Africa Fashion Industry

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Abstract

This paper is going to explore the lens of the fashion industry as a form of pop culture that explores the challenges as well as the opportunities that are offered in the industry. In the first body paragraph, it will give a brief overview of the history of African fabrics and the different types of clothing in Africa. The second body paragraph will talk about the relevant research and how it is linked together with the fashion industry in Africa. Lastly, the third body paragraph will talk about the way fashion is used to embrace culture and diversity. To end the paper, it is also going to examine my personal life of how I see fashion industry and the things I learned from my research paper.

Literature Review

The African industry has a lot of history behind their clothing. The history of clothes that were made from tree bark helped discover the development of woven textiles. Uganda and Ghana used the tree bark for important occasions such as ceremonial dances. Also, much of the clothing in Africa are made from animal furs, hides, and feathers. The animal clothing is mostly worn by the villagers and the village warriors in the village. Some of the beliefs about wearing African clothing for some African tribes are that animal carvings on their masks will improve their communication with animal spirits.

There are three different types of fabrics: textile, print, and pattern. The textile is a cultural heritage of Africa that has been around for centuries. Each of the color in the textile represents different aspects of African culture. An example of some colors that are used in the
textile and have important meanings are gold, white, pink, and green. The gold is the most popular color that is used in most of the African clothing. The meaning behind the color gold is that it represents high status, wealth, and mostly worn by royalty. White represents pureness, while pink represents feminine qualities. The green color represents spiritual growth and also relates to the land and harvest. There are other colors that I didn’t list, but also have important meanings. The print which is famously used to make clothes for important purposes are the African Wax Prints. This fabric displays social stature through the colors and patterns of their clothing. Some of the colors are blue, purple, orange, red, and much more. There are so many patterns in wax prints such as flowers, animals, shapes, etc. The last fabric is the textile, they are important because they display the social stature and identity which makes spotting outsiders easier. The most important things about the fabrics are the colors because it has a very deep and symbolic meaning in African Fabrics as they convey certain messages when worn or displayed during significant times and situations like celebrations and mourning. The color that represents celebration is bright colors, such as, gold or white. The colors for mourning are red, black, and sometimes white.

Khaminwa implies different types of clothing in Africa and how they are created. There are two kinds of textile looms that are most used in Africa which are the single and double-heddle. The single-heddle are used for wider pieces of clothing, while the double-heddle are used for narrow strips of clothing. These two are most used because they “use it to weave in colored threads and create richly textured fabrics” (Khaminwa, pg 1). Khaminwa also talks about two of the most popular dyeing techniques that are made from vegetable dyes. These two dyes
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are tie and dye and resist dye. The fabrics are dip into the vegetable dye that protects the covered areas from being dyed.

Fashion has been in existence for centuries and it is one of the largest and most popular industries around the world. There has been numerous challenges as well as opportunities in the African industry. In this article “Africa’s Fashion Industry: Challenges, Opportunities,” Ann Brown talks about the underlying problems that are present in the African industry. Brown said “The world seems to be fascinated by African culture and design. So why isn’t the fashion industry on the continent blowing Paris out of the water?” (Brown, pg 1). For many years, African clothing has been admired by different countries and people around the world and it is unique because of the textures, colors, and patterns.

However, the African clothing is being showcased in fashion shows, “We see our fabric, our textiles and our prints being showcased in the international market by Western designers and we can’t say anything,” (Brown, pg 1). Different non-African companies are taking the African fashion industry works without acknowledging them for it, as well as, not giving them any credit. Society is believing that the famous and the non-African companies are the companies who started making the fabrics. Meanwhile, the reality is that Africans are the ones who are creating the African fabrics. The non-African companies should give credit to them that created the clothing that they are using for their fashion shows because that would show gratitude. This incident is mostly taking place in the United Kingdom. African industries are struggling because most of them don’t have the materials or the opportunity to travel globally to fashion capitals. This gives the non-African industries to steal African designers work and to promote it as their own. Sadly, in most African countries, the government see fashion industries with little value.
Maybe that's the reason that non-African industries have the opportunity to get ideas from Africa.

Even though there are challenges in the African industry, there are also some opportunities that are present in the African industry. For example, the African industry is getting help from outside countries to help them promote their designs and their industry is also in high demand from those countries. “The interest in African design was always there but before, due to the lack of exposure, it was difficult for us to realize its potential. Now, with the Internet and TV...Plenty of Western designers is now trying to use African prints in their work” (Brown, pg 1). Basically, technology has let the exposure of African clothing to be visible in the African industry because before they didn’t know their full potential of what they could accomplish. One of the designers named Ally Rehmtullah shared his opinion about the African industry “The industry has great potential. Africa’s global ranking may be low but cultural colors and clothing is increasingly being embraced globally,” (Brown, pg 1). This is an example of the history of African fabrics. Their cultural colors and clothing are inspired all over the world because they are unique and beautiful.

African industry uses pop culture to embrace their culture and diversity through their clothing. There is a new brand called Libaya that is going to open soon in Accra, Ghana. Libaya means a traditionally tailored women’s top. The purpose of this brand is that “it is important to represent diversity... Libaya focuses on building a fashion community that celebrates the diversity of female beauty...” (Shaw, pg 3). This shows that it is not just an African brand, but something that is going to celebrate Africa’s diverse culture and history. They want the top to represent the diversity of beauty and to carry an African story at heart with the brand. They want
to achieve a sense of woman power and achievements through the tops. The tops “Libaya links Africa and the West by speaking a language every successful woman understands, which is fashion.” Libaya brand is speaking to all women, not just African women, but every successful woman. This brand represents pop culture through gaining popularity and social media. Many women are wearing this brand on social media and it is the most tops that are being worn in Africa and also in America.

Conclusion

After reflecting and writing this paper, I now have a better understanding of African fashion industry. I am an African woman from Liberia, who moved to the United States at age seven. Being raised in America most of my life created a loss of knowing the facts about African fashion industry, but this research has really helped me to have an understanding of African fashion and the meanings behind the colors and prints of African fabrics. I have learned that the fashion industry is worldwide, but the most popular industries are the industries that are in America and the United Kingdom. Even though Africa has one of the most beautiful and unique clothing worldwide, their industry is still having some challenges.

This research paper reminds me of the reality show called Sweatshop: Dead Cheap Fashion. It is similar because the workers who made the clothes were treated and pay unfairly. In Africa, the fashion industry companies are not acknowledged for their clothing by non-African companies. Also researching articles about Africa industry taught me that African clothing is a symbol of diversity and their culture. Overall, this experience was very meaningful to me
because this is my culture and fashion heritage that I am going to carry with me throughout generations.
Work Cited


3) Helen Jennings. Journal of Contemporary African Art, number 37, November 2015, pp. 44-53 (Article)


Annotated Bibliography


   In this article, the author wants to prove that the information New York Times and BBC provided about Africa’s fabric being made from Dutch is a falsification history. The author goes on to talk about the history of different fabrics in various countries in Africa. The author finished her argument with a documentary video on kente cloth weaving. Kente cloth weaving is woven on a narrow horizontal wood structure. The author name is anonymous, but from my knowledge, the author seems to be convincing because the author provided the history of African fabrics. This article will be a great source for my research paper, but the only problem is that it does not have the author’s name and it is a very short article. I can also include the information from the video about kente cloth to use for my paper.


   This article, Muonjia Kaminwa implies different types of clothing in Africa and how they are created. She provided information about two main kinds of textile looms that are used in Africa. Kaminwa also talks about two of the most popular dyeing techniques that are made from vegetable dyes. She also talks about clothing traditions that are across the continent. There was not a lot of information about the author, but she is a writer and artist. The things I like about this article is that it provides traditions of clothing and the main textile looms and popular dye. I am going to incorporate this article in my first body paragraph because it shares the history of different types of clothing in Africa.

3) Helen Jennings. Journal of Contemporary African Art, number 37, November 2015, pp. 44-53 (Article)

   Helen Jennings article tells the brief history of African fashion. Jennings supports her claim by providing the history of where fashion started from in some parts of the countries in Africa. She explains some of the challenges that are still present in African fashion. Jennings is a London-based journalist, author, etc. of the new-media platform Natal and an author of New African Fashion. Jennings work is credible because there is similar version of her essay written by other writers. This article will be very great for my paper because it covers issues that I would love to include in the body paragraph.


   Kristina Rodulfo in this article wants to embrace different cultures and religion in a New York Fashion Week. Rodulfo did that by casting Anniesa Hasiblian fashion show with immigrants and second generation children. In this article, the designer wants to make this fashion show as an opportunity to make political statements about the immigration ban that is present in America because of the new president. Kristina Rodulfo article is audible because this information was spreading all over social media and on TV. Rodulfo graduated from New York University with an Associate Editor. This article will be great for my research paper because it is talking about how fashion is more than just looking nice. Fashion is a form of political
statements. At the same time, I am not sure if it is going to flow with my other articles because it is about African fashion.


Jacqueline Shaw is talking about a set of tops that is going to open in 2017. In this article, they want the top to represent the diversity of beauty and to carry an African story at heart with the brand. The brand is called Libaya which means a traditionally tailored women’s top. The brand wants to achieve a sense of woman power and achievements through the tops. Jacqueline Shaw is a professional Fashion Designer that have a degree in Fashion. This article will be a great source for my paper because pop culture views fashion as a way of celebrating diversity. I can talk about the purpose of Libaya brand in my article.


Sunday News Online look at the lens of how pop culture is a vital component of fashion. It includes designers and trendsetters who advances their brand in order for their brand to be popular around the world. The article included other aspects that are blended to fashion which is technology. This article will be good for my research paper because it covers information that influences fashion. It seems audible because it provided current issues and there are a lot of history behind fashion.