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Precarious production: globalisation and artisan labour in the Third World

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ABSTRACT *This article provides an overview of recent literature and studies of Third World artisans in the context of economic globalisation. Drawing upon recently published research conducted in various countries in Central America, Asia and Africa, it demonstrates that globalisation has intensified the precarious existence of artisan communities through increasing global competition, the mass production of craft goods, and shifting trends in fashion, cultural taste and aesthetics. Both government and non-government efforts at supporting artisans are criticised for providing limited and ineffectual programmes and policies. Moreover, recent consumer trends like 'fair-trade' shopping are likewise only piecemeal and limited in terms of the long-term support they can give to struggling artisan communities. When artisans survive, they do so mainly on the periphery of both global and local capitalist economies; this is a situation that has rarely changed over the decades. In various ways, and in specific regional contexts, the globalisation of production exacerbates, rather than diminishes, the marginal status of artisan communities.*

There is no doubt that artisans live a precarious, fractured and marginalised existence. It has been estimated by the United Nations that, in India for example, over the past 30 years the numbers of artisans have declined by at least 30%, with many artisans joining the ranks of casual wage labourers and the informal economy.[1] Mass produced, standardised and cheap factory items have replaced many of the various goods once produced by the artisans.[2] Moreover, essential raw materials like skins and hides, certain types of wood, metals, shells and other craft materials have either become too expensive for the artisans to purchase, or else have been diverted to mass production. Those artisans that do survive invariably produce for a world market, and so daily confront the vagaries of that market.[3] Significantly, the issues and problems addressed in this article apply to many artisan communities drawn from the developing world, but especially to those marginal artisanal groups and craft workers in Central and Latin America, Africa, and throughout Asia.[4]

The significance of craft production is that it crosses all sectors of the modern global economy—from pre-industrial to industrial and post-industrial.[5] Unlike

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some other forms of labour, artisan production can also enable a degree of labour autonomy for those who have limited access to the cash economy. As craft production is generally household- based, its analysis raises important questions concerning the changing nature of gender and generational relations within the household. Finally, with the coming of a globalised economy, coupled with post-modern consumer sentiments, crafts represent a traditional (or homely) form of consumer goods, which, for some buyers, have great appeal. In other words, the consumption of crafts allows for a reconnection back to earlier and more earthy forms and designs in a fragmented, fractured and technological world. The discussion in the following sections of this article highlights the precarious nature of artisan employment and its inevitable consequences for families and communities. Despite the West's fluctuating interest in all things 'ethnic', 'traditional' and 'different', the daily life of the Third World artisan remains one of struggle, poverty and exploitation.

Artisan and craft production in the Third World: an overview of recent research

In 1993 in her edited book *Crafts in the World Market*, the anthropologist June Nash argued that crafts are the medium of communication between people who live profoundly different lives, in different countries, but who can respond to the symbols, textures and forms that express different cultural traditions. She went on to write that there is now a reverse flow of goods from the former colonies back to the industrial centres of the world as consumers seek out the exotic and unique objects of handicraft production.[6] Western consumers want to know more about the products and producers of the items they are buying. While the activity of buying a handicraft may imbue the purchaser with a sense of buying tradition, or of supporting a struggling community of workers, the art of craft production, an everyday activity, may itself be a form of resistance and struggle in the face of global economic and cultural changes. Craft production, as James Scott points out in the case of Malay peasants, may in fact be a 'weapon of the weak', an activity which frequently operates at the margins of the mainstream economy and the state.[7] Importantly, it helps maintain family, household and community relations, providing the producers with a sense of symbolic power and maintaining a localised cultural identity.

It is important to recognise, however, that artisan production is frequently a highly contested and antagonistic form of production. The relentless commodification of craft production, inherent gender segregation and discrimination against women and girls, and a generational divide are evident throughout studies of artisan communities. The increasing commodification of craft production is indicative of the increasing globalisation of production more generally. Various studies have described the ways artisan communities have attempted to re-organise and adjust to changing global economic circumstances and market demands. One body of literature, for instance, explores this process of internationalised craft commercialisation in terms of commodity chains that link artisans, wholesalers and first world department stores.[8] The trade in artisanal goods themselves is largely dominated by a handful of importing countries—

namely Germany, the USA, the UK and France, illustrating that the industry is largely at the beck and call of dominant first world corporations and trading regimes.[9] Other scholars have reported on artisan communities that seek market niches or develop flexible specialisation in their manufacturing of crafts in order to survive.[10] The commercialisation and global expansion of certain craft industries concomitantly can lead to severe localised effects. For example, this is dramatically illustrated in the case of Indonesian textiles, where the development of this industry into a large, commercialised manufacturing process which created 80 000 jobs has led to the subsequent demise of an estimated 410 000 traditional artisan jobs in weaving and associated crafts like dyeing.[11]

It is important not to generalise, however, about the extent to which global capital transforms artisan communities. In a recent study, Rudi Colloredo-Mansfield argues that increasing competition as a result of economic neo-liberalism and globalisation among artisan communities in Otavalo, Ecuador, has revitalised these communities, opening up new markets and opportunities and re-creating interdependencies between artisans, merchants and shopkeepers. While there is a sense of community survival there nevertheless remains a pervasive system of inequality wrought by transnationalism and competition. As he argues: 'I want to analyze the distinctive inequalities that afflict people seeking livelihoods in capitalism's austere margins and explain how internal discourses of "competition" naturalize these inequalities as an acceptable (for the moment) community condition'.[12] Tanya Korovkin similarly provides detailed evidence concerning recent economic and cultural changes confronting the artisans of Otavalo, which, she argues, led to a transformation in, rather than disappearance of, the local Quichua culture. As she writes: 'Not only did the market expansion in Otavalo fail to destroy the community institutions but is also gave rise to an indigenous intelligentsia whose members redefined Indian identity in accordance with new cultural and economic realities'.[13]

It is notable, therefore, that in mainly ethnographic studies of the localised effects of the commercialisation of craft production, complex and subtle social changes are unearthed. In her article on the embroidery (*chikan*) industry in Lucknow, India, Clare Wilkinson-Weber analyses the way this industry has changed over time to become a mass-market industry. Once dominated by highly skilled male embroiders (who are mostly now the agents or middlemen) it is now dominated by semi-skilled Muslim women, most of whom work from home—which keeps them in *purdah*—and produce coarse, cheap products for a largely local market.[14] This raises another key point: craft production is an important industry for the employment of women. Significantly though, the final stage of the process—the selling on of the finished goods—remains an inherently masculine task. This is confirmed in several important studies of women's home-based, subsistence production in various settings in the Asia Pacific and, as such, reveals the unique ways women are exploited by both their class and gender, and even, in some specific cases, their religious affiliations.[15] Comparative, inter-country research reveals conclusively that women lack control over the distribution and marketing of crafts, exacerbating their inequality within the industry. Moreover 'womanly' traits like docility, dexterity and obedience are crucial factors in selecting workers, subsequently denying similar opportunities to those

women who do not fit the 'feminine, obedient worker' stereotype. Ideas of domesticity and the 'ideal' role of women intersect at various levels in the craft production process, leaving many women at home, thereby having to mind children, cook and clean and produce craft goods on time and for low rates of pay.[16] The feminine domestication of craft production intersects with patriarchal perceptions of women's sexuality where, in the case of the Philippines for example, menstruating women are prohibited from the site of dyeing.[17] Finally, the domestic nature of women's craft production means that it is not only impossible for them to form craft unions, but also difficult for them to develop strategies to overcome entrenched patriarchal structures embedded within artisan industries.

The study of *chikan* production described above highlights the pitfalls of an industry that is increasingly commodified. As the artisan is paid per piece, and as the market is demanding more, the artisans themselves are becoming de-skilled, only bothering to learn one or two popular stitches. Even urban artisans in Lucknow were criticising the work of rural-based embroiderers whose work was the most simplistic. Indeed, the rural embroiderers were paid even less per piece, emphasising the levels of exploitation between more organised, or well connected urban producers and the rural artisans. Thus it is ironic that the relative success and popularity of the craft is leading to its partial demise, at least in terms of the level of skill of the artisans and lack of variety of high quality, finished product.

The exploitative nature of craft production is not confined solely to gender discrimination. Much of the industry is piecemeal, repetitive, and based on an intensive and prevailing division of labour based on both class and gender. This is highlighted, for example, in a 1988 comparative study of artisan labour in India, the Philippines and Indonesia and its results are indicative of the inequalities found in the industry throughout the Third World.[18] Craft workers tend to have little formal education, are rarely organised and so are subject to a range of exploitative work conditions like poor safety, low wages and lack of formalisation of their craft skills. Needless to say, it is the opportunistic middlemen who exploit these precarious labour conditions to their financial benefit. On this point, Virginia Miralao, in her study of a range of Philippine craft industries, like rattan furniture construction, hand weaving, mat making and hand embroidery, describes the various physical risks and health hazards, low rates of pay, lack of labour unions and labour laws, and general exploitative conditions faced by workers in these industries.[19] In another example illustrative of the inherent health risks to workers, Dan Imhoff describes the case of a female artisan who, after purchasing cheap dyes (containing high levels of heavy metals and toxic chemicals) from a local market, proceeded to empty the dye bath onto her garden bed.[20]

Research demonstrates an intrinsic relationship between various industries and artisan production. This is especially the case with tourism and handicraft production. The immense growth in international tourism to resorts like those in Bali or Thailand, or the coastal resorts in Mexico or the Caribbean, is matched by an increase in tourist handicrafts of various kinds. However, like the tourism industry itself, research shows that the tourist handicraft industry is seasonal and

fluctuates between various sites depending upon the market, advertising, government support and other factors.[21] This is apart from the fact that the handicraft market is invariably tightly controlled by a few agents, is highly exploitative and earns relatively little for the individual artisan.[22] The fluidity and precarious nature of Third World artisan production is exemplified in the case of Guatemalan textiles. Imhoff describes how the market for these goods in the USA took off in the early 1990s and was intimately connected with youth and backpacking travel to the region. Every conceivable accessory item, like water carriers and backpacks, were festooned with attractive and colourful patterns unique to Guatemalan culture. However, in their race to secure a slice of the burgeoning market, Guatemalan artisans competed with each other to the point of market-saturation, over-supply and declining prices and declining market desire. This is despite their attempts to branch out into different areas, lower their prices and adapt to market conditions.[23]

June Nash's collection of papers published in 1993 deals with several issues among the possibilities and pitfalls of Latin American artisanal production on a global level. These problems include: dominance by TNCs and large monopoly retail businesses; shifting fashion styles and trends; and general market corruption and unreliability.[24] Similar conclusions to Nash's earlier edited book are to be found in the more recent edited collection Artisans and Cooperatives and Handmade Money.[25] Like the situation in Central America the perils and pitfalls of craftwork is experienced by artisans on the periphery. Kyoko Kusakabe, for example, describes the ways in which women weavers on the Laos–Thailand border experience the highs and lows of producing for a market that is rapidly being subject to liberalising forces. While opportunities are closed off for some (the 'old' or traditional weavers), others experience the benefits of a commercialised weaving scene.[26] Other alternatives for survival by artisans competing in the global marketplace, such as small producers binding together and subcontracting their wares, rarely offer long-term gains. In the case of Albay artisan subcontractors in the Philippines, it was found that those who were initially successful preferred to invest their profits in fast-moving, high-yielding ventures rather than re-invest in the craft enterprises where the market remained insecure and fickle.[27]

Quotidian crafts, elite crafts and consumption

The success of artisanal crafts within the wider national and international markets largely depends on the whims of global consumer demand. We can distinguish between artisan crafts for everyday use—'quotidian crafts'—and those that are fundamentally for status—'elite crafts'. In terms of a global market, following Bourdieu, we can delineate a status distinction in the types of crafts produced and consumed.[28] Artisanal crafts that are seen to be of high quality, rare, with great artistic beauty, or intricately constructed have a specialised and elite consumer market. These elite consumers are most likely to be able to relate tales concerning the craft involved, where the item is from, the location of, and specific details about, the artisan community, and so forth.[29] On the other hand, there circulates a veritable variety of everyday craft goods like women's cloth bags, backpacks,

leather wallets and handbags, wall hangings, floor rugs, and dress jewellery, to name just a few, which are largely for global mass consumption.

At the local level quotidian crafts are under threat. For instance, cheap plastic sandals are replacing leather ones and, in turn, are displacing the mass of indigenous leather shoemakers in countries such as India.[30] Likewise, clay pottery items are being replaced by plastic or aluminium plates, bowls, jugs and cups. Cotton weave is substituted by synthetic cloth, with the advantage that it is lighter, cheaper and rarely needs ironing. There are numerous examples where a traditional craft is subsumed by mass-produced items. Artisans themselves are more than aware of this, however, and indeed many develop strategies to accommodate fluctuating global markets and interest in their crafts. Studies show that artisans can quite readily adapt and change, often producing inferior crafts for a global market that have little resemblance to the meaning-rich, specialised crafts that are reserved for ceremonies or local consumption. Thus we can differentiate between strategic craft production in a globalised market and traditional craft production for a specifically localised market.

Notably absent in the literature on artisan production are related studies of craft consumption—on the meaning, motivations and reasons for consuming artisanal crafts, analysing the interrelationships that develop between Third World artisans and Western consumers. This in itself can be a fruitful area of enquiry, as demonstrated in a recent study of the culture market of Niger. In this instance, the author analyses the intricate connections built up between Western consumers and artisans in the context of shifting notions of 'traditional' and 'modern' and describes the ways economically successful Tuareg artisans redefine their 'traditional' craft and their place within the conventional socio-classificatory system. As Davis explains in her conclusion:

> 'Modern' artisanal objects thus represent a striking transformation between Westerners and non-Westerners. For Westerners, Tuareg artisans appeal to a contemporary political consciousness that drives expatriates to develop egalitarian relationships with local people…For Tuareg artisans, Western expatriates comprise a new and reliable clientele who grant to artisans a novel cultural status, along with wealth and esteem refused by their traditional noble patrons. 'Modern' artisanal objects mirror these changes: their Western utility, indelible Tuareg style, and novelty represent the adjustment of Tuaregs and Westerners to each other and to an as-yet obscure ideal of postcolonial modernity.[31]

In certain circumstances, therefore, there is a sense of political and social unity felt by the Western consumer in 'helping-out' the struggling or marginal artisan peoples. Yet, fundamentally, relatively little is known about the reasons why Western consumers buy craft objects that are produced by Third World workers. Are they motivated for reasons of fashion, pity, status, memory (of travels), beauty, television images, or a combination of these? Moreover, do the reasons proffered by Westerners differ from the purchasing motivations of local consumers?[32]

With the emergence of 'ethnic chic', the hybridisation of fashion, and a return to 'earthy' and 'natural' forms and colours in interior design, Third World craft goods and patterns have become popular. Apart from overseas travel, it is largely

by way of catalogues and visits to 'fair-trade' stores that Western consumers are able to purchase 'authentic' artisanal products. Apart from mail-order catalogues, internet websites have also become important promoters of Third World artisanal goods.[33] Yet, with few exceptions, this again remains a largely under researched area. In her article 'Selling Guatemala', Carol Hendrickson analyses the portrayal of Mayan and Guatemalan clothing and handicraft items in a range of mail-order catalogues circulating in the USA. She reveals the various ways these catalogues construct the 'natural', 'traditional' and even, in some cases, 'primitive' images of Guatemalan life that are used to appeal to consumers. Western consumers sometimes '… *are* made more aware of the situation in that country and Maya *do* earn money from these businesses'.[34] But, in each case, products have to be tailored to suit the foreign audience, the 'horror' stories of certain communities are toned down, and the fact that the crafts marketed overseas are produced according to strict quality control measures is never revealed.[35] 'Fair trade' shopping, which involves the marketing of Third World artisanal crafts and produce with the intended aim of linking first world consumers to Third World producers, has been critiqued as counter-hegemonic consumerism. In this context, Josee Johnson critically explores how fair-trade discourse constructs various understandings of development, consumerism and social justice and what these discourses reveal about issues like over-consumption in the industrialised cores and globalised structural inequality.[36] She finds that fair-trade discourse tends to 'rely on individualistic notions of choice and consumer sovereignty, obscures the structural linkages between core and periphery in a globalised economy, and belies the collective environmental implications of individual free choice in the marketplace'.[37] Significantly, she also points out that, rather than providing or stimulating any serious discussion of structural inequality, fair-trade discourse instead supports a more liberal, depoliticised vision of cultural difference. In this context, 'ethnic branding', 'tradition', and 'authenticity' thereby become important features in the marketing of crafts. To illustrate this trend, Lynn Stephen reports on the integration and 'ethnicisation' of Mexican rugs in the North American consumer markets, showing how the 'branding' of ethnic identity is an important marketing tool, despite the revelation that the majority of 'Mexican' rugs are now made in India.[38]

Government and non-government organisation intervention

Specialised government agencies and various non-government organisations (NGOs) have aimed to preserve the range of crafts unique to their nations. Notwithstanding the good intent of state or national policies to preserve 'traditional' crafts, there is nevertheless an underlying paternalism in such policies when the very same state is pursuing a broader global industrial and manufacturing agenda that competes with, and will ultimately lead to the marginalisation, or even complete demise, of local artisan industries. Government policies and bureaucracies, set up to promote artisan industries in various Third World countries, have been criticised for their failure properly to recognise and promote the needs of craft workers.[39] The failure to recognise 'on-the-ground', local knowledge and incorporate this into employment policies and planning shows a disdain for

marginal workers and so reproduces the failures of top-down policy making so indicative of ill-conceived, developmentalist policies. Moreover, who decides what activities are worth supporting and what specific crafts are considered unique to a nation and its peoples, and why is a significant question to pose. In this sense, the state involves itself in a process of what I term 'selective traditionalising', a process which can assist some communities to survive but may condemn many others. For instance, we can critically ask: why isn't the everyday artisanal activity of making simple bricks, tiles or bowls deserving of state protection and support?

In the case of India, I hypothesise that the motives of elite Indian consumers of artisanal crafts can be linked to earlier nationalist projects of identity formation. For instance, in the early part of the twentieth century, the Bengal School of Art is a case in point. This was a modernist style of art that was distinctive from both traditional Indian painting and Western modernism. The artists, most notably Nandalal Bose, Abanindranath Tagore and Jamini Roy, were seeking new sources of modernity and drew their inspiration from folk tales and village arts and crafts, and they specialised in re-interpreting Indian myths often in miniature form, employing bright, earthy and natural colours. They blended classical, folk and modern styles to produce an artistic form that would represent an authentic Indian nationalist identity. For instance, Nandalal Bose's subject matter often depicted the spectacle of Indian popular culture—images of village artisans and workers and domestic life.[40] These days too, there are similarities with the resurrection and popularity of 'native', 'traditional' or 'authentic' Indian arts and crafts, where we witness the Indian urban elite and diasporic community of professional migrants seeking to interrogate and reconstruct their identities, through literature, film and art, in a fragmented and globalising world.[41] Jyotindra Jain argues that a great divide now exists in India between the mainstream elite artists who work in studios and sell through organised galleries and the 'everyday' artisans and craftspeople. This latter group:

> mainly thrive on the new urban patronage which has arisen as a result of protection and patronizing developmental endeavours on the part of the government. The government encourages these with a view to keeping the artisans self-employed and to earning precious foreign exchange by exporting manufactured craft products. Once it is established that the 'crafts' are primarily 'commercial' rather than 'cultural' in nature, their treatment involves different strategies, one of which must be that the criteria for design and aesthetics are oriented to commerce-related development.[42]

Jain goes on to write that a schism evolves wherein tribal and village artistic products are rarely considered part of contemporary 'art'. Rather, the 'art' of rural artisans, or more correctly 'artists', is predominantly mass produced, commercially driven 'handicrafts'.

Unlike state-supported systems, the situation at the non-governmental level is somewhat different. While the support of various NGOs, the establishment of artisan co-operatives, and the emergence of various fair trade schemes are welcome, there remains a sense of hopelessness as artisans employed by these various NGOs have to compete in a global market. For example, a 1997 report by

the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) on women artisans in India describes the rise of artisan sweatshops where NGO staff on good salaries, with leave and other job benefits, supervise the work of women who are barley struggling to survive on a subsistence income. In one case, orders for Belgian lace were rejected on the grounds of poor quality. The income from sales, more than 10 times the cost of lace manufacture, is largely shared by the charity and the NGO that buys it, with only a subsistence level of wages trickling down to the artisans. The various fair trade bodies, with their focus on a fair price, are also criticised for failing to ensure that the artisans are accorded just and reasonable wages and suitable employment conditions and rights.[43] Moreover, the fickle nature of the global marketplace means that various crafts come in and out of fashion, leading to problems of dwindling markets and over-supply.

Another way in which artisan labour has the potential to survive, with both government and NGO assistance, is through the imposition of intellectual property rights. The globalisation of production has given rise to several well known cases of copyright and patent violations in relation to medicines, music and literature. However, one of the key problems that emerges is that artisanal crafts and skills are shared, owned and practised by a community and so stand in stark contrast to the Western view of knowledge as a commodity owned by an individual or an incorporated company. Furthermore, what happens when another marginalised group uses similar patterns or crafts to enter the marketplace? Moreover, can a community or group hold onto its intellectual property when businesses from another country decide to use the same patterns and designs?[44]

Skills training of artisan labourers

Is there a need, or indeed advantage, for specific skills training and education for artisans? Should the skills of the artisans be formalised and would any benefit be derived if this were to happen? In the area of skills training and the social uplift of artisan communities, the majority of research undertaken points to the advantages of forming artisan co-operatives which are managed by, or in linkage with, fair trade organisations.[45] This is despite the various criticisms of these organisations outlined in previous sections. One particular group that has recently been formed to assist and train various artisan communities from around the globe is the 'Artisan Enterprise Network' (AEN). As they point out in their publicity, they have a goal of 'empowering owners of micro and small businesses to be entrepreneurs in the global marketplace'. The AEN was established after being one of 44 winners of a World Bank competition for innovative ideas to reduce world poverty and spur development. Essentially, the AEN sets out to establish and ferment an entrepreneurial spirit and organisation among artisan communities. Included in the AEN is an artisan/entrepreneur curriculum that teaches small business planning and entrepreneurial skills.[46]

Many other organisations provide assistance and training for artisans. At the international governmental level, SEED (Boosting Employment Through *S*mall *E*nterpris*E* *D*evelopment) is a programme of the International Labour Organisation (ILO) to capitalise on the ILO's work in supporting micro- and small-scale enterprises. For example, in Mali the ILO assisted in establishing the

National Federation of Artisans, which has over 20 000 members and assists these workers in having a representative voice in government affairs. Moreover, the ILO is developing a range of guidelines, manuals and training programmes for capacity building among marginal working communities like artisans and handicraft workers. At the non-profit level, The Crafts Center is an organisation that connects artisans to potential buyers and assistance organisations like micro-credit agencies and various NGOs. It also educates and trains artisans and their development partners about product quality, sound business practices and market trends, and 'best practice' in production and marketing, and raises general consumer interest in and appreciation of handicrafts.[47] For some organisations, implementing a Western, globalised management and business training programme will enable the non-Western artisan to survive by becoming a small, entrepreneurial and profitable business. For others, it is by offering a range of credit and business plans. Yet, there remains in the world of private production the inherent problems of fluctuating market demand, intense local and global competition, lack of social power and hence a lack of effective bargaining and negotiating skills, and a general reduction in secure and meaningful employment once the skills of the artisan become commercialised. There are all too many cases in the developed world of small enterprises failing within their first year of operation to graft the Western model of entreprenuerialism and small business development onto the communities of marginalised Third World workers.

Concluding comments

In *Consumer Culture and Postmodernism*, Mike Featherstone writes about shopping as a symbolic and self-validating experience—where the pleasure of shopping is often far greater than the pleasure derived from the good that is purchased.[48] We may be able to extend this argument further. That is to say, in the act of purchasing an artisanal commodity, the Western consumer is at once buying the experience of authenticity and traditionalism in a way that symbolically connects the commodity back to the producer. This is reinforced by a direct experience of buying from the producer, as in a tourist encounter, or from a fair trade shop or through a catalogue, where the details of the craft and the producers themselves are provided.[49]

Ayami Nakatani, in a recent conference paper, recounts the tales of Japanese middle class consumers, and the various women's' magazines aimed at this market, which personalise the consumption of craft goods. She explains:

> The Japanese consumers, predominantly women, crave for the stories and 'biographical' details about these goods. Responding to those needs, the magazine articles and import dealers provide some ideas about the context of production; their discourse tends to create a highly romanticized, and static view of local producers. On the part of the purchasers, they turn the goods into personalized possessions and display them in an effort to express their individuality.[50]

Thus, in a hyperreal world of mass, packaged consumption, global telecommunications and virtual relationships, the purchase of an artisan craft may act to temporarily anchor the consumer in a real world of labour production.[51]

Yet, despite the urge to speak of the caged-up, 'postmodern consumer', in many ways, the daily life and struggle of Third World artisans have changed little over the past few decades. This is the life of precarious production—a maginalised existence determined by the ever-changing desires of a whimsical global consumer market. Tourists may come and go, wars and civil disruption may occur, and various raw materials may become too expensive or disappear forever. Producing for the global market is thus fraught with an array of perils. To be an artisan is thus a contingent and relative experience, whereby the majority of artisans fluctuate between work and unemployment, income and poverty.

Just as the life of the artisan is precarious, so too is the craft itself. The globalisation of artisanal crafts has led to the separation of the craft from the actual artisan. For example, various factories in China now mass produce and market 'sari' cloth, based on Indian designs, which finds it way into Western supermarkets and discount fabric stores, as tablecloths, placemats and bed linen. Thus it may be now possible to speak of the 'virtual artisan', meaning that the craft itself survives in a hybrid form that may or may not be produced by the original workers. Coupled with this is the concomitant emergence of artisanal or craft 'bricolage', whereby the artisanal product becomes an assemblage of popular patterns and designs, often used out of context, and with the finished good a mere resemblance of its former self.

Finally, it is now commonplace within postcolonial theory to write and research on the complex phenomenon of globalised, hybridised identities, as postcolonial migrants fluctuate between their 'traditional' and 'fixed' cultural identities and their 'new' identities which form after migration.[52] In many respects the contemporary artisan too has a hybrid identity: some retain traditionalism in their craft while simultaneously producing for a global consumer or local tourist market. Moreover, the vestiges of the craft itself survive, despite its material transference from design to artefact to mass-produced commodity. Either way, the identity of the artisan is imbued in the craft piece itself—whether it is on the design of the embroidery, the shape of the pot, the style of weaving, or the colours and patterns of the cloth. In other words, unlike the displaced or marginalised wage worker, artisan crafts carry with them a piece of the identity of the makers themselves and so circulate in the global consumer markets of department stores, fair trade shops or local bazaars and markets. Thus, despite the precarious and fragile nature of artisan production, their crafts and skills survive.

Notes

This article is a substantially revised version of two previously presented papers. The first was presented in an international workshop I co-convened on 'Asian Artisans and Small Scale Producers in the Global Economy: Trends, Issues and Problems in the New Millennium' held at the International Institute for Asian Studies (IIAS), University of Amsterdam branch, 4 January 2002. The second was presented at the fifth Asia Pacific Sociological Association Conference—'Asia Pacific Societies: Contrasts, Challenges and Crises', 4–7 July 2002, Queensland University of Technology, Brisbane.

1 S Seth, 'Towards a volunteer movement of artisan support', *Craft News*, 6 (1), 1995, pp 1, 3–4.

2 For instance, in the Indian context, this is illuminated most recently in R Ganguly-Scrase, *Global Issues/Local Contexts: The Rabi Das of Bengal*, New Delhi: Orient Longman, 2001.

[3] See, for example, K Anderson (ed), *New Silk Roads: East Asia and World Textile Markets*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992; C Balkwell and KG Dickerson, 'Apparel production in the Caribbean: a classic case of the new international division of labour', *Clothing and Textiles Research Journal*, 12 (3), 1994, pp 6–15; and J Nash (ed), *Crafts in the World Market*, Albany, NJ: State University of New York Press, 1993.

[4] Although there are, at times and in certain contexts, subtle differences between the terms 'artisan' and 'craft' (ie where an artisan may be seen as a skilled worker and a craft worker may be seen to be engaged in a hobby), nevertheless I use these words interchangeably throughout the paper as the subtleties are far too indistinguishable in the context that I use them in this article.

[5] VA Dickie & G Frank, 'Artisan occupations in the global economy: a conceptual framework', *Journal of Occupational Science: Australia*, 3 (2), 1996, pp 45–55.

[6] J Nash, 'Introduction: traditional arts and changing markets in Middle America', in Nash, *Crafts in the World Market*, pp 1–3.

[7] JC Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance*, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1985.

[8] See, for example, various contributions in Nash, *Crafts in the World Market.* See also C Steiner, *African Art in Transit*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994; K Tice, *Kuna Crafts, Gender and the Global Economy*, Austin, TX; University of Texas Press, 1995.

[9] S Kathuria, 'Indian craft exports for the global market', in S Kathuria, V Miralao & R Joseph, *Artisan Industries in Asia: Four Case Studies*, Ottawa: International Development Research Centre, 1988, p 21.

[10] M Chibnick, 'The evolution of market niches in Oaxacan woodcarving', *Ethnology*, 39 (3), 2000, pp 225–242; and WW Wood, 'Flexible production, households and fieldwork: multisited Zapotec weavers in the era of late capitalism', *Ethnology*, 39 (2), 2000, pp 133–148.

[11] Described in K Buchanan, 'Center and periphery: reflections on the irrelevance of a billion human beings', *Monthly Review*, 37 (3), 1985, pp 86–97.

[12] R Colloredo-Mansfield, 'An ethnography of neoliberalism: understanding competition in artisan economies', *Current Anthropology*, 43 (1), 2002, p 114.

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[15] See L Kaino (ed), *The Necessity of Craft: Development and Women's Craft Practices in the Asian–Pacific Region*, Nedlands: University of Western Australian Press, 1995; A Nakatani, '"Eating threads": brocades as cash crop for weaving mothers and daughters in Bali', in R Rubenstein & LH Connor (eds), *Staying Local in the Global Village*, Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai'i Press, 1999, pp 203–229; and C Wilkinson-Weber, 'Skill, dependency and differentiation'.

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[17] AG Guillermo, 'Weaving: women's art and power', in *ibid*, pp 35–56.

[18] Kathuria *et al, Artisan Industries in Asia.*

[19] V Miralao, 'Labour conditions in the Philippine craft industries', in *ibid*, pp 30–56.

[20] D Imhoff, 'Artisans in the global bazaar', *Whole Earth*, Fall, 1998, pp 76–81.

[21] For a detailed overview and critical summary of recent research on this theme, see J Brohmen, 'New directions in tourism for Third World development', *Annals of Tourism Research*, 23 (1), 1996, pp 48–70.

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[25] K Grimes & B Milgram (eds), *Artisans and Cooperatives: Developing Alternative Trade for the Global Economy*, Tuscan: The University of Arizona Press, 2000; W Morris, *Handmade Money: Latin American Artisans in the Marketplace*, Washington: Organization of American States, 1996.

[26] K Kusakabe, 'Cooperation and competition across border markets: changes in the definition of women's weaving activity in Lao–Thai borderlands', paper presented at the 6th Conference of Women in Asia, Canberra, Australia, 2001.

[27] R Rutten, 'How craftworkers and small subcontractors may profit from the world market: a Philippine case', paper presented at a workshop on 'Asian Artisans and Small Scale Producers in the Global Economy: Trends, Issues and Problems in the New Millennium', IIAS, University of Amsterdam, 4 January 2002.

[28] P Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, London: Routledge, 1984. In this important study Bourdieu provides a detailed analysis of the process of class and cultural reconfiguration in France, whereby a subtle, but nevertheless distinct, differentiation emerges between

the various class factions and their cultural practices and their mobilisation of cultural resources, or 'cultural capital'.

[29] A Nakatani, 'Exoticism and nostalgia: consuming Southeast Asian handicrafts in Japan', paper presented at the 3rd EUROSEAS Conference, London, 6–8 September 2001, p 13. In this paper Nakatani analyses the Japanese elite women's obsession (or 'craze') for consuming hand-woven textiles and other craft goods from Asia.

[30] See Ganguly-Scrase, 2001, *Global Issues/Local Contexts.*

[31] EA Davis, 'Metamorphosis in the culture market of Niger', *American Anthropologist*, 101 (3), 1999, pp 498–499.

[32] This is an area of research that I have recently commenced, exploring these questions in focus group discussions with middle class Indian consumers in New Delhi. I will return to this question below, where I briefly look at the motivations of elite Indian consumers and the role of the state.

[33] For instance, for detailed links, catalogues, details about retailers and producers, etc, see http://www.fairtradefederation.com. 'Ten thousand villages' (http://www.villages.ca) is another important website for the promotion and marketing of Third World handicrafts in North America.

[34] C Hendrickson, 'Selling Guatemala: Maya export products in US mail-order catalogues', in D Howes (ed), *Cross-cultural Consumption: Global Markets, Local Realities*, London: Routledge, 1996, p 118, emphasis in the original.

[35] *Ibid*, pp 118–119.

[36] J Johnson, 'Consuming global justice: fair trade shopping and alternative development', in J Goodman (ed), *Protest and Globalisation: Prospects for Transnational Solidarity*, Sydney: Pluto Press, 2002, p 39.

[37] *Ibid*, p 55.

[38] L Stephen, 'Weaving in the fast lane: class, ethnicity and gender in Zapotec craft commercialization', in Nash, *Crafts in the World Market*, pp 25–57.

[39] S Suratman, '"Weaving" a development strategy: cottage industries in the Philippines', *Sojourn*, 6 (2), 1991, pp 263–289.

[40] For a detailed discussion, see T Guha-Thakurta, *The Making of New 'Indian' Art*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992.

[41] A Appadurai, *Modernity At Large: The Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*, Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1996.

[42] J Jain, 'Art and artisans: tribal and folk art in India', in Kaino, *The Necessity of Craft*, p 29.

[43] UNIFEM, 'Social security for artisans in the voluntary sector: are human rights being denied?', New Delhi, 1997.

[44] M Riley & K Moran, 'Protecting indigenous intellectual property rights: tools that work', *Cultural Survival Quarterly*, 244, 2001, at http://www.cs.org/publications/CSQ/244/introduction.htm, accessed 1 September 2002.

[45] See Grimes & Milgram, *Africans and Cooperatives.*

[46] AEN (Artisan Enterprise Network); information about their curriculum and other details found at their website: http://www.artisanenterprisenetwork.org, accessed 20 September 2002.

[47] http://www.craftscenter.org, accessed 20 September 2002. It appears that this centre has linkages to the AEN.

[48] M Featherstone, *Consumer Culture and Postmodernism*, London: Sage, 1991.

[49] See Hendrickson, 'Selling Guatemala'.

[50] A Nakatani, 'Exoticism and nostalgia', p 13.

[51] For excellent summaries and analyses of the literature, theories and complexities of consumption, see B Fine & E Leopold, *The World of Consumption*, London: Routledge, 1993; and D Miller (ed), *Acknowledging Consumption*, London: Routledge, 1995.

[52] See, for example, S Hall, 'The question of cultural identity', in S Hall, D Held & T McGrew (eds), *Modernity and its Futures*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992, pp 273–325.

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