

AFRICAN ENVIRONMENT AND FASHION

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Abstract

Fashion is not novel to the contemporary African society. It has in most cases been erroneously seen as being peculiar to human's physical adornment. But a more careful look at the word shows that it denotes trends not only in the aspect of human adornment but as it relates to a lot of other things in a changing world. The African environment is a unique environment which takes into consideration the perspective of an African man in relation to the changes in his environment. Fashion in this study is seen from the perspective of an African man as it relates to aesthetics a branch of Axiology which deals with beauty in relation to values. Using the method of critical analysis the researchers find out that the African environment like a natural environment is simply fashionable. Such environment nevertheless do not only pick interest in what the current trend is but rather takes pride in the value of such trends as it relates to their cultural ethics and aesthetic. The researchers suggest that the value of fashion be put into consideration even as we try to fit into the

changing world. It is, therefore, necessary that philosophical ethics and aesthetics be put into consideration in deciding and appreciating what fashion is in an African environment.

Keywords: Fashion; ethics; aesthetics; African environment;

INTRODUCTION

The term fashion is plagued by its many different uses, and by the unclear application of the concept. For example, the term connotes difference, but also sameness. It signifies the latest distinction, as well as the return of the old. While it may be defined by an insular and esteemed aesthetic elite, who make a look exclusive, this look is often using references from those excluded from making the distinction.

Whereas a trend often connotes a peculiar aesthetic expression and often lasting shorter than a season, fashion is a distinctive and industry-supported expression traditionally tied to the fashion season and collections. Style is an expression that lasts over many seasons and is often connected to cultural movements and social markers, symbols, class, and culture (ex. Baroque, Rococo, etc.). According to sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, fashion connotes "the latest difference."

Even though the terms are often used together, fashion differs from clothing and costumes — "clothing" describes the material and technical garment; "costume" has come to mean fancy-dress or masquerade wear. "Fashion," by contrast, describes the social and temporal system that "activates" dress as a social signifier in a certain time and context. Philosopher Giorgio Agamben connects fashion to the current intensity of the qualitative moment, to the temporal aspect the Greek called *kairos*, whereas clothing belongs to the quantitative, what the Greek called *Chronos*.

Africa is one of the most diverse continents in the world. The diversity in Africa, especially sub-Saharan, is normally centred around culture, ethnicity, gender, religion, etc. However, commentators assert that people of African descent encounter similar challenges and therefore point to the need for integration to realize the full benefit of its diversity. The call from commentators comes on the heels of diversity's critical impact on growth and development. Notable among these elements of diversity is ethnicity, which sometimes bring predicament to the continent in the form of ethnic conflicts among others. Diversity in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) coupled with the advent of globalization puts pressure on societies as well as on organizations to appreciate its relevance due to the benefit derived when managed efficiently to ensure inclusion. A well-managed diverse environment fosters inclusion which can translate into growth and development.

A more detailed study on the nature of African environment show a peculiar unity in diversity as the ethical values and norms of an African man seems not to have any significant difference from each other. It can be understood that in relation to fashion the aesthetic view of trend in relation to cultural ethics is not just limited to one part of African but rather shows an inter connectedness. It is therefore no wonder that the ancient African man has a unique sense of fashion and relates it strongly to cultural ethics, this explains why the ancient African woman goes bare and still do not arouse the porosity of the African man. This goes further to explain that the African sense of beauty is devoid of animalistic porosity and molestation. The African woman do not go bare in the ancient time for wanting to expose herself rather she is compelled by lack of clothing to do so. Fashion to the African is therefore a mind set of what is valuable and morality; this is apparently portrayed in their disgust and frown to current trends that fails to appreciate morality in its real sense.

The African environment still embodies its natural beauty which fits into any form of trend and is characterized by richness of natural resources. This state of the African environment attracts a lot of

prying eye of foreigners who wish to impose their harmful fashion on the African environment and if possible poses and explore the uniqueness of its environment.

It is important to note that the African man's sense of fashion has been the underlying factor for a beautiful environment as they see fashion as valuable and believes that if a particular trend would harm their environmental heritage then it's not worth venturing into.

FASHION AND AESTHETIC

Aesthetics is a branch of philosophy dating to Plato and Aristotle. Prior to the nineteenth century, aesthetics had two goals, to analyze the creative process and establish rules for judging beauty and taste in the fine arts. In the late nineteenth century, two developments changed that direction. First, as psychology developed an epistemology, aestheticians began to apply its theory and methods to the study of aesthetic judgments. Second, as standards of living rose, consumers began to demand products that were both functional and attractive. In response, aestheticians broadened their scope to include the design of everyday objects. Today, the term "aesthetics" is construed to mean the study of both the fine and applied arts.

In the broadest sense, Fashion includes objects and endeavours designed to appeal to any sense. However, in common usage, fashion is taken to relate to a person's way of dressing or a new trend in the clothing industry. According to aestheticians, the purpose of the fashion industries is to create "significant beautiful items that beautifies the everyday life of individual in different sense. They also endeavour to keep abreast of the new development in and are in fact the orchestra of what the people see as trend. Individuals consume fashion to meet higher others needs pleasure in perceiving beauty and emotion in grasping the meaning of symbols. In the "aesthetic experience", beauty and expression are inextricably linked.

Fashion refer to the design of household objects, such as consumer products, furniture, appliances and clothing. Compared to painting and

sculpture, fashion meets a broader set of needs. To achieve significant form, fashion must meet utilitarian as well as aesthetic needs. While most household objects are not such fine examples of significant form of fashion, in a society where most products meet utilitarian needs, aesthetic attributes help in people's choice and appreciation of what fashion is.

More than a decade ago, Holbrook (1981) challenged consumer researchers to shift their focus from utilitarian to aesthetic attributes of products. Despite sporadic attempts to rise to Holbrook's challenge, we continue to neglect the aesthetic aspects of consumption. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the design of fashion goods.

Fashion is a pervasive phenomenon of our culture. While fashion affects the design and consumption of many products, clothing is the classic example. In fact, the effect of fashion on the way we dress is so profound that the design, production and marketing of clothing, which encompasses many industries, is collectively known as "the fashion industry." Given the status of fashion as a multibillion dollar industry and the ability of "significant form" to meet a broad spectrum of consumer needs.

THE FASHIONABLE NATURE OF AFRICAN ENVIRONMENT; A PREY FOR WESTERN INDUSTRIALIST.

The biggest concerns over unethical Local fashion industry insiders across Africa are exploring new sustainable solutions, and tapping into more traditional ones, that will enable them to stay afloat financially as well as protect the environment.

practices in Africa's fashion landscape is the heavy dependence on imported garments and materials from Asia and the West which often contain traces of hazardous chemicals as well as the use of plastics and toxic chemicals dyes that may include bleach or lye residues that could end up in natural or municipal water sources.

The global fashion industry has been harming the planet for decades. After the oil industry it's the world's worst polluter. It relies on water-intensive production, uses toxic dyes, and the extensive air-polluting travel associated with fashion shows also set bad records.

The African fashion industries has little or nothing to contribute to the destructive nature of the fashion industries world wide. The Africans has been mindful of anything that would harm their environment and have therefore opted for sustainable solutions thereby taping into more traditional ways to enable them stay afloat financially and at the same time keep their environment safe.

By putting this much effort Africans has succeeded in maintaining a beautiful environment which has not been tampered by over exploitation nor harmed by the over zealously of the different fashion industries. This has caused the western industrialist to see Africa as a new environment for their unending exploitation to satisfy their greedy curiosity and claims. An environment the Africans has cherished and protected over the years has become a centre of envy for the westerners.

The Chinese has proceeded to buy lands in Africa while the Americans are so interested in controlling the population of Africans under a pretentious care for their well being. This in the actual sense is a ploy to wipe out Africa or better still reduce it to a helpless number and take over their rich environment. The truth is that the African environment is in no way threatened by the population of Africans in fact, the vastness and richness of the African environment would be enough to sustain a thousand more generation to come.

Till today Africans are still seen as an inheritance by the westerners they teach their students that they live in trees and that their lands are theirs to possess. An African priest once recounted his encounter with an English boy who walked up to him and asked "Fr, is it true that you live on tree tops" and the priest in response sarcastically said "yes dear, we do, even your Queen stayed on a tree when she visited" the

boy broke out crying on the thought of their all mighty Queen staying on a tree which was to him degrading and un heard of, this incident further explains how the Africans are being viewed by westerners even today.

The fashionable nature of the African environment which has today become the trend for the so called developed countries have maintained an original and natural look with its richness intact. This is a trend that can never go old and also very priceless. Africans should therefore be mindful of what they have and also try not to be ignorant of the treat around them and doing everything within their power to protect this heritage.

APPLICATION OF AESTHETICS IN THE APPRECIATION OF FASHION AND FRICAN ENVIRONMENT; THE PERSPECTIVE OF AN AFRICAN MAN

Aesthetics is a way of relating characterized by multisensory perception, attention, emotion, and imaginative freedom. What is distinctive about environmental aesthetic appreciation, and what grounds that appreciation? In answering these questions, there is wide agreement that environmental aesthetics is largely concerned with the environmental character of natural objects as opposed to the object-centred approach typical of art, where the aesthetic object is conceived as fairly static and bounded, for example, a painting or sculpture. Environmental

aesthetics has also served as a critical response to the so-called “scenic model” of aesthetic appreciation of nature, where a focus on natural scenes has been held to be ocular centric and narrow, failing to capture the variety of multisensory and changing qualities of natural phenomena (Carlson, 2000). It is often claimed that the scenic approach is rooted in the Picturesque movement of the 18th and 19th centuries, where landscapes were judged as aesthetically pleasing according to standards of human design as seen in gardens and landscape paintings. The scenic model also tends toward a distanced

and mediated rather than relational and more intimate aesthetic encounter with the natural world.

The environmental approach recognizes the potential of multisensory attention to particular, individual living and non-living things, such as an eagle in flight or a striking rock formation. Importantly though, a more holistic experience of settings and atmospheres shape appreciation. The startling, eerie sound of a fox screaming will attract our attention, but this will be situated within a particular environment, say, having added force as it punctuates a quiet night. Many “objects” of aesthetic attention are better described as phenomena and processes, e.g., changing patterns of clouds in the sky, or the drama of a sudden thunderstorm. Living things move, grow, and decay at different rates, with ecological processes illustrating changes across both time and space in the long and short terms. These changes will be apparent in terms of aesthetic qualities that emerge with changes in weather, seasons, and over longer stretches of time.

It is sometimes argued that aesthetic valuing lies on the more humanizing, even anthropocentric, end of the perspectives and attitudes people take to the natural world. To address to this kind of criticism, various responses have been offered by philosophers and environmental aestheticians, one important one being that aesthetic value is a form of non-instrumental valuing. Translated into relational terms, our aesthetic relations with the world can be said to involve “sympathetic attention” rather than a self-centered perspective (Brady, 2003). More specifically, aesthetics can be understood as a way of relating in at least a couple of ways. As I see it, discovering aesthetic value in the world depends upon a very basic relation between that which is appreciated and the appreciator. To recognize aesthetic qualities in the world begins in sensory perception of phenomena. As such, when we talk about aesthetic qualities we’re always talking about relational qualities which emerge between perceiver and perceived.

Having seen aesthetic as beauty with value, the Africans has a strong sense of ecstasy in everything that deals with its fashion. The African man value quality and at such believes that quality translates to beauty. In the aspect of fashion, clothing in particular the Africans believe that the beauty of an outfit depends on how well that outfit covers the body. It is therefore safe to say that the African man do not appreciate dresses that exposes the skin no matter how beautiful one may think they look the African man still views it as disgusting and unacceptable. Some scholars referring back to the ancient tradition of ladies of different part of Africans going naked may argue that Africans celebrate nudity and therefore wonder why they frown at the western influence on fashion that exposes the flesh. The truth is that the

ancient African man saw fashion as a mind set and so beyond their nudity they created a moral standard which guided the conduct of the individuals in the society, these standard restricted their freedom to go against the believes and ethics guiding their view on the way they perceive their counter parts.

This particular ideology of Africans fashion sense as a mindset of morality portrays the innocence of the African man, they can at such be viewed in relation to the story of the biblical Adam and Eve who when hit by the consequences of their sin and were compelled by their guilt and knowledge revealed to them by their sinful act to cover up their nudity did so thoroughly without the intention of revealing it. The Africans take pride in the sacredness of the body even before the inception of the white men but lacked the materials to back up this believe.

The newly found fashion which the contemporary African man has tried to embrace with both hands has freed the African of the ancient ideology of what fashion really is, this covered their reasoning as they dwell only on the physical aspect of our ancient fashion side and uses

it as a pillar to hold onto the ideology of fashion today as it is presented by the white man.

CONCLUSION

The idea of the topic fashion and the African environment has been observed from two broad perspectives by the researcher. First the paper presented fashion from the African man's perspective. Secondly it also looked at the African environment as fashionable environment and as such appreciating the natural beauty and richness of the environment.

Ethics has always been upheld in the different practices of the Africans and this has guided the way they see thing. Though the ancient African man did not study any kind of philosophy yet he has applied it in the way he goes about different practices and also in his view about fashion. The sense of an African man's beauty as aesthetic (attaching value to beauty) has been one of the reasons our environment has not been robbed off its natural richness which is ever fashionable.

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