	8
Kenyan batik	
Kenyan mask	4
Malachite animals	
Malawi chairs	
Mozambican masks	
Ndebele aprons	
Ostrich eggs	
Passport masks	
Salad spoons	8
Shona sculpture	3
Skeleton figures	
Small wooden spoon	4
Walking stick	
West African masks	
Wire work	
Wooden animals	
Wooden ashtray	
Wooden candle holders	
Wooden carvings	5
Zulu dolls	
Total	49

Table 32: References made by South Africans to African objects

Reference to objects	Numbers
African art	16
African culture	2
African objects	1
African souvenir	
African things	1
Africanism	2
Artifacts	4
Authentic	4
Commercial	1
Crafts	11
Culture	
Curio	
Decoration	3
Ethnic	
Fascinating	
Handcraft	
Kitsch	
Mass produced	
Mementos	
Native craft	
Primitive art	
Tourist goods	8
Traditional pieces	2
Typical Africa	2
Total	57

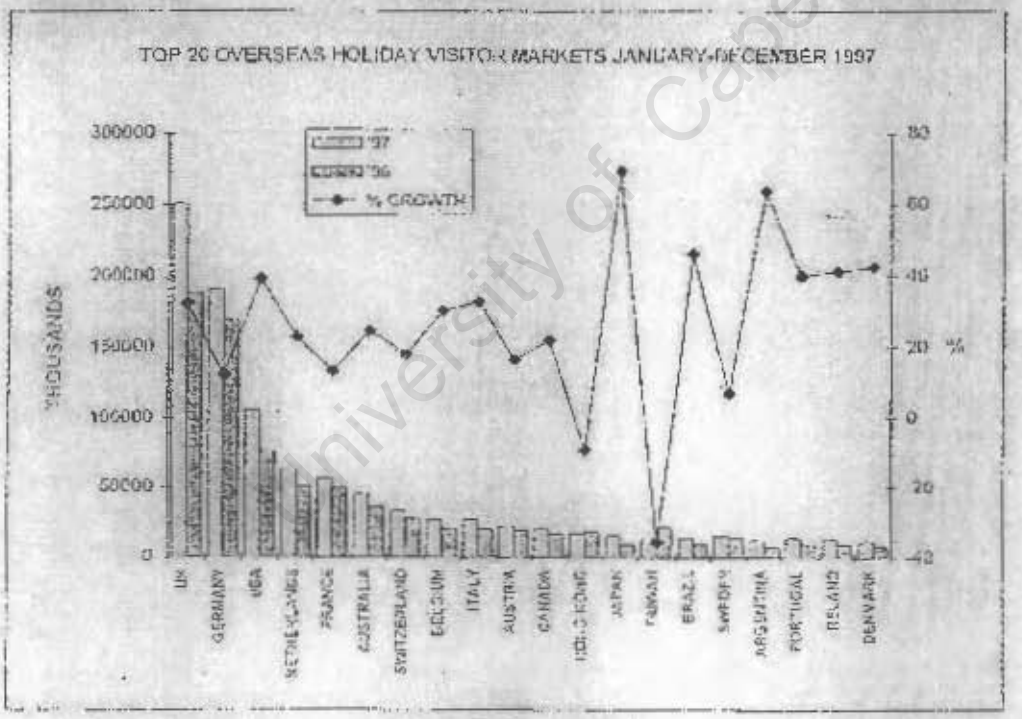
Appendix D: Satour official data

Table 33: Number of total foreign arrivals through Cape Town International Airport*

Year	Foreign arrivals by air
1997	281536
1996	218410
1995	179843
1994	103286
1993	73804
1992	48364
1991	35668
1990	25661
1989	18697
1988	931

Table 34: The top 20 overseas visitors* to South Africa

THE TOP 20 OVERSEAS HOLIDAY VISITOR MARKET (TABLE F)



The top twenty overseas holiday markets are illustrated in the above figure. The total overseas holiday market grew at a rate of 22.5% over the period January to December 1997.

*Sources: CSS (Central Statistic Service Pretoria)

Appendix E: Inventories of traders

Inventory 1: Agnes from Kenya (case 1)

No.	Unit	Item	Country of origin	Price	Value
35		animal spoons, little	Kenya	5	175
3		animal masks	Kenya	45	135
20	pairs	animal spoons, twisted	Kenya	25	500
16		animals, sitting	Kenya	25	400
6		animals, sitting, small	Kenya	15	90
50		animals, small	Kenya	5	250
16		ashanti dolls	Kenya	30	480
1		ashtray	Kenya	50	50
2		ashtrays, animal design	Kenya	45	90
65		banana leaf batik	Kenya	30	1950
3		banana stem dancers	Kenya	30	90
50		bangles	mix	15	750
3		bangles, beadwork	South Africa	15	45
20		bangles, elephant hair	Kenya	65	1300
15		bangles, elephant hair, imitation	Kenya	15	225
25		batik	Uganda	33	825
66		batik	Uganda	45	2970
46		batik	Uganda	85	3910
		batik, large	Tanzania	150	0
70		batik, maasai scenes	Kenya	35	2450
12		bone knives, little	Kenya	30	360
1	pair	bone spoon	Kenya	68	68
20		bone spoons, little	Kenya	20	400
3	pair	book holders	Kenya	85-95	270
2		bowls	Tanzania	85	170
6		bowls	Zimbabwe	150	900
5		bowls, wood, animal design	Zimbabwe	60-150	525
6		candle holders, ebony, twisted	Tanzania	60	360
16		combs	Tanzania	40	640
3		cups, wood, animal handle	Kenya	45	135
4		drums, little	Kenya	75-150	452
2		giraffe bowls (sweet dish)	Kenya	40	80
1		giraffe in pair, medium	Kenya	75	75
1		giraffe, medium	Kenya	25	25
8		Giraffes, small	Kenya	15	120
10		key holders, wood	Kenya	10	100
1		madonna with child	Tanzania	90	90
4		marimba'	Kenya	75	300
2		masks, large with cowry shell	Kenya	280	560
4		maasai heads	Kenya	40	160
30		necklaces, animal design		25	750
15		necklaces, beadwork	South Africa	15	225
6		necklaces, big five, long	Kenya	25	150
2		necklaces, bone beads		35	70

9		necklaces, loather, cowry sholl		45	405
15		necklaces, shells, lion, maasai	Kenya	15	225
24		necklaces, fertility dolls	Kenya	15	360
4		necklaces, small bone sculptures		15	60
3		shields, little	Swaziland	40	120
2		skeleton, large	Tanzania	75	150
37		skeleton, small	Tanzania	25-30	999
3		spear, maasai	Kenya	95	285
7		statures, medium, kikuyu	Kenya	95	665
5		statures, medium, maasai couple	Kenya	60	300
2		statures, medium, maasai warrior	Kenya	50	100
4		statures, small, kikuyu	Kenya	75	300
25		sun glass holders, beadwork	South Africa	10	250
4		tick tack drums	Kenya	20	80
4		tripods	Kenya	75	300
7		warrior/ kissing masks (maasai)	Kenya	45/50	329
831		Total			28548

Inventory 2: Francoise from the DRC (case 3)

No.	Unit	Item	Country of origin	Price	Value
15	pair	animal spoons (salad) small	Kenya	15	225
11		bamana mask	Mali	650	7150
13		bamana mask, small	Mali	175-180	2275
3		bamileke statuette (used by healers, soothsayers)	Cameroon	280	840
21		banana leaf batik	Kenya	25	525
27		bangles		20	540
9		baskets, woven	Zaire/Congo	25-35	270
13		batiks	Kenya	25	325
4		batiks	Zaire/Congo	45	180
2		batiks, blue	Zaire/Congo	125	250
10	pair	bead earrings		25	250
2		bembe or kumu masks (big, green, red paint)	Zaire/Congo	280	560
7		big spoons with zebra	Kenya	25	175
2		black beads necklaces		120	240
3		blue and white beads necklaces		85	255
14		bogola cloths (mud cloth)	Mali	250-550	5600
5	pair	bone salad spoons	Kenya	60	300
1		bowl, wooden			0
2		boxes	Zaire/Congo	250-300	550
1		bwa mask	Burkina Faso	850	850
1		chevron bead necklace		450	450
22		colon figures	Ivory Coast	150	3300
2		dan masks	Ivory Coast	300	600
10		elephant mask	Kenya	15	150
7		fang masks	Gabon	200-250	1575

7		female masks (babanki style?) punu mask	Cameroon/Gabon	380	2660
2		glass bead necklaces		150	300
10	Pair	glass bead earrings		35	350
35		guro masks large	Ivory Coast	280-300	10150
4		guro masks on calabash	Ivory Coast	350-450	1600
7		guro masks small	Ivory Coast	150-200	1225
1		helmet mask ('elephant') babanki style	Cameroon	980	980
5		helmet masks Igbo or mambila /Nigeria	Nigeria	380-400	1950
3		horn key holders		25	75
29		knives, little		10	290
30		bakuba cloth, long	Zaire/Congo	150	4500
6		bakuba masks (cowry, beads, raffia cloth)	Zaire/Congo	750	4500
3		kwele masks	Gabon	400	1200
1		large colon figure	Ivory Coast	350	350
7		large kuba cloths (bushoong/ ncaka kot)	Zaire/Congo	980	6860
1		large masks	?	395	395
1		large masks	?	350	350
2		large masks	?	295	590
1		large masks (nails, cowry, fur) Songye	Zaire/Congo	650	650
1		large statue		850	850
15		letter opener (ebony)	Kenya	20	300
22		letter opener (mahogany)	Kenya	10	220
5		little animals		10	50
2		lwalwa masks, (or ogoni mask/Nigeria)	Zaire/Congo	380-450	830
33		malachite bangles	Zaire/Congo	10	330
10	pair	malachite earrings	Zaire/Congo	25	250
8		malachite necklaces, large round beads	Zaire/Congo	25	200
20		malachite pendants	Zaire/Congo	5	100
4		malachite necklaces, small oval beads	Zaire/Congo	25	100
2		mali wedding cloth	Mali	550	1100
1		mask	Congo	350	350
1		mask (metal and beads)	Ghana	250	250
1		mask (nunuma; animal mask)	Burkina Faso	280	280
1		mask (yohure) with horns	Ivory Coast	380	380
2		masks (ibibio)	Nigeria	380	760
3		masks (metal cowry shell)	Mali (?)	250	750
2		masks, with hair, protruding mouth	Cameroon?	?	0
3		maasai honey containers	Kenya	150	450
5		medium giraffes	Kenya	25	125
7		medium lion	Kenya	25	175
27		necklaces with fertility dolls		15	405
2		ostrich eggs painted	South Africa	250	500
30		pins with animals	Kenya	10	300
1		pipe	Zaire/Congo	120	120
4		pipes (man faces)	Zaire/Congo	200-250	900
52		raffia cloth, new	Zaire/Congo	75	3900
6		raffia cloth, old	Zaire/Congo	120	720
8	pair	salad spoons	Kenya	20	160
5		sitting animals	Kenya	25	125
3		small elephant	Kenya	15	45

7		small giraffes	Kenya	15	105
1		small leopard	Kenya	15	15
3		small lion	Kenya	15	45
5		small masks (metal cowry shell)	Mali (?)	180	900
21		small zebra	Kenya	20-25	462
1		songye mask	Zaire/Congo	250	250
1		songye mask	Zaire/Congo	280	280
2		spears	Zaire/Congo	250	500
3		spoon statues (lega?or lumbo/Gabon)	Zaire/Congo	280	840
20		spoons, little		10	200
1		statue (couple)	Zaire/Congo	650	650
1		statue (female with little person?bamileke)	Cameroon	825	825
6		statues (size approx. 50 cm)	Zaire/Congo	250	1500
2		statues (size approx. 80 cm)	Zaire/Congo	350	700
1		stature carrying a calabash	Ghana	250	250
2		statures	Mali	250	500
8		stone bead necklaces		150	1200
3		trade bead necklaces		380	1140
1		tshioke mask (circumcision)	Zaire/Congo	350	350
4	Pair	twin figures (igbo? ashanti?) medium	Nigeria? Ghana?	500	2000
1		twin figures (igbo? ashanti?) medium	Nigeria? Ghana?	250	250
4	Pair	twin figures (igbo? ashanti?) small	Nigeria? Ghana?	300	1200
1		twin figures (igbo? ashanti?) small	Nigeria? Ghana?	150	150
5	Pair	twisted salad spoons	Kenya	30	150
3		walking sticks	?	180	540
28		whale tail necklaces		30	840
11		wooden key holders		20	220
794		**Total**			**97497**

Inventory 3: Isabelle from the DRC

No.	Pair	Item	Country of origin	Price	Value
4		ashanti fertility dolls	Ghana	150	600
2		bamana masks	Mali	300	600
2		bangles, brass, large	Benin	300	600
1		basket, woven, used to keep food cold	Zaire/Congo	250	250
8		boxes, wood	Zaire/Congo	350-180	1720
1		brass large sculpture, soldier	Benin	750	750
2		brass medium sculptures, soldiers	Benin	350	700
2		brass small sculptures, soldiers	Benin	250	500
4		colon	Ivory Coast	150	600
10		combs	Tanzania	50-75	630
1		fang mask, large	Gabon	300	300

7		fang masks, small	Gabon	60	420
5		guro masks, large	Ivory Coast	250-280	1325
7		guro masks, small	Ivory Coast	135	945
7		headrests, luba	Zaire/Congo	180-250	1505
10		helmet masks, igbo or mabila	Nigeria	350	3500
1		ibo mask	Nigeria	350	350
1		knife, men's face, large	Cameroon	250	250
8		kuba cloth	Zaire/Congo	150-180	1320
12		kuba cloth, medium	Zaire/Congo	300-350	3900
3		kuba cloth, large	Zaire/Congo	1000-1500	3750
3		kuba masks	Zaire/Congo	180	540
3		kuba masks, large	Zaire/Congo	350-500	1275
11		kuba, raffia mats	Zaire/Congo	75	825
2		mask, round, metal inlay	Uganda	250	500
1		marimba	Zaire/Congo	200	200
1		mask	Nigeria	300	300
5		masks	Cameroon	300	1500
2		masks, coin inlays	Gabon	350	700
3		masks, hair and horns	Cameroon	250	750
2		masks, large	Zaire/Congo	500	1000
4		musical instruments, Tshokwe	Zaire/Congo	150	600
2		oracle crocodiles	Zaire/Congo	200	400
5		passport masks	Cameroon	50	250
1		pendant, Songye mask	Zaire/Congo	100	100
1		pendu masks	Zaire/Congo	180	180
5		pipes	Zaire/Congo	150	750
8		puru masks	Cameroon	250-300	2200
3		songye masks	Zaire/Congo	400	1200
1		spoon, man's face, large	Cameroon	250	250
3		spoons, wood, old	Zaire/Congo	200	600
8		statuettes	Cameroon	150	1200
2		statuettes, beds with people	Zaire/Congo	150	300
5		statuettes, king regalia	?	750	3750
3		statuettes, very small	Zaire/Congo	120	360
1		stature, medium, yellow wood	Cameroon	150	150
10		statures, large	Zaire/Congo	350-450	4000
9		statures, medium	Zaire/Congo	180-200	1710
2		statures, small	Zaire/Congo	150	300
1		stool, luba	Zaire/Congo	1000	1000
1		sun mask	Cameroon	250	250
2		teke masks	Congo	250	500
9		tshokwe masks	Zaire/Congo	150-350	2187
2		songye masks	Zaire/Congo	185	370
219		**Total**			**54712**

Inventory 4: Lisa from Kenya (case 2)

No.	Unit	Item	Country of origin	Price	Value
8		candle holders, soapstone	Kenya	40-50	360
1		chess game, soapstone	Kenya	150	150
4		eggs, soapstone	Kenya	15	60
1		basket woven	Kenya	20	20
1		basket woven	Kenya	25	25
2		hippo, soapstone	Zimbabwe	30	60
2		serviette holders	Kenya	10	20
4		giraffes, medium	Kenya	25	100
7	pair	salad spoons	Kenya	25	175
5		sitting animals	Kenya	30	150
4		batik	Kenya	35	140
4		paintings	Kenya	35	140
7		bangles	Kenya	10	70
11		rings, brass	?	25	275
36		love bugs	South Africa	15	540
97		**Total**			**2285**

Appendix F: Survey questionnaire for traders and sellers

University of Cape Town
Department of Social Anthropology

QUESTIONNAIRE

Travelling Objects - The Social Life of African Objects

This questionnaire is needed as part of the requirements for the completion of my Masters* dissertation in Social Anthropology. The object of my fieldwork is to study African objects within the context of market exchange. The focus of my research is the interaction between traders and buyers. Therefore I need information about traders' social background, their aspirations regarding their work and their living conditions. You have been randomly selected to participate in this survey and I would appreciate if you would assist by completing the survey. The results of this survey are treated as strictly confidential.

Interview number	
Date	
Market site	
Place of residence of respondent	
Home language of respondent	
Religion	

*The work began as a project for a Masters degree. It was subsequently upgraded on the recommendations of my supervisor and the Department of Social Anthropology, UCT.

1. Demographic Data

Date of birth	
Country or place of birth	
Sex	
Marital Status:	
Single	
Married	
Divorced	
Widowed	
single, living with partner	
number of children	

Questions 1.2 to 1.6.3 only to be answered by *non-South Africans*. *South Africans* please move to question 1.7. Capetonians (persons born in Cape Town) please move to question 2.1.

1.2. When did you arrive in South Africa?

1.2.1. Who accompanied you?

1.3. In which countries did you live before you arrived in South Africa?

country	Duration (days, weeks, etc.)

1.4. Have you lived somewhere else in South Africa before you arrived in Cape Town?

No		Move to question1.5
Yes		

1.4.1. Where in South Africa have you lived before?

1.4.2. How long did you stay in each place?

1.5. When did you arrive in Cape Town?

1.6. Do you miss your home country?

very much	
sometimes	
a little bit	
not at all	

1.6.1. How would you describe the social and economic conditions in your home country?

	social conditions*	economic conditions**
very satisfying		
satisfying		
dissatisfying		
very dissatisfying		

* In terms of health and educational institutions, social security, crime, social life, etc.
** In terms of job opportunities, inflation, unemployment, etc.

1.6.2. How would you describe the social and economic conditions in your home country compared to the conditions in South Africa?

	social conditions	economic conditions
the same as in South Africa		
better than in South Africa		
worse than in South Africa		

1.6.3. Are you planning to return to your home country to live there again?

Yes	
Undecided	
No	

Question 1.7 to 1.8.2 only to be answered by South Africans who were *not born* in Cape Town. Non-South Africans please move to Question 1.9.

1.7. When did you arrive in Cape Town?

1.7.1. Who accompanied you?

1.7.2. Where did you live before you arrived in Cape Town?

1.7.3. How long did you stay in each place ?

1.8. Do you miss the place where you have lived before?

very much	
sometimes	
a little bit	
not at all	

1.8.1. How would you describe the social and economic conditions of the place where you have lived before?

	social conditions*	economic conditions*
very satisfying		
satisfying		
dissatisfying		
very dissatisfying		

* in terms of health and educational institutions, social security, crime, social life, etc.
** in terms of job opportunities, inflation, unemployment, etc.

1.8.2. Are you planning to return to the place where you have lived in before?

Yes	
Undecided	
No	

* * * * * * *

1.9. Please give reasons for coming to Cape Town!

Searching for a job	
Starting a business	
Expanding my business	
Searching for new opportunities	
other (please indicate)	

2. Educational and occupational qualifications

2.1. What is your highest qualification?

No formal education	
Sub a/b	
Standard? (please specify)	
Matric	
Postmatric non-university	
University	
other (please specify)	

2.2. What is your profession (be as precise as possible)?

2.3. Are you self-employed?

Yes		Move to question 3.2
No		

3. Working conditions

3.1. When did your present employment start?

3.2. Have you worked in African trade before?

No		Move to Question 3.3.
Yes		

3.2.1. Where?

3.2.2. When?

3.3. Who trained you to do your work?

3.4. What kind of work did you do prior to this employment/ occupation?

3.5. Do you enjoy your work?

No	
Yes	

Please give reasons for your answer!

3.6. Do you perceive the trade of African objects as a lifelong, full-time and permanent career?

No	
Yes	

Please give reasons for your answer!

***Employees* please move to question 3.15**

3.7. When did you start your business?

3.7.1. What motivated you to start your business?

3.7.2. Where did you start your business?

3.7.3. How did you finance your business in the beginning?

3.8. Are any of your family members traders?

No		Move to question 3.9.
Yes		

3.8.1. Who is a trader in your family?

3.8.2. In which country do they run their business?

3.8.3. What kind of merchandise do they sell/trade in?

3.9. How many people do you employ to sell your merchandise?

3.9.1. What nationality are your employees?

3.10. Do you sell African objects somewhere else besides this market site?

No		Move to question 3.11
Yes		

3.10.1. Where else in Cape Town, South Africa or in any other country do you sell your objects?

3.11. How do you purchase the objects that you are selling?

Please rate, giving the most common answer the number 6 the least common the number 1.

Local producers (South Africa)	1	2	3	4	5	6
Local wholesalers (South Africa)	1	2	3	4	5	6
Friends or family members of your home country	1	2	3	4	5	6
Local producers (outside of South Africa)	1	2	3	4	5	6
Local wholesalers (outside of South Africa)	1	2	3	4	5	6
Wholesalers form other African countries coming to Cape Town	1	2	3	4	5	6
I get the merchandise myself in its country of origin	1	2	3	4	5	6
other:*	1	2	3	4	5	6
other:*	1	2	3	4	5	6

* please specify

3.12. How do you receive the objects?

Please rate, giving the most common answer the number 6 the least common the number 1.

Suppliers send them by road	1	2	3	4	5	6
by train	1	2	3	4	5	6
by air	1	2	3	4	5	6
by ship	1	2	3	4	5	6
I buy them pick them up at their place of production	1	2	3	4	5	6
I travel through African villages and search for objects, which I buy from users or producers of the objects	1	2	3	4	5	6
Suppliers come to my market site and deliver goods	1	2	3	4	5	6

3.13. How do you pay for your merchandise?

exchange of goods, e.g. food, tobacco or other African objects	
Cash	
credit card	
Cheque	
other*	

*please specify

3.13.1. Where, in which situations, and for what kind of objects would you usually use these means of payment?

	where	situations	kind of object
exchange of goods, e.g. food, tobacco, other African objects (please specify the items of exchange)			
Cash			
Credit card			
Cheque			
Other			

3.14. Do you buy the objects that you are selling on a credit basis?

Never	
Sometimes	
Always	
Frequently	

3.14.1. Do you keep books and an inventory of the objects you own?

No	
Yes	

3.15. Would you regard the payment/income you receive as:

more than adequate	
adequate	
too little to meet your basic needs	
so little that you need to borrow money	
so little that you have to do an additional job	

3.16. How many people do you support from this income besides yourself?

4. Trade

4.1. What kind of African objects do you sell?

		country of origin
African masks		
wood sculptures		
clay sculptures		
bronze sculptures		
stone sculptures		
African cloth		
African dress		
African hats		
paintings		
batiks		
pillows		
recycling art (plastic chickens, tin cars and boxes)		
jewellery		
wire work (motorbikes, flowers)		
bead work		
woven baskets		
objects of daily usage such as wooden spoons, chairs, pots, etc.		
pottery		

weapons and knives		
games (chess)		
little articles such as key rings, small wooden or stone animals		
drums and other musical instruments		
other:*		
other:*		
other:*		
other:*		
other*		
other:*		

* please specify

4.2 Do you know the exact origin of all the objects that your are selling?

yes	
most of the time	
no	

4.3. Where do the majority of objects that you are selling come from?

1.....

2.....

3.....

4.4. Please name three objects or types of objects that you are selling the most?

1.....

2.....

3.....

4.5. In your opinion, how should one refer to the objects that you are selling?

4.6. What do you think about the objects that you are selling?

Please tick (you may select more than one option)

indifferent	
I like them	
they remind me of my home country	
I dislike them	
they scare me	
other:(Please specify!)	

4.6.1. Would you also collect the objects that you are selling and display them in your home?

No	
Yes	

Please give reasons for your answer!

5. Trading interaction

5.1. To what kind of category of people do your potential customers belong to?

Please rate, giving the most common answer the number 6 the least common the number 1.
(you may select more than one option)

local tourists	1	2	3	4	5	6
overseas tourists	1	2	3	4	5	6
Capetonians	1	2	3	4	5	6
gallery owners in Cape Town	1	2	3	4	5	6
gallery owners from overseas	1	2	3	4	5	6
collectors of African objects (local)	1	2	3	4	5	6
collectors of African objects (overseas)	1	2	3	4	5	6
other traders of African objects	1	2	3	4	5	6

5.2. In your opinion, what are potential buyers most interested in?

Please rate, giving the most common answer the number 6 the least common the number 1.
(you may select more than one option)

antiques	1	2	3	4	5	6
traditional objects	1	2	3	4	5	6
the stories I tell them	1	2	3	4	5	6
something small and cheap	1	2	3	4	5	6
valuable but small objects	1	2	3	4	5	6
valuable objects no matter what their sizes are	1	2	3	4	5	6
other*:	1	2	3	4	5	6
other*:	1	2	3	4	5	6

* please specify

5.3. Think about your trading interactions with customers! List five questions, or more, most frequently asked by your clients? How do you answer the questions? Are you always honest?

1.....

2.....

3.....

4.....

5.....

5.4. How would you describe the majority of your customers?
5.5.

Please tick (you may select more than one option)

distanced	
very friendly	
friendly	
unfriendly	
interested in what I sell	
interested in me as a person	
sometimes a bit strange	

just looking around	
they bargain too little	
They bargain	
They bargain too much	
Other:(please specify)	

5.5. Can you recall a strange, funny or even unpleasant encounter with a client? If yes, could you please tell me about it.

.6. How would you define art?

Art is:

Please tick, you may chose more than one option.

something beautiful	
a system of symbols	
a skilled handicraft	
the expression of an individual's inner feelings	
a masterpiece, which is generally acknowledged to be no less by the connoisseur	
something meaningful	
a form of communication	
something unique	
a product of civilisation	
the conscious use of skill and creative imagination esp. in the production of aesthetic objects	
a cultural expression	

If none of these definitions suits you, please feel free to give your own definition of art:

7. Are there any questions in this questionnaire which you have found shocking, pointless or naive?

No		Move to question 7.1
Yes		

Which ones? (Number of question)

Why?

7.1. Are there any questions you would have liked to have been asked?

No	
Yes	

Which ones?

How would you have replied?

6.2. Is there anything that you would like to ask me?

****

Thank you for your participation!

Appendix G: Interview Schedule for traders/salesperson

Female__ Male__ Age__

1. When did you start working at the market?

2. What kind of work did you do before you started to work here?

3. Who told you about this job?

4. Where does your employer come from?

5. Did your employer train you to do this work?

6. Do you like this job?

Yes___ No___ Please give reasons?

7. How would you regard the income you receive?

8. How many people do you support from your income?

9. Do you like the objects that you are selling?

10. How would you call/name to the objects that you are selling?

Appendix H: Survey Questionnaire for visitors to Cape Town

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Department of Social Anthropology

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QUESTIONNAIRE

Travelling Objects - The Social Life of African Objects

Introduction

This questionnaire is needed to support my present research at the African art markets in Cape Town. I am a student at the University of Cape Town and I am working on my Masters Dissertation in Social Anthropology. The major aspect of my work is to focus on the social networks encompassing the paths of African objects. I am exploring the plurality of market participants involved in trade of African objects in Cape Town. One focal point of my research is the interaction between purchasers and traders of African objects. The trade of African objects satisfies a wide public. The public's perceptions about and their terminology applied to objects they purchase might differ significantly according to their individual interests. The analysis of perceptions and terminology used within the context of market exchange will provide me with insights into circulating ideas about and meanings of African cultural productions. Therefore I need information about purchasers' social background and their attitudes towards African objects.

You have been randomly selected to participate in this survey and I would appreciate if you would assist by completing the survey. The results of this survey will be treated as strictly confidential. You may answer this questionnaire in English, German or French.

Date	
Accommodation in Cape Town	
Place of permanent residence	
Home language	

1. *Demographic Data*

Country of Birth

Date of Birth

Sex
Male: __
Female: __

Marital Status
Single: __ married/with partner: __
divorced: __ widowed: __

No.of children: ___

1.2. What is your highest qualification?
(Please tick)

No formal education: ___ Sub a/b: ___ Standard: ___ Matric*: ___

Post-matric: ___ University: ___ Other: ___ (specify)

*Abitur, High-school Diploma, Baccalaureate

1.3. **What is your profession (be as precise as possible)?**

1.4. **Are you self-employed?** Yes: ___ No: ___

2. ***Travel Information***

2.1. **When did you arrive in Cape Town?** _____

2.2 **Who is accompanying you?** _____

_____

2.3. **Have you been to Cape Town before?**

No: ____ (move to question 2.4) Yes ___

2.3.1. **How often have you been to Cape Town?** _____

2.3.2. **When last did you visit Cape Town?** _____

2.4. **How many days/weeks will you stay in Cape Town?** _____

2.5. **Please give reasons for coming to Cape Town!**
(Please tick)
Holiday: ____ Business: ____ Visiting friends: ____ Visiting family: ____

Other:

2.6. **Did you ever visit <u>other</u> African countries?**

No: ____ (move to question 2.7) Yes ___

2.6.1. **Which countries did you visit and for how long did you stay there?**

Questions 2.7. to 2.10. only to be answered by *Non-South Africans*.
South Africans please move to question 3.1.

2.7. When did you arrive in South Africa? _____

2.8. Did you travel somewhere else in Southern Africa before you arrived in Cape Town?

No: ____ (move to question 2.9) Yes ___

2.8.1. Where have been in South Africa before you arrived in Cape Town and for how long?

2.9. Have you visited South Africa before?

No: ____ (move to question 2.10) Yes ___

2.9.1. How often have you been to South Africa? _____

2.9.2. When last did you visit South Africa? _____

2.10. For how many days/weeks are you in South Africa? _____

3. *African Objects and Trade*

3.1. Did you buy any African objects, such as woodcarvings, bead work etc. ?

No: ____ (move to question 3.5) Yes ____

3.2. What kind of African objects did you buy?

object	country or place of origin	place of purchase
example: beer pot	*KwaZulu/Natal*	*Greenmarket*

3.3 **What were your reasons for buying African objects?**
(Please tick you may chose more than one option)

I wanted some nice souvenirs to take back home: ____
I bought the objects as gift for family or friends: ____
I bought the objects to sell them at home (e.g. gallery owner): ____
The trader was poor and I felt pity for him/her: ____
I saw the object and liked it (purchase on impulse): ____
I am a collector of African objects: ____
(If you are a collector, please answer questions 3.4 to 3.4.5)
Other reasons.

3.4 **When did you start collecting African objects?** _____

3.4.1 **What kinds of objects and from which African countries are you collecting?**

3.4.2 **Where do the <u>majority</u> of objects that you own come from?**

3.4.3 **What are the reasons for collecting African objects?**

3.4.4 Do you collect other objects, such European paintings, antiques, coins, stamps, etc.

No: ____ Yes ___, if yes please specify:

3.4.5 Do you ever sell some of the objects of your private collection to other collectors or someone else?

No: ___ sometimes: ____ Yes _ _

3.5 Are you planning to by some African objects?

3.6. What are you most interested in purchasing?

Please rate the following options, giving 1 to least possible and 6 to most possible.

Antiques	1	2	3	4	5	6
traditional objects	1	2	3	4	5	6
the stories the trader tells me about the objects	1	2	3	4	5	6
something small and less expensive	1	2	3	4	5	6
authentic objects of African culture	1	2	3	4	5	6
valuable but small objects	1	2	3	4	5	6
valuable objects no matter what their sizes are	1	2	3	4	5	6
the stories the trader tells me about her/his life and home country	1	2	3	4	5	6
other:*	1	2	3	4	5	6
other:*	1	2	3	4	5	6

*Please specify

3.7. How would you characterise the objects that you have purchased or planning to purchase ?

Please tick (you may chose more than one option)

Traditional Pieces: _ _
A piece of Art: __
Both, merchandise and a piece art: ___
Copies of traditional pieces: ___
Souvenirs: ___
Curios: ___
Other: (Please specify):

Antiques: ___
A merchandise: ___
Handicrafts: ___
Investment objects: ___
Authentic African handicraft: ___

3.8. **Briefly describe how you will use the objects you have purchased in your home** (Please, indicate the use for each object that you have purchased!)
E.g. as decoration, daily use, as a vase, etc.

4. ***Market experience***

4.1 **Do you remember the trader[s] you bought the object[s] from?**

No: ___ (move to question 4.4) Yes ___

4.2 **Can you remember what the trader[s] told you about the object[s] you have purchased?**

No: ____ (move to question 4.4) Yes ___

4.3 **Could you briefly describe some of the things the trader[s] have told you?**

4.4 **Did you enjoy visiting the markets in Cape Town/ South Africa?**

No: ___ Yes __ Please give reasons for your answer:

4.5 **Did the markets that you have visited in Cape Town or South Africa meet your expectations of an African market?**

No: ___ Yes __ Please give reasons for your answer:

4.6 **Did you compare the price of the objects among different traders before you purchased the objects?**

No: ___ Yes __

4.7 **Did you bargain with the traders?**

No: ___ Yes __

5. ***Art and Authenticity***

5.1 **How would you define art?**

Art is: (Please tick, you may chose more than one option:

something beautiful		a system of symbols	
something meaningful		a form of communication	
a skilled handicraft		something unique	
the expression of an individual's inner feelings		a cultural expression	
a masterpiece which is generally acknowledged to be no less by the connoisseur		the conscious use of skill and creative imagination especially in the production of aesthetic objects	
a product of civilisation			

If none of these definitions suit you, please feel free to give your own definition of art:

5.2. **How would you define the term "authentic"?**

Authentic is: (Please tick, you may chose more than one option:

something that is contemporary		something that was produced by tribal societies prior to colonialism	
something traditional		anything is authentic as long as it expresses a society's cultural values	
an object that is produced by a traditional artist for a traditional purpose and conforms to traditional forms		an object that is produced by a traditional artist without any intention of selling it	

an object that has been used in a ritual, e.g. a mask that has been danced		something that conforms to an original so as to reproduce its essential features	
something that is genuine			

If none of these definitions suit you, please feel free to give your own definition:

6. *Conclusion*

6.1 **Are there any questions in this questionnaire which you have found shocking, pointless or naive?**

No: ___ (move to question 6.1) Yes ___

Which ones? (Numbers of questions) _____, _____

Why?

6.2 **Are there any questions you would have liked to have been asked?**

No: ___ Yes ___

Which ones?

How would you have replied?

6.3 **Is there anything that you would like to ask me?**

Thank you for your participation!

Appendix I: Interview schedule for potential customers

Female__ Male__ Age__

Where do you come from?

How long have you been to Cape Town?

Do you like Cape Town?

Have you been somewhere else in South Africa?

Is this your first trip to Africa?

Did you buy any African Objects? If yes, what kind of objects?

What will you do with them?

Where did you buy them?

Did you like the markets? Why?

How would you refer to the objects you have bought?

Appendix J: Questionnaire for collectors

Department of Social Anthropology

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1. *Demographic Data*

Date of Birth **Country of Birth** **Sex** **Marital Status**

Male: __
Female: __

Single: __ married/with partner: __
divorced: __ widowed: __

No.of children: ___

1.2. What is your highest qualification?
(Please tick)

No formal education: ___ Sub a/b: ___ Standard: ___ Matric*: ___
(specify)
Post-matric: ___ University: ___ Other: (specify)

*Abitur, High-school Diploma, Baccalaureate

1.3. What is your profession (be as precise as possible)?

2. *Collection*

2.1. When did you start this collection?

2.2 Did you collect anything else before? If yes, what did you collect?

2.3 Did you collect from young age? If yes, what did you collect?

2.4 Were your parents collectors? If yes, what did they collect?

2.5 How did your present collection develop? Do you remember the first pieces that you collected? What were they?

2.6a Is there a system in the way you collect? In the way that at certain moments you would only collect a certain category of objects, for example Twin Figures?

2.6b What are the criteria you use to decide whether an object should become part of your collection?

2.7 Do you keep a catalogue of/classify the objects in your collection?

2.8 **Do you do anything to conserve the objects in your collection?**

2.9 **How many objects are in your collection at present?**

2.10 **How do you finance your collection?**

2.11 **Do you ever sell objects of your private collection?**

2.12 **Is there a limit to what you can collect?**

2.13 **Do you perceive your collection as an investment?**

2.14a **Could you please give me some reasons why you are collecting?**

2.146 **Do you feel that you are saving the objects from extinction?**

2.15 **What do you like about the objects that you are collecting?**

2.16 **Are you interested in the historical and socio-cultural background of the objects?**

2.17 **How would you refer to the objects in your collection? [in terms of artefact, tribal, art etc]**
Please give reasons for your answer!

2.18 **How do you understand the term authenticity? Is it the major criteria for evaluating objects?**

2.19 **Would you agree that the collection is worth more than its individual parts?**

Appendix K: South African Postcards

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