

Part I

Transnational Sites

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Tartan: Its Journey Through the African Diaspora

Teleica Kirkland

Introduction

Tartan has a globally iconic and recognisable cultural image which links it immediately to Scotland and Scottish heritage. Although there are fabrics found in many parts of the world that consist of the same arrangement as tartan and are not part of Scottish material culture, the influence of the Scots can often be recognised by residuals of tartan patterns that appear in national or religious clothing. In August 2014 my organisation, the Costume Institute of the African Diaspora (CIAD), curated its first large scale project which was the culmination of research into how tartan style patterns came to be found on different types of fabric in several different parts of Africa, India, and the Americas. The project was entitled *Tartan: Its Journey Through the African Diaspora* and outlined how the uniforms of the Scottish Highland Regiments and the colonial involvement of the British government and the East India Company left their mark on the African cultures they encountered throughout the British Empire.

Tartan: Its Journey through the African Diaspora involved a great deal of planning, liaising and collaboration with many organisations to bring it to fruition. The idea was not just to tell the incredible story of how sartorial influence could travel around the world and impact aspects of African material culture, but also to redress history from the perspectives of the people left with this legacy. How did colonised people take this imperial remnant and appropriate the colonising Other to their cultural advantage, and how have they sought to establish their own identities through its use? Essentially, the project looked at how these communities adapted, adopted, or absorbed this influence to bring significance to elements of their own dress cultures.

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1 The outcomes represented in this project were the culmination of
2 three years of research. They highlighted the heritage of the communi-
3 ties we were focusing on and explained how cultures often intertwine
4 to develop different traditions and practices. These were explored in the
5 influence of tartan on madras cloth in the Caribbean, in the emergence
6 of tartan patterns amongst the Maasai in Kenya in the form of the shuka
7 blankets they wear, and through the discovery of the relationship to
8 tartan that developed amongst the Zulus in South Africa. This chapter
9 details how the project was realised, and shares some of the learning that
10 took place in the process of putting a project of this size together. As with
11 all creative projects that incorporate several different parties, the laying
12 of a shared groundwork and the understanding of the context was the
13 foundation and the nucleus that helped everyone remain focused on the
14 task at hand.

17 **History and research development**

19 Scotland's long historical and cultural relationship with tartan became
20 contentious in the eighteenth century as the British government outlawed
21 the wearing of tartan by civilians in any form with the Dress Act of 1746,
22 which was part of the larger Act of Proscription. The Act of Proscription
23 was established after the Jacobite Rebellion of 1745 and was part of efforts
24 by the British government to stop the rebellions of the Highland clans
25 against British rule. The belief was that prohibiting particular cultural
26 attributes and signifiers would eventually decimate the kinship of the clans
27 and in turn remove their enthusiasm for revolting.¹ The punishments for
28 the act were rigorously enforced and went from harsh fines and imprison-
29 ment of six months or more to being forcibly conscripted into indentured
30 servitude for seven years on plantations in the West Indies or Australia.
31 The act, which had done its job of removing tartan as a cultural marker in
32 the Highlands, was repealed in 1782, by which time tartan was no longer
33 popular Highland wear. However, the Highland Society of Edinburgh,
34 which was founded and established in 1784 by Scottish noblemen, capital-
35 ised on a resurgence in an interest in Highland culture to re-establish the
36 wearing of tartan as cultural attire.

37 On learning this information about the Dress Act, I also learnt that
38 an exemption to the ban on wearing tartan was made for the Scottish
39 regiments in the British Imperial Army, who continued to be dressed in
40 tartan as identifiers of their heritage. In his article on Scottish material
41 culture, Dziennik states that 'the Highland soldier was depicted as the
42 pinnacle of martial virtue', becoming in the words of Richard Finlay,

‘the most important factor in the propagation of a distinctive Scottish input into British Imperial activity’.² Dziennik speaks of Highlandism and Highland culture as a kind of romantic invention and suggests historians are looking at the aesthetics of the culture instead of why its foundational elements came about in the first place. Although he makes a convincing argument, the fact remains that Scottish Highland cultural clothing, romanticised or not, was forcefully disassociated from the people who used it, but then engaged as a symbol of military might when those same people were working on behalf of the British. This exception feels cruel and insidious, but clearly indicates that the British understood the power of dress and the connotations that would be associated with wearing tartan.

Understanding this element of Scottish dress history enabled me to draw parallels with the way that traditions of dress and adornment of enslaved Africans had been treated, since the removal of all artefacts that would tie a person to their cultural heritage was part of the enslavement process in the Americas and also echoes how the British treated Zulu dress in South Africa. The British believed traditional clothing connected the Zulus to their traditions and stirred up African-centred ideologies which were obviously a threat to colonial systems.³ These similarities of treatment between the Highlanders, enslaved Africans and colonised Zulus, were unexpected connections that were uncovered throughout the research for this project.

Recognising this distinguishing element of Scottish culture in various parts of Africa and the Caribbean inevitably caused me to question how and why such similar patterns exist within the cloth and clothing artefacts of people who reside thousands of miles away from the British Isles. I was soon to discover that there was a very involved and engaging history that would retell the legacy of colonial engagement with African people through material culture.

The genesis of this project into the origins of tartan patterns on different cloth in African communities came from research I was already doing. During my research I found similarities in fabrics in Jamaica, St Lucia, Dominica, St Vincent, Carriacou (one of the islands of Grenada), Nevis and Tobago. These are all countries and territories that were once colonised by the French but then taken over by the British, except Jamaica which was originally colonised by the Spanish and captured by the British. This mention of the difference in colonial power in Jamaica is an important detail as it is noticeable in the fabric. Although there are similarities in the Jamaican cloth, it is significantly different in the pattern, style, name, and colour. The Jamaican cloth is called bandana, which is a contraction of the Sanskrit and Hindi words bandhana and bandhnu which means to tie

1 or bind. This cloth is always maroon, white, and dark blue. Modern varia-
2 tions of the cloth show a distinctly different style in the proximity between
3 the lines where the pattern crosses to other forms of madras, and although
4 it is not known as madras I included it in this research as it is strikingly
5 similar to the other fabrics and has its origins in the same region in India.

6 Discovering the similarity in the patterns of these fabrics made me
7 question why they bore a resemblance to tartan and if there was any con-
8 nection between the two. That question caused me to investigate the colo-
9 nisation of the Caribbean and the reach of the British Empire. My initial
10 investigations found that the madras cloth that is known today was created
11 in the southern Indian village of Madras Patnam (colloquially shortened
12 to Madras). In 1639 the East India Company arrived and developed this
13 small fishing village into the city of Madras (now known as Chennai)
14 and used it as one of their main points of export from the East Indian
15 coast.⁴ Through continual fighting with French and Dutch competitors
16 who also had ports and territories in East India, the madras cloth industry
17 was developed, and cloth was subsequently sent across the colonial world
18 where vestiges of its involvement are still used in the reproduction of many
19 Caribbean islands' national dress. It is important to note that madras cloth
20 had been in existence in India long before the British arrived. Trade in
21 woven cloth between India, the Mediterranean and Africa can be dated
22 back to the first and second century BC.⁵ By the twelfth century, some of
23 the finely woven and brightly coloured cottons had been developed to
24 have a type of striped and check pattern which was also being exported
25 from India across the world.

26 The cotton cloth woven in this area was a type of loose weave muslin
27 that was often coloured with vegetable dyes and semi-fixed with rice gruel
28 or sesame oil and overprinted and embroidered with images of flowers
29 or religious symbols.⁶ To ensure a steady and regular supply of merchan-
30 dise the East India Company attracted families of weavers and merchants
31 to Madras by offering a thirty-year exemption on taxes. The permanent
32 establishment of weavers in the area helped to develop the tighter and
33 more robust weave of the fabric. This was highly favoured by the British
34 who would export it back to Britain and around the rest of the British
35 Empire, through this global engagement the fabric came to be known by
36 the name of the region it came from.

37 At the beginning of the eighteenth century, there was a surge of Scottish
38 migration to India. Some of the new arrivals became employees of the
39 East India Company, whilst others became traders and set up businesses.⁷
40 By 1822 the enthusiasm for tartan and tartan style patterns had grown
41 immensely after the visit of King George IV to Edinburgh. This influenced
42 the British in India and started to have an impact on the development

and production of madras fabric. By the middle of the nineteenth century, kilt-wearing British Highland regiments were occupying and fighting campaigns in India. The combination of these factors provided varying levels of influence to the weavers in Madras as the checked patterns of tartan fabric and kilts inspired the recreation of the designs in the lighter weighted cotton cloth with brighter colours for the colonial markets. Thus, the brightly coloured madras fabric started to be block printed and woven in check patterns that were akin to the same style of pattern that can be seen on tartan.

With a history of enslavement spanning over 250 years, the Caribbean is a region steeped with colonial legacies, which signifiers such as madras cloth loudly attest to. The clothing of enslaved populations was an enormous undertaking that was generally under the strict supervision of the plantation mistress who designated enslaved women as seamstresses to construct the majority of the garments.⁸ The larger the plantation the greater the number of enslaved people and so systems of manufacture were put in place to ensure the efficient production of clothing for the working population of the plantation. Much of the cloth for clothing the enslaved in the British Caribbean came from the cloth mills in Wales. This fabric, known colloquially as ‘negro cloth’, was roughly spun and woven coarse cotton that was produced specifically for the enslaved people of the Americas.⁹ A similarly produced variety of Scottish osnaburg linen was also known as ‘negro cloth’ and contributed to the fabric exported to the Caribbean and North America for the clothing of enslaved populations. The manufacturing of Scottish linen had developed into a thriving industry throughout the mid eighteenth century and was able to boost the economy of the country through the export of the coarsely woven fabric to the colonies.¹⁰ In a recent lecture, historian Dr Norman Watson detailed the objection to abolition of the slave trade by the Scottish textile merchants as this would have greatly impacted the production of the cloth and therefore limited future profits.¹¹

Madras cloth was introduced into the Caribbean in the seventeenth century as an import from France and worn by white French women and free women of colour. French women would use a piece of Indian madras cloth to wrap around their heads under their hats as this was the fashion at the time.¹² However, during the eighteenth century the introduction of the Tignon Laws, which spread to the Caribbean from Louisiana in the USA, stated that Black and mixed-race women (free or enslaved) had to cover their hair so as not to offend the white population.¹³ Thus, the demand for brightly coloured cloth grew and cheaper variations of the cloth started to be made available at slave markets. Simultaneously the British were also selling madras fabric to their colonies in East Africa, and

1 American manufacturers were buying bolts of madras fabric to sell to their
2 growing commercial markets.

3 After tracing the history back from the Caribbean to India and find-
4 ing the Scottish involvement, I then started to look at where else in the
5 African Diaspora tartan style patterns were turning up. As I already knew
6 about the Maasai in Kenya and Tanzania and the shuka blankets they wear
7 I investigated whether there could be a possible connection to Scottish
8 tartan amongst Maasai dress culture. The Maasai are a group of people
9 who live in East Africa in an area of land that straddles the border of
10 Kenya and Tanzania and is commonly known as Maasailand. They are
11 one of the oldest cultural groups in Africa and have managed to maintain
12 their culture and way of life for centuries. For many years, the Maasai
13 wore animal skins or cotton body wraps known as shukas permeated with
14 animal fat and terracotta, the red clay that is dominant in the soil of their
15 region; however, around the 1960s the construction of the shukas changed
16 and they became blankets woven out of acrylic.¹⁴ Any images of Maasai
17 will show them wearing brightly coloured shukas mostly with a base red
18 colour but often with a bold check pattern that has a striking resemblance
19 to tartan.

20 The responsibility for giving Maasai shukas a tartan pattern has been
21 attributed to an Indian man living in Kenya by the name of Mr P. D.
22 Dodhia. Mr Dodhia had been designing patterns which resembled tartan
23 for shukas for many years which he would then send to factories to have
24 made up. After a few years, he received a gift of a book containing sev-
25 eral types of tartans from Scotland: he then adapted their designs and
26 used them as specifications to send to the factory to be made into acrylic
27 shukas.¹⁵ With the connection to Scotland and Maasai dress culture made
28 clear, it also struck me that the wearing of blankets (known as plaides)
29 by the ancient Scottish Highlanders is very comparable to the wearing of
30 shuka blankets by the Maasai and that this should be a highlighted point
31 of connection.

32 The final part of my investigation was in South Africa, specifically the
33 worshippers of the Nazareth Baptist Church, commonly known as the
34 Shembe Church. During the research process, I found a book entitled
35 *African Textiles* by Christopher Spring. This book contained images of
36 young men and women from the Nazareth Baptist Church during their
37 annual festivals dressed in a uniform of tartan kilts, red or white shirts and
38 pith helmets. At the time, Spring was the chief curator of the Sainsbury
39 Africa Gallery at the British Museum and I was fortunate enough to meet
40 and speak with him about this. He described to me the story of Isaiah
41 Shembe who had started this church as a place of worship for members
42 of the Zulu tribe who were rejected from the Christian missionary church

that was established by the British colonial forces. The rejection of the locals was due to their adherence to their traditional attire or values which was felt to be a threat to British dominance. And so Shembe, believing he had a calling from God, developed the Nazareth Baptist Church as an inclusive place for local Zulu people who wished to maintain their traditional practices whilst also including elements of the Christian faith, thus syncretising the Nazareth Baptist Church and its followers.¹⁶

The young men and women of the church wear a particular type of costume once a year that has very strong colonial overtones. The young men wear boots, knee-high black and white socks, a tartan kilt, a white shirt with tasselled fringe, bow tie, and pith helmet. The young women are bare-foot with beads around each ankle, a tartan kilt, a red shirt with a beaded white belt, beaded armllets, and beaded headband. This uniform is known as the 'Scotch' and the incorporation of colonial elements into religious ceremonial practices is particularly interesting. Spring stated that it was to do with the reverence Shembe had for the Scottish regiments, simultaneously recognising them as colonial forces and also as people who had themselves fought valiantly against the English in various battles from the thirteenth to the eighteenth centuries in an effort to gain independence. However, Robert Papini, in his 2002 essay about the development and wearing of these uniforms by the young men and women of the Shembe Church, goes a little further by considering whether the uniform is 'a form of resistance seeking to establish amongst its wearers an autonomous realm of discursive freedom'.¹⁷ Papini's analysis of the uniform presents an engaging critique and I agree with his assertion of resistance through dress, since the accommodation through syncretisation which this outfit attests to is certainly a form of resistance. My understanding of the necessity to syncretise the uniform was so the followers of the church could live freely without harassment or punishment from the British whilst still practicing their Zulu traditions. The conclusion Spring made about the inclusion of the kilt being due to reverence for the Scottish may be true but there is more evidence to suggest that the use of colonial attire as subterfuge was more likely. The story of that historic struggle to find their autonomy through adopting practices of accommodation continues to be represented in the uniform of the Nazareth Scotch dancers. The idea of the Otherised and colonised body wearing part of a colonial uniform to represent their autonomy seemed a little complicated to present within an exhibition format, but I felt it was still important information, and so the decision was made to include one of the costumes from the young dancers of the Shembe Church with a simplified explanation.

There were many more African communities across the continent, in countries such as Ethiopia and Nigeria, who had their own tartan or

1 colonially-inspired tartan-based textile cultures that could have been fea-
2 tured in the project, but it was important to strike a balance between the
3 different elements that were to be included, plus the size of the gallery
4 space limited what we were able to show. In the end, ten pieces were
5 chosen for recreation and sourcing from the research I had gathered; three
6 Maasai herdsmen with shukas; three women's national costumes from
7 the Caribbean – Jamaica, St Lucia and Carriacou; one young woman's
8 costume from the Shembe Church; one tartan fashion jacket with ensem-
9 ble outfit loaned to us for the duration of the exhibition by Vivienne
10 Westwood; one original Black Watch uniform from the nineteenth cen-
11 tury; and one contemporary piece designed by the winner of our CIAD
12 tartan design competition.

13 14 15 **The project outcomes**

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17 After consolidating the research and determining what outcomes we
18 would deliver, the CIAD team and I formulated a plan of what we needed
19 for the successful execution of the project. The project itself consisted of
20 three outcomes with a variety of smaller outcomes as support. With the
21 help of Heritage Lottery Funding (HLF), we recruited sixteen project
22 assistants with an interest in history and culture to join the CIAD team.
23 They were a very diverse and international group of young people from
24 Brazil, USA, Israel, Russia, the UK and even one from Chennai in India,
25 the vibrant city that used to be the town of Madras Patnam! We found
26 out that she got involved with the project because of her connection to
27 the region and we were so pleased to have her on board. With our small
28 team expanded by sixteen, we set about training them in all aspects of
29 delivering the project. From web design to film-making and photography
30 to mannequin construction, our assistants were involved in every element
31 of the project.

32 In order for us to be able to get access to resources and information
33 we sought engagement and collaboration with organisations, brands and
34 businesses that had connections to dress history, culture, and tartan in
35 particular. Firstly, we partnered with the HLF, who not only provided us
36 with the funding for the project but also helped us with advice around
37 promotion and general project support. Secondly, the Black Watch Castle
38 and Museum in Perth, Scotland, where we received incredible help from
39 Museum Manager Emma Halford-Forbes, who courteously loaned us an
40 original nineteenth-century uniform of the 42nd Regiment of Foot (Black
41 Watch), complete with sporran and bearskin, for the duration of the exhi-
42 bition. We also partnered with Vivienne Westwood (herself an avid fan of

tartan) who provided us with an amazing fashion outfit that consisted of a tartan jacket and matching handbag, a skirt made from recycled sea plastic and a headdress of recycled fake flowers.

We also fostered a partnership with the Scottish Tartan Authority during the research and delivery of this project and the director, Brian Wilton, was very helpful in providing us with some great contextual information on the history of tartan and a definition of what tartan was. However, our biggest collaboration was with the Victoria and Albert Museum (V&A). Susana Fajardo from the Textile Conservation Studio at the V&A and Gesa Werner, an Independent Costume Mounting Specialist, who often works in the V&A's Textile Conservation Studio, ran a series of workshops to share some of the skills and techniques the V&A use for displaying costumes. They both came to us through a successful collaboration between CIAD and the V&A's Caribbean and Africa Strategy initiatives. Janet Browne, manager of the V&A African Heritage and Culture Department, also helped by providing performance space for the dance element of the project and the wrap party.

Having chosen ten costumes to explain the story of this journey of tartan through the African Diaspora, images were collated of the Masai, and Shembe Church pieces and illustrations of the Caribbean pieces were drawn to recreate the costumes. Obtaining costumes from the Caribbean would have been too difficult because of the logistics and cost and often the costumes used in festivals and ceremonies tend to be personal items belonging to the performers. However, costumes that corresponded to the islands being represented were able to be recreated from madras fabric in CIAD's stocks. With the Vivienne Westwood outfit organised and arranged for installation, the Shukas from Nairobi for the Masai section obtained, and the madras costumes from the Caribbean being made, the Shembe Church costume and the Black Watch uniform were the next that needed to be sourced.

The collection of the uniform was an endeavour which required flying to Perth to get the items, ensuring they were suitably wrapped and packaged and then travelling back to London on the train to keep the uniform flat in transport boxes and at the correct temperature. As the uniform was over one hundred years old it required particular care and consideration so as not to suffer damage from dust or insects over the duration of the exhibition. This meant it required a display case as opposed to the open display of the other costumes, and it was loaned to us on the condition that it would be protected in a glass box. Thankfully, Robyn Earl from the V&A Exhibitions Department was able to help us with this by facilitating the loan of a full-size display case. Providing a real uniform complete with all its ensemble parts, helped tie the story of British imperial and colonial

1 legacy in Africa and the African Diaspora directly to the involvement of
2 the Scottish regiments.

3 I had decided that the costumes worn by the young women who per-
4 form the Nazareth Scotch dance should be displayed as they demonstrated
5 a good balance of Zulu and Scottish influences. However, the acquisition
6 of the costume was much more difficult to obtain. Having failed to get
7 hold of anyone who might be able to help with accessing leaders of the
8 Shembe Church and having contacted every tartan retailer in London
9 and Scotland, I turned to Brian Wilton for guidance and advice on how
10 to obtain this particular tartan. He helpfully sent me a vector image of
11 what the tartan could look like from an image I had sent him. With that
12 graphic, I set about recreating a version of the kilt out of three metres of
13 black Gabardine wool and fabric paint as well as the rest of the costume. I
14 was overly aware that time was being lost trying to obtain these costumes
15 from different locations across the globe and the next stage of the process
16 needed to start on time.

17 Our last item was a contemporary fashion outfit designed by the
18 winner of our tartan fashion design competition. The outfit was designed
19 by fifteen-year-old Tianna Jade Small Cruickshank from The Grey Coat
20 Hospital School who got the inspiration for her piece from designers and
21 icons such as Joy Prime and Isabella Blow (Figure 2.1). Her design stood
22 out as being truly unique as it contained a mixture of styles and influences.
23 This final piece was made out of a madras fabric she chose from CIAD's
24 stock, and was made by Gesa Werner and myself.

25 With all our pieces made and acquired it was time to commence with
26 the mannequin construction workshops, which took place over ten weeks
27 at the home of CIAD's Financial Director, Dermot Bates, who graciously
28 cleared a large studio space in his house in East London. The final piece
29 to our collection was the outfit loaned to us by Vivienne Westwood,
30 which was expertly mounted on the opening day of the exhibition by
31 Westwood's Archive Manager Raphael Gomes. This piece and the piece
32 by Tianna Jade were the only two contemporary items in the exhibition;
33 all the other pieces were garments that were laden with historical legacy
34 and so it was fitting to have these two fashion outfits to bring the exhi-
35 bition element of the project full circle so we could concentrate on the
36 documentary.

37 Most of the filming for the documentary was done by the project assis-
38 tants with help from the core CIAD team on the company camera or their
39 mobile phones. As a result, the final documentary varies in quality from
40 clip to clip, which is reflective of the different types of devices used in its
41 production. This did not please the editors, but despite their grumbles,
42 the project assistants put together a great piece of work that didn't just



Figure 2.1 Tianna Jade Small Cruickshank's winning competition piece. Courtesy of Teleica Kirkland.

document the story of the project and its construction but also spoke to their learning and enjoyment of this work.

To engage with the history of the Scottish regiments the CIAD Project Manager Paula Allen and I took two of the project assistants, Monique, and Daniella, to Scotland. Neither of them had been to Scotland before and Monique had never left London, so going to Scotland generated quite a lot of excitement. On arriving at the Black Watch Castle and Museum, we were granted a tour by Museum Manager Emma Halford-Forbes who explained in great detail the campaigns of the 42nd Regiment of Foot and why they were called the Black Watch (the dark blue, black, and dark green of their kilts made them look black in certain light). Daniella filmed as Monique furiously scribbled notes, and we all learnt quite a lot about the 42nd Regiment's military campaigns in India.

The final stop in Scotland was to Pitlochry to visit Brian Wilton at the Scottish Tartan Authority offices. Wilton was incredibly friendly, patient and extremely knowledgeable about tartan. He told us all about the tartan registry and how every Scottish tartan was catalogued and archived at the Tartan Authority. He gave us the history of the very first piece of tartan

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1 being found in a peat bog on the body of a Celtic man that dated from the
2 twelfth century BC near the Caucasus Mountains. Wilton also explained
3 that although madras has quite strong links to tartan it would not be
4 included in the tartan registry because it could not be categorised as a
5 tartan which he qualified as being a set pattern that has a minimum of two
6 colours which creates a repeat pattern that crosses at right angles.¹⁸ He was
7 passionate about his work and the project assistants got some great footage
8 of him explaining the different characteristics of tartan and why its defini-
9 tion and use have been contested over the years.

10 During the preparations for the exhibition and in between going back
11 and forth to Scotland, a dance performance was being choreographed
12 and rehearsed. The performance was envisaged to tie the final parts of the
13 journey together and portray how many differing elements from across
14 the world came together within the African Diaspora. The dance was cho-
15 reographed by Suzette Rocca, a choreographer and dancer with decades
16 of experience in diverse dance forms, and was performed by three profes-
17 sional dancers; Andrea Queens, Theo Alade, and Simone Foster. The per-
18 formance was called Crossing Cultures and was accompanied by Chrono
19 Cross Shadow Forest African Celtic Fusion remix. As the final part of
20 the project, the performers needed to embody what this story had repre-
21 sented: not just the material culture from the collision of cultures across
22 the British Empire but also the establishment of new identities from that
23 cultural hybridisation. To demonstrate that message further each dancer
24 was dressed in stylised costumes that incorporated a blend of the fabrics
25 that had been part of this project.

26 After all the research, preparations, travel, filming and editing the pro-
27 ject was finally launched on 4 August 2014 on the cobbled courtyard out-
28 side Craft Central Gallery in Farringdon, London (Figure 2.2). Knowing
29 that strips of tartan would be unfamiliar on the streets of London, Laura
30 extended the tartan beyond the gallery walls into the street covering the
31 lampposts and trees leading up to the gallery. The Guadalupian dance
32 troupe Zil'Oka performed on the opening night and the whole troupe
33 came dressed in their finest madras check. Our African drummer Zuzu
34 and Scottish bagpiper Hamish set the tone by performing a superb live
35 jam session on the night. As the launch came to an end, we received a
36 visit from Jonathan Faiers, Professor of Fashion Thinking at Winchester
37 School of Art, and author of *Tartan*, an incredibly informative book that
38 discusses tartan as being a 'textiles transporter'.¹⁹ It was great to meet him,
39 having read his book and having gleaned a lot of my understanding of the
40 cultural engagement with tartan from his work.

41 After the exhibition closed, the next stages involved delivering the final
42 two elements of the documentary and the dance performance. For this, the



Figure 2.2 Launch of the *Tartan: Its Journey through the African Diaspora* project and exhibition. Courtesy of Teleica Kirkland.

team transplanted to the V&A Museum where we combined the screening of the documentary and the dance performance with the wrap event for the project. The event was very well promoted by the HLF and the project assistants which meant there was standing room only in the performance and screening space. The project wrap felt like an exhalation of breath and was the culmination of years of hard work, and we were incredibly grateful to all who were involved. With the core team and the project assistants, we gave a special thank you to the V&A for all their incredible support, as their input helped elevate this project beyond all expectations.

Conclusion

The journey of this research travelled from various countries in the Caribbean passing back through India on to Scotland and then on to Kenya and South Africa. This enabled us to map out a broad picture of how the development of these patterns have come to influence the economic, cultural, and social developments in these countries and regions.

The *Tartan: Its Journey Through the African Diaspora* project started as a small seed of an idea and taught us so much about the British Empire and how it captured many different cultures to make it function at its optimum. The importance of those cultures to the system is not widely

acknowledged, and although the legacy of the British Empire and British colonial history still affects many people today, the impact of Empire on cultures within the African Diaspora is not widely understood or discussed. This project aimed to at least start the conversation.

These conversations can of course be difficult, and it became clear throughout the project's development that discussions around the legacy and impact of the British Empire are never without controversy or tension. However, if we are to foster a greater understanding of each other and the world then we must keep communicating.

The history of Scotland, its relationship to England and its subsequent involvement in the British Empire is long and complex and has been told countless times. However, the understanding of how this history fits into the development of material culture in the Caribbean provided a compelling argument to our narrative that offered another piece to the puzzle of understanding cultural histories. It became clear from this project that there is a lot of work to do in this area and so although this project was some years ago the learning continues.

Being able to trace the development of identities across cultures and throughout history is an incredibly rewarding but also very long process made more difficult by the differing relationships various communities have with their material cultures. But, this project demonstrated indisputably that doing so is worthwhile and that texts like these provide valuable archival resources for the understanding of material cultures from across the world. The development of the Costume Institute of the African Diaspora and the various projects we curate with global communities is our way of attempting to provide an easily accessible platform for the engagement of these resources. In this project we set out how we mean to continue, highlighting hidden histories and retelling narratives with a global focus.

Notes

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Further resources

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