

CHAPTER 4

Resisting Global Homogeneity but Craving Global Markets

Kiwiana and Contemporary Design Practice in New Zealand

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New Zealand's relatively short post-settlement histories, limitations associated with remoteness, and small population (4.4 million in 2013) have had implications for the development of a design culture. To construct a New Zealand design history into a national framework is to tell a unique story – and to comply with populist understandings of 'nation' as an imagined site implying 'unity, coherence and wholeness to those within a national space' (Allon 2012: 387), despite critiques (Perry 2012). This is not a tale of dazzling successes in the commercial design of a wide range of material artefacts, with our national style recognized internationally; or one of carving a prominent global niche of idiosyncratic designer items. It is a story of the narrative inherent in quotidian things as they articulate a country and its history. 'Everyday things are ... essential to the understanding of society and culture' (Fallan 2010: vii). This chapter is a cultural theorist's contribution to efforts to understand notions of design within New Zealand's contemporary consumer culture.

Throughout the twentieth century import restrictions came and went with changes of political leadership. Periods of import restrictions were aimed at developing the local manufacturing sector, to foster employment and contribute to Gross National Product (GNP). In a small population with few manufacturers, the consequence was that similar items were found in most homes. In the late twentieth century those remembered items (everyday ceramic ware, toys and logos of ordinary consumables like groceries and shoe polish) were considered kitsch: trivial or 'low brow' materiality imbued with sentimental familiarity and nostalgia. While never noted for their sophisticated

design, they were proudly ‘New Zealand made’. Today they have been identified as ‘kiwiana’ and reassigned: affirmed and celebrated as encapsulations of distinctive postcolonial nationhood. With globalization and the deluge of mass consumer items, the recasting and revival of kiwiana into the mainstream market can be explained as an eager search for items that convey a refreshed version of an assertive bicultural state. These goods have been described as ‘nothing if not humble artefacts of popular culture (that) have been taken to [possess] an added lustre, appearing simple and honest and reflective of a less pressured society’ (Barnett and Wolfe 1989: 15) than today. ‘These items are representative of New Zealand heritage in the popular imagination’ (Piatti-Farnell 2013: 7).

Meanwhile, new designers are striving to participate in international cosmopolitan design culture and e-commerce with the goal of creating items that express national distinctiveness, while simultaneously earning a place on the global design stage. Resistance to global homogeneity and determination to deliver uniqueness are key elements of both kiwiana and of contemporary design practice in New Zealand. Various formal government agencies and private enterprise initiatives are fostering and supporting new design and driving outputs. Creativity and design entrepreneurship amalgamate in continual attempts to rebrand a confident nationalism (Bell 2012a).

In the Beginning. . .

The story starts with a precolonial Maori population who arrived in about 1200 (Fairburn 2008) – late in world terms for first people. Sufficient access to good food allowed time for the creation of heavily decorated *toanga* – treasures – from local wood, flax, feathers, bone and *pounamu* (jade). No account of any New Zealand phenomenon can begin without acknowledging the narratives present in traditional Maori artefacts: *whakapapa* (genealogy), *Nga Te Ahi* (attachment to place), and particular events are embedded in the objects’ rich design and decoration (Wilson 1987). The creation of items with such clear positioning in a specific locale contrasts markedly with the current fashion for a generic ‘global style’.

Nineteenth-century Southern Ocean sealers and whalers were accustomed to the comforts of tables, chairs and beds (Northcote-Bade 1971). They used bone and wood to make furniture and trinkets (Wolfe 1997). New Zealand was colonized by Britain in the mid- nineteenth century mainly for the development of agriculture. The early settlers felled massive *kauri* and other native trees to clear land for farming, using the timber to build and furnish their homes. There was no special style; the term colonial ‘simply denotes the furniture made and used by colonists’ (Northcote-Bade 1971:12). The sheer remoteness from useful resources called upon settlers to apply design skills

to solve the practical problems of everyday survival. The notion of ‘making something out of nothing’ was quickly established (Bell and Neill 2014).

In the mid-1930s the New Zealand government began to impose import restrictions, banning introduced factory-made goods, to encourage local manufacturing. The small populace – around 1.5 million at that time – impeded the capacity to sustain an extensive sector ‘of highly specialized and expert professionals to produce popular and high culture’ (Fairburn 2008: 44). The limited availability of goods from elsewhere meant the ability to innovate was valued. Local businesses, often originally back-shed enterprises, created everyday items. Some of these later grew into larger companies that eventually dominated the New Zealand manufacturing sector, such as Crown Lynn ceramics (Monk 2006; Bell 2012), and Fisher & Paykel, makers of household whiteware. With their modest beginnings founded by imagination and innovation, and a perceived feasible market niche, these and other enterprises became the mainstay of the quotidian products still recognized in New Zealand as intrinsic to the culture. Some may argue, with historiographical reflexivity, that such unassuming beginnings are a globally familiar story; that it is difficult to make a case for New Zealand ‘exceptionalism’ (Fairburn 2008). Australia, for example, produces a parallel history of design values (Jackson 2006). Nevertheless, New Zealand’s national mythologies rejoice in local innovation in geographic isolation.

New merchandise based on or decorated with old kiwiana imagery and design is currently saturating the home wares, design accessories and casual clothing markets. For example, original Crown Lynn ceramics are widely collected; new reproductions, and images of original wares as graphic embellishment, abound. Vintage roadside signage, company logos and handwritten menus and recipes have been snapped up, along with anything else that represents New Zealand natural or cultural heritage: native flora and fauna, local architecture (state houses, wooden villas). These objects convey a visual narrative, a reconfiguration of the historic within the contemporary, as a new genre of representation. The old goods and meanings are not forgotten: they have been resurrected and repositioned, and play a prominent part in national identity discourse.

Myths of National Character

The successful performance of those small manufacturing businesses reiterated particular notions in national mythologies. A key term in local lexicon is ‘Number 8 wire mentality’ which refers to any inventive solution achieved using non-traditional approaches and materials. Number 8 wire, a thickness measurement on the British Standard wire gauge, was a staple item in a rural society, its strength and flexibility lending itself to numerous ad hoc tasks. While

actual Number 8 wire is now 40mm gauge in the metric system, the concept of problem solving through the ingenious use of Number 8 wire is part of the national mythology that praises the 'can do' ethic of citizens. Another well-worn term is 'kiwi ingenuity' or 'good old kiwi ingenuity', a 'self-awarded belief in our own resourcefulness, especially with mechanical objects' (McGill 1989: 57). 'Kiwi ingenuity' is still applied to any story of successful local invention and manufacturing, especially those self-financed projects that begin very modestly, then develop into something larger, even global.

DIY (do it yourself) also has powerful resonance in national myths. Without the availability of specific expertise or materials for certain tasks it was normal for individuals to problem-solve for themselves – using that Number 8 wire mentality, of course. The results of such exertions were traditionally summed up by 'she'll be right!', a confident exclamation that the problem was solved. The result, however adroit, would be pronounced 'not bad, eh!' These values were associated principally with masculinity. Such attitudes meant that, for example, creating a business from a few improbable resources (saved because they might 'come in handy' one day) and almost no capital was an achievable proposition. These actions proved to the practitioners that all problems are better solved by figuring out what actually works, than by applying a cerebral theory (Bell and Neill 2014).

These qualities clearly stood the country in good stead as it developed a successful agricultural economy. They were also useful attributes for local designers aiming their products at the (small) exclusive end of the local market. A 2006 account of New Zealand design 'legends' constantly, and sadly, reiterates the obscurity of the individual designers; that New Zealand was an environment where designers and craftspeople 'struggled to convince New Zealanders of the validity and importance of their creative endeavours' (Lloyd-Jenkins 2006: 8). Many of them continued to generate original items 'in spite of widespread indifference and ignorance of their work' (ibid: 146). Perhaps strategies to develop a design culture in New Zealand in the new century, to achieve economic ends, might grant designers a new level of recognition for their contribution to the culture? (Elizabeth 2006).

The Struggle to Create a Contemporary Design Niche

With late twentieth-century globalization and new consumer needs, New Zealand's need for competitive capability-building strategies in the design of value-added products, services and brands was being challenged. Perhaps the well-established national stereotype could be mobilized to tell, through new products, the tale of 'our' uniqueness and 'our' common goals (Elizabeth 2006). In her campaign speech prior to winning the 1999 election and becoming Prime Minister, Helen Clark proclaimed 'we must unleash the creativity of our

scientists, researchers, designers and innovators in the search for new products that we can sell to the world for good prices' (New Zealand Labour Party Press Release, 31 October 1999).

In the 1950s New Zealand's GDP was sixty per cent above the average for the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries, and ranked fourth for economic competitiveness (after Switzerland, Canada and Luxemburg) (Yap 2011). Many of the children who grew up in that era – today's ageing baby boomer population – sentimentally recall the post-war period as an idyllic, innocent time (Bell 1996). The economy was buoyant, New Zealand boasted a generous social welfare system, home ownership rates were high, race relations were claimed by the dominant *pakeha* (white) group to be positive, and immigrants were mainly from the UK and Pacific islands. New Zealand defined itself not by importance or power on the global stage, but by an asserted egalitarianism – albeit inherently sexist and racist (Bell 1996) – and pride in 'their way of life' (Sinclair 1986: 88).

By 2009 this country had slipped to 22nd of the 30 OECD countries for GDP, rising to 19th in 2012. Manufactured goods for export are low on the list of key drivers of the New Zealand economy. After primary production (land based products) and tourism, manufacturing even for the home market is severely limited by high labour, transport and stock-holding costs, and by the competition of significantly cheaper imported goods. A high exchange rate and the tax system encourage investment in land and buildings over investment in productive activity. The pivotal impact of national economic policies, market conditions and societal conditions are all significant. The national story and local circumstances remain inescapable in this 'global age'.

The local manufacturing sector in New Zealand is characterized by many small companies in specialized industries. Some are lauded for their international success, creating diverse products such as Ecostore cleaning products, New Zealand Natural Premium Ice-cream, Fitzroy Superyachts, Icebreaker merino sportswear, 42 Below Pure Vodka and Kathmandu outdoor clothing and equipment. The last two, businesses with small local beginnings, were so successful globally that they were eventually bought by international conglomerates. New Zealand is rated 9th of the OECD countries for direct foreign investment. This is despite public opinion that fears the loss of promising companies and technologies, and loss of control of natural resources to offshore owners (Fabling and Sanderon 2014). 'Brands are born somewhere. Companies are born somewhere' (Bernstein, cited by Pike 2011: 7). The problem is how to make that somewhere here? Over the past decade that tradable sector has declined (N. Z. Manufacturers and Exporters Association 2014, www.nzmea.org.nz/Events.aspx). In short, economic and market forces are challenging opponents to fledgling designers.

In 1999 the Labour government began its nine-year leadership. As reflected in the quotation above, the new Prime Minister took on board the British

'Cool Britannia' project, with the new Heart of the Nation venture aiming at developing new products and creating fresh markets. Businesses trying to cultivate offshore markets had to sell not just themselves, but (the capabilities of) the New Zealand economy and brand 'New Zealand' (Molloy and Larner 2013). In the drive for export diversity, innovative design was a potential weapon for wealth creation, a means of arresting the economic downturn. International evidence supported this potential. For example, the Scandinavian countries, all similar in population size to New Zealand, have used design as a tool for profitability, innovation and business competitiveness. However, their proximity to large markets is advantageous (Yap 2011).

Surely, here in the remote southern ocean, brilliant design could overcome the tyranny of geography (Elizabeth 2006)? The Heart of Nation and allied projects have tried to reverse this, suggesting that isolation must give rise to fresh design approaches. Surely this would achieve an 'exceptionalism' (Fairburn 2008), with corresponding economic benefits. This notion ignores the inescapable influence of global media on local designers and consumers.

Government policy initiatives have aimed at developing the 'cultural sector', both for revenue and for national branding (Molloy and Larner 2013). The goal has been to coax those well-established national values of inventiveness into a more elite realm. The government-appointed Design Taskforce established in 2002 concentrated 'on building design-driven culture and capability within companies ... The Taskforce advised upskilling executives in the strategic application and management of design within their business' (Smythe 2011: 354). In 2003 the Design Taskforce produced a document, *Success by Design*, proposing designers as the (new) key to economic success and saviours of the homeland (albeit in conjunction with business leaders) (Elizabeth 2006). Various reports and conferences aimed to develop the design sector as a tool to diversify the New Zealand export economy, usually trying to work top down, from senior executives, with designers resting on or near the bottom rung.

Was this the time to write contemporary design into New Zealand's national story? The fashion industry became particularly buoyant, rapidly expanding from a small disconnected group selling to an inner-city urban clientele in 2000, to a large complex industry serving international markets. Along with the film industry, surely it could 'revamp New Zealand's international image ... rebranding New Zealand as a talented nation' (Larner, Molloy and Goodrum 2007: 381). Art and design schools proliferated; private providers became a new sector, alongside established universities and polytechnics. While many graduates have made great contributions to the local and international film and digital media industries, and numerous new products enhance local consumers' lives, efforts to net accolades for global design are ongoing. New Zealand has the highest tertiary brain-drain rate of any OECD country (Gibson and McKenzie 2012). The migration of the talented to better-paying work environments has not helped this sector nationally.

The 2007 recession made a deep impact, forcing previously successful retailers and manufactures of locally-made designer goods to close. In the fashion sector the survivors manufactured most of their garments offshore. South East Asian countries provide cheap labour to manufacture a vast array of consumer goods, including items designed here.

It is not possible to provide data about the economic contribution of the creative industries in New Zealand. Any attempt to map the fiscal state of this sector, for instance via data from Statistics New Zealand, is stymied. Because the numbers of participants is so small, and therefore potentially identifiable in any table of figures (for instance regarding income generated), that data is confidential to Statistics New Zealand, or in other words unavailable to researchers. However, there is ample material to demonstrate economic vulnerability, compared with other OECD countries (Yap 2011). Design policies of the past decade have failed to push economic performance back into the top half of OECD countries. Daniel Miller writes, 'it is clear that one of the key struggles of modern life is to retain both a sense of authentic locality . . . and yet also lay claims to a cosmopolitanism that at some level may evoke rights to a global status' (Miller 1998: 19). In New Zealand that struggle is a persistent one.

Example: The Home Furniture Contest

A 1981 study found that household furniture items are often 'special objects in the home', the owners' most cherished possessions. The authors concluded that relationships with objects contribute to the cultivation of a sense of self (Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton 2010). The selection of items used to create a personal comfort zone at home is driven by availability, along with the circumstances and aspirations of the purchaser.

Local markets for household furniture and accessories are utilized here, briefly, to illustrate the effects of some of the issues outlined above. Cosmopolitanism is perceived as sophistication: international physical mobility is now central to the lifestyle of many local consumers (Cohen, Duncan and Thulemark 2013). For the less mobile, travel remains a strong aspiration. Substantiations of mobility capital or objects that represent travel fantasies are now *de rigueur* in New Zealand middle-class domestic interiors. Such items are happily mixed with goods that extoll explicit localism.

The 2007 global economic downturn's collision with the strong New Zealand dollar meant that imported goods, already desirable, became far cheaper than items made here. A casual survey of merchandise available shows that copies of design classics are now readily available and affordable. That the original items feature constantly in international design magazines assures the purchaser – even of the fakes – of their aesthetic desirability and cultural cache. Such items are often priced under \$NZ100 (about 59 Euros, \$US50, or

50 British pounds). A local manufacturer of ‘designer’ goods has no possibility of displaying similar price-tags. New Zealand has very high costs for rent, utilities, labour, materials and transport, and fifteen per cent Goods and Services Tax (GST) on every transaction. Besides, a cheap price implies cheap goods, a designer told me, assuring me that lower sales are one cost of maintaining a place in the appropriate elite realm for such objects (Anonymous 1 2014).

Even prosaic mass produced chain store furniture, made either in New Zealand, Indonesia or China, and often with generous periods of interest-free payment, can barely compete. A particular retailer of both Italian and New Zealand up-market furniture, the latter slightly more expensive, told me that the cost of the Italian goods was in the design; the cost of the New Zealand goods was in the making. She implied a higher cultural capital in owning the Italian goods: ‘people love the status of Italian design’ (Anonymous 2 2014).

An interesting new enterprise, Rekindle, makes furniture using waste, including from the 2011 Christchurch earthquake. Their profile combines environmental and social issues (Fuentes 2012), an example of explicit sustainability. This non-profit enterprise creates something positive from an extraordinarily challenging event. Obviously the products have significant souvenir value, as they convey a major story about recent New Zealand history, and about ingenuity. Allegorically, they commemorate a natural disaster in which 181 people died, while symbolizing rebirth through the recasting of damaged materials. None of the furniture is available for less than \$NZ300, the cost of a simple square-sided stool. Similar-looking items made from ‘distressed’ recycled timber imported from Java cost significantly less. In mainstream culture there is little significant cultural capital in buying and displaying New Zealand made goods, even as singular as Rekindle’s, in the home or office. This is unhelpful to the development of a potential New Zealand design industry. New shops dedicated to local design do appear, but none has been notable for its longevity. *The Clever Design Store* (formerly *Cleverbastards*) website (www.thecleverdesignstore.com) offers diverse goods by New Zealand designers. It was founded in 2008 to showcase contemporary household products, jewellery, t-shirts, toys and handbags. The director acknowledged its limitations, including ‘the lack of physical contact between customer and product. Designer products that have a high level of craftsmanship still provoke a desire to touch . . . That cannot be replaced entirely’ (*Her Business Magazine*, <http://www.herbusinessmagazine.com/Lifestyle/Art++Design/Case+study+Clever+Bastards.html>). The site is a platform for over a dozen designers, mostly producing items for the home. Many of these goods include kiwiana references in their design (Fig. 4.2).

Another competitor for the New Zealand purchasing dollar – and ‘style’ – is Trade Me, the wildly popular online shopping site. There are constantly over 2 million live auctions. I just checked: today there are over 9,000 chairs for sale, ranging in price from \$1 to ‘buy now’ for \$NZ5000. Householders selling their



Figure 4.1 Chris Johnson's *Imprint Stool*, available through web outlet The Clever Design Store and from Yoyo Furniture, a Wellington shop dedicated to New Zealand design. Photo courtesy of Chris Johnson.



Figure 4.2 Work in process: a rug designed by Bing Dawe being handcrafted from wool at Dilana's Christchurch studio. Completed rugs: on the wall *Solo* by John Reynolds; on the floor *Clematis* by Tim Main, and *Meccano* by John Lyall. Photo courtesy of Dilana.

used goods do not have the overheads of a retail business, or tax, so prices can be extremely cheap. The purchaser may delight in having discovered something 'vintage'.

There is also a craze, stimulated by television home make-over shows, to 'upcycle'. This process adds 'boho' or 'industrial' chic to interiors, using items that might otherwise be discarded. This new market niche is not necessarily driven by ecological motives, but perhaps offers a means of creative self-expression, economy and of owning something unique (Nalewajek and Macik 2013). The



Figure 4.3 Moa Room, Paris. Photo courtesy of Moa Room.

irregularity of components, whilst making each item exclusive, makes it harder to commercialize. Design magazines support the trend as taste-makers. One writer advises that ‘it is now eco-friendly and cool to incorporate waste into design’ (Chan 2012: 46). The practice falls into the category of labour intensive handicrafts (Ordonez and Rahe 2012). Kiwiana or Maoriana references or decoration are often co-opted to correspond with current fashion.

Offshore, the Moa Room in Paris promotes and distributes the work of New Zealand designers to Europe. Products include Dilana artist-designed floor rugs handcrafted from New Zealand wool, various furnishings and accessories and lighting and furniture design by David Trubridge (Fig. 4.4), the ‘only New Zealand designer . . . to achieve a global presence’ (McCall 2014: 23). The Moa Room director says that when he started in 2006 he learnt an important lesson about European perceptions of New Zealand: ‘They knew so little that we might as well have been Patagonia’. Sporting success, sheep and the 100% PURE campaign have defined New Zealand in Europe to date’ (Robert 2011). Other attempts by various companies to market New Zealand design in dedicated retail spaces in New York, London and elsewhere have been short-lived (Smythe 2011).

Maoriana

‘Maoriland’, a direct reference to local indigenous people, was an early twentieth-century tourism brand identifier for New Zealand. Images of Maori were widely incorporated in promotional material, such as posters and postcards (Alsop and Stewart 2013). ‘Maoriana’ embraces any popular cultural items that incorporate images and symbols from traditional Maori culture. Maori imagery has long been popular on souvenirs for the tourist trade. Some early twentieth-century grocery items depicted Maori on their labels (Alsop and Stewart 2013). Today Maori imagery has been appropriated into commercial items to create something of a bicultural pastiche. Maoriana delivers a prescription for designers and makers to explore the opportunities of new products. The consumer landscape, physical, metaphorical and symbolic, Goodrum explains, is a key location in the construction of meaningful identities. New fashionable outputs from the local creative industries offer ‘a rich seam from which to mine a range of debates over processes self-signification and cultural construction of identity’ (Goodrum 2005: 23–25).

Most New Zealanders are aware of the long-standing notion that for any cultural image and design to be Maori, it should incorporate a Maori referent, and should be created by a Maori artist (Waaka 2007). But this stance is by no means unanimous. Maori motifs are included across genres by non-Maori, including the mass manufacture of ‘Maori’ souvenirs in Chinese and Taiwanese factories. Efforts to enforce or monitor this, in order to empower Maori artists



Figure 4.4 Lights by David Trubridge. Photo Courtesy of David Trubridge Design.

and craftspeople, have been controversial and ineffective (O'Connor 2004). In a study focusing on the use of Maori imagery in merchandise, one design magazine editor suggested that 'it is a really promising vehicle for a kind of New Zealand nationalistic expression that properly embraces biculturalism' (Bell 2012a: 281).

The use of Maori elements is widely apparent on new consumer goods, decorative home wares, clothing and accessories in particular. Merchandise in expensive shops or ‘showcase’ pieces in the shops at major museums, as well as the cheapest items in ubiquitous \$2 shops, draws heavily on New Zealand Maori and kiwiana motifs. The imagery has a strong presence in the fine arts, and even in bodily inscriptions: kiwiana and Maoriana tattoos have become the new ink fashion for both locals and tourists. The labels Esther Diamond and



Figure 4.5 *Aroha* (love) baby blanket, appliqued recycled wool, featuring a tiki and piwakawaka (fantails) by Rona Osborne for Native Agent. Photo courtesy of Rona Osborne.

Native Agent (www.nativeagent.co.nz) were perhaps the first two to take Maori imagery into new textiles, both companies working with well-known local Maori and Pakeha artists to embellish – and therefore define – their products.

Traditional Maori *tiki* images turn up recast as everything from clocks (TikiToki – get it?), designs on tote bags, beach towels, home wares, furniture and clothing. This symbolic biculturalism indicates appeasement in the discourse of national unity, a situation not borne out politically. The artists and craftspeople, Maori and Pakeha, making these items, have found a market niche in which to place their artefactual representations of nation. Through this work they are dislodging the polarization of local ethnic discourse between conservative assimilationist and bicultural ‘politically correct’ positions (Bell 2006). They may be described as revisionists re-stating the identity of a nation. The items they create contribute to the *bi*-cultural economy. This encompasses not just design, production, circulation and sales, but also ‘a highly-localized aesthetic restyling of the everyday life of the collective of consumers’ (Bell 2012a: 284). This aesthetic is quintessentially local, challenging the deluge of homogenous goods now flooding the New Zealand market. Maori, Pakeha, new immigrants, the gift market to New Zealanders residing overseas, and international tourists are keen consumers of this merchandise. Political interrogators may challenge the use of Maori design by (often) non-Maori makers, but this appears to be no deterrent to buyers. That objects with Maori decoration have become so mainstream is testament to a (re)valuing of the local, a gleeful expression of cultural distinction.

Conclusion: Creating and Consuming Identity

Kiwiana and Maoriana show that mundane design is a nexus of New Zealand cultural identity. As Lyall observes, ‘depictions of New Zealand (within New Zealand) depend on recognition, which comes about by the replaying over and again of particular images and ideas about what should visually represent us’ (Lyall 2004: 107).

Design culture is not necessarily elite, but everyday (Fallan 2010). Plainly, the local creative industries, and the purchasers of their products, are playing a substantial role in the maintenance and expression of national identity. The recasting of traditional vernacular kiwiana into the everyday retail sector has vastly expanded cultural representation. Consumption of the new merchandise reiterates a shared understanding of nationhood. In this way positive, populist ideas of nation are sustained and affirmed. Creating designs that accentuate localism reiterates the maker’s sense of place, showcasing both personal and national identity. This is a site for negotiation of ‘the large scale structures of political economy and the small scale (but also social) histories of intimate life’ (Highmore 2002: 296).

This chapter builds on the understanding that practices of both construction and consumption are intensely cultural (Bourdieu 1984). It illustrates the decisive impact of national economics, market conditions and societal character on design practice. Subscription to the ideas embedded in the objects demonstrates that any notion of a superseded nation state is debunked. Embedded in these items are selective historical narratives, symbols of a banal nationalism (Billig 1995) that by its global preponderance is by no means redundant. In these objects creativity, consumption and nationality intersect. Kiwiana and Maoriana are sites referring to particular historical, geographical and political foundations which have moulded and continue to mould citizens' subjectivities.

According to Spoonley (2005), a majority sense of group self-identity has taken a long time to develop in New Zealand. Political and legal strategies towards reconciliation between the different groups are a feature of postcolonial culture in New Zealand. Hence these new kiwiana and Maoriana material items might be considered as artefactual declarations of a new postcolonial era, a confident form of identity assertion. The construction of idiosyncratic features of 'Kiwi culture' is a convenient circumvention of historic tensions, a veiling of internal stresses, and an identifiable part of the drive of a decolonized nation to create an identity (During 2005). The enthusiastic persistence of the imagery seems to fulfil the need for a secure point of reference, marking national difference in the face of the risk of anonymity in contemporary postmodern society (Kessous and Roux 2008). Kiwiana and Maoriana deliver a distinctive semiotic underpinning of a nation's traditional myths.

This exploration of contemporary design in New Zealand, and its place in the national narrative, shows, for everyday consumers, a prioritizing of vocabularies of local distinction, over attempts at joining a global design culture. Kiwiana and Maoriana are too highly localized to compete with, for example, Italian and Scandinavian design products. That is the aspiration of the successive new 'hot' designers featured in glossy magazines and weekend newspaper supplements. Designers are absent from the national narrative, compared with, for instance, successful international sports people, film industry achievers or business entrepreneurs. There is ongoing frustration at the limitations to trying to create new global design brands (Smythe 2011; Yap 2011).

Rather than resist a reiteration of national history in favour of a sophisticated, albeit homogenous, global gaze, the geo-political straitjacket of the nation state remains intact, with occasional cheerful restyling. The continuing incorporation of kiwiana and Maoriana into everyday material culture does nothing to address the desperate search for new export markets to fulfil, or the goal of developing a strong design culture. Nevertheless, as powerful expressions of localism in the early twenty-first century, their place in the narrative of historic style is assured. Populist attitudes to materiality which explicitly represents the nation have undoubtedly advanced to a new phase.

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