

## The Playful and Privileged Africanicity of Luxury @AlaraLagos

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Alára is a new luxury concept store in Lagos, opened in 2015. Founded and run by Reni Folawiyo, a self-declared design enthusiast – and a member of what is reportedly one of the richest families in Nigeria – the store was purpose designed by the renowned Ghanaian-British architect, David Adjaye, and features clothing, design and art from across Africa and the wider world. In late 2016, the store threw a lavish, cabaret-themed party to launch and promote its status as the first official distributor of Christian Louboutin shoes in West Africa, and to mark the arrival of the exclusive goods. As pictured on Alára’s active Instagram page and by guests using hashtags like #LoboutinatAlara and #Alararouge, the many elaborate details of the event included an acrobat descending from the store’s high ceiling to the strains of a solo violinist, a champagne bar, and candle-lit tables festooned with red flowers and feathers. Red was the colour of the night, being the colour of Alára’s branding and likely also a nod to the trademark soles of Louboutin shoes, samples of which were dangled from the ceiling as well as displayed in transparent triangular cases held by female models. Shadowy, cast in dark red hues, the images of these models on Alára’s Instagram page are ceremonial in mood. Holding the shoes in almost reverent fashion, dressed in large *aso oke* headwraps out of which single feathers jut, the women look almost as if engaged in some kind of traditionalist ritual, evoking colonial stereotypes of Africans greeting new material commodities, new ‘stuff’ of whatever stripe, with fetishistic and disproportionate attention.

Read as such, these images, as well as the mere fact that ‘Louboutin in Lagos’ garnered such celebratory notice and promotion, could suggest the coming of luxury to a place where it does not ordinarily reside, and to people for whom it is not familiar or expected. A visit to Alára or wider browse through the store’s Instagram account, @AlaraLagos, belies this kind of reading, however. It reveals instead an Afrocentric aesthetic vision, an ‘Africanicity,’ and a knowing, ironic and playful approach to the construction, staging and consumption of luxury. As Folawiyo explained in an interview with *Vogue*: ‘Alára is an expression of myself—my travels, my interests. And it’s an expression of this place [Lagos/Nigeria], how we live here’ (quoted in Singer 2014: n.pag.). These remarks gesture toward the theoretical view of luxury that the chapter takes, namely that luxury is performative. Not an inherent property, luxury is a matter of designation and declaration. Ultimately it is whatever is cast successfully, whatever seduces, as such. It is for such reasons that the critical luxury scholars John Armitage and Joanne Roberts (2016) suggest that to understand what luxury comprises and means in any given context, we must ask after its ‘spirit.’ Luxury goods are ‘auratic,’ as Delphine Dion and Eric Arnould (2011) similarly put it. They function, certainly they sell, by inspiring a relative sense of awe and transcendence. The luxury retail store is or needs to be thick with atmosphere, then. There must be something in the air, ‘something which flows forth spatially, almost something like a breath or haze’ (Bohme 1993: 117). This something is not simply there, freely or organically arising. Atmospheres ‘proceed from and are created by things, persons and their constellations’ (Bohme cited in Degen, Melhuish and Rose 2017: 6). This means that they can be produced, instrumentalized, manipulated and so on, for instance to create a “‘buzz’ ... to galvanise consumer behaviour” (Hudson 2015:

293). Shaped by and shaping tastes, sensibilities, aspirations and even bodily comportments, variously inclusive and exclusive, in all this fundamentally classed, atmospheres are vectors of power.

This chapter is concerned with the performative content and constellations of luxury at Alára, and with the atmosphere that ensues. Atmospheres can be gleaned by decoding their constituent elements and signs, and by the more tacit, bodily and synaesthetic processes of experiencing and being moved by these things (Biehl-Missal 2013; Bille et al. 2015). This is because the experience of an atmosphere is one 'in which affects, emotions, sensations and meanings are inextricably mingled' (Edensor 2015: 334). Extended visits in the flesh would be one way to get a sense of the atmosphere at Alára – arguably the most obvious and complete way. However, the chapter is based on a reading and feeling of the store's Instagram account. Images have a presence that is more than merely representational, a presence of their own, and in and through this they have, generate and communicate atmospheres and moods (Biehl-Missal 2013). The impressions that they make are more than visual. To the extent that they are highly staged and rhetorical, for instance depicting luxury items in persuasive combinations that may not necessarily be found on the (also highly staged) shopfloor, they also serve to lend further appearance and atmosphere to that which they depict (Bohme 2003: 72). Images serve as aesthetic marketing devices, in short, and thus, as in this chapter, they can be broached as not simply reflecting or representing the atmosphere of the place in question but contributing to its construction.

It is in this last regard that the digital photo sharing app., Instagram, becomes especially apt for the present purposes. With 600 million-plus users as of the time of this writing who are able to post, caption and hashtag their own still and short moving audiovisual content, as well as browse through, like and comment upon others' posts, the core logic of Instagram is to give appearance, feel and value – to things, experiences, places, embodied selves, brands and so on – to attract views and to thereby promote (e.g. see Carah and Shaul 2016; Marwick 2015). Instagram has become a powerful tool for building brands. It stimulates and capitalises upon aesthetic and affective labours of 'making look' (Carah and Shaul 2016). A new technology of public intimacy, it comprises a new site and surface for the production, seeing and sensing, and circulation of glamour and allure, processes that are critical to the aesthetic and attention economies of contemporary consumer capitalism (Thrift 2008). 'Insta-attention,' we could call it, is typically fleeting: a glance before one moves on to the next of a virtually endless stream of content and hyperlinks. The analysis in this chapter is based upon my repeated glancing in this everyday fashion, but also more slowly, deliberately and analytically, through the 400 or so images, with accompanying captions and hashtags, posted @AlaraLagos between the inception of the Instagram account in March 2015 and May 2017. The analysis also draws on published interviews with Reni Folawiyo about her ideas and intentions for Alára, as well as two visits that I made to the store in 2016.

### **Setting the Promise of Luxury: #Like a Box of Chocolates**

The very first image @AlaraLagos is of a wide angle of a side façade of the building, taken from below and rising up to a dusky blue sky. It shows a thick and level, ochre red surface etched with deep lines running into repeated geometric patterns, and interrupted

haphazardly by square and triangular cutouts. A glass surface behind the cutouts reflects the sky. In a city with over 15 million inhabitants, and without anything approaching adequate infrastructure for them, where space is at a high premium and the rhythms and textures of daily life anything but smooth, this tactile image conveys a sense of breadth, ease and plenitude, and a quiet and confident drama. Captioned 'Alara is here!', the image announces the store as not only a new site of soaring extravagance in Lagos, but also one centred on a local aesthetic. The patterning of the building's skin, and the red, grid-like ornamental metalwork at the front, back and top of the structure reference the geometry of traditional Yoruba motifs (Conway 2014). The cutouts are reminiscent of the expensive Austrian laces that Yoruba and other Nigerian women favour for the most important of social occasions. The much-remarked fact (e.g. see Conway 2014; Singer 2014) that the structure was designed by Adjaye, a global African 'starchitect,' only lends its further luxurious *Africanicity*.

Inside, between the solid glass panes that make up the building's front and back walls, is a triple-height space comprising a series of ascending white terrazzo landings connected by short moveable staircases of the same cool material and hue. The landings serve as the store's primary display stage. About halfway up, to the right, is a walled-off space dubbed 'the cage room' for its partial encasing by black metalwork wrought in yet another geometric pattern. At the very top is an outdoor roof area. Momentous in scale, sweeping insistently upward, suffused with both natural and artificial lighting, the main interior space of the store is, at the same time, grounded and warmed by a dark cladding that lines the ceiling and one side wall, as well as by the many colourful items on sale that are dotted artfully around. Its scale is also humanized by its subdivision into landings, which renders it navigable as a series of smaller places. Thus the interior space of Alára impresses and communicates grandeur, but without coming to feel cold or empty, or forbidding. Indeed, the space beckons, lures in. Looking like stacked Lego pieces, for instance, the squat staircases invite a playful clamber.

An early image of the store's interior posted on its Instagram account is taken from the righthand side of the ground level, from which position some but not all of the landings and staircases, and their items on display, can be seen. The caption reads 'Alára's stairway to heaven,' which articulates with both what the image shows and what remains beyond the frame to suggest that more and more delights are to be had as one ascends. A sense of the delightful unknown is repeated in another picture of the interior also taken from below, focused, in this case, on the cage room. Because of the black metalwork and the darkness of the space behind it, the image does not reveal what the room holds, and the contents of the area just outside it are likewise indistinct, a little blurred. But bright ceiling spotlights twinkle down on everything, enchanting, and what does filter through the 'cage' are splashes of colour. Magical things are to be had here, the image winks, they need only be sought. The accompanying text verbalises this promise: 'You never know what you might find #likeaboxofchocolates.' This phrase and hashtag derive from the well-known movie, *Forrest Gump*, where they summarize the eponymous character's optimistic openness to whatever may come.

What comes at Alára, what is found as one mounts the self-declared 'heavenly stairway,' is an eclectic yet carefully selected mix of things. Giving an overview of what is in the store, Folawiyo said in an interview: 'there's furniture from Moroso, the Italian brand, but also objects I've picked up in markets in, say, Turkey. We have designers from South

Africa making furniture for us, baskets from women in Zimbabwe, scarves from Ethiopia, weaving and leather goods from Nigeria...’ (Singer 2014: n.pag.). Otherwise put, the stock ranges from ‘global’ luxury brands, which is to say mostly Western ones, such as Valentino, Stella McCartney and Louboutin, to locally celebrated and globally ‘rising’ African brands like Maki Oh, to little known or new African lines, to craft and artisanal work from the continent and beyond. Suggested by Folawiyo’s indicative list is that there is a particular emphasis at Alára on Africa as a site and source of luxury, not just a receptacle for it. In fact, according to a *Wall Street Journal* article, Folawiyo’s ‘ambitions for Alára go far beyond filling a gap in Lagos’s luxury-retail landscape. She hopes to address a deeper issue—the fact that so little of what’s made in Africa is considered luxurious in the first place’ (Conway 2014 n.pag.). Below I describe and theorize how ‘Africa’ becomes central to not just the material provenance of luxury at Alára but also to its aesthetic and spirit.

### **Creating and Curating an African Luxury: #This is What We Love**

Dion and Arnould propose that things become luxurious through a series of performative symbolic and material processes that can be understood as a kind of magic. Drawing on Marcel Mauss and Henri Hubert (1902/1933), they understand magic as ‘a system for managing the transfer of qualities through similarity and contiguity,’ or through likeness and contact (2011: 504). This, to be clear, is not the magic of rabbit-in-the-hat, magic as cheap trick or bamboozlement. Nor is it magic in the African sense of *juju*. Rather it is a ‘secular magic’ of allure, seduction, beguilement (Thrift 2008: 9). These are aesthetic properties, practices and states utterly foundational to consumer capitalism. If increasingly needed to distinguish even the most mundane of consumer goods (Bohme 2003), they are indispensable for the constitution and demarcation of ‘luxury.’ For this, according to Dion and Arnould (2011), the ‘charismatic creative director’ becomes key.

This is Reni Folawiyo at Alára. The first full image of Folawiyo on the store’s Instagram account shows her in a quirkily stylish patchwork coat looking captivated by and in the process of capturing an image of something, out of the shot, said to have ‘caught our eye at Sacai,’ a Japanese luxury brand. ‘#mrsF,’ as she is tagged, stands in a semi-darkened room. A pale grey wall behind her is dotted with reflections of small circles of light that look like golden bubbles blowing in the wind. The scene and atmosphere are almost wondrous. A flurry of hashtags locate Folawiyo in Paris, at ‘#pfw,’ Paris Fashion Week, to be more exact. Looking for luxury, and transferring and transmuting it from *her* view into ‘ours,’ are at the heart of Folawiyo’s work. As in the two brief quotes from her that I have already cited above, Folawiyo makes clear in interview accounts that the store is an expression of her singular vision, a product of her ‘magic touch.’ Thus even when she is not physically depicted or explicitly named, we can read the framing and voice @AlaraLagos as her own. Figuratively and performatively then, it is Folawiyo who renders also ‘wondrous’ the turquoise Fulani wedding slippers said to be en route from Agadez, central Niger; who casts as ‘#localgems’ the pendant lines of coloured glass beads pictured at Lekki Market, a somewhat kitschy touristic arts and crafts market located in a working class neighbourhood of Lagos. Very far from Paris Fashion Week or the Salone del Mobile Milano where a number of the posts @AlaraLagos also impute Folawiyo’s physical presence, the caption for the image of beads from Lekki Market makes the performative claim that with the right eye, we never know what luxuries might turn up

where, in seemingly unlikely places: “#alaraloves... Impromptu walks through Lekki market... you never know what you’ll find #localgems #straightouttalagos #craft.”

The goods at Alára not already or widely considered luxurious are granted entry to this exclusive rank in the first place by the store’s envisioning and branding of them as such. For the African amongst these things, Ethiopian scarves say, or the glass beads from Lekki Market if they do indeed end up on in the store, this process of becoming luxury by charismatic designation contains an element of what we could call postcolonial re-enchantment, that is, a remembering and recasting (if also sometimes ‘upgrading’ or ‘updating’) of their ‘native charms.’ Two images of artisanal leather handbags on the Instagram page speak to this process of transformation. In the later of the two images, the handbags, tagged ‘bags made in Africa,’ are staged with a series of other items in the store. A visitor to the Instagram page comments nostalgically, and appreciatively: ‘Gosh! I used to have loads of those bags when I was a child. My dad used to bring them back from the North (Kano). They stank to high heavens for a few weeks but they were beautiful.’ The earlier image of same genre of bags confirms what is implicit in this remark that, however beautiful and special ‘now,’ they were not always at the level of luxury. In this image, the bags are displayed against mouldy green corrugated iron sheets; or, in other words, they are obviously not at Alára. The accompanying text reads: ‘This is what we love! #comingsoon #alaraloves #artisans #handmadebags #africanluxury #nigeria.’ Declared loved by Alára and so to be loved, the artisanal bags are in this image not yet luxury but on their way there, ‘#coming soon.’

As in this example, the physical, conceptual and, on Instagram, visually mediated space of the store contribute to bequeathing (additional) luxury to the goods that cross its various thresholds. If so, we could be more specific and say that what Alára gives or imparts is of that which I have already termed its luxurious Africanity. Having been deemed suitable for and/or of sufficient likeness with the store, the goods there become not simply luxury but ‘*African luxury*.’ The fact and space of the store also allow for the lateral transfer of both luxury and Africanity between the various items and brands in stock. In the shop as on the Instagram page, the African is intermingled with the Western/global ‘certified’ already or more as luxury. Maki Oh is modelled with Marni; peppered at the feet of mannequins dressed in Alessandra Rich are beaded Southern African baskets; cushions from Senegal surround Bottega Veneta bags. Visually and stylistically, the African and the Western/global are in some instances indistinguishable. But this is not because the former looks like or mimics the latter, as the ready assumption might be. *The resemblance flows the other way around*: the Valentino bag in what looks like (and could well be) African print, for example;<sup>1</sup> the Stella McCartney in colours and patterns akin to the indigo-dyed Yoruba cloth, *adire*; the Bottega Veneta woven leather men’s bag of which one visitor to the Instagram page asks ‘was this made in Lagos?’ because, in terms of how it looks, its material, form, style and detailing, it well could be.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The fact that ‘African print’ itself has a foreign or non-indigenous, and colonial, provenance is telling, and useful, for what is at the crux of my argument here, namely that African-ness or Africanity is performative. Although first originated from Javanese batiks by way of Europe, African print is African because it has *become* so. For more on this see, for example, Nina Sylvanus (2007), also the chapter by Amah Edoh in this collection.

<sup>2</sup> Interestingly enough, and perhaps telling, is that in the time since I first drafted this chapter and included the link to this comment, the comment has been taken down and the Instagram account with which it was posted has been disabled. However, Alára’s response to the comment is still up. It reads: ‘@prncesse lkyi Hello. No it’s not [made in Lagos]. Bottega is an Italian brand and it’s produced in Italy.’

This is no coincidence. Folawiyo purposely curates Alára with and for what she names and thereby seeks to promote as an African – and I would suggest more specifically Lagosian – eye and feel. Referring to the Western/global brands that are in the store or not, she explains: ‘I tried to choose based on our aesthetic. I’ve tended to go for brands that have a lot of work, a lot of colour. It’s not about a streamlined look here. I love Jil Sander, but that’s not our aesthetic’ (Singer 2014: n.pag). Her curatorial approach to Western/global luxury is to bend it to “our” tastes and needs: it must fit and cater to these, otherwise it will not be admitted. In itself, this makes Alára a critical case study of African luxury to challenge assumptions that Africans will or do simply lap up whatever is Western, always already desiring and deeming it superior (e.g. see Iqani this volume). As to what Alára’s ‘African aesthetic’ comprises, in the same interview Folawiyo describes it as ‘expressive,’ ‘embellished’ and ‘adorned.’ To think with her counter-example, whereas Jil Sander is streamlined, modernist, unfussy, and tending to monochromes, black and white especially, Alára’s brand of luxury looks like bright and warm colors; embellishments and adornments; beads, lace, embroidery and appliqué, studs, sequins and other rough and complex textures; and the mixing of all the above, that is to say, mixed colours, patterns and textures. The taste is not for the sleek and glossy and immaculate or, alternatively, the shiny and ‘bling.’ The look and feel are loose, limber, lively and expressive, not tight, controlled, muted or somber.

The rendering of Western/global luxury on what could be read as localised terms also manifests discursively on the store’s Instagram account. Two Anya Hindmarch clutch bags with glittery detailing in the shape of a thundery and sunny cloud respectively are described as ‘the perfect accessory for the rainy season.’ A time of heavy and dramatic downpours, lasting about eight months of the year, rainy season is a definitive aspect of Lagos life. A pair of Louboutin shoes ‘now in store’ are described as ‘owambe with a twist.’ ‘*O wa mbe*’ is Yoruba for ‘it is here,’ but is also the name given to the large, expensive, virtually open access parties that Nigerians famously throw. We can read the ‘twist’ to which the caption refers as a play on what is already a Yoruba play on words: the Louboutin shoes whose arrival is being announced (*o wa mbe*, it is here) are precisely what a stylish, moneyed Lagos woman might want to wear to an *owambe* party. Such translating of Western/global luxury items and logics @AlaraLagos – of which there are not many, in any case – must not be read as somehow necessary, however, as if the store’s audience and clientele cannot comprehend or access the non-African without such mediation. Rather they are humorous and knowing. What is being played at and upon here, and in the store as a whole is the meshing, mobility across and between, and mutual imbrication of the local and global. At Alára, luxury is a thoroughly cosmopolitan affair, including its Africanity and its pan-African provenance, importantly.

The concept of the ‘Afropolitan’ might seem to encapsulate the analysis that I am putting forward here. Very briefly, the portmanteau term – Afropolitan for African and cosmopolitan – is thought to have been first coined by the writer, Taiye Selasi (2005). Of Nigerian and Ghanaian parentage, raised and schooled across the world, Selasi speaks from her own dizzyingly transnational positionality and subjectivity to define Afropolitans as contemporary ‘African emigrants’ for whom locales on the continent like Lagos, Nairobi and Johannesburg, and ‘a G8 city or two (or three),’ London, Paris and New

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York, say, are equally and fluidly home (2005: n.pag.). Decidedly privileged, by definition mobile, the Afropolitan subject, and the Afropolitan aesthetic, are urbane, self-reflexive, cool, decidedly stylish and insistently hybrid. I initially read Alára as in this vein. But in fact I am of the view that the concept of the Afropolitan is tautologous: cosmopolitanism, or worldliness, is already contained within the category and name of 'African' (Mbembe and Nutall 2004). I also concur with Grace Musila that this tautology speaks to 'anxieties about the 'African' on its own' (2016: 110). These views led me back to a reading of Alára's vision and construction of luxury as 'African,' where African precisely can and does include, and signify, being in, of, and with the world too.

Alára's splice of Africa and kind of African are of the most exclusive rank. If the Afropolitan has been criticised as elite, a position that not every African can occupy materially, aesthetically and ideologically (e.g. see Dabiri 2016), Alára's African is 'super-elite' (Thurlow and Jaworski 2014, emphasis added). In addition to Folawiyo's personal place at the highest socio-economic strata of Nigerian life, in interviews she names among Alára's intended clientele other ultra-wealthy Nigerians, the type who would ordinarily hop on a plane to London to go shopping for luxury.<sup>3</sup> Without reducing her talents and labours at Alára to this, it is indisputable that her spectacular wealth, and the global and hyper-stylized mobility this enables, are utterly key to her ability to make luxurious. In and from the very particular Africa where she and the ideal or intended Alára clientele reside, the whole world is one's stomping and playing ground. The store is this world come home, to Lagos.

### **Fashionable Fun and Games: #Come Thru**

While it is the work @AlaraLagos to draw and invite in, it does not follow that entry into the physical space of the store is promised or given for all. The Instagram account depicts few customers or other visitors having taken up the invitation, posted on many of the images, to '#comethru.' The exceptions are notably elite, and in all cases stylish: invitees only at the Louboutin night, a number of whom are recognisable as local celebrities and wealthy socialites; sophisticates, sipping champagne and chatting keenly at the art and other pop up cultural exhibitions staged in the easily reconfigurable space; the global hip-hop star, Yasiin Bey (formerly known as Mos Def), and so on. Atmospheres are created and flow through proximal bodies, human and non-human, such that their quantity and quality must be carefully selected and regulated in and for the luxury store, to produce the necessary air of exclusivity. Alára is not a place for crowds, for jostling or sweating or struggling; *that* Lagos, which, to be sure, is the empirically and materially predominant, is elsewhere, beyond the store's walls. Also tending to be out of the visual frame are the labouring bodies – Folawiyo excepted – that necessarily populate the store and render it possible. While this is a logic fundamental to capitalist consumer culture, @AlaraLagos, labour is further invisibilized, and moreover (re)commodified, by its aestheticization.

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<sup>3</sup> Folawiyo says in her *Vogue* interview, for example, that the store is 'for' a woman like Nana Otedola, who is the wife of Femi Otedola, still a stratospherically wealthy Nigerian although in 2016 he did not make the annual Forbes index of African billionaires because, due to falling oil prices and the linked collapse of the Naira, his estimated wealth had reportedly 'plunged' from US\$1.8 billion to US\$500 million.

Crispin Thurlow and Adam Jaworski (2014) identify the aestheticization of workers and their work of their hands as one of the visual and material strategies in the representation and production of luxury spaces, experiences and atmospheres. They conceive of the labour that produces luxury as 'visible-invisible.' Visible-invisible labour is an oxymoronic outcome of the simultaneous and contradictory constitution of luxury by perfection, craft, customised service and the like, by labour intensity in short, at the same time as leisure, calm, space and discretion, or the absence of labour and stress. The sight and sound and hum of the hardworking bodies upon which luxury depends do not a luxurious experience make, hence it is that common techniques in the representation and branding of this experience include the 'blurring, decentering, disembedding, desaturation, and the metonymic reduction' of these bodies (Thurlow and Jaworski 2014).

@AlaraLagos, it is *parts* of bodies – of models, professional or not it is not clear – used repeatedly in the space of the store to stage, model, and in this dabble and frolic with the goods on offer. Disembodied feet are pictured walking against the same grey wall in Valentino and Sophia Webster for example, while an anonymous hand lightly suspends a shiny blue Louboutin shoe in front of a multicoloured canvas. In a two-second video, a female body, dressed in designer wear from its unseen head down, sits on a high stool and leisurely dangles its feet. That, per Instagram's design, the video runs on auto-loop amplifies by iterating its playful randomness: bedecked in Marni sandals, the feet dangle on and on and on. Another micro-splice of video captures the mist escaping from a perfume bottle as a hennaed hand depresses the nozzle. What, for the henna, looks like the same hand boasts a set of rings as it grips one of the rods on a stylized foosball table that is, itself, all the more an amusing surprise for being repurposed from the colourful wooden fishing boats that dot the West African coast.

The mood is similarly jokey and ironic when the luxury goods are staged on their own. A pair of chunky Nicholas Kirkwood shoes are hooked on to the side an unidentifiable piece of furniture also made from old fishing boats, one foot cocked at a spry angle. Perched on and among the branches of a plant, its mirrored lens reflecting the surrounding foliage, is a pair of sunglasses. So improbably placed, the glasses look like treasure for the hunt. A clutch bag embellished with large semi-precious stones that could be mistaken for rock candy is described, in another example of double punning, as 'hand candy.' 'I'll have a clutch on the rocks, please,' continues the punning in reference to an image of two other clutches laid out on a bed of white pebbles. In a number of cases, as with the foosball table, or the sandals beaded in the image of Frida Kahlo's iconic face, or the designer sunglasses in the shape of an open, red-lipped mouth, peep of teeth and tongue included, the fun and jokes start with the luxury goods themselves.

At Alára, luxury, including even the work of producing, staging and selling it, is anything but a solemn or reverent affair. Things are not taken too seriously – the highly expensive and exclusive things for sale, that is. Indeed, these things are treated like toys, props for play.

## Conclusion



Premised on a theoretical view of luxury as performative, including as a diffuse quality of feeling that arises from objects, places and people, and their ordering and interacting, this chapter has offered a reading of the content and atmosphere of luxury @AlaraLagos. The chapter argues that Alára's highly curated brand of luxury looks and feels like fashionable fun and games, and this centered around a certain African aesthetic, taste and self-reflexivity that quite casually and knowingly includes and incorporates goods and brands from elsewhere. Spectacular (and stratospherically expensive) though they are, I would argue that it is less the fact and design of the store, or the things for sale there, that comprise its ultimate luxury. Rather it is the spirit of play, the mood of magic: the stylized carefreeness, dabbling and frolicking on display on Instagram; the staging of adventure and new or reenchanting delight; the mixing and mashing of the African and the not. For the hyper-privileged few who can take up the store's invitation to drop by and partake, and, presumably, for the many more whose participation is limited to browsing @AlaraLagos and sometimes posting enthusiastic and desirous comments about what they are seeing and feeling, the store offers itself as a playground for the fashioning of luxurious African – African and/as global – living.

Play is a highly political matter. Who gets to play, where, how, and with what and whom are questions about both productive and reproductive labour, leisure and its material and moral dialectics, time, and of course sheer means in the basic yet quite brute sense of money, 'cash.' But play is political also because it is dispositional, a matter of both mental and bodily attitude and self-perception. It is simultaneously and recursively a product, performance and sign of one's imagined, lived and felt place and priority in the order of things. As produced, represented and promised @AlaraLagos, the place and priority is at the very top, at the very front, entitled to and getting, *affording*, in all senses of the word, the very best. This, too, is and must be understood as a mode of African 'being-in-the-world' (Mbembe and Nuttall, 2004: 347). It demands further attention, and critique, as, among other things, a complex site and instantiation of a series of interlinked gross inequalities, from the very local to the global. But given the stubborn insistence with which representations of Africa are expected to in one way or another "bear testimony to Africa's [putative] difference constituted... by its slum life and chronic poverty" (Nuttall and Mbembe, 2005: 194), it becomes another form of critique to urface that, for some Africans, insouciant play and privilege, both at home and abroad, are in fact a way of life.

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