

*The history and sociological significance of
Africa Fashion Week New York 2011-2014*

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Dedication

My family, to whom this thesis is dedicated to, has been a constant source of love, concern, support and strength.

For my daughter Jadesola

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Abstract

In the African Diasporas individuals and cultural groups espouse the core ethos of Pan-Africanism such as solidarity, unity and sense community, by consciously engaging with African people of different nationality, ethnic and racial groups. Through African-centred cultural and social activities including soirees, beauty pageants and community gatherings, communities in the African diaspora foster interactions, create ties with different African groups to construct collective local and transnational identities. While Pan-Africanism as practiced on the African continent seeks to construct a unified African identity that is shaped by geography and common struggles against European hegemony and oppression, for the African Diasporas in Western European countries and North America, the struggle is against racial and gendered discrimination, exploitation, and economic inequalities.

This study focuses on Africa Fashion Week New York (AFWNY) characterised as a pan-African platform because it is vocal on the plight of fashion designers of African ancestry. I argue that AFWNY is a platform and space for African fashion practitioners from different diasporas, cultural and ethnic backgrounds to come together to construct and articulate Black fashion identity, share narratives of their lived experiences and express their aspirations, challenges, successes and struggles through their design practices. While, race and historical oppression are two common threads within this space, yet, AFWNY is constructed around a shared vision for global recognition of black fashion practitioners as creative, skilful and innovative

artisans in an anti-black fashion industry. In developing my argument I draw on my own experience as a black African woman within the fashion industry, and conclude by analysing the motivation and rationale for the AFWNY event.

Introduction

The study explores the ways in which Africa Fashion Week New York (AFWNY) expresses Pan-Africanism through the medium of fashion. Pan Africanism is understood as “a construction of a collective African identity based on shared goals, values, social and historical experiences of struggling to lift Africa from its untenable status as a marginal oppressed and largely excluded Continent” (Muchie 2000:1). Since the civil rights movement in North America and the independence of African states from colonial rule in the 1960s, the struggle to physically, economically, culturally and psychologically uplift the African continent and its people from the grips of capitalism and imperialism have been approached mainly from a political angle, which critiqued colonial imperialist exploitation of African resources, cultural heritage and oppression of its people. Essentially, Pan-Africanist is the principle that African nations (and peoples) must unite by consolidating their efforts and resources towards a unifying purpose freedom, to forge geographical, political and economic alliances across the African continent in order to protect against historical and modern neo-colonial forces and exploitation. Yet, in the present time, African states remain divided by politically constructed borders, cultural differences, foreign religions and languages, and mental colonial legacies.

Meanwhile, in the African diasporas individuals and cultural groups espouse the core ethos of Pan-Africanism such as solidarity, unity and sense community, through conscious engagement and identification with African people of different nationalities, ethnic and racial group identities. Through African-centred cultural and social activities including soiree, beauty pageants and community gatherings,

communities in the African diaspora foster interactions, create ties with different African groups and construct collective African identities. While Pan-Africanism as practiced on the continent seeks to construct an African identity that is shaped by geography and common struggles against European hegemony and oppression, for the African diasporas across European and American cities, the struggle against multiple oppressions including racism, gendered discrimination, economic exploitation and inequalities, presents opportunities for the formation of collective identities based on shared interests.

Most notable is Africa Fashion Week New York (AFWNY) described as a pan-African platform because it is vocal on the plight of fashion designers and practitioners who are black in New York. AFWNY is a platform and space for African fashion practitioners from different diasporas, cultural and ethnic backgrounds to come together to construct and articulate African fashion identities, stories about their design practices and their aspirations, challenges and successes. AFWNY is constructed around a shared vision for global recognition of black bodies, and fashion practitioners as creative, skilful and innovative artisans in an anti-black fashion industry.

My study argues that AFWNY is championing a more nuanced understanding of Pan-Africanist ethos including community solidarity, self-determination, agency, sense of wholeness within a group, unity and collective identity for African fashion practitioners across the Diasporas. The study examines the ways in which Pan-African ethos are expressed at AFWNY, in fashion expressions and representational strategies adopted by the event organisers. Utilizing the fashion week apparatus, AFWNY is an

attempt to consolidate the efforts, skills and stories of African fashion practitioners around a single objective – to re-brand the image of Africa through craft, design practices and technology. Further, to this AFWNY intervenes to position, and reconstruct the image of African fashion in mainstream fashion media discourse.

Fashion has not found an easy home within academia. Lipovetsky (1994) explains the relationship between fashion and academia,

“The question of fashion is not a fashionable one among intellectuals . . . Fashion is celebrated in museums, but among serious intellectual preoccupations it has marginal status. It turns up everywhere on the street, in industry, and in the media, but it has virtually no place in the theoretical inquiries of our thinkers. Seen as an ontologically and socially inferior domain, it is unproblematic and undeserving of investigation; seen as a superficial issue, it discourages conceptual approaches” (Lipovetsky 1994:3-4).

Historically, the study of fashion was believed to be of little importance given that academia was a domain reserved for male aristocrats, and given that there was a limited arc of issues considered to be of sufficient importance to warrant male interest. Niessen and Brydon (1998) argue,

“Fashion and clothing have for a long while remained scholarly unmentionables. The unwillingness of social analysts to recognize the power of how people – of how they themselves – clothe, decorate, inscribe, perform and otherwise gesture with their bodies and avoidances . . . Only recently, as some of the conventional barriers of academe crumble, have fashion and clothing matters been more incisively pursued and more credibly received” (Niessen and Brydon 1998: ix-x).

Fashion was regarded as futile, and linked to women’s physical appearance, thus as objects of study fashion and clothing were deemed inconsequential, frivolous, amoral, feminine and insignificant (Baudrillard 1981; Kawamura 2005). However, Thorstein

Veblen (*Theory of the Leisure Class in 1899*) and Georg Simmel (*Die Mode of Fashion in 1904*) challenged deep-rooted assumptions and misconceptions. Through detailed analyses of the clothing practices of the upper strata of society they advanced that clothing was indeed consequential and an instrument for distinction and differentiation. Simmel's and Veblen's respective investigations laid the foundations for academic analysis of fashion as their investigations illuminated the different utility for clothing and the messages conveyed via material objects (Kawamura 2005).

I take as my starting point the view that the study of fashion presents an opportunity to re-interpret old assumptions about social processes and patterns, to make new discoveries about human societies, and the transitions, shifts in cultures, behaviour and thoughts over time and space. Just as fashion was deemed an inconsequential object of study, black subjectivities including agency, experiences, truth and consciousness have been disregarded, suppressed, silenced and homogenised in conventional academic and media discourse (Hooks 1981; Eze 1998; Collins 2009). This anti-black attitude is succinctly expressed by European philosophers as Hume and, Hegel (1956) in their respective essays. To illustrate, David Hume

“I am apt to suspect the Negroes to be naturally inferior to the whites. There scarcely ever was a civilised nation of that complexion; nor even any individual eminent in action or speculation” (Hume 1758:119)

Hume accords a prominent role to skin pigmentation, and that skin complexion determines an individual's rationality and irrationality. Like Hume, Hegel (1956) was of the opinion that Africa, have no history and denied rationality to Africans. However, Harris argues that Hegel's “Ignominious pronouncements on Africa are a great contribution to the stereotypic image of Black people” (1987:19).

Over time, these Western philosophers have influenced modern thoughts, and claims about Black consciousness, identity and realities have become dominant to our understanding of selves as black subjects (Ani 1994; Eze 1998; Wright 2004). No wonder Zeleza (2003a) exclaims it is an arduous task rescuing both African history and world history from the burdens and blindfolds of Eurocentric historiography. That is to say European perspectives dominate understanding of history, and African experiences (Hawk 1992).

The suppression of black voices and realities in mainstream discourse, in particular fashion media discourse motivates this study. This study adopts an autoethnographic approach to explore and analyse the history and of Africa Fashion Week New York (AFWNY) from the time of its inception in 2009 to 2015. My study contributes to the dialogue and extant literature on fashion, black stylization and the design practices of African practitioners (Rabine 2002; Allman 2004; Rovine 2004; Tate 2009) in western spaces. I have identified through extant literature that there are contradictions in the construction of an African identity and treatments of black subjectivities. How these impact on ideas and design practices are recurring themes. My study examines the literature on Pan Africanism and Black feminist thought and explores the treatments of race, ethnicity, religion, class, fashion, ideology and oppression. Interrogating this study through the lens of black feminist thoughts and Pan Africanism accords me several opportunities, to center the ideas and realities of black practitioners (women and men); secondly, to become aware of the ways in which dominant ideas and social structure shape our consciousness. Thirdly, it increases our understanding of the significance of power and knowledge as the tools of empowering the oppressed (hooks 1994). Finally, providing insight into the

realities of African fashion practitioners is imperative, as it not only empowers the oppressed, perhaps it will sensitize the privileged to these realities (Collins 2009).

Here I outline broadly the theme of each chapter. Chapter 1 provides historical, social, and cultural perspectives on fashion. Chapter 2 reviews fashion theory and sociological definitions of fashion. Chapter 3 provides a critical overview of Pan-Africanism, and identifies its shortcomings in terms of the gendered exclusions which it reproduces. Chapter 4 situates events such as Africa Fashion Week in terms of race, gender, class and identity. In Chapter 5 I explain my methodological approach and autoethnographic strategy. Chapter 6 outlines the evolution of Fashion Week in the context of the development of Fashion Capitals and modernity. In Chapter 7 I present my own autoethnographic account in attempts to derive indepth critical understanding of my life experiences in particular to give meaning to my experiences working in fashion as a black woman. Chapter 8 presents a visual analysis of AFWNY promotional campaigns to identify and establish what meanings these images express. Chapter 9 analyses AFWNY in terms of its political economy and social significance, followed by the conclusion of the study and recommendation for future studies.

Chapter 1

Historical, Social, and Cultural Perspectives of Fashion

This chapter sets the backdrop for my own case study of the emergence of Africa Fashion Week New York as a specific instance of an African-centred economic, political and socio-cultural practice. I begin by reviewing the etymology of the term fashion, definition and perspectives from which fashion has been considered in Western thoughts.

Fashion in Western societies has not always been so democratic (McRobbie 1998; Wilson 2003). For instance, in sixteenth century Europe the government regulated public dress through sumptuary laws (Delpierre 1997). At present, fashion is regarded as one of the world's most important creative and cultural industries (Lemire 2010; Hopkins 2012). Lemire argues "Fashion is increasingly recognized as a powerful, variable force shaping economies, cultures and societies; this phenomenon is now the focus of many individual and collective investigations" (Lemire 2010:14). Modern fashion is media-driven, seasonal, corporate, international and constantly renewed (Breward 2003; Breward and Gilbert 2006; Skov 2006; Skov et al. 2009).

Fashion is a highly value-laden term (Kawamura 2005; Hopkins 2012). But what is in a word? Barthes (1967) argues "the value of a word is not found in its origin but its place in the language system" (1967:7). The importance placed on fashion reflects contemporary societal values i.e., personal profit, individualism, self-interest, freedom, management, competition, global production and consumption (Breward and Gilbert 2006; Hopkins 2012). The multi billion-dollar industry is configured in

the twenty-first century around a key set of cities and temporal cycles, which promote a global fashion industry (Beward and Gilbert 2006; Hopkins 2012). But first, what is fashion, and why is it so important?

What is Fashion?

The terms fashion, clothing and dress are commonly used interchangeably to mean the same thing. There has been a conflation of these terms in popular culture, which only brings about further confusion as to what constitutes fashion (Kawamura 2005). Before moving on to what fashion is and is not, it is imperative to make some clarifications and lay out the differences between clothing, dress and fashion. To begin with clothing, the French term *mode* has evolved over the years as the usage of the term broadened. Adopted from Latin ‘modus’, in the 15th century, Mode was used to refer to clothing. The French philosopher Garve (1792) used the term *mode* to refer to various objects of everyday use including clothing. Following Garve, Furetière (1690) defined *mode* primarily as custom, as a way of life, or the manner in which objects are produced. *Mode* therefore constitutes the way clothing are made. In the English language clothing is regarded as fashion, yet, only specific types of clothing. For example, Western clothing system are considered as fashion. While the clothing practices of Asia, Africa and indigenous cultures are described as traditional dress or costume (Jansen 2015). Although the two phenomena are separable and separate, the differentiation between Western from non-Western clothing practices is problematic in defining fashion (Rovine 204; 2015), to clarify I begin with a brief recount of the term fashion, its original meaning in Latin, followed by the changing meanings.

The term Fashion has its roots in Latin. In its earliest definitions, Fashion was a

term that focused mainly on the process of constructing common or popular wear in various settings. Kawamura (2005) notes the etymology of the word fashion to depict the total focus on the process of making: “The English word fashion originally comes from the Latin *facio* or *factio*, meaning ‘making’ or ‘doing’ and the Middle English word ‘Fashion’ means to make, or a particular make or shape” (Kawamura 2005:29-30). The French word for fashion first appeared in 1482 and referred to a collective manner of dressing. The usage of the word evolved by the late 1480s, and fashion acquired a meaning in reference to dress or lifestyle, particularly in the upper circles of society. Kawamura asserts, “Fashion was an indicator of class status and court privilege around this time period, the more modern view of fashion as a way to make clothes arose in the early sixteenth century” (Kawamura 2005:30).

That is to say, the term fashion meant the common approach to dressing. It was subsequently adopted to describe the dressing of a particular lifestyle, i.e., the personality of the upper class in society. As the meaning of the term Fashion evolved from its Latin origins, in the same way, the meaning of the term in English has also been transformed through common applications. Today, the term fashion is used to define and qualify clothing, accessories, household objects, contemporary ideals, cities and space (Kawamura 2005; Entwistle 2009; McAndrew 2010). Yet, there are differences between clothing and fashion.

Clothing, Dress and Fashion

At the present time, there are diverse uses of the term Fashion, commonly used by individuals and groups within society, as well as to describe complex processes including meaning, production, consumption, dissemination of material objects

(Crane 2000). Clarification should be made between material and non-material aspects of fashion, for instance the differences between clothing and fashion. Brenninkmeyer (1963) explains the point of difference between the fashion synonyms clothing, dress and costume,

“Clothing meant the distinctive dress worn by members of any profession. Dress comes from the Middle French ‘dresser’ to English ‘dress’ meaning to arrange, and in general, it means the principal outer garments worn by women or the visible part of clothing. ‘Costume’ means mode of personal attire or dress belonging to a nation, class or period” (Brenninkmeyer 1963 cited in Kawamura 2005:4).

The terms clothing, dress and costume are not synonymous as they represent different objects and ideas. As previously mentioned, in Western thought and writings, the clothing practices of Asian, African and indigenous cultures are described as ‘traditional dress or costume’ (Jansen 2015). This marks the political, cultural and geographical differences between the Western and the rest of the world (Achebe 2001). Hall (1997) argues that binary oppositions are crucial for meaning about African fashion and European fashion design practices.

Eicher (1995) clarifies the relationship between clothing and dress, fashion and dress and clothing and fashion, “Clothing and dress are not synonymous because a focus on clothing ignores body modifications as part of dress” (1995:299). This implies, the study of dress involves an exploration of the changes made to the body using both permanent and temporal props and instruments from fabrics, accessories, piercing and other forms of body modifications. For example, tattoos, piercing, henna, weight lifting, skin bleaching are examples of body modifications that demand the same attention as the study of a piece of garment (clothing). These body modification examples should be approached as a study of body supplement or clothing styles in

order to understand how dress is used in specific contexts and times (Eicher and Sumberg 1995).

On the distinction between fashion and dress, Eicher (1995) argues “fashion and dress are not synonymous because fashion can be found in many arenas of life, not just in clothing and body adornment” (1995:299). That is to say, dress comprise of all the modification and clothing styles performed on the body to express meanings, whereas fashion is a term to qualify clothing, accessories, household objects, contemporary ideals, cities and space (Kawamura 2005).

Finally, on the distinction between clothing and fashion, Eicher (1995) argues “Not all clothing is fashionable dress” (1995:299). Anthropologists Roach-Higgins and Eicher define dress as an “assemblage of body modifications and/or supplements” (Roach-Higgins and Eicher 1992:32). This definition considers the functions of dress and human’s ability to innovate, change dress styles and use the body as a site of performing culture. Clothing are signs to be read (Barthes 1967), as it comprises of material objects, i.e., garments, shoes, bags and other props people adopt to express meanings. Fashionable dress depending on the specific cultural context signifies widely accepted clothing styles including body modifications. For example, within the Western corporate office environment, the combination of suit, trouser and tie is an appropriate fashionable dress, whereas the Yoruba Agbada and sokoto will be considered inappropriate within this cultural context. This is in accordance with the ways in which clothing is organised and has been socially defined within the context of corporate business environment where the suit and tie attire is linked to a display of power (Joseph 1986). Within the cultural context of the Nigeria office environment, the Yoruba Agbada and sokoto is a common form of male power dressing. It is accepted and recognised as such, therefore depending on context not all clothing is

regarded as fashionable dress. All this points to, that within a given space and time, what is considered as fashionable dress varies in specific cultural context.

Sociologist Kawamura (2005) argues that Fashion is more than mere clothing

“Fashion is a concept that separates itself from other words which are often used as synonyms of fashion, such as clothing, garments and apparel. Those words refer to tangible objects while fashion is an intangible object. “Trying to define a particular item of clothing as fashion is futile because fashion is not a material product but a symbolic product which has no content substance by/in itself” (Kawamura 2005:2).

For Kawamura (2005) it is crucial to mark the distinctions between the terms Fashion, clothing, garments and apparel. It is vital not to conflate the meaning of one with the other, as this only creates further confusion and misunderstanding. Kawamura shows that the definition of fashion is beyond the mere description of garments and clothing to focus on the production of meanings, the ways in which individual and group express these meanings materially and visually and how these meanings are shaped by external forces.

Fashion is symbolic in the sense that it is used as a symbol to express an idea, value or meaning (Hall 1997). While clothes, material objects are signs to represent the meaning of fashion, fashion is best understood as the subjective stories and messages that are conveyed through clothing practices, individual consumption practices and production processes. Hall (1997) describes representation as a process by which members of a culture use language to produce meaning. Language here comprises of signs, images, written texts and audio. In the process of producing meaning about concepts (fashion) signs (clothing) are used to communicate meanings about our feelings, experiences and events (Hall 1997). Fashion conveys a wide array of meanings and messages, these are drawn from a broad range of sources including

historical/contemporary commentary, media and oral traditions which constitute the fashion discourse. It is described as a knowledge system, which informs thinking, shapes behaviour and creates meaning systems and cultural codes (Thompson & Haytko 1997). Fashion discourse are adopted by people and groups as long as it “fits the circumstances of their immediate social settings, sense of personal history, interests and life goals” (Thompson & Haytko 1997:18) to convey meanings about their experiences and realities.

Individuals and groups use clothing practices to advance differing cultural viewpoints about the body and human values. For example, an individual (consumer) may chose to adopt the viewpoint that designer labels are better than mass-produced clothing because the former gives a sense of connection and membership to the upper class; or that African sartorial practices are preferable to Western fashion practices because the former challenges the hegemonic reach of the latter. Either way, consumers adopt both hidden and dominant cultural viewpoints to express meanings about their class, gender, and race and to reflect their environment (Thompson & Haytko 1997). Nevertheless, before consumers can represent these meanings, they must share the same conceptual mapping or culture. For example, I have noted that fashion enthusiasts immediately recognise and mark the differences between an authentic Chanel purse and its Chinese imitation. Whereas, a non-conscious fashion follower, would not be able to identify the differences, but would purchase the imitation because of the meaning attached to Chanel – luxurious, high class. Therefore, designer brands such as Chanel are signs that are used to represent concepts such as class, wealthy and glamorous. For people to convey specific meanings, they learn “about the system and conventions of representation, codes of their language within a given culture” (Hall 1997:22). As conventions are learned, this enables recognition,

understanding and interpretation of cultural signs in their social environment.

Fashion conveys subjective meanings about identity, class, status, gender roles, sexuality, culture, ethnicity and national origins (Craik 1994, Wilson 2003; Allman 2004 Rovine 2004). Fashion is not only expressive and meaningful; it also facilitates social interaction and the development of relationships between diverse groups and individuals (Wilson 2003). For example, at the annual fashion week activities in New York City, a variety of people from diverse spaces, time, places and class congregate to participate in the annual season showcase of spectacle and performance. Many relationships (such as business to business) have been formed and cultivated through attendance at fashion week (Skov 2006).

Below I provide a brief historical account of the significance of clothing as an instrument to maintain class and gender distinctions and reinforce prevailing values.

Clothing, gender and religion

As a social object, clothing is unspeakably significant (Carlyle 1831) not merely because of its ability to conceal and protect the body from harsh climatic conditions, but for its capability to reveal the body, express collective consciousness, mark social roles and gender identity (Entwistle 2000; 2009).

At the present time, clothing is an essential aspect of the society. Much can be learned from material culture, as the purposes of clothing ranges from concealing or revealing nakedness, to protecting the human body from climatic conditions (i.e., cold weather, rain, snow), to signify a person's occupation (i.e., Nurse, police officer), to signify ranking in a field of practice/community (i.e., soldiers, King, Captain). Clothing is a

highly visible material object, Fanon opines,

“The way people clothe themselves, together with the tradition of dress and finery that custom implies, constitutes the most distinctive form of a society’s uniqueness, that is to say one is most immediately perceptible...great areas of civilization, immense cultural regions, can be grouped together on the basis of original, specific techniques of men’s and women’s dress” (Fanon 1967:35).

This implies clothing fulfils a social function; it also has a cultural element to it in that groups can be differentiated on the basis of their clothing. While clothing is a common practice in that it is shared by human beings, clothing practices varies across time and space.

I now illustrate with a brief account of the relationship between clothing and the organisation of religion. In the late sixteenth century Europe Christian doctrines regarded clothing as an instrument of control. Christianity was a powerful tool that was used by the ruling class to wield power over the masses to manage productivity, thoughts, behaviours and social experiences. Stubbes (1585) explains the rationale for this control over sartorial behaviour:

“By wearing of apparell more gorgeous, sumptuous and precious than our state, calling, or condition of life requireth, whereby we are puffed up into pride, and inforced to thinke of ourselves more than we ought, beying but vile earth and miserable sinners...this sin of excese in apparel remaineth as an example of evil before our eyes, and is a provocative to sin, as experience dayly proveth” (Stubbes, 1585:11-14).

That is to say, clothing was recognised as highly visual in that it expresses the wear’s social class and standing. The Christians equated attractive clothing with sin, and it was an offence and immoral act against divine law to appear enchantingly handsome or beautiful if one is not a member of the ruling class or financially stable. Furthermore, the sumptuary law dictated clothing practices, lifestyles and demonised

women who appeared to be visually attractive

“Let chaste and modest virgins shun the attire of the unchaste, the clothing of the immodest, the insignia of brothels, the adornment of harlots; showy adornments and clothing and the allurements of beauty are not becoming in any except prostitutes and shameless women” (Cyprian cited in Corrigan, 1988:5).

Women’s clothing practices including elaborate body decorations, enhancement of the body and appearance were considered unclean and immoral acts. Women who dressed their bodies elaborately were demonised and represented as harlots and prostitutes. This indicates clothing is recognised as an external signifier of feelings and values, more importantly, clothing can be deceptive. For instance, growing up in Nigeria, some clothing such as the green camouflage and police uniform are reserved for the members of the police force, and are not to be worn in social settings. People caught by the police wearing these uniforms in social settings were often beaten up and thrown in jail for a while. Also the uniform is taken away from them. This is to do with the meanings associated with the green camouflage in the Nigerian environment. It is a material object that signifies an army profession, and the army is considered an exclusive club, with high expectations. Therefore, for civilians to wear the uniform socially was considered disrespectful and negatively sanctioned by members of the security forces.

Christianity also used clothing to maintain gender differences, Stubbes (1585) points out that clothing was used to signify gender to spectators:

“Our apparell was given as a signe distinctive to discern betwixt sexe and sexe; and, therefore, one to weare the apparell of an other sexe is to participate with the same, and to adulterate the veritie of his own kinde” Stubbes, 1585: 68).

Clothing was used as a social tool to differentiate between men and women within society. Male and female styles of clothing are used socially designate and separate male and female according to sexes. It was unacceptable for women to wear clothing designated for male members of the society. It was considered abominable for a man to adorn himself in clothing designated for a female. To do so was deemed impure and disgraceful to the social group – men. This indicates men were expected to perform different roles in the society, thus associated with values such as logical and highly reasonable. In contrast, in non-western cultures for example Igbo men, adorn themselves in wrappers as do the women (Allman 2004). That is to say, clothing is a sign system to be interpreted by onlookers and spectators in the society (Hall 1997).

The ruling elites used clothing to control behaviours, thoughts and ideas of the masses in society (McDowell 1984). As an example, the ruling class constructed the idea of modest clothing such as the nun's habit. The habit as prescribed by Christianity does not offend God, however clothing styles other than the nun's habit were abhorred as unchaste, worldly and whorish (CYPRIAN 1932). This is contradictory, clothing, including the nun's clothing constitutes visual material culture, the things of the world. Yet, the ruling class placed greater emphasises on women's appearance. This is a way to ensure class hierarchies and distinctions between the rich and poor are maintained. McDowell (1984) reveals the intervention of clothing in European politics,

“Clothes were a tool of oppression, a weapon yielded against the poor. They were used to drive the lesson that the grand were not simply different they were better because they were rich. They wore on their backs the proof that they were superior intellectually, morally and socially” (McDowell 1984:10).

This indicates that clothing was a tool to pronounce and uphold power, wealth and the superiority of the ruling class thus maintaining the status quo. For instance, Rych (1614) argues, “It was difficult to know a prince from a peasant, a Lord from a Lout, a Lady from a Launderesse” (Rych 1614:47). This clearly indicates that clothing is an important medium of communication and social marker.

The designation of particular piece(s) of clothing as moral (Rich) and others as immoral (Women) depicts the whole process of creating and attaching meaning to specific piece of clothing.

Fashion and the body

Dress is a second skin (Entwistle 2003), suggests our dressing and clothing have a significant relationship to our bodies. This relationship occurs on several levels i.e., physical (i.e., visible) and subconscious (i.e., latent/self). Entwistle argues that “dress imposes itself on our experience of the body” (2003: 12). The way we experience our body and environment is often as a result of how we are dressed. To illustrate drawing from my experience, as a little girl in primary school, the school required all pupils to wear the appropriate style of clothing i.e., purple pinafore and white shirt, black/brown shoes and white socks. I dreaded going to school whenever this criteria wasn’t met, either due to shortage of water to wash the white shirt and electricity to iron it. When dressed inappropriately in school I felt out of place. This limited and constrained my enjoyment of school activities for the day. Thus, dress heightened my self-awareness (Entwistle 2003) and influenced my interaction with my school activities, teachers and friends. Similarly, Irobi (2007) argues that the body is the site of cultural signification, identity formation and cultural performance. As a medium of communication, the body performs several functions more importantly; it

situates the self within the social environment (Entwistle 2003; Welters and Lillethun 2007).

Further, Entwistle (2003) argues that “different techniques of dress produce different bodies” (2003:133). That is our experience of dress is influenced by the relationship of dress to the social world. This relationship often takes the form of attitudes, perceptions, aesthetics, and history of the dress, tailoring and techniques. To continue from the example cited above, dressed appropriately in accordance to the school requirements imposed upon me the identity of a student, a learner in primary education. Wearing the school uniform from primary to secondary school, I experienced and expressed my body differently, I was conscious of my identity as a student, and the set of expectations i.e., read and write, submit assignments and homework in a timely manner, maintain and ensure clean appearance at school. Also, I experienced my body differently at the weekend when dressed in play clothes or in going-out dress (clothing worn on special occasions). At the weekend, being in play clothes certainly produced a different body, for example, when I played in the sand, I didn't have to worry about my identity as a student, or getting my clothes soiled. To attend bible meetings however, my dress was carefully ironed and shoes polished. At the bible meeting environment with my family, my dress imposed upon me a different experience – religiousness, gathering to worship and family closeness.

Dressing the body is a personal and public activity (Hollander 1978). In this sense, clothing are used by individuals and groups to mark differentiation and express ideas about race, sex, gender, class, education, nationality. Personally, it requires care and effort to create visual representations of one's subjective feelings and thoughts (Hall 1997). Individuals are actively involved in constructing these meanings; they

draw props including dress, clothing and accessories from a wide range of sources to create meanings on the body (Roach-Higgins and Eicher 1992). Publicly, in social settings as in the working environment individuals express and reproduce social and cultural values or norms in the society. In social settings, as people interact meanings are read and signified (Hall 1997).

A study of clothing system and practices highlights the ways in which the body is constructed, manipulated and regulated in through social interactions (Goffman 1969; Allman 2004; Wilson 2003) either as an independent agent or a collectivity. For instance, in eighteenth century Europe, women wore corset to tighten and make the waist appear tiny, also men padded their stockings to make their legs look more muscular (Steele 2001).

Clothing, dress and the body perform different social functions. Clothing conceals and reveals the body; it disguises and enhances the body in numerous ways and gives life to dress (Entwistle and Wilson 1998). As a site for signification and performance, the body externalises subjective feelings and experiences that we are making of the world (Hall 2007). Entwistle (2003) explains that there is a dynamic relationship between the body and dressing practices. People adopt various supplements and techniques in dressing the body, including tattoos, scarification, jewellery, dreadlocks, corset, makeup, body paint, piercing, garments (Eicher 1995). The body is modified through exercise and dieting, dyeing hair, hair extensions, growing beard, shaving. Also, in attempts to enhance the body, men and women often resort to personal grooming include waxing, shaving and plucking hair from eyebrows, skin bleaching/whitening, surgical augmentation and enlargement of the breasts, lips, and butt implants (Welters and Lillethun 2007). In modern societies dress is of great importance, regardless of the financial setback and health costs,

people will alter their bodies for various reasons. In the process the body becomes the site to manifest and express deeply internalised social norms, perceptions, make protests, conform to social norms, enhance and increase social standing. (Kawamura 2005; Welters and Lillethun 2007). In the study of fashion systems, an exploration of ways in which the body is consumed and produced is crucial (Entwistle 2003). In the next chapter I introduce fashion theories.

Chapter 2

Fashion Theory: Towards A Definition of Fashion

In the previous chapter I focused on the etymology of the term fashion, the distinction between the terms fashion, clothing and dress, significance of clothing and its relation to the body. In this chapter, I provide a brief summary of the treatments of the term fashion in the social sciences, and its sociological importance. I provide three definitions of the term fashion, in order to highlight some of the common features of fashion namely change, order and wide acceptance.

In his sociological analysis of fashion, Hopkins (2012) argues that fashion may be better understood upon closer inspection of human behaviour. That is to interrogate human behaviour, their motives, activities and the rationalisation they provide for their actions. A sociological perspective throws the spotlight on social interactions, and performance of rituals to highlight the motives and meanings attached to actions, interactions and relations. A sociological analysis of fashion enriches our understanding of how meanings are constructed and diffused. A sociological perspective of fashion offers rich insights as it identifies and analyses the effects of globalisation in the production and consumption practices of individuals and groups. It interrogates and examines the ways in which social and economic relationships are mediated, regulated and influenced by social historical forces.

Fashion is Change

In my consideration of the term fashion, I have come to the understanding that there are several definitions of fashion, and fashion can be explored from various

subject topics and interests, i.e., fashion cities (Hopkins 2012); fashion week (Rocamora 2009), fashion model (Mears 2011); fashioned body (Entwistle 2003). From these perspectives a common theme emerges - change, urban cities, Western cultural landscape and White European fashion design practices. Below are three examples of definitions which I believe best describe my personal observations of fashion.

I begin with Welters and Lillethun (2007) definition of fashion which allows fashion to exist simultaneously among multiple cultures, Fashion is “changing styles of dress and appearance that are adopted by a group of people at any given time and place” (2007: xxi).

Rovine (2009) describes fashion as changing styles of dress and body adornment that are motivated by the social values placed on innovation.

From these two key descriptions of fashion emerge key words such as change/innovation, dress, appearance, body, adornment, values and culture. This indicates that the fashion process is about change that is to improve or substitute (an idea, culture or practice). The process of change is interplay of complex processes; however, change might be silence or a rowdy revolt. Take the example of the dress reform movement, which also sparked the sexual revolution of the eighteenth and nineteenth century Europe (Fischer 2001). In this example, backed by medical evidence, women rebelled against the restrictive garment – the corset. However, earlier in the sixteenth century, “the corset worn by the members of the upper class was considered an essential part of proper and modest dressing for women, and some women “tight-laced”, squeezing their waist down to 15 inches or smaller” (Ruark 2001: 12). This indicates that the corset a dressing practice of the upper class later

became popularised as a result of imitation by the lower class. Even with the discomfort of the corset, the lower class imitated the lifestyle practices of the upper class in order to share the pleasures as well as challenge the status of the wealthy class via clothing and dress practices (Summers 2001).

Class membership, specifically, upper class membership was highly regarded, as the lower working class looked to the upper class to establish standards of behaviour and what was considered as important (Elias 1978). Further, within a completely different cultural setting, Summers (2001) argues that the corset fulfilled a different role, as an “ideological ally”, the corset helped missionary women to maintain their identity as civilised in remote parts of the world. This indicates that meanings are relative to cultural setting. Yet, clothing is used as a medium for expressing subjectively feelings. Hall (1997) argues that meanings are not fixed, however, people hold on to the internalised norms of the society from which they emerge.

Collins (2009) defines ideology to mean “the body of ideas reflecting the interests of a group of people” (2009:7). The internalised norms such as class distinctions are performed and expressed in new cultural settings even if no one is able to read the sign. The Nun’s subjective feelings of superiority attest to the ideological dimensions of class oppression, colonialism and imperialism which still permeate in modern societies. This clearly indicates the manner in which ideas about class and race are influenced by prevailing societal values, which then shape attitudes and perceptions. It further reveals that humans adopt ideas and practices without given much consideration to it, as long as the meanings associated with the idea will add value to their lives and aspirations.

Finally, Godart (2012) argues that fashion cannot be planned or imposed because it is a social process of mutual adaptation, it is relational, simultaneously inclusive and exclusive, public and demands order (Godart 2012). Take as an example, uniformity of dress among the peasants, clothing practices was controlled through the sumptuary laws; therefore, this cannot be described as fashion. Godart argues that fashion exist in a society as long as agents are free to act, decide on the object, practice, and representation to adopt, and to what extent. However, as social objects, actors are not completely detangled from external influences from peers, third parties and institutional power (Godart 2012). This indicates the free will to act, chose and self-represent are essential to the making of fashion meanings. According to Godart, an object is considered a fashion when it is adopted freely by a growing number of actors i.e., people and organisations. However, the exact number of actors is relational, because once the idea becomes too common; people adopt something else and move on (Godart 2012).

Fashion Theory

Fashion is a highly contested term (Welters and Lillethun 2007; Godart 2012). There is no universally accepted definition in that individuals and group from rural to urban areas adopt fashion as a means to convey meanings specific to their contexts and sensibilities (Allman 2004; Lemire 2010). Nevertheless the study of fashion has been approached from different subject topics i.e., business, arts and design history, and social science disciplines as psychology, sociology, cultural studies and anthropology. Wilson (1985) argues, “Fashion is a field upon which a whole variety of arts and discourses meet” (1985:20). This implies fashion is a social process that

connects diverse dimensions of human activities including political, economical, social, technological, and cultural.

In fashion studies, there are several theories of fashion. The most popularised is the theory of the leisure class advanced by Thorstein Veblen in (1899). Using Marxist philosophy, Veblen observed and summed up the wasteful display of wealth by the powerful elite as conspicuous consumption. The trickle-down theory by Georg Simmel (1904) is another theory of fashion, it posits that fashion in stratified societies offered the potentiality for social mobility. Simmel theorised that lower status groups i.e., working class emulated the fashions of the higher-status groups. As the working class imitated their fashion practices and styles, the higher-class would move on to new styles in order to differentiate themselves. In the more recent times, for instance, luxury brands such as Tommy Hilfiger and Burberry were considered exclusive fashions of the upper class (Okonkwo 2007). When the middle working class with disposable income started buying these brands, the upper class switched to Chanel and custom made designer-clothing. This implies the elites innovated while the working class imitated. Change in appearance however, did not trickle down the status hierarchy.

Another theorisation of fashion is the trickle up theory advanced by G. A. Field (1970), it postulates change occurred from bottom-up. Lower status groups or subgroups innovated new looks in order to maintain meaning, uniqueness and differentiate themselves from imitators, while the elites appropriated aesthetics developed by the lower-status groups, they discarded the meaning originally attached to them, and infused their own meaning. In the struggle for authenticity and differentiation subgroups, lower-status groups and high-status groups have

accelerated the fashion change process by innovating new ideas and expanding the boundaries of fashion.

Grant McCracken (1988) revised the trickle down theory to reflect contemporary conditions of the industry. He shifted the focus of the study to small fashion houses and independent designers with a wider consumer base and affordable price as opposed to the upper class affiliated with large fashion houses.

Finally, at the present time, style changes emerge from all groups simultaneously, as a result of globalisation, mass manufacturing, marketing, promotion and advertising across multiple mediums (Okonkwo 2007). Blumer (1969) advances the collective selection theory; he describes fashion as a process of collective selection whereby taste is formed by a group of people responding collectively to the “spirit of the times”. This indicates that in the fashion process, change is introduced by taste makers namely designers, fashion editors, fashion magazines, fashion TV, fashion week, fashion conglomerates, who translate taste into design, these taste makers select fashions from numerous competing sources and alternatives. Thus according to Blumer (1969) fashion is competition between alternative styles for positions of fashionability. This indicates that at the present time fashion gatekeepers such as mainstream magazines e.g. Vogue magazine is highly regarded in the diffusion of meanings. Again, this is due to the meanings Vogue magazine has become associated with. It is also to do with the conventions and norms wherein; fashion magazine editors are present at fashion week events. While there are several theorisation of fashion, these are the most popular examples of fashion theorisation, which have served as the foundation for other theories to be developed.

It is argued that although these theories adequately address some societal

issues, they are inadequate to fully understand the transnational, cross-cultural permutation of global fashion (Eicher 1995; Rovine 2105). For instance, Simmel and Veblen both placed emphasis on class-based explanation of differentiation in Western contexts. It is argued that the focus on Western cities and space constrains and erases the sources of dress inspiration and their application in cross-cultural terms, across space and time (Eicher 1995; Hansen and Madison 2013). Conspicuous consumption and distinction as explanations of fashion behaviour are culture-specific, this implies that fashion exists and are transformed within culture, by cultural actors, processes and structure. I now turn to the conceptualisation of fashion in non-western spaces.

Fashion in Non-Western Societies

Speaking of culture, in Western thoughts and writings non-Western societies are often described as primitive with no fashion (Welters and Lillethun 2007), yet elements from these primitive cultures have been appropriated for commercial purposes and to serves the interests of Western designers (Rovine 2015). Therefore, it is safe to say that fashion theorisation have been significantly influenced by nineteenth century racist writings which centres the perspective of Western capitalist societies (Niessen 2003).

Craik (1994), who examines the language used in defining fashion in the academia, argues

“Symptomatically, the term ‘fashion’ is rarely used in reference to non-Western cultures. The two are defined in opposition to each other: Western dress is fashion because it changes regularly, is superficial and mundane, and projects individual identity; non-Western dress is costume because it is unchanging, encodes deep meanings and projects group identity and membership” (1994:18).

In the system of representation, marking binary oppositions is a way to construct meanings. For example, while western dress is considered fashion and non-western i.e., Asian and African dress are deemed costume. In constructing this meaning, popular culture uses signs and images (White) to create favourable representations of Western fashion, while drawing from colonial legacies to fix the meaning of African fashion to the past. The diction used above associates Western civilisation ideas such as freedom, success, development etc. (Hall 1996; Hendrickson 1996; John & Jean Comaroff 1997; Polhemus 2005). An example of the system of representation used to code meanings about Western civilisation is Social Darwinism, the hierarchical structure which ranked human cultures into primitive (Black) and civilised (White) (Essed and Goldberg 2002), also “coded the value of dress and appearance practices” (Lillethun 2007: 79). This indicates cultural code and systems have been used in constructing Western dress and fashion as the standard for non-Western cultures to aspire to (Niessen 2003). At the present time, the effects and consequences of ranking human cultures according to relative status and authority can be seen in its shaping of the inclusion and exclusion of cultural produce, practice and people in many ways.

More importantly, this orientation has also affected fashion theorising, in the sense that ideas, perspective, truth, and definition of fashion has largely occurred from a white western capitalist perspective (Rovine 2015). Earlier fashion theorists have neglected to theorise the power configurations that exists between Western fashion and other fashion systems, Said asserts that “ideas, cultures and histories cannot be seriously understood or studied without their force, or more precisely their configurations of power, also being studied” (1979: 5). With this in mind any scholarly examination of fashion must take into consideration historical processes as

well as the ways in which power is configured socially in behaviour, habits and knowledge (Elias 1978). There are a growing number of fashion theorists who have begun challenging the hegemony of European perspective in fashion and cultural studies (Rabine 2002; Rovine 2010). I now provide some examples of early theorisation of fashion as informed by Eurocentrism.

Discourse: The Language of Fashion and Representation

Craik argues, “In accordance with the way anthropology has conceptualised non-western culture as timeless and unchanging, so too techniques of dress and decoration have been regarded in the West as fixed” (Craik 1994:18). This clearly indicates that meanings about Western and non-Western cultures are constructed and produced through the system of language (Hall 1997). Meaning producing practices such as images in media representations, academic and fashion media discourse are all practices used by the west to “construct its own civilization, enlightenment and progress” (Abrahamsen 2012:140), to assert “western power” (Rovine 2015:38) and to fix non-western cultures to primitive past (Harris 1987).

In the context of African culture, this indicates that Eurocentric anthropological interpretations of African cultures and subjectivities remain a powerful frame of reference in Western writings (Eicher 1995; Rabine 2002; Rovine 2015). In Western narratives African cultures are fixed to the primitive and unchanging past, an orientation reproduced via discourse, stereotypical representations of Black bodies, misinterpretations of African cultural practices and dress in popular culture (Allman 2004).

In an effort to define fashion, distinction is made between Western fashion

practices and the rest of the world. To illustrate, Roach & Musa (1980) argue that fashion is a unit that when divided breaks into two distinct types namely simple and complex fashion system. A simple fashion system is found in small-scale, pre-modern societies, and using the beautification practice of the Tiv of Nigeria as an illustration, Roach & Musa (1980) assert the, “Types of scar designs used for beautification change from generation to generation” (1980:20). This indicates a simple fashion system entails the beautification practices shared by members of the ethnic group. While Roach and Musa (1980) focused on the flow of scar designs and techniques, and how they are devised, copied, popularized, abandoned and replaced by others on the basis of person-to-person contact Eicher considers meaning, and argues that body modification is used to mark the ethnic identity of an individual (Eicher 1995). The Tiv of Nigeria communicates meaning of their ethnicity through body scars and modifications. It is a way to recognise each other and for them to be recognised by others. More importantly, African tribal marks and scarification of the body as a practice is a means of providing spiritual protection to the individual. This orientation is informed by the view of the world – in Yoruba spirituality the world is both the visible and invisible, and that there is an interaction between these forces. As such an individual is connected to god and not a separate entity from god (Obenga 1998).

Furthermore, Craik argues in non-western cultures fashion “embodies meanings of spirituality, religiosity and fertility while also encoding power relations” (Craik 1994:18). I draw from my experience as a member of the Yoruba kingdom and my observation of clothing practices at festivals. The Yoruba people adopt and adapt to suit their sensibilities different props to include dress, accessories, tribal markings, scars, tattoos and makeup to express meanings about divinity, ancestral pasts, to pay homage to the ancestors, heritage, gods, to express marital status and beliefs. The

fashion system of the Yoruba people is more complex than to be reduced to the status of a simple fashion system. This is the case when non-Western cultures misinterpret, misrecognise, fix and bound Yoruba practices to traditional meanings.

In contrast, fashion in the West is regarded as a complex fashion system characterised by rapid change and novelty (Craik 1994). The complex fashion system occurs within urban spaces where fashion is linked with beauty, success and the city, and involves a network of people including designers, stylists, retail buyers, advertisers, publicists, photographers, and manufacturers of textiles, garments buttons, cosmetics and many other fashion professionals. (MacCracken 1988; Wilson 2003). Also, Kawamura (2005) describes the complex fashion system as an ‘emblem of modernity’ (Kawamura 2005:26). Complex fashion systems are found in large-scale capitalist societies i.e., fashion capital cities such as Paris, Milan and New York. The contemporary cities as New York, London, Paris, Milan and Tokyo are known to play host to fashion. The distinction between simple and complex fashion systems is the space in which fashion is distributed and produced.

Rovine (2009) argues that recognising fashion is a global process “offers an opportunity to trace the flows, intersections and occasional collisions of forms and their associations as garments and images travel” (2009:44). Broadening fashion discourse presents an opportunity to acquire greater understanding of how meanings are exchanged across cultures by people through material objects, as well as the cultural contexts in which clothing is created and encoded with meaning, and how changing contexts affect these meanings. The transcultural study of fashion offers rich insight into a range of techniques adopted by people with distinct local practices, histories, social systems, meanings, economies and source of inspiration (Rabine

2002; Rovine 2015). While, this will give due consideration to the influences exerted by specific cultural groups, it will further broaden the understanding of fashion, reveal the flows and tensions in global fashion production.

In her definition of Fashion, Rovine (2009) claims that fashion is a continuum,

“‘African’ or ‘Western’ styles are points on a continuum rather than discreet categories. The terms ‘African’ and ‘Western’ are more abstract than literal in their points of reference, reflecting conventions rather than realities, is dramatically illustrated in contemporary contexts by the internationalised realms of clothing manufacture, distribution and marketing” (Rovine 2009:47).

That is to say, it is normal practice for fashion media discourse to designate the clothing practices of people according to social conventions for example, Western fashion, African fashion, modest fashion (Eicher and Scumberg 1995; Lewis 2015). Yet, the distinctions made between Western and African fashions are meaningful. Fashion is, after all, “a form of visual art, a creation of images with the visible self as its medium” (Wilson 2003: 9). In this sense, the visible self has been constructed as White and European. Global fashion discourse is dominated by Eurocentric assumptions that Europe (Western culture) is the epicentre of fashion and is responsible for the creation and diffusion (Braudel 1985; Lipovetsky 1994; Hollander 1994; Welters & Lillethun 2007; Lindgren 2015). Lemire (2010) argues “Fashion was assumed by many to be a creature of Europe, only later exported to other regions of the world with the development of regional, modern economies” (Lemire 2010:12). European and American historical accounts have largely focused on their encounters with other regions of the world through conquest and domination (Rovine 2015). An understanding of fashion revolves around key cities such as New York, London, Milan and Paris (Allman 2004; Kawamura 2005; Polhemus 2005; Lemire 2010;

Hopkins 2012).

Western fashion discourse has presumed a hegemonic and majority white field of practice (Niessen 2003) despite the global and transcultural flow of ideas, materials and production and consumption practices. As a result in Western fashion discourse the influences of non-western cultures and their contributions to design practices are omitted and erased. The implications of this omission create tensions, incomplete representations of societies, and limited knowledge of how human beings across space and time organise and live out their lives (Lewis 2003).

It is safe to say that fashion is a complex topic, and it has proven difficult to theorize since it pertains to more than one set of practices that cannot be covered within a single discourse or discipline (Hopkins 2012). For instance, the distinctions made between Western and African fashion itself embodies a historical and political legacy of slavery, imperialism and colonisation. The colonial systems erected in African communities not only plundered natural resources, it also controlled the clothing practices of the population, indigenous dress practices were forbidden in civil professions and replaced with western styles of dressing (Comaroff 1996; Allman 2004).

The sociological significance of Fashion

A universal and multicultural perspective on fashion offers a more holistic means of reflecting and expressing the diversity of cultures, forms of cultural representations, and production and consumption practices in the world. Such a definition will embrace the cultural patterns as found in Africa, Asia, Europe, America and many other countries/spaces that have either been marginalised,

excluded from mainstream discourse, or subjected to distorted representations. To do this means going beyond the narrow explanations of fashion as instrument of class distinctions and differentiation in the society. To do this means revealing the interdependence of human activities in this global age.

The exploration of fashion has occurred from diverse perspectives including cultural studies (Hendrickson 1996; Allman 2004; Kawamura 2005; Entwistle 2006; Godart 2012). For instance, from a feminist perspective it has been argued that despite fashion's ambiguity it is used to promote homogenisation, oppression, sexualization and commodification of women's bodies (Fisher 2002; Wilson 2002). There are diverse understandings of fashion across disciplines, space and time, as there are different cultural codes and systems of representations (Hall 1997). Fashion exists in different spaces from the local to global yet, fashion has been largely explored and defined from an Eurocentric perspective (Allman 2004; Rovine 2009) in that human interactions are observed within the urban city (Simmel 1904). This is one reason the definition of fashion remains contested. A sociological analysis of fashion is an opportunity to problematize Eurocentric narratives of non-western fashion and clothing practices, to interrogate the contradictions in the fashion production and consumptions processes, as well as highlight the ways in which social structures shape interactions and social relations. More so, sociological analysis explores the social processes at play, and the ways in which fashion is experienced differently in spaces such as the urban city and rural areas.

In the Social sciences, production, consumption and diffusion practices in the capitalist economy are some recurring themes in the exploration of fashion. These themes reoccur in part due to the early theorisation of fashion. Thorstein Veblen

(1899) is often cited as the most influential fashion theorist, argues that fashionable dress is an aspect of conspicuous consumption that enslaves women in the interest of capitalism, which serves to maintain the status quo of the wealthy elites. Similarly, Jean Baudrillard (1981) perceives fashion to be ugly, since it encourages higher levels of consumption. He argues that fashion exists as an ideology to mask the unchanging nature of domination under capitalism. For Baudrillard (1981), fashion in all its form including consumption, compulsive change, variety in style typifies wastefulness and serves no other function than to express capitalist values. Similarly, Wilson (2003) opines, “Fashion is capitalism” (Wilson: 2003:19). These diverse theorisation of fashion enriches our knowledge of the social organisation of things, micro and macro analysis and broadens our perspective of social world.

A sociological perspective presents an opportunity for self-understanding in that it explores the connections between our actions and the social world. Thus opening up new perspectives as well as create awareness of sources of our behaviours. Sociological perspective challenges commonly held beliefs and assumptions about cultures, knowledge and history. It helps us see clearly the opportunities and constraints in our lives.

The sociological relevance of AFWNY

Using AFWNY as a case study and drawing from my autobiography, the study draws attention to the structural conditions and complex processes which produces the current situation wherein black African fashion practitioners are pushed to the margins in mainstream fashion practices. For instance, Lewis (2003) argues that as a result of the insecured relationship between the dominant mainstream culture and the

African diaspora, the history and important contributions made by African diaspora fashion has been neglected in mainstream culture. Therefore, members of the African diasporas including models, fashion designers, photographers and other creative fashion practitioners engage in series of actions through the medium of fashion to create identities, reject and comply with mainstream definitions of fashion, and to engage in creative practices such as fashion design.

Sociological imagination permits me to draw from my lived experiences as a black fashion model and member of the African diaspora community in Europe. This is to situate and position myself not as a spokeswoman speaking in the name of society, i.e., the African diaspora fashion community and Black Africans, but as a sociologist interested in gaining sociological insights. The study examines pertinent issues that are relevant to the experiences of fashion practitioners and cultural producers of African descent in the fashion industries. These issues include but are not limited to cultural representations, self-definition, identity, solidarity, community building, empowerment and justice.

The sociologist Kawamura (2005) developed an interdisciplinary approach to fashion by mixing sociology with other social science disciplines. She argues “Fashion may be socially frivolous but it is not sociologically trivial. Fashion is the result of a great deal of influence which collectively determines the social structure of society” (Kawamura 2005:13). At the present time, trends and technological innovations are not necessarily formed at the top of the social-economic ladder to trickle down. Rather fashion practices today have become to some extent democratic (Wilson 2003). Fashion is no longer dictated by wealthy elites, but rather by the most influential and powerful including magazine editors, designers across cities such as

Paris, Milan, London and New York (McCracken 1988).

In conclusion, in the study of Africa and African people in the realms of knowledge production e.g. academia (Collins 2009) and in the realms of cultural production, e.g. fashion and cultural industries (Rovine 2015), there exists stereotypic representations that have been inherited from European colonisation, cultural imperialism and exploitation of Africa. Fashion facilitates self-expression, identity and self definition, and thus it presents an opportunity to explore some of the ways in which these stereotypical representations of the black body, culture and practices are resisted through the fashion expression strategies of individuals and groups. Further to this fashion can help us understand social relations and interactions between members of a specific group and/or cross cultural groups. It can also shed light on the interconnections and interdependence between the developed and less developed parts of the world (Giddens 2001) and the processes of consumption and production in general (Erner 2006). The next chapter provides a brief historical account of the history of fashion cities, the fashion industry as we know it today. I explore processes, conditions and events that brought about changes in Western fashion practices.

Pan-Africanism: History and Theory

Introduction

Pan Africanism emerged as a distinct ideology for the oppressed to resist European colonialism and imperialism (Nkrumah 1963). This chapter presents an overview of the treatments of Pan Africanism, identify and examine the historical origins of Pan Africanism in the diaspora, the central tenets of Pan Africanism and its grounding in Marxist and Socialist principles.

As alluded to briefly in the thesis Introduction, a Nigerian immigrant Adiat Disu initiated the concept Africa Fashion Week New York, in 2009. The phenomenon has rapidly proliferated across western capital cities including London, Dublin, New York, Washington, LA, Milan, and Berlin. The study identifies and focuses on the origin of the concept in New York. Organisers of Africa Fashion Week New York (AFWNY) describe the event as Pan African in that it brings together people of fashion practitioners of African descent to New York City (AFWNY 2010). This study poses the question to what extent does AFWNY reflect and espouse the tenets of Pan Africanism? But first, what is Pan Africanism?

What is Pan Africanism?

There are several competing definitions of the term Pan Africanism (Welz 2013). For instance Pan-Africanism has been defined as an alternative conception of

the world of Blackness and its heterogeneous cultures (Gilroy 2004). This is to resist commonly accepted European and American racialized configurations of the black body as an object and fetishised commodity (Lewis 2003). Pan Africanism counters racist Eurocentric conception and invention of blackness wherein blackness is constructed to be inferior and sub-human, and consistently represented in binary opposition to White. Appiah (1992) argues,

“The notion of Pan Africanism was founded on the notion of the African, which was, in turn, founded not on any genuine cultural commonality but on the very European concept of the Negro. The very category of the Negro is at root a European product: for the whites invented the Negroes in order to dominate them” (1992:20).

For Appiah, the terms ‘African’, ‘Negro’ are in dichotomous relationship to ‘European’, ‘white’. Consequently, Pan Africanism has been considered by critics as an invalid, abstract and inauthentic ideology as it is informed by European orientation and not indigenous traditions, beliefs, values or ancestral heritage. The study welcomes the criticism, but considers Pan Africanism a valid ideology with freedom from all sorts of oppression and exploitation as basic principle; it is an ideology that emanates from a very specific consciousness, history and understanding of the social organisation of things.

Historical relationship over several millennia, geographical continuity and spirituality are considered as some of the cultural commonality of the African people (Goode 1970). Similarly, Sartre asserts, “from one end of the earth to the other, the blacks, separated by the language, politics and the history of their colonisers, have in common a collective memory” (cited in Ungar 1988:322). Although, the socio-political construct black which served as the basis for the dehumanisation of African peoples, is equally a common thread among the oppressed (Black Africans), people

with no memories of their ancestral cultural heritage, history and land. Pan Africanism identified and articulated resistance against oppression as a cultural commonality of the oppressed.

Culture is the whole economy of attitudes, behaviours, tastes, ideas and beliefs shared by a people, the cultures including beliefs, attitudes and tastes of the African people in different Diasporas and on the continent vary according to environments in which they are incorporated. For instance, while the African diaspora in Brazil still practice forms of the Yoruba spirituality systems, among the Yoruba people of Nigeria, Western forms of Christianity dominates. Fanon's insight on the colonizing experience is apt and exposes the dilemma of returning to the past. "Colonisation is not satisfied merely with holding a people in its grip and emptying the native's brain of all form and content. By a kind of perverted logic, it turns to the past of oppressed people, and distorts, disfigures and destroys it" (Fanon 1963:170). That is to say, the colonial subject becomes indoctrinated and conditioned to associate positively with the colonisers and to reject his/her own indigenous cultural practices, image and heritage.

Hakim and Sherwood (2003) argue that Pan Africanism is an ideology of resistance and struggle against economic oppression and socio-political suppression. I see these traits, resistance and struggle as hermeneutical strategy shared by colonial subjects living under oppressive conditions. Pan Africanism was invented to confront and tackle oppressive living conditions, economic exploitation of the labour and resources of the African people and to reflect the interests of the people including freedom, solidarity, unity and community (Young 2010). Resistance and struggle are thus collective traits, and a central aspect of an African cultural makeup and identity.

Furthermore Campbell (1994) argues,

“Pan-African identification has taken many forms, but it has been most clearly articulated in the project of achieving the liberation of the continent of Africa and the dignity and self-respect of all Africans” (Campbell 1994: 205).

Pan Africanism is not only an ideology but also a value system, (Welz 2013) in that it espouses values such as self-respect, self-worth, and sense of pride, self-determination, liberation, self-sufficiency and harmony among Africans and people of African descents in different Diasporas (Sherwood 2012).

Finally, Janis (2008) argues that

“Pan Africanism acts as an umbrella term for a range of intellectual and political practices that seek to address the culture issues of – and to unify politically – Africa and the diasporas, including African personality, Negritude, the Pan African congresses, Afro/Africenterism and Africana culture/theory” (Janis 2008: 33).

This implies Pan Africanism is an ideology for African people irrespective of cultural outlook and orientation. This definition also points to the idea that it is in the interest of all African people to unite against oppression. Collins define oppression as “any unjust situation where, systematically and over a long period of time, one group denies another group access to the resources of society” (Collins 2009). European colonialism and imperialism are systems of oppression that were utilised to suppress the ideas, thoughts, realities and esoteric knowledge of black African people globally (Martin 1983; Hakim and Sherwood 2003). The system of oppression utilises antidialogics such as conquest, manipulation, cultural invasion, and the concept of divide and rule to create division in African countries along the line of ethnicity, class, and religion (Freire 1988, 2002) which protects and promotes European worldview, white superiority, exploitation and capitalism (Nkrumah 1963). Pan Africanism aims

to unify these diverse personalities, cultures, languages, religion and people on the Continent. Resistance against oppression infers a politically driven movement aimed at the “unification of African forces against imperialism and colonial domination” (Welsh-Asante 1993:32). Most importantly, Pan Africanism seeks to heighten awareness of the implications and consequences of disunity of the African people (Nkrumah 1965), and the need for continental unity. For instance, from the perspective of the African Union,

“Pan-Africanism is an ideology and movement that encourages the solidarity of Africans worldwide. It is based on the belief that unity is vital to economic, social and political progress and aims to unify and uplift people of African descent. The ideology asserts that the fates of all African peoples and countries are intertwined. At its core Pan-Africanism is a belief that African peoples, both on the continent and in the Diaspora, share not merely a common history, but a common destiny (AU Echo 2013:1).

The African union is an institution charged with creating regional connections and networks across the African continent as a way to fortify alliances and co-operation. Pan Africanism has also been considered as a belief, a creed, a system, philosophy and theory for decolonisation (Martin 1983). At its core is the belief that the economic and political unification of all African nations in Continental Africa is imperative for the preservation of African geographical landscape, for the improved living conditions of the African people (Janis 2008).

From these diverse views of Pan Africanism emerge key words namely global liberation, African identity, emancipation, sovereignty, community, ownership, collective interests, unity and solidarity (Adejumobi 2001; Olaosebikan 2011). In light of these divergent views and conflicting views of Pan Africanism, for this study I draw from Pan Africanism as conceived by Kwame Nkrumah (1964, 1965) and

examine its aim of continental unity. I begin with a brief recount of the origin, environing conditions that led to the emergence of Pan Africanism.

History and Evolution of Pan-Africanism

Pan Africanism is regarded both an ideology and a movement (Janis 2008; Young 2010; Olaosebikan 2011). Pan Africanism has transformed owing to the various levels of applications in space and time. For instance, earlier manifestations of the ideology are evidenced in the first resistance against slave ships in the 18th century. The evidence suggests that Martin Delany first conceived the idea of Pan Africanism in the 18th century against plantations enslavement; the idea was elaborated in the 19th century by Edward Wilmont Blyden explaining the revolt against colonialists across various colonies, and in the 20th century W.E Dubois developed the idea further. Also notable in the transformation of Pan Africanism is Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana, who asserted that continental unity is critical to the economic development and protection of African nations against alien occupation (Nkrumah 1963). The project to unify the continent is driven by the impetus to protect the interests of African people, for the people to self-define and assert their economic and political aspirations. Continental unification focus on activities such as the economic trade partnerships, free movement, consolidation of regional territories are strategic moves deemed necessary to position the African continent at the center rather than in the margins of power (Nkrumah 1965; Sherwood 2012). This implies increasing bargaining power, negotiating the terms of engagement with former colonial powers, self-determination are some of the concerns and interests of the African people. I now provide a brief account of the trajectory of Pan Africanism

from the diaspora to the continent of Africa. For the purpose of this study, I trace Pan Africanism to a specific period in time, the nineteenth century. Thinkers, intellectuals and activists such as W.E.B Dubois, Marcus Garvey, Frantz Fanon, George Padmore, Ida Hunt, Hastings Banda, Dudley Thompson, Julius Nyerere, Obafemi Awolowo, Nnamdi Azikiwe, Leopold Senghor, and Jaja Wachuku have been influential in the development of Pan Africanism (Nwoko 2006).

Pan African Congress: Pan Africanism in the African Diasporas

In the year 1900 Henry Sylvester Williams and a small group of African men initiated a conference to protest against European dehumanising treatments of African people globally. At the close of the conference, the foundation was laid for the establishment of a Pan-African congress (Adejumobi 2001). The Pan-African became a site to address African issues, in particular the problem and burden of white rule, exploitation and oppression. It also served as a platform to educate people on their rights and freedom and increase their awareness (Hakim and Sherwood 2003).

The first conference in London which ran over three days in 1900 took place under the aegis of the African Association in London. The conference was attended by African delegates from North America, West India and Europe. The conference highlighted the insidious nature of oppression and racial discrimination inflicted on black African people in the British colonies, UK and the USA. In the context of the U.S., from 1900 to 1908, anti-black riots broke out in cities like New York, and in smaller places like Evansville and Greensburg, Indiana, and Springfield, Ohio (Christian 1995). Racial prejudices, inflammatory editorials and irresponsibly

exaggerated accounts in the media, stereotypical representations of black people and institutional policies contributed to the oppression experienced by black Africans in the U.S. To illustrate, the resistance against Black enfranchisement has been attributed to the race riot in Atlanta Georgia in 1906. The growth of the city's Black people population led to increased competition for resources and social distinction. Senechal (1990) argues that Black people organized businesses and created social capital, and directed efforts at political and social equality for their community. However, the white population resented the freedoms enjoyed by the black peoples; they were against the idea of black enfranchisement. The city's white ruling class tried to control the black population by imposing severe restrictions on public conduct and increased segregation through Jim Crow laws in public transportation and housing. Black people were killed by the police and lynched by angry mobs as they resisted white suppression (Senechal 1990).

Although the African Association in London focused on the lived experiences of Black people under the British Colonial Empire, contacts were made and networks were established with other black people (immigrants and students) in France, America and the Caribbean. The African Association evolved into the Pan-African Association to reflect the diverse experiences of Black African people under White oppression (Adejumobi 2001). Furthermore, Henry Sylvester Williams established the first Pan-African journal to document the experiences of African people in various territories of the British Empire (Janis 2008; Sherwood 2012).

The Pan African congress became a safe space (Collins 2009) for varieties of African people, mostly educated elites in the diaspora who shared their lived experiences of living within the framework of white supremacy. By 1945, African

elites (students) from the continent including Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana formerly known as the Gold Coast became actively involved in setting the agendas of the Pan African Congress. The sixth Pan African Congress is often regarded as an important time in the history of the Pan African movement owing to the radical thoughts and thinking of Kwame Nkrumah (Janis 2008).

Kwame Nkrumah: Radical Pan Africanist

Pan-Africanism emerged in the 20th century as an intellectual political movement conceived by descendants of the trans-Atlantic slave trade in the U.S. (Sherwood 2012). The coalition transformed with the involvement and contributions from African immigrants and students, it transitioned from making protests to White authorities to demanding, and subsequently radical revolution against European enslavement, genocide, oppression and exploitation of Black African bodies (Welz 2013).

The mobility and movement of African students and people from villages in Africa to Western cities facilitated dialogue, interactions, opportunity to share lived experiences, knowledge, build networks and the political mobilization of African people in the fight for freedom, liberty and self-rule. Sherwood (2012) argues that Pan Africanism symbolizes the determination of the people of African descent to free themselves from foreign domination and exploitation. This determination is best expressed by Kwame Nkrumah. Nkrumah was an immigrant African student and intellectual who experienced the doctrines of white supremacy on his indigenous lands in Ghana, as well as in Western cities as a student (Nkrumah 1963). Inspired by the works of Haitian activist Marcus Garvey (Garvey and Garvey 1923), and Marxism, Nkrumah held the belief that Africans belonged in Africa and land is

freedom. Nkrumah saw black people in conditions of economic exploitation, social deprivation and political suppression. He criticized the imperialist government for the intention to perpetually dominate Africa, and believed liberation, freedom and independence from colonial rule was crucial (Nwoko 2006). Furthermore, Nkrumah held the belief that the awakening of a national consciousness, the emergence of a working class movement and the growth of a national liberation movement are crucial to eradicate the ills of colonialism and imperialism (Nkrumah 1962).

At the sixth Pan African Conference in 1945 Kwame Nkrumah argued for self-determination, self-reliance, sovereignty and developing an African consciousness that will benefit their history and plight. His agenda was immediate independence from colonial rule. Members of the Pan-African congress favoured gradual self-government; this was major impasse for the Africa-based activists who sought immediate independence from colonialism, imperialism, European domination and to eradicate Western hegemony. Members of the congress considered Nkrumah's vision to be too radical, in comparison to their strategy for integration, better treatments from the colonial powers and access to participate in civil society (Sherwood 2012; Welz 2013). Although Africans in diaspora have first hand experience of oppression too, their orientation and cultural outlook in the societies in which they are immersed valued protests, and lobbying as means of resisting oppression. Also, they sought to lay claim to spaces within the Western spaces they occupied.

After the sixth congress, Kwame Nkrumah founded the West African National Secretariat to work for de-colonization of Africa. In early 1947, Nkrumah was invited to serve as the General Secretary to the United Gold Coast Convention (UGCC) in

Ghana; this marked the beginning of his quest for Africa's liberation and unity. On 10th March 1952 Nkrumah was elected as the Prime Minister and on March 6th 1960, he announced plans for a new constitution, which will make Ghana a Republic. On 19, 23 and 27 April 1960 Nkrumah was elected president (Nwoko 2006). Several African nations adopted Nkrumah's radicalism and vision. Under the leadership and direction of Nkrumah, a continental Pan African organisation was founded.

OAU: Pan African Organisation and African Unity

“For centuries, Africa has been the milch cow of the Western world. Was it not our continent that helped the Western world to build up its accumulated wealth? We have the resources. We Must Unite now or Perish” Kwame Nkrumah 1963

Following the independence of 37 African nations in 1963, the Organization of African Unity was established at Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. On May 25, 1963, leaders of thirty-two independent African States met to form the Organization of African Unity (OAU). In 2002, the African Union replaced the OAU, charged with the task of promoting the economic, social, and political conditions for Continental unification.

In the early days of its formation, the Organisation of African Unity expressed solidarity with the remaining African nations under colonial oppression, in particular South Africa who became its 53rd member in 1994. Among the aims of the OAU were but not limited to; to eradicate all forms of colonialism from Africa; and achieve greater unity and solidarity between the African countries and the peoples of Africa; defend the sovereignty, territorial integrity and independence of its member states; accelerate the political and socio-economic integration of the continent; promote and

defend African common position on issues of interest to the continent and its peoples (Nkrumah 1962). Under the leadership and radical thinking of Nkrumah, the organisation of African Unity sought the political and economic unification of the Continent.

Pan Africanism: Political and Economic Domains

Nkrumah outlined in his speech at the founding of the OAU the significance of political and economic unification,

“On this continent, it has not taken us long to discover that the struggle against colonialism does not end with the attainment of national independence. Independence is only the prelude to a new and more involved struggle for the right to conduct our own economic and social affairs; to construct our society according to our aspirations, unhampered by crushing and humiliating neo-colonialist control and interference. From the start we have been threatened with frustration, where rapid change is imperative, and with instability, where sustained effort and ordered rule are indispensable. No sporadic act nor pious resolution can resolve our present problems. Nothing will be of avail, except the united act of a united Africa” (Nkrumah 1963).

Underpinning Pan Africanism is a body of ideas, operating simultaneously across different spheres including the political, economic and social. In relation to the OAU, at the core of the Pan African ideology is economic sovereignty and self-determination (Janis 2008). Self-determination refers to the capability of Africans to design policies for its peoples, to develop and harness natural resources, human resources and the financial structures of the continent for the benefit of the collective. Political freedom is described in terms of independent government; democratic freedom and a democracy whose sovereignty is vested in the masses. It is argued that this ideology is fundamentally informed by Western and socialist principles (Nwoko 2006; Sherwood 2012).

Nkrumah advocated that the realm of politics alone was not enough to eradicate the consequences of colonialism. He advanced that an economic unification of Africa will not only challenge Western imposed structural factors i.e., exploitation of natural resources in Africa, more importantly, it will enhance the development of African societies and infrastructure. African people will implement decisions that will be of benefit to the collective, control the means of production and have ownership of lands. Finally, Nkrumah was cognizant of the consequence of colonialism and imperialism on the orientation of the oppressed. For instance, he observed that neo-colonialism is closely related to imperialism, in that these two ideas equally fulfil the same end - exploitation. Further, Nkrumah argues that neo-colonialism is the highest stage of imperialism, in that imperialism abandons its old form of naked exploitation, and adopts the national bourgeoisie as supervisors (Nkrumah 1963). That is to say, Black elites masquerading as political leaders, businesspersons, government officials are modern day progenitors of the colonial structure, who have internalised oppressive practices and ideas. I believe Nkrumah underestimated the powerful force of colonialism and European cultural hegemony in African communities. For instance, there were people who considered Nkrumah's ideas to be too radical; these people were so suspicious of Nkrumah's motive for continental unity.

Pan Africanism and Black feminism thoughts have largely focused on global white supremacy capitalism patriarchy. While the exploitative and oppressive activities of Black African capitalists receive minimal or no scrutiny at all. Under this system of global white supremacy capitalism patriarchy, oppression is not race or gender specific (Freire 2002; Weber 2010), rather has become naturalised and marketed as business model in which everyone can partake in. Following this line of thought, AFWNY is a prime example of what black capitalists do i.e., increasing their

reputation, status and generating personal profits, whilst claiming to adhere to socialist principles such as collective good, co-operation, ownership, community building and public good.

Socialist and Marxist Doctrines: Pan Africanism

It is argued that the capitalist system protects the material interests of the ruling class (Freire 2002), thus Pan Africanism from inception is influenced by anti-capitalist ideas, and it critiques exploitation, monopoly, personal profits, individualism and competition (Nkrumah 1964, 1965) the necessary conditions for capitalism to thrive and normalised.

Brown (2006) argues that Pan Africanism has provided the conceptual platform upon which various theories including social, economic and political have been developed and grounded. He argues that Pan-Africanism informs critical race globalism since it:

“Advocate economic justices with greater emphasis given to the legal intricacies of global economic expansion and its impacts for the African Diaspora and historically marginalized minorities around the globe” (Brown 2006:70).

Pan Africanism provides a viewpoint from which to understand more clearly the social organisation of things, our interdependence as well as the subject positions we occupy in the social world. In the legal domains, Pan Africanism has also been utilised as a tool for social justice, in that it centres the experiences of the oppressed.

At the stage of post-colonial rule, Nkrumah identified another process in the journey towards dignity. He advanced the philosophy Consciencism, for the decolonisation of African people,

Consciencism is a “body of connected thought which will determine the general nature of our action in unifying the society which we have inherited, this unification to take account, at all times, and of the elevated ideals underlying the traditional African society” (Nkrumah 1964:78).

Nkrumah was of the view that the African cultural landscape had transmuted and was irreversible owing to the influences of alien cultures, tastes and orientations including European Christian doctrine and Islam. At the present time in Africa, these influences manifest in different forms including ethnic rivalry and religious conflicts. For instance, in Nigeria, religious violence occurs quite often between the Islamic and Christian religious groups. To further complicate matters, the Muslims are predominantly Hausa/Fulanis and the Christians Ibo. The Hausa/Fulani and Ibo/Igbo are two dominant ethnic groups with different cultural, religious-social and economic interests and worldviews (Olaniyan 1985). It has been argued that these value systems Christianity and Islam are foreign to the African peoples, are considered detrimental to the liberation of the black African man and woman. They both seek to create a condition whereby the black African remains in subservient role and serving foreign interests and agendas (Biko 1987). In addition, these foreign religions are deeply phallogocentric as it centres male perspectives in the construction and interpretation of meanings and knowledge.

Consciencism is grounded in the environment and living conditions of the people. That is to say, the decisions are made to benefit the collective, to reflect their concerns and aspirations in the social world. This is where I believe Nkrumah underestimated the influence of ideology. However, it has been argued that there can be unintended

consequences that flow from social action (Weber 1965; Turner 1996). That is to say the social actor (Nkrumah) had no significant control over, or knowledge of the consequences of incorporating existing colonial traditions and practices that have been adapted and re-adapted by the African people into the new socio-cultural landscape. For instance, the unintended consequence of ascetic of religious action has been the creation of capitalist culture (Turner 1996). The unintended consequence of the triple heritage (Mazrui 1986) is intra-ethnic wars, conflicts and struggle for superiority between Christian and Muslims in African societies.

Grounded in Marxist philosophy, Pan Africanism provides an integral worldview against oppression and its contradictions (Wiredu 2007), and how the oppressed can achieve his/her own emancipation by developing an awareness and consciousness of political and economic organisation.

Ethnic groups including Native Americans, African-Americans, people of African descent in different diasporas are dealing with multiple dimensions and systems of oppression to include colonialism, imperialism and exploitation, globalisation and the transmutations of old histories (Young 2010; Sherwood 2012). For instance, from a Marxist perspective, just as the emerging bourgeoisie in the French Revolution revolted against feudal (aristocracy) society to challenge the conservative ideas of the old régime (Gundle 2008), so the working class in its fight and struggle for a new society must challenge the dominant outlook/philosophy of the ruling class and the prejudices of the society. Lorde (1984) asserts “The true focus of revolutionary change is never merely the oppressive situations which we seek to escape, but that piece of the oppressor which is planted deep within each of us” (1984: 123).

Kwame Nkrumah’s Pan Africanism is a guide to action in three central areas of

activity namely political, economic and social domains. The ideology gives voice, agency and awakens the consciousness of the oppressed to their oppression. Most importantly, it outlines the priority areas for emancipation and complete liberation against oppression. I now turn to the treatment of women in the liberation discourse.

Pan-Africanism and Women

Evidence suggests that the contributions and influences of women in the struggles against oppression have been largely ignored owing to gender politics, colonial legacies and patriarchy (Spivak 1988; Iman et.al 1997; Collins 2009; Mama 2010).

For example, accounts of black African liberation struggles and experiences have been largely androcentric. Male perspectives of the liberation struggles/movement are favoured and dominate understandings of these historical events. For example, women such as Anna Jones, Anna Julian Cooper, Fannie Barrier Williams, Ella D. Barriers, Mrs. Loudin, Ms. Adams and Claudia Jones played central roles within the Pan African Congress, (Reddock 2014), yet the thoughts, ideas and activities of male nationalists and leaders have received greater attention. Anna Julia Cooper an educator and advocate was actively involved in social movements committed to transforming the oppressed conditions of African people (Martins 1983).

Reddock (2014) argues that one of the most successful Pan African international organisations of all time was the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA). Co-founded by Amy Ashwood Garvey the organisation mobilized Africans for the fight against colonialism and imperialism. Although the success of UNIA is often attributed to Marcus Garvey, Reddock argues that Amy

Garvey was instrumental to the success of the UNIA. For instance she founded the UNIA's newspaper the Negro World, which was internationally circulated; She also played a prominent role in the Fifth Pan-African congress and when her husband was arrested, Amy Garvey ensured his thoughts and ideas were widely disseminated (Reddock 2014).

Furthermore, Ramdani (2015) affirms that the influences and contributions of African-American women in international world politics from the late nineteenth century to the mid-twentieth century are overlooked. In consequence, modern discourse tends to ignore or erase the involvement, participation and contributions of women (Reddock 1994; Ramdani 2015). For instance, the contribution of Amy Garvey to the Fifth Pan-African Congress in Manchester, she outlined the marginalisation of African women, the exploitative conditions and the lack of solidarity from African men as problematic,

“Very much has been written and spoken of the Negro, but for some reason very little has been said about the black woman – she has been shunted into the social background to be a child bearer – this has been principally her lot” (Reddock 2014:23).

This perhaps reflects African women's experience from slavery, to colonialism; African women are expected to be strong, resilient and home makers. In addition, ideas about possibilities for their lives are debated and foisted upon them through laws, and mass media productions (Collins 2009). The objection to the marginalisation experienced by women in the liberation struggle is an indication of the voiceless status and invisibility of women they experienced as an oppressed group. Reddock asserts that it is baffling that the “histories of pan-Africanism could be written without examining the extensive contribution of women” (Reddock

2014:24). Similarly, within the historical context of U.S., Ramdani (2015) argues that Afro-American women played a key role in the promotion of transnationalism in the world of politics, in that women used “international stage to protest, to attract world attention on the race problems in America” (2015: 1). Yet, the voices of women are silent, and invisible from mainstream discourse.

During the course of my investigation, I noticed the literature is replete with male narratives and documentation of male in leadership roles within the liberation struggle. Take the book, *Pan-African History: Political Figures from Africa and the Diaspora since 1787*, (Hakim and Sherwood 2003), in which the authors surveyed only three women out of forty Pan-Africanists. I became conscious of this fact, and the need to engage with female narrative. I spent much time trying to identify the women and their perspective of resistance and struggle, in order to highlight issues such as co-operation, unity, and community.

Reddock (2014) argues that Pan Africanism is significant for women of African descent:

“Pan-Africanism for African women refers both to the conscious identification with Africa and critique of European domination and racism, as well as to the mutual responsibility of persons of African descent dispersed throughout the world, to each other, wherever they may be located” (2014:58).

This implies Pan Africanism is a source of identity for African women, as oppression manifest in their day-to-day living conditions, not separate from it. Pan Africanism can transform the social conditions of systemic oppression, inequalities and exploitation of African women and men in that it provides an awareness of the system of oppression. At the present time, in the globalized era women are active using

various avenues and art forms to expose the intersections of oppression comprising of race, gender, class, nationality and ethnicity (Collins 2009). Furthermore, Mama (2010) argues that African women are committed to the liberation movements. African women, she contends are mobilising at different contexts including the local, regional and international levels to deploy action plans to challenge oppressive conditions of the African continent. For instance, more women are engaging in politics and actively participate in running their communities (Ramdani 2015).

As previously mentioned in Chapter 2, this study combines black feminist thoughts and Pan Africanism. Both sets of ideas emphasize the importance of centering the perspectives and global realities of Black women and African people. These ideas were conceptualised as reactive measures to combat male dominance, white supremacy and capitalism (Collins 2009). Yet, both ideas share many similarities, in particular both address issues of power and knowledge. For black feminist thought race, class, gender, religion, nationality and ethnicity are distinctive systems of oppression, yet part of one overarching structure of domination in which all these systems are dependent on one another (Collins 2000, 2009). Black feminist thought considers the economy, polity and ideology as effective system of control and examines the ways they are used to suppress and subjugate the ideas and lives of black women.

In summation, Nkrumah's vision of solidarity and unity on the basis of geography includes the harmonious relationship and co-operation between black African, white Arabs and other settler minority groups, as one economic and one political power. This drive towards continental unity has been derided for the simple reason that black Africans, the settler Arabs and Europeans on the Continent do not

share a common culture, i.e., heritage, values and worldview. For instance while the European worldview is based on conquest and domination, African indigenous cultures espouse oneness with nature, spirituality, sense of oneness and group identity (Ani 1994). Evidence of this can be seen in the European idea of development and civilisation where nature is objectified and exploited for imperial pursuit.

By advancing continental unity for the African people on the continent, Nkrumah also sought to alter the terms of engagement in dealing with the European colonial systems. (Weber 1965) Nkrumah believed European interests to be detrimental to the growth and development of the continent and its people (Nkrumah 1963, 1964). For example, the colonial administration/system beginning with the scramble for Africa, annexation of African territories, pillaging of natural resources for the development of European countries. Pan Africanism is regarded as an ideology reflecting the concerns of the African people irrespective of categories such as race, beliefs, gender, religious values and traditions. Nkrumah advanced the idea that unity of purpose in the political and economic domains will elevate the status of regional territories as well as accelerate favourable living conditions of people on the continent. Geography and shared struggle became the basis for the construction of an African identity, to foster values such as co-operation, self-determination, unity and solidarity.

The next chapter explores the identity construction process, the challenges and need for identification. The concept of identity allows people including individuals and groups to stand out, fit in, it is crucial to promoting unity, solidarity among and within groups.

Chapter 4

Situating Africa Fashion Week: Race, Gender, Class and Identity

Introduction

In the previous chapter I outlined the history and philosophical underpinnings of Pan Africanism, and the formation of a central African identity as a means of connecting global Africans to their lands of origins. In this chapter, I identify and examine the treatments of African identity/identities and the complex process of identity construction along the lines of race, class, gender, ethnicity, national and culture. I believe an understanding of the latter is crucial to our interpretation of events such as African Fashion Week New York.

The Challenges of an African Identity

The organic development of the African cultural landscape was fundamentally interrupted by 500 years of imperialism and colonialism, by 1900 European powers had divided the African continent disregarding ethnic and linguistic boundaries of the continent and the peoples (Nwoko 2006; Kanu 2012). Conflicting viewpoints on African identities can not be avoided owing to the global dispersal of African peoples in different Diasporas and on the African Continent. Literature and popular culture tend to describe African people in different diasporas i.e., U.S., Britain, China, India as one, sharing a symbolic bond, whereas in actuality, there are differences in terms of orientation, cultural outlook, histories and taste. The omission and erasure of

differences and diversity of the African people is one of the core reasons the construction of an African identity or identities remains a recurring theme (Lee 2004; Appiah 2005; Zeleza 2006).

In the process of constructing an African identity, the ideology of Pan Africanism homogenises the experiences and worldview of the African people, cultures and geography (Martin 1983) to create a distinct African identity and Africaness. To recount, Pan Africanism is a set of ideas that was invented by African peoples in diaspora as a means to reclaim and reimagine Africa beyond a Eurocentric lens. For example, Eurocentric discourse and partition of Africa created the condition where the indigenous African communities who self defined according to group membership, religion, kingdom and ethnicity (Mkabela 2005) were rebirthed as Africans. Therefore, European colonialism and Arab imperialism as external forces eroded indigenous cultures and traditional practices of the African peoples, and created the conditions (economic, cultural and psychological) that has led to de-centeredness, dislocation and disorientation experienced by African people today. For instance, dominant knowledge and education about African communities, taste, values and history which emanates from Western European perspective has informed and continues to shape understandings and representations of African cultural practices and black bodies. Mkabela (2005) asserts “much of the literature on African culture and education can be ideologically traced back to the emergence of knowledge about indigenous peoples in the context of European imperialism” (2005: 178). This knowledge of African culture have been absorbed as natural into popular mainstream culture and used to reinforce and reproduce European structures of power and domination and suppressing African knowledge creation (Turner 2002).

As mentioned in Chapter 3, Pan Africanism was conceived in reaction to the economic and political subjugation of people of African ancestry (Gilroy 2004) and the devaluation of Blackness (Kanu 2012) by Western colonial powers. Critics of Pan Africanism argue that the ideology emanates from a foreign source rather than her own indigenous traditions (Masolo 1994; Wiredu 2007). The construction an African identity, that is not tethered to indigenous traditional systems (including language, morality, legal, social economic and spiritual systems such as the Yoruba Ifa System) is regarded as “disingenuous, hypocritical” and problematic (Bewaji 2016). However, this should be considered as one of the implications of Eurocentric knowledge claims about African communities in which indigenous traditions have been condemned as primitive, ungodly, barbaric and irrational (Bewaji 2016). Foreign taste, convictions and religious systems were instituted to replace indigenous systems; these colonial tools only serve the purpose of keeping Africa in the state of dependence and marginalisation, perpetual development paralysis and deprive the populations the benefits of a good life (Biko 1978; Bewaji 2016).

Attempts has been made to construct an African identity along the lines of class, race, ethnicity, culture, and ideology, these include Black consciousness (Biko 1978), Black Power (Ture and Hamilton 2011), Pan-Africanism (Thiong’o 2006), Afrocentrism (Asante 1991; Mazama 2003), Afropolitanism (Mbembe 2001), Black Nationalism (Garvey and Garvey 1923; Gilroy 1993), and Negritude (Sartre and McCombie 1951; Cesaire 2000; Ratcliff 2014).

The object/subject position is another issue surrounding the construction of an African identity. From the confines of Eurocentric orientation Africa has featured and continues to feature as the object of study, as such African people are denied the

value, and experience of human agents (Asante 1987). Interrogating the European frame of reference where African people are situated as objects and the cultural practices of the people are misrepresented and appropriated (Asante 1987; Mkabela 2005) is considered a conscious act, and necessary in the formation of an African identity. In doing so, African people recognise the ways in which oppression operates, and the need to center their own experiences and realities. Bewaji argues that if African people continue to neglect traditional systems, European cultural outlook will remain relevant in determining the conditions in which African people are considered to be human beings, respected and dignified (Bewaji 2016).

An African worldview influenced by indigenous traditional systems is not anti-Western, but centred on the conditions of the people. Mkabela (2005) argues that the marginalization of African indigenous knowledge creates decenteredness, dislocatedness and dis-orientation of African peoples from cultural practices, systems and political origins (Asante 1987). The dislocation of African indigenous knowledge is visible in the implementation and adaptation of ideological and philosophical positions (such as Feminism, democracy), which is grounded in European worldview as opposed to African indigenous knowledge (Mkabela 2005). Bewaji (2016) argues that the condition of dislocation, and disinterest in African indigenous systems indicates lack of confidence and agency in African centered worldview. Ngugi's resistance to European hegemony indicates not all African people lack confidence in their indigenous system. Ngugi O' Thiong is a Kenyan writer in the field of African Literature. In exile he uses his craft and writing skills to destabilise, protest and confront the legacies of colonialism as they manifest to dramatically wield influence in African communities. Ngugi renounced writing in English in 1977, he writes in his first language Gikuyu to express his beliefs, to center an African worldview, and

make his work accessible to ordinary people. In sum, Ngugi's writing in an indigenous Sub-Saharan African language indicates confidence and agency in indigenous systems. More importantly, his work is not geared towards explaining the humanity of the Kenyan people to a European audience, nor is it dependent on any European models. In the process of constructing an African identity, Ngugi draws from his indigenous language Gikuyu. Centering African worldview bears significant consequences, which tends to manifest in financial and political oppositions.

As previously alluded to, the African people are a global people operating from different socio-political, economic and cultural contexts, space and time. However, collectively their experiences have been shaped consciously and unconsciously by Eurocentric discourses. For example, within the context of the U.S. skin colour was invented as the basis of oppression (Appiah 1992). As a result race features a great deal in the construction and formation of an African identity. This is because the racial characterisation White and Black were invented and assigned values. Blackness became associated with negative connotations and stereotypes (Hochschild 1999; Ejorh 2006). African people react differently to the negative portrayal of blackness, including self hate and internalised oppression (Weber 2010). Although, the ruling class and government used the press, media and educational institutions to reinforce anti-black attitudes (Turner 2002), Blackness became the basis for solidarity and unity amongst black African people who developed keen awareness of the oppression and suppression of their realities within a racist society. Social and political movements as 'Black is Beautiful', and 'Black Power' represented the resistance of Black Africans in the U.S. against racial oppression and suppression of their worldview and experiences.

Solidarity on the basis of skin colour has been criticized, however, it has been argued that racial solidarity is an inclusive form of blackness in opposition to racism in which economic and political resources are denied to black people on the basis of their pigmentation (West 1992; Hall 1988). For the proponents of “Black is beautiful”, Mudimbe (1988) cautions that asserting the distinctiveness; values and intelligence of Africa people will only succeed in "flattering condescending Western ears" (Mudimbe 1988:36). In other words, the impetus to construct an African identity on the basis of race is significantly influenced by the ideas and inaccuracies propagated by the capitalist system which invented race, assigned meaning to it, and wielded it as an instrument to justify exploitation. Similarly, Appiah (1992) argues that attempts to espouse African identity will only serve "to make real the imaginary identities to which Europe has subjected us" (1992:62). That is to say, there are two conceptions of Africa; African as imagined by Eurocentric thoughts and Africa as experienced from the perspectives of African people. To begin with, Africa as idealised in Western imagination is primitive, unchanging and barbaric (Hochschild 1999; Ejorh 2006). Within this narrow and inaccurate view, apathetic characterisation of African people and the black experience include stereotypical representations in popular culture, erasure and omission of African people in discourse, objectification, dehumanisation, denigration of black bodies in Western media (Hawk 1992; Turner 2002).

At the present time, the anti-black attitudes that persist within mainstream fashion industry are historically informed (West 2002). For instance, hooks argues

“representation of black female bodies in contemporary popular culture rarely subvert or critique images of black female sexuality which were part of the cultural apparatus of 19th-century racism and which still shape perceptions today” (1992:62).

Black bodies were not only sexualised, but fetishized, objectified, denigrated, and raped. 19th century racism manifests in contemporary thoughts and practices in form of exclusion of black bodies and negation of African practices in popular culture. For instance, writing on mid 20th century American fashion industry practice McAndrew (2010) argues:

“The fashion industry in the United States required black women to pass as white in order to gain training or employment. Indeed, Ophelia DeVore, a woman whose physical appearance made it hard to categorize her racially, received professional training from the Vogue School of Modelling under the assumption that she was white” (2010:29).

This indicates that for some time white skin or fair complexion has been associated with power, dominance, privilege, wealth and higher social status, conversely black as a social marker signifies inferiority and abnormality. At the present time, the foisting of inferiority on the black skin is evidenced by the growth of the skin bleaching or whitening industry. The skin-whitening industry is purported to be a multi-billion dollar industry. The rapid growth of this industry suggests and reinforces the notion that white skin is pure and beautiful (Hoskins 2014), while dark skin is a burden to be erased. This is a subtle way in which organisations in cultural industries use public relations campaigns to communicate anti-black attitudes and racial hierarchies. Black subjects resort to skin whitening, conceptualised as ‘glamour labor’ (Wissinger 2015) as a means to increase their prospects of gaining employment and success in life.

Identity construction at the present time is inextricably tied to luxury commodities and consumption practices which expresses ideas about class and social status (Simmel 1904). More importantly, these race-informed practices in the present time indicate

race is a historical and social practice (West 2002), and it remains relevant in that it shapes perceptions that reinforce anti-black attitudes (Turner 2002). Racism is not monolithic, rather it is a process that assumes and shifts disguises thus racist attitudes are historically situated (Fanon 1967).

The other conception of Africa is informed by the African experience of Africa. This is a project to self-assert, self-define, and self-represent. One would expect an African worldview and orientation, but in actuality, the European model has largely informed this conception of Africa. For Appiah (1992) constructing an African identity on the basis of racial characterisation is an Eurocentric agenda, in that it is significantly influenced by the European gaze, which is fixed on the notion that black people are without history, they are inferior and deprived (Fanon 1967; Gilroy 2004). Furthermore, the White gaze fixes Africa's heterogeneous cultures, identities, heritage and practices outside of modernity; this is evidenced in the representations of black African people in a perpetual village life, as monolithic objects of observation and inspiration for goods and services (Abrahamsen 2012). The European gaze or racial gaze has been described as a mere social construction that can be corrected by "correcting cultural errors" (Fanon 1967:40). These errors include the historical inaccuracies about Africa, African cultures and people that are disseminated via religious doctrines, economic practices, further, the errors which African people have been conditioned and indoctrinated to accept as truth (Mudimbe 1988; Appiah 2005).

On the idea of Africa, and African identities, Zeleza argues that

"The idea of "Africa" is a complex one with multiple genealogies and meanings, so that extrapolations of "African" culture, identity or nationality, in the singular or plural, any explorations of what makes "Africa" "African," are often quite slippery as these notions tend to swing unsteadily between the

poles of essentialism and contingency” (Zezeza 2006:1).

The Eurocentric claim that Africa is without history and African history begin with slavery (Mbekala 2005) have been refuted by scholars. However, European scholars continue to deny the presence of indigenous African civilisation and dynasties (Diop 1974). Africa consists of many different yet connecting parts with various points of ethnic origins, cultural backgrounds, heritage and dynasties.

The Idea of Africa

Soyinka (1977) argues that Africa is a political term of foreign derivation. This implies Africa is a geopolitical term constructed through Western discourse, with western socio-economic interests and inclinations. Cultural critic Hall (1996) argues

“The original African is no longer there. It too has been transformed. History is, in that sense, irreversible. We must not collude with the West which, precisely, normalises and appropriates Africa by freezing it into some timeless zone of the primitive unchanging past” (Hall 1996:231).

Although, the term Africa is used to represent the geographical landmass of the continent, it is essentially coded Black as a conceptual mapping for sub-Saharan Africa. This is evidenced in the racialized view of Africa promoted in Eurocentric discourse and popular culture for instance Africa as the dark Continent, inferior, powerless, helpless and superstitious. Hegel (1956) assert that Africa is “unhistorical, undeveloped”, a land of childhood enveloped in the dark mantle of night, the Negro exhibits the national man in his completely wild and untamed state” (1956:91). Untamed state implies primitive state, produced by nature, wild, savage, native and free. Hegel’s narrow conception of Africa and the Africa man as a Negro in untamed

state set precedence for the “special vocabulary of disparity” (Zeleza 2006:16) intended to devalue the lives, and knowledge produced by African people. These vocabularies of alterity are invented to condense Africa’s diverse cultures, peoples and philosophies into a single reality, in contrast to Western civilization. Western civilization includes a wider definition; defined as Christian, white people, prosperous nations with reasonably stable capitalist liberal democracy. The invention of Africa as an opposite to Western civilisation works well as it reproduces and preserves Western cultural outlook and thoughts which in turn reinforce Western political, economic (Richey and Ponte 2011, 2012) and psychological trauma (DeGruy 2005).

Furthermore, it has been argued that “Africa is as much a reality as it is a construct”. This implies that Africa as imagined in Western discourse i.e., primitive, savage, helpless etc. have acquired physical and material existence. Drawing from Marx’s theory of alienation it can be argued that African histories, political origins and peoples have been alienated from their original matrix of being and spirituality. Therefore, Africa’s productivity has been appropriated and organised in the service of foreign interests. This is manifested in the underdevelopment of social amenities and infrastructure, colonial educational curriculum, Americanisation of African societies and imitation of Western system of governance.

Tomlinson describes this process as cultural imperialism, the use of political and economic power to exalt and spread the values and habits of a foreign culture at the expense of a native culture (1991). At the present time Western cultural practices, taste, values, beliefs are highly valued within African communities. For instance, drawing from my observation of African immigrants in Ireland, who give English-sounding names to their black African children. Some reasons for this disassociation

with Africa, and African identities are social conditioning and religious affiliations. For example, a major influence is religion, a Yoruba, Nigeria-born couple in 2015 named their son Enoch. I asked, what his Yoruba name is, they insisted the child's name was Enoch. And he is Irish, not African. As if to legitimise their choice of names, they explained further, "African names are too difficult to pronounce, we want to make it easier for the white people to say his name". Fanon (1968a) argues that colonized people are denied the opportunity to know themselves, as the colonised claims to know the colonised, Fanon goes on, "but this knowledge betrays a determination to objectify, to confine, to imprison, to harden" (1968a:34).

Furthermore, the domination of Western cultural outlook and orientation in the worldview, beliefs and tastes of colonial subjects (Okere 1971; Zeleza 2006) is not only a form of imperialism but cultural hegemony (Gramsci 1971). At the present time, in Nigeria the colonial educational curriculum, business transaction in the colonial language English, religious doctrines i.e., the worship of White Jesus in African churches are some examples of colonial legacies utilised by the ruling class to manipulate the masses. Within the Nigerian social-cultural landscape colonial and Western ideologies are utilised by members of the ruling class to reproduce the exact structure of oppression Nkrumah's Pan Africanism sought to eradicate. It sought to create the conditions wherein oppressed people achieve self-respect and dignity (Sherwood 2012; Welz 2013).

Imperialism alienates people from indigenous cultures till they become incapable of expressing their humanity (Fanon 1967, 1986). The anti-Apartheid activist Biko asserts "The most potent weapon in the hands of the oppressor is the mind of the oppressed" (Biko 1987:10). The mind as a weapon implies consciousness is created

and conceived in the mind, thus as an instrument, the mind can be altered to self-destruct and serve. Woodson (2009) argues that it is imperative to educate the mind; however, he notes the dichotomous nature of education. For instance, education serves multiple purposes either as a form of control or empowerment. Yet, he was of the opinion that information harnessed can protect and serve the interests of an individual and freed the mind from oppressive ideas.

Blackness: The Signifier and Signified

I provide an etymology of the term Negro drawing from Latin and Greek in particular because of the influences of these on the English language. For instance, it is estimated that more than 150,000 words of English are derived from Greek (Oxford Companion). Tracing the etymology of the word Negro, Moore argues the word Negro in Greek is derived from the Latin root word *necro*, which means dead. In Spanish the word Negro means black "The same word 'Negroes' was used for both meanings in Portuguese and Spanish, whereas in English 'Negroes' was generally used for slaves and 'Blacks' for simple colour designation" (Moore 1997:39). The etymology of the term Negro reveals the complex processes of ascribing meaning to an object, more so, objects and terms have different multiple meanings as it travels from one language to another.

Further, the selection and translation of specific words from another language i.e., Greek to English reveals the whole process of meaning making and the configurations of power present within. The word Negro, meaning dead, was adopted as a colonial invention used during the trans-Atlantic slave trade to qualify captured Africans according to skin pigmentation and for their intended use - Black and slave. Negro

became a popularised within Euro-colonial contexts as a means to dehumanise and devalue the lives of the people captured as slaves. The Negro race was invented in European imagination and became configured as such to signify the dead people with no history, no culture and no future (Moore 1997; Wright 2004). The categories black, Negro, coloured and nigger are terms of alterity originating from Western mentality as ways to define and bound African peoples at different times and space i.e., America, Australia, South Africa and Europe as inferior and uncivilised. People of African descent have either resisted or complied with such imposed definitions and identifications. For example, through the civil rights movements, the group formally known as Black Americans came to be identified as African Americans. Most significant aspect of this is the power to self-define and freedom to identify with the ancestral lands in Africa.

Mama argues that the term identity is a political construct as evidenced by the creation of English culture and British identity for the British Empire, Mama argues

“There are no substantive apparatus for the production of the kind of singularity that the term seemed to require. The petty bureaucratic insistence on tribal and racial markers, our new flags and anthems, and even the grand national stadiums and basilicas could not and still cannot be compared to the imperial administrative and ideological apparatus that lay behind the production of English culture and its more encompassing political front, British identity” (2011:10).

While identity is regarded paramount to mark individuality and produce differences, Mama argues that in actuality, identity production is a complex process. British Culture and English identity are achieved through devastation and destruction of nations, lives, conquests and appropriation of world resources including material and natural resources of indigenous peoples, this constitutes the British Empire. However,

in the politics of popular culture British identity is commonly represented as white and Christian. Mudimbe (1988) argues that identities are invented therefore the African identity is still in the making (Mudimbe 1988; Appiah 1992). For Mudimbe, the construction of African identity begins with the neutralization of the word Africa. He argues that accurate discourse on the realities of African people can only occur with the disruption to, and by challenging Western imposed narratives and stories about Africa, particularly, in the context of history and contributions to progress.

To resist Western imposed narratives and boundaries, African identity construction should move beyond commonly projected basis of solidarity and characterisations such as tribal and racial markers, nationality and economic infrastructures. Furthermore, Mama et. al. argues “identity is a gross simplification of selfhood, a denial and negation of the complexity and multiplicity at the roots of most African communities (2011:11). In the context of African realities, the term identity simplifies and denies the individual subject within clearly established boundaries of ethnicity, race, class, religion etc. These boundaries of social identities are historically situated and confines African people, their realities to the margins as unchanging. Identity therefore encapsulates the understanding people hold of who they are, what is meaningful to them, what their interests and concerns are (Myer 2009).

Shared Identity: Racial, Social and Self Identity

The memories of the ancestral past, dislocated histories, metaphysical interruption, depopulation of African people from the continent and racial conditions are some of the elements that have been called upon in the conception of an African identity. Racial solidarity encapsulates the co-operation, recognition of oppression,

amongst people considered as black in the race classification hierarchy. In addition, racial solidarity movement such as Black is Beautiful has served in instilling racial pride, self-love, dignity, voice to the voiceless and centring the lived experiences of black people of African descent in various spaces and time. (Zezeza 2003).

Lloyd (1991) argues, “Racial formations can take place between various levels and spheres of social practice, as for example, between political and cultural spheres or between the individual and the national level” (1991:63). That is to say, identity formation includes self identity, social identity, cultural/ethnicity identity, national identity are invented to fulfil an economic or political agenda. Examples include the Black Lives Matter movement, the European Union and Miss Black USA. A key example of racial solidarity with great impact was under the leadership of Marcus Garvey (Garvey and Garvey 1923). Cognisant of the fact that the knowledge about Africa produced by Europeans was not intended for the upliftment and empowerment of African people (Abrahamsen 2012). Marcus Garvey and Amy Garvey established the Universal Negro Improvement Association and became proponents of Back to Africa and Africa for the Africans movement. The association enjoined blacks to cooperate by putting aside their ethnic and cultural differences for a greater purpose - to develop their communities, to achieve economic sovereignty and attain unity for the Black race globally (Martin 1983). UNIA advocated values such as self-love, racial pride, self-reliance and education.

Appiah (1992) argues, “Africans share too many problems and projects to be distracted by a bogus basis for solidarity” (1992:45). This indicates constructing an African identity on the basis of race is considered to be superficial, baseless, essentialist and lacking legitimacy (Appiah 1992). The adoption of skin colour as the

basis for economic and political co-operation between Black people globally, challenges the meaning of Black identity since the process produces new ways of being, termed by Hall (1988) as 'new ethnicity'. It has been argued that racial solidarity tends to produce new forms of identity and 'new cultural politics of difference' (West 1992).

In that black as a political category become challenged as such concepts as religion, nationality, sexuality, gender and class invokes contradictions and tension in the process of identification (Hall 1988). For instance, in Nigeria societies, where black people dominate, differences are marked by religion, ethnicity and class. Race is a social reality with grave consequences; therefore, it should not be dismissed and simplified (Fanon 1968a).

This is particularly relevant to the concerns of this study. Drawing from my experience as a fashion model within the local fashion industry in Ireland/UK, my race played a central role as it shaped the degree of my participation, involvement, and access to resources as fashion editorials, advertising campaigns and fashion shows. Experiences of racial discrimination and exclusion have significantly impacted on my personal life, identity, self-esteem, confidence, financial independence and view of reality. These experiences are not unique to me. Black fashion models within Western fashion spaces, recount similar, and often times extreme instances of the material consequences of race in their lives and realities. For instance, at fashion week events across the big four London, New York, Paris and Milan, white models dominate the catwalk shows, editorial campaigns and advertising (Dries 2013, 2014), with black models rendered invisible. Although, the black population is considered a minority within these European cities, it is argued that the fashion industry practices

of racial discrimination and exclusion does not embody diversity and reflect the multicultural profile of the people who make up the industry.

Foucault (1972) argues that these are practices of domination that individuals, societies and institutions conceal through different masks and technological power. The fashion industry's gatekeepers such as casting agents, magazine editors, photographers, creative directors, beauty editors, marketing specialists, fashion press and fashion experts including academics wield different masks and systems of representation i.e., fashion, media, knowledge and instruments of power to render black Africans as irrelevant.

Rocamora argues that Fashion media discourse is a privileged site where differences are affirmed (Rocamora 2009); it is used by fashion gatekeepers to either subvert or reinforce relations of domination. For example, Ralph Lauren uses his privilege as a white male fashion designer, to commodify the iconography of Native Americans for his winter catalogue (Metcalf 2012). Take for the instance definition of beauty in fashion media discourse, Sekayi (2003) argues that the mainstream definition of beauty "consistently includes immutable qualities found less frequently among populations of African descent" (2003:469). That is to say, normative media blackness is ambiguous as the representation of blackness is generally based on white aesthetic standards i.e., light complexion and hair texture.

Furthermore, fashion media discourse tends to canonise a few Black women as spokesperson for the group and then refuse to listen to, or accept any other but these select few. This is an act that is used to control, homogenise experiences, and stifle subordinate groups and silent the majority (Collins 2009). To provide instances of tokenism, I draw from Black British fashion model Jourdan Dunn who asserts "I find

it weird when agents say, ‘You are the only black model booked for the show’. Isn’t it great?” (Tsjeng 2014). Also, model Chanel Iman recounts her experience of discrimination at castings when told by designers “We already found one black girl. We don’t need you any more” (Freeman 2014). Fashion gatekeepers such as maintain the status quo and perpetuate the notion that Fashion is a white European construct. The systemic act of tokenism is also used to reinforce the idea ‘black don’t sell’ (Wissinger 2015).

Demystification of Africa

Grassroots coalition movements, economic co-operation and cultural celebrations are some of the ways in which Black African people express the realities of their condition and to challenge capitalism and male dominance. Some African scholars have argued that knowledge and education can instil cultural pride, self-esteem and confidence (Mudimbe 1988; Appiah 1992). The confusion surrounding self identity and group identity stems from historical inaccuracies and social conditioning of the oppressed with doctrines and foreign outlooks (Spivak 1988). Cultural imperialism works by disqualifying or erasing the knowledge and mode of education of certain populations that are low on the social hierarchy (Said 1993). Also, Spivak (1988) asserts that cultural imperialism has the power to disqualify or erase the knowledge and mode of education of certain populations that are low on the social hierarchy.

Education and knowledge creation are regarded as powerful acts of resistance in that they present opportunities to redefine one’s position and subjective in the world as well as select cultural values that reflects one’s interests and concerns. (Woodson 1926; Mudimbe 1988; Appiah 1992; Zeleza 2003). This has been

demonstrated by Ngugi who adopted the Sub-Saharan language to promote African pride and appreciation for African literature (Thiong'o 1986). Appiah (1992; 2005) asserts that the contribution to knowledge is important in engaging with the world. He argues that Africa, including the cultures, people and traditions are fixed to the periphery, consequently the experiences and realities of African people are deemed irrelevant within Eurocentric discourse; at the same time, African people tend to judge themselves according to these Eurocentric outlook and standards.

From Objects to Subjects: Moving Beyond Colonial and Neo-Colonial Oppressive Discourses.

The shift in the treatment of Africa and African people from the object to the subject of discourse can be attributed to several factors and changing socio-political conditions. Zeleza argues that the understanding of Africa has, “shifted according to the prevailing conceptions and configurations of global racial identities and power, and African nationalism including Pan-Africanism” (Zeleza 2006:1). This study identifies Pan Africanism as an instrument of such shift, as a movement and ideology reflecting the interests and concerns of African people globally dispersed, Pan Africanism espouses values such as self-definition and self-determination. These are key elements in the process of liberation and emancipation of the mind and spirit of the African peoples from the grips of mental and physical slavery and colonial oppression.

The development and cultivation of values such as self-determination and self-definition implies the consciousness of African people, on individual level to act and decide on course of actions that reflects their aspirations. Self-determination implies the willingness to engage with African history (written and oral), cultural outlook,

spirituality.

Africans and the people of African descent are global, that is to say they inhabit different regions of the world, and these include descendants of the transatlantic slave trade in the Americas, Europe, Australia, Asia and Africa. Therefore in the theorisation and construction of African identity consideration must be given to the varieties of languages, sensibilities, cultural outlook and histories of the African people. Zeleza (2006) describes the process of an African identity formation,

“I conceive Africa and African identities both as states of being and of becoming. They are dynamic historical processes, messy spatio-temporal configurations of agency, structure and contextuality that are subject to change, which are not always easy to predict” (2006:18).

That is to say, Africa is not a coherent object of study, and African people are not a people without history as postulated in Eurocentric discourse (Hegel 1956). Africa and African are distinct concepts and processes. In the dominant worldview, Africa is a geopolitical and geocultural term, and does not have anything to do with geographical location. In political terms Africa as the Dark Continent usually implies an unstable, corrupt, helpless and disoriented imitation of western democracy. In the cultural term, being an African implies adherence to forms developed in Africa, typically associated with negative connotations i.e., primitive, barbaric and unchanging. Zeleza (2006) argues that identity is not a static concept, Africa and African identities experience stages of transmutations and ongoing changes.

By way of summary, the ongoing project to define African identity/identities has been tackled from diverse ideological perspectives and via different mediums including literature, religion, language, arts and race (Soyinka 1977; Mazrui 1986; Mudimbe 1988, 1994; Appiah 1992; Zeleza 2005, 2006). African identity is a

construct, process and site of oppression (neo-colonialism) and resistance (Pan-Africanism).

The marginalization of Africa and African peoples occurs on the cultural, social, political and economic levels (Appiah 1992). Africa and African people including realities of their experiences, remain in a perpetual state of stasis for three reasons: Firstly, Africa is viewed through western lens as an object rather than the subject. In the popular media, Africa is objectified, devalued and represented as helpless, and dependence on Western intervention in management and governance. Secondly, although race remains a powerful social construct that determines and shapes lived experiences and social interactions. For instance, race has played a crucial part in suppressing the voices of African women in public discourse and spaces (Collins 2009). This is because socially, black women are assigned an inferior status in society, when compared to white women who are able to vocalise their interests in public discourses. Finally, the invisibility or absence of African voices, bodies, thoughts and ideas in academia is a combination of knowledge, power, and systems of representations.

In the next chapter, I provide an outline of my methodology including data collection methods and autoethnography.

Chapter 5

Methodological Approach and Autoethnographic Strategy

Introduction

In this chapter, I provide an overview of the research design and methods, rationale for selecting autoethnography and secondary data sources. The latter will include non-participant observation and documentary analysis of AFWNY 2011 - 2014 as represented through the medium of new media technologies, public relations campaigns and media coverage.

Study Rationale

This study fulfils several purposes, foremost amongst which is my aim to give voice and agency to Black African producers working within the cultural industries, particularly in fashion. Most recently, in the ongoing effort to position African cultural practitioners as active players within the global fashion industry, African-centred enterprises have emerged. These include: ECOWAS Fashion Week and Africa International Fashion Week. In sum these events are utilised as platforms to represent and promote Africa's vibrant cultures and craftsmanship.

Secondly, this study is the first of its kind, offering an analysis of Africa Fashion Week New York. The study explores the strategies adopted and adapted by African practitioners in diaspora to self-define, self-represent, and articulate meanings of their design practices, actions and realities in the globalised era.

Finally, the study extends the understanding of fashion and African identity. As an

African woman and fashion practitioner my professional experience as a fashion model and a producer and curator of fashion in Europe places me firmly within the concerns of this research rather than somewhere outside it as a spectator. I draw from my experience to highlight the intersections of race, class, religion and nationality, and make an attempt to provide an explanation of AFWNY. I now turn to the research strategy.

Map of research strategy

The study adopts an autoethnographic approach, a combination of autobiography and ethnography (Bochner and Ellis 2002). This is to set the focus and direction for the study, and to investigate the issues raised in a systematic fashion. To begin with the study asks to what extent does AFWNY foster the tenets of Pan Africanism? That is, the event is purported to be Pan African, this idea, meanings and motives of AFWNY needs to be further deconstructed.

But first, to clarify terms, I define Pan African as an idea relating to people of African descent and ancestry. Pan Africanism is defined as an ideology, movement and condition of the African people. Underpinning this ideology are socialist principles, as informed by Marxist theory of social organisation of society. Pan Africanism is therefore a condition of the mind, it is an ideology for oppressed people to recognise their oppression as economic and ideological, and unify to end it (Janis 2008). Pan Africanism as conceptualised by the elites of the nationalists and liberation movement to advance self-assertion and autonomy, also holds the belief that African people have a common experience of oppression, and it is in their best interest to collectively resist oppression, exploitation and suppression on the economic, political,

cultural, social and ideological domains (Nkrumah 1964). Resistance to oppression entails contesting the social norms, conventions of colonial discourse and system of knowledge, which this study attempts to do.

I take the position of interpretivism in relation to ontology and epistemology, this is to reflect the claim that reality is multiple, not fixed, relative and diverse (Neuman 2000). This is to indicate that I consider “knowledge, and systems of meanings to be socially constructed, interactive”, emotional and personal, rather than objectively perceived (Carson et al. 2001:5). It is important to understand subjective experiences including motives, meanings, and reasons are time and context bound (Neuman 2000). Autoethnography permits me to draw from my lived experience, and situate myself in the study, using reflexivity, as well as extant theories such as Black Feminist thought (Collins 2009) as guide. I now provide some rationale for adopting autoethnography as a research method.

Autoethnography

The term autoethnography is described as “highly personalized account that draws upon the experience of the author/researcher for the purposes of extending sociological understand-ing” (Sparkes 2000:21). Autoethnography “lets you use yourself to get to culture” (Ellis, Adams, and Bochner (2010). Situating my self within the concerns of this study offers invaluable opportunities.

There are several conflicting arguments about the effectiveness of Autoethnography as a useful scientific method. It has been criticised for its rejection of traditional analytic goals such as objectivity, abstraction and generalisation (Ellis 2000). It is considered a non-traditional approach because researcher subjective

experiences and personal insights are included in the process of producing knowledge. That is to say, autoethnography is a non-conventional in that the researcher is not detached from the study. In comparison to traditional approaches, autoethnography “acknowledges and accommodates subjectivity, emotionality, and the researcher’s influence on research” (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner 2010). This is why autoethnography is also regarded as a cultural narrative for “The struggle for humanization . . . the overcoming of alienation, for the affirmation of men and women as persons” (Freire 2002:44). Historically, the requirement that researcher must maintain objectivity silenced the voices of oppressed and marginalized groups such as Black women. This indicates power has been configured in practices such as knowledge production and education in the academia (Atkinson 2006).

It is argued that traditional methods advocates research from a ‘White, masculine, heterosexual, middle/upper-classed, Christian, able-bodied perspective’ (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner 2010). Evidence of power configurations is found in the history of conventional methods, which proffers the notion that knowledge can only be produced using objectivity, and in a methodologic fashion. A non-traditional approach provides an opportunity to challenge the very structure of governance which is rooted in colonialism and capitalist in nature. Furthermore, using autoethnography is a means to challenge prevailing ideas and knowledge claims about the world. In the process of negotiating power, the method reveals that acquisition of knowledge and truth emanates from diverse sources including personal knowledge and experience.

Autoethnography is an alternative research method that approaches research as storytelling, however it, “fractures the boundaries that normally separate social science from the narrative text and refuses the impulse to abstract and explain’ (Ellis

and Bochner 2000:744). Story telling as a means of transferring information also draws from previous events and experiences. It is a useful method of understanding one's reality and patterned structures of behaviour in that the storyteller expresses and interprets reality using his/her own experience. Thus, in the process opportunities for self-discovery, self-definition and increased awareness of self arises (Gornick 2002). Story telling is a thoughtful and deliberate act, In African oral traditions, at the centre of any story is a moral message. Stories are a mode of transmission to preserve history, family legacy and identity as it is passed from generation to generation (Holt 2008). I now turn to the significance of weaving my own story in the study

My Autobiography

My personal autobiography includes reflections on my personal observations and experiences. As data source, my autobiography will shed light on the process of identity formation, representation, self-definition, and indoctrination which might have been ignored using quantitative methods as survey or questionnaires. I draw from my personal knowledge of the fashion industry so as to relate it to issues raised by Africa Fashion Week New York. AFWNY as a specific case provides rich insights into the intersectionality of power, race, class, gender, religion and nationality. Also, I relate to AFWNY an intervention in fashion in that it challenges and resists the prevailing characterisation of Black subjectivities by centering the interests of fashion practitioners who are of African descents.

The study is informed by professional and personal experiences, in particular my prior involvement with Africa Fashion Weekend Dublin in 2010. I regard AFW Dublin edition as a means to stake belonging, self-represent and connect African people in different Diasporas through trade, innovation and creativity. Organized by

Zimbabwean sister Stha and Ska, I was involved as a model and event consultant. I engaged, researched, shared, and led activities leading up to the event and post the event (model casting, model catwalk training, sourcing photographers, and liaising with creative professionals both within and outside Ireland). The social interaction at the event was not limited to racial groups, non-Black models, photographers and sponsors were also present.

Reflexivity is considered as a valuable method of data collection (Pelias 2003; Davies 2008). Yet, autobiography is selective and based on hindsight (Heewon 2008). This to me is a disadvantage in the sense that memory of past events are often lost or suppressed. So to what extent can I trust my mind to recall memory of past events and experiences? Are these experiences mine or shaped by other external factors i.e., books I have read, stories I have been told?

Reflexivity provides a broader understanding of the ways in which social structures have influenced the researcher's cultural experiences and interactions with others. To illustrate, I am convinced that my interest in fashion and AFWNY stems from my socialisation as a young child and from my experience of the industry as a fashion model. Growing up as a young child, my parents maintained impeccable appearance in their dressing and up-keeping. My mother was a primary school teacher; I have vivid memories of her impeccable sartorial choices - Western style skirts and blouse, polished nails and neat appearance. My father was a business man, consistently dressed impeccably in tailored-suits. He believes "The way you dress is the way you are addressed".

At an early age, I learned the value of self-presentation. My interest in clothing and impeccable appearance jolted me into the arms of the fashion industry. In

my experience as a fashion model, I have struggled with some of the issues raised in the study, and factors such as race, ethnicity and nationality have all shaped my life choices in more ways than I can articulate due to the constraints of the study. As a young adult I adopted cultural events as a means to gain entry and be recognised by the mainstream fashion industry. For instance, fashion for me is an instrument to express cultural outlook, history and contemporary issues. This is indicated by the events I have conceptualised and produced between 2007 to 2014; including Fashions Aloud 2008 during the Cork International Jazz festival, Fashion Against Racism held at the Lord Mayor's Mansion House Dublin in 2012; From Africa With Love and the Science of Fashion In Conversation with Prof. Helen Storey, at the National College of Arts and Design Dublin.

Furthermore, Reflexivity is defined as a researcher's self-critical approach that questions how knowledge about the subject is generated and how relations of power operate in this process. It has been argued that western culture and civilisation has influenced the African psyche, worldview, culture and heritage (Ani 1994). Western ideologies and philosophies most notable Christianity have shaped and deeply influenced my perception of reality, understanding of fashion, my identity and frame of references. During the course of my investigation, I use reflexivity as a means to critically examine my knowledge and truths about myself, my heritage and my identity and how these conspire against me to reproduce my own oppression and suppression.

Finally, writing my self into the research challenges issues of silent authorship (Holt 2003), rules of scholarly discourse, as well as offers an alternative perspective into these issues. For instance, I recount my personal experiences in order to make sense

of these experiences as well as present explanations (Adams 2012). I draw from Black Feminist thoughts, Afrocentricism, and other extant theories to understand the motives of AFWNY, I use Bourdieu's theoretical insights as an attempt to provide an explanation and gain deeper insight into the practice. My reflections afford me the opportunity for self-empowerment, growth, and to confront uncomfortable truths. Hopefully, this will open room for dialogue and incentivise Black women to write about what they care about, and to see the writing process as therapeutic and healing.

Advantages of Autoethnography

Autoethnography is a qualitative method that combines some elements of ethnography and autobiography (Heewon 2008). The richness of autoethnography is evidenced by some of its advantages to include, Ethnography is designed to explore and observe cultural phenomena from the point of view of the subject of the study for better understanding of the cultural belief, personality and thoughts (Maso 2001). Some of the advantages are a range of data collection tool such as personal narrative, reflexivity, graphic, audio-visual or performative materials (Scott-Hoy 2002; Holt 2003; Ellis 2004; Murthy 2008; Saldana 2009; Adams 2012). Adopting this approach fulfils a key research objective, that is, to give voice and agency to Black African fashion practitioners in the Diasporas and on the continent (Ellis 2004; Alexander 2005; Holman 2005; Griffin 2012). More importantly, throughout the course of this study, I have confronted and challenged epistemologies emanating from my socialisation and religious indoctrination which let unchecked will significantly continue to influence my interactions, attitude and cultural outlook. Drawing from personal experiences to produce stories that can 'sensitise readers to issues of identity politics and forms of representation that deepen our capacity to empathise

with people who are different from us' (Ellis & Bochner 2000). Writing is therapy, and a means of expressing and articulating emotions, feelings and experiences.

As a method it provides an opportunity for the researcher to engage in the study as critical reader and writer thus increasing knowledge of self, finding a voice and gaining a deeper understanding of the struggles and challenges for a common identity, and the dynamics of fractured collective identities (Alexander 2005). Also, it offers an opportunity to center feelings, stories and events (Ellis & Bochner 2000), it expresses the struggle to make sense of individual experiences in a wider context, it is less constrained, and it raises very few ethical issues (Boyle and Parry 2007).

An autoethnographic study of AFWNY considers themes such as cultural representation, identities, self-definition, ownership, community building and socialist and capitalist principles. It examines how the cultural symbols and material culture adopted by event participant to produce results such as meanings, experiences and views. For Black cultural practitioners in the fashion practice, the 'struggle for humanisation' is against capitalist conditions to include racial discrimination, racism, white supremacy, marginalization, voiceless and tokenism. Autoethnography therefore creates the conditions for the 'transformation of dehumanising structures' (Freire 1988:402). In doing so, autoethnography draws from methodological tools and extant literatures to analyse and explain these cultural experiences (Ronai 1996).

It is argued that ignoring hermeneutics in understanding African culture and philosophy has led to the interminable subordination of the African to the West. Okere (1971) argues that authentic African cultural values and ideals can be achieved by adopting a hermeneutical approach in both the production of objective knowledge and empirical observation. Thus, for Okere, interpretations and explanations drawing

from African Philosophy is significant for asserting and affirming the identity and dignity of Africans, who felt insulted, scorned, and crushed by occidental worldviews and ideologies (1971). Overall, the starting point for decolonisation of the mind is connected to real life experiences, which is built around a struggle for liberation whether cultural and/or economic (Okere 1971; Serequeberhan 1994).

To conclude, Autoethnography is a pedagogical tool for researchers to explain their multiple identities, to examine their experiences and recognise their racial, cultural and gendered social relations in relation to his/her membership to a larger social group (Carey-Webb 2001). It is a focus on the distinctive qualities of an individual, to reveal the methods and ways an individual negotiate events and circumstances. Alexandra (1999) asserts, “a way of reading between the lines of own lived experience and the experiences of cultural familiars to come to a critical understanding of self and other and those places where we intersect and overlap” (1999:310).

Data Collection

Data Sources

The study utilises autobiography as a primary source and secondary data sources include observations, review of websites, media coverage, multimedia contents and articles produced and disseminated via digital and new media technologies platforms.

I have selected these data sources for several key reasons, most important, are reliability, validity, and practicality (Bryman 2001). To begin with reliability, I can learn more about AFWNY and the extent to which Pan Africanism is expressed

through an objective exploration i.e., non-participant overt observation of event activities and the material cultures produced can tell more about the event vision and, participants rationale. The validity of AFWNY as a Pan African event is measured by exploring the methods and strategies adopted by organisers and participants to explain and describe the reasons and rationale for their actions.

Further, I explore the meaning of AFWNY from different sources, including knowledge produced by the organisers, participants and external stakeholders such as media coverage, interviews and articles. On the issue of practicality, and bearing in mind the distance of the site to be investigated i.e., New York City, I considered costs and budget, time required to travel to New York and the number of people to be interviewed at the site. For this reasons, I considered secondary data collection. Notwithstanding, the study would be further enriched if I had actually visited Africa Fashion Week New York City, to conduct structured interviews with key stakeholders. I have put that down as a project for the future.

Secondary data sources offer several advantages including saves time, money and provide rich data. For instance, I did not have to travel to New York City to observe event activities, as well as to conduct interviews with the key stakeholders of AFWNY. I am convinced that people are likely to provide scripted answers in structured interview setting. Whereas, observing and collating information from different sources can provide richer insight i.e., on the strategies, methods and ways people adopt to interact and the social processes at play. Data collection sources include existing video coverage and transcripts of interviews published online by various individuals (i.e., blogs) and media (online Magazines and digital edition of traditional media i.e., CNN).

Using secondary data source enriched my understanding of AFWNY, the contexts and the issues surrounding its inception. For example, on social media platforms i.e., blogs I found individually produced contents such as articles arguing for and against AFWNY, and several videos of activities at AFWNY. I used the internet (Google search) to search for interviews, media coverage, videos and images of AFWNY. Social media platform i.e., Facebook provided unlimited access to various international actors such as designers and models from diverse ethnic backgrounds and nationalities in the field of fashion. I also had access to read archived blog postings and online articles. This wealth of information was overwhelming, in that I found it challenging to stick to the focus of the study.

The two main disadvantages of using existing data sources I found are firstly, credibility of these online data sources. The second issue is with data overload. To illustrate, I exposed myself to information diffused via social media websites and video coverage of activities, thus the process of defining my research question and area of focus was a series of trial and error, and testing. Owing to the magnitude of available data, I was indecisive about what I needed to find out about Africa Fashion Week New York. Further, I examined data produced by public broadcaster such as CNN international and other video production of AFWNY by its participants and stakeholders. It was difficult to maintain an objective view, in that these videos are at best public relations tools.

To demonstrate and ensure rigorous data collection, it was imperative to be analytical and critical about the data sources selected. This involved cross-referencing the selected sources for trustworthiness and truth. I familiarize myself with the available data and information about AFWNY by using a range of analytical

techniques i.e., cross-examining different interview transcripts and looking for disparities in video coverage and post-event reports. For instance, I noted that the AFWNY press release has been circulated around social media blogs, websites and articles, therefore, the information put out by the press offices Adiree are being reproduced and unexamined by keen followers of AFWNY. This process itself requires deconstruction, as proponents for AFWNY reproduce ideas and information about the event, without critical thinking and investigation to ascertain the validity and truth.

Through the study, I alternated and negotiated emotions, owing to my personal and vested interests in AFWNY, I had to detach myself emotionally from AFWNY and the positively uplifting stories in order to evaluate it through the lens of Conflict Theory and Pan Africanism. AFWNY is a public relations campaign organised by enterprising African immigrants in the diaspora, in an effort to establish and benefit from the free market capitalist economy. AFWNY is a public relations campaign that is built around the idea of Pan African and Africa and capitalism. Public relations is a planned, deliberate and purposeful effort, define by Grunig and Hunt (1984:6) “as the management of communication between an organisation and its publics”. For my autobiography, I allowed my emotions and feelings to surface; this was a terrifying but necessary evocative process.

Digital Data Sources

There are several conceptualisations of digital methods; Rogers (2009) asserts that digital methods are the repurposing of tools that already organise the web. This implies an extension of data sources to reflect contemporary transformations and

processes. Kozinets (2010) argues,

“the analysis of existing online community conversations and other internet discourse combines options that are both naturalistic and unobtrusive – a powerful combination that sets netnography apart from focus groups, depth interviews, surveys, experiments and on-person ethnographies” (2010:56).

The internet and social media platform provides data sources, in that individual produce contents to express their creativity i.e., photographic content; contents are also produced by collectives as a means of articulating and promoting diverse views and ideas about social issues i.e., The Guardian Newspaper. These contents are part of the social reality, and the platforms offer direct accessibility to study the ways in which people engage with technology and negotiate power, identity and spaces in the virtual world (Rocamora 2011, 2012, 2013). The growing significance of digital technology in the social world is undeniable (Murthy 2008).

At the present time, digital technology plays a central role in mediating relationships and interactions spanning across international boundaries. Chittenden (2010) reveals the significance of digital spaces as discursive sources for identity construction. Digital technology is a contemporary advancement, in that it provides new ways of keeping informed of fundamental changes in social world. To illustrate, new media technologies such as video streaming of live events, virtual reality, vblogging, digital presentation (Pinterest, Instagram), blogging has opened up endless possibilities for both research, performance and fashion presentation (Rocamora 2011, 2013). New media technologies i.e., blogs, twitter provides an instantaneous transmission of thoughts, images and ideas across different space and times.

The use of online source for data collection has alluded me to key issues, broadly speaking race and blogging, how black identities are acted out in virtual spaces, how

people use social media spaces i.e., YouTube for identity construction, self-definition and knowledge production.

Most important, the internet provides a space wherein women can construct for themselves 'spaces' of articulation (e.g. Black Twitter) (Collins 2009) and expression to connect with variety of people, build a community of practice, share experiences, provide opportunities for networking and dissemination of cultural production, to promote the participation of women and expose women's influences across all spheres of life to include political, cultural, economic, and social. Thus, digital technologies (blogs, social networking platforms i.e., Facebook, twitter) are regarded as contemporary data sources (Murthy 2008). Data on political and cultural issues including personal experiences of black Africans globally dispersed are readily available on the Internet to include in forums, newsgroups, websites, bulletin boards, blogs and mailing lists. For example, through social media space, i.e., facebook page of Free West Papua Campaign, I learned about the genocide of the Black people of West Papua and the Black untouchables of India. Inasmuch as the Internet mediates and facilitates interaction amongst African people globally dispersed, further studies of how these spaces are owned and claimed by ethnic minorities is essential. Also essential are the uses of online spaces as an affirmation of class and social capital.

Privacy and Ethical Considerations

Data collected via digital methods exposes the convergence between online and offline methods, the connection between digital technologies and everyday life and invoke critical reflection about traditional methods. As an active user of social media platforms, using online data sources has broadened and increased my

awareness in relation to privacy, confidentiality and identity. An autoethnography approach to study, does not mean, the absence of ethical considerations. This is part of the reason why I focused on the history of AFWNY and the motives of its founder Adiat Disu. Information already exists and is accessible to the public. I wrote to Disu in 2014, to inform her about my interest in AFWNY as sociological study. I didn't seek the informed consent of participants, and I have limited my analysis to AFWNY, and the motives of the founder.

Sampling

My data collection is simple; it includes observations from digital and social media platforms, analysis of media generated articles, AFWNY website and my personal experiences. I also utilise extant knowledge and ideas from literature to fully engage and provide an interpretation of data collected (Bryman and Burgess 1993).

Due to the magnitude and unreliability of information available online, I have restricted the number of data sources to videos, website and articles which best allows an understanding of the process of interest

Videos of AFWNY

Youtube channel of AFWNY:

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCXYT7kYIUyPpYiwSQWIkODw>

Coverage of AFWNY 2010 by BCMOfficial:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hdWiw2WnYcE>

Arise News: Interview with Adiat Disu in 2011. Africa Fashion Week New York On Our Take with Christina Brown and Adiat Disu YouTube

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AEwqQZdIXgo>

CNN International coverage of Africa Fashion Week New York 2011

<http://edition.cnn.com/2011/WORLD/africa/07/27/africa.fashion.new.york/ind>

[ex.html](#)

Also, Transcripts of published interviews include:

Venicia Guinot (January 19, 2014) Ventures Africa
<http://venturesafrica.com/ventures-travel-interview-with-adiat-disu/>

Olushola Pacheco (March 16, 2015) Whoot Africa
<http://whootafrica.com/inspiration-africa-adiat-disu-forbes-most-powerful-woman-in-africa/>

Baindu Kallon (Dec 28, 2013) Global Post
<http://www.globalpost.com/dispatch/news/regions/africa/131209/african-fashion-week-3-questions-adiat-disu-adiree>

New Media Technologies

Websites include www.africafashionweeknewyork.com; www.adiree.com. These sites offers detailed information pertaining to the participants, nationality, interests, label/brand, images of previous events, press releases, corporate sponsors and external affiliations and partnerships.

AdireePR facebook page - <https://www.facebook.com/AdireePR>.

FaceBook: New York Fashion Week Africa (Formerly Africa Fashion Week New York). <https://www.facebook.com/africafashionweeks?fref=ts>

Data Analysis

To provide meaningful interpretation and explanation of AFWNY, I use extant literature, in particular Black feminist thought, and Pan Africanism, as both theories are influenced by Marxist theory of conflict in society. Marx claims that society is in a state of perpetual conflict and tension as people compete for limited resources i.e., material, political, ideology and economic, and that order is maintained in society

through domination and power, rather than consensus (Wallerstein 1974). I draw from sociological theories, in particular, Bourdieu to provide explanation and analysis of data.

An autoethnography approach to this study implies data analysis is an ongoing process. For instance, drawing from my personal reflections demanded ongoing and constant analysis. Early on I focused on my modelling experiences which meant purposefully sitting still to think about experiences of racism and discrimination. The more I engaged with extant theories, the more I became convinced that I needed to dig deeper into my early socialisation processes in order to explicate how these processes have shaped my life choices. The trouble I found with reflexivity is that I was overwhelmed with memories of events and activities long forgotten and suppressed. It cannot be forced; rather it is an evocative process and procedure. In an attempt to manage these data flowing from my reflections, to better understand and provide explanations and interpretations I wrote it all down. And proceeded to delete happenstance that I felt was not relevant to the study.

In relation to the secondary data collected, the data analysis procedure began by limiting the scope of analysis to the situated activities at the event i.e., fashion shows and talks; the meanings of AFWNY from the perspective of the inventor in order to document and acknowledge the meanings of her contributions, the strategies for promoting, articulating and expressing AFWNY as a Pan African event; the construction of an African fashion identity, and its material manifestations. Most importantly, my analysis is tied and bounded to the research aim which is to what extent does AFWNY espouse tenets of Pan Africanism? To make sense of the data collected and highlight the messages, I use content analysis to identify categories as a method for classifying data relevant to the research question. These are cultural

representations, self definition, identity, ownership and the socialist versus capitalist economy.

These categories are a combination of the aims of Pan Africanism and Black feminist thoughts. These themes are fixed, however there is an opportunity to add more as I examine the meaningful and symbolic contents of data collected (Neuman 2000).

The next chapter explores the concept of fashion week in greater detail and provides further contexts to the study.

Fashion Week, Fashion Capital and Modernity

Introduction

In this Chapter, I examine the economic utility of Fashion, focusing on the history of Fashion Week in the big four namely New York, Paris, Milan and London and the contradictions inherent within these capital cities.

The importance of fashion to the urban economy has been underestimated, mainly because fashion is often associated with women and appearance. Increasingly, in the twenty first century cities engage as entrepreneurial actors in a globally competitive urban environment (Corcoran 2015). The city as a global political and economic apparatus is created from the ground up and is the ongoing accomplishments of those who live, work, migrate to and socialise in them. The rise of the now ubiquitous creative quarters, fashion incubation, digital hubs and silicon valleys all bear powerful witness to the centrality of the city in the global capitalist economy. It is a fact today that a rising share of the economic action is urban (Sassen 1998). Against this backdrop I explore the concept and evolution of Fashion Week, a creative (but crucially also economic) intervention in urban space which has become a key component of the global fashion industry.

Situating Fashion Week

There are different experiences of fashion week, in some parts of the world

owing to “the overlay of different purposes and different types of encounters fashion week is also known as a fashion fair or a trade fair” (Skov 2006:765). That is to say, the purpose of fashion week is mainly economic exchange. This is evidenced in by the combination of activities including trade fair, showcase, exhibition and business support activities that are produced and staged as part of the industry event (Entwistle 2002; Skov 2006; Breward & Gilbert 2006; Lemire 2010). Fashion Week is the platform for the diffusion and communication of meanings and ideas, and urban cities play a central role (McRobbie 1998). Meanings are constructed by key industry experts such as magazine editors, fashion buyers and investors. The fashion meanings are then diffused to a wide range of audiences via newspaper reports and magazine editorials.

Global cities such as New York, Milan, Paris, Cape Town, London and Lagos capitalize and exploit local and transnational resources including buildings, heritage sites, professional workforce, cheap labour and technology to distinguish themselves from other cities. For example, the city of London is known to accommodate and play host to the corporate head offices of the largest international luxury goods and fashion conglomerates (Jansson & Power 2006). New York City’s pre-eminence is tied to the city’s network of fibre optic cable which connects workers in real time to other places and spaces (Sassen 1998).

Sassen (1991) asserts that these cities are important command centres of the transnational networks. This suggests the city is used and regarded by multinational corporations such as Google and PayPal with offices in London, New York and Dublin as an instrument in an effort to acquire shares, diffuse ideas and penetrate the free market economy. Similarly, Weller points out that these cities act as “switching

centres for the transmission of ideas harvested from a wide range of sources” (Weller 2007:43). That is to say, multinational corporations i.e., Conde Nast with transnational networks connect several cities on the continents of Asia, Africa, Europe and North America. Localisation permits Conde Nast to collect and collate information including knowledge about consumer consumption and production practices from various locations, space and time. In this sense, the city is a switching center, and multinational corporations insert themselves into several cities simultaneously, for power, to gain insight, market shares, thus transcending geopolitical boundaries.

In the fashion industry, transnational corporate fashion conglomerates such as Kering, Compagnie Financiere Richemont, LVMH, and IMG maintain their presence in a variety of local contexts and markets. For example, Gucci stores are located within cities across the big four namely New York, London, Paris and Milan. These cities are the switching centres for a transnational network of fashion designers and design houses fully owned and controlled by these fashion conglomerates. Kering, Compagnie Financiere Richemont, LVMH, and IMG economic shares and operations spans across the luxury, high-end and mass markets, with products ranging from accessories bags, shoes, perfume, spirits and jewellery to household and clothing products. In their study on London Fashion Week, Entwistle and Rocamora argue that fashion week operates as “an embodiment of the wider field of fashion. It is an instance of the field of fashion materialised or reified – physically realised or objectified” (2006:736). That is to say, the field of fashion is composed of variety positions and workers, who vie and compete for recognition. I now provide a brief history of fashion week, its key players, and the role of New York, Paris, Milan and London, as fashion capital cities in the global field of fashion.

Press Week in New York City

The term 'Fashion Week' is a modern concept, coined by Fern Mallis in 1994. However, long before Fashion Week, there was Press Week, conceived by the American publicist Eleanor Lambert. Press Week emerged in 1943, in New York as a platform to foster the growth of the American garment industry, and to prove American fashion practitioners were just as innovative as its international counterparts that is, the French and Italian industries (Hopkins 2012).

Press Week has undergone several transformations most notably, is the term itself. For instance, in 1993, Press Week was formerly known as "7th on Sixth", at that time the name signified New York City's fashion quarters. The new name derived from the combination of 7th Avenue, the creative quarters of New York's fashion industry, and 6th Avenue, the centralized location of Press Week at Bryant Park. In the 1920s and 30s, 7th avenue was revered as the garment district (Popik 2005). The centralisation of the American fashion design sector within one local district indicates the availability of workforce, cheap labour and the presence of cultural hub/creative quarter. In 1994, "7th on Sixth became known as "Fashion Week" yet its aim remains to promote the goods and services of American fashion practitioners, including workers and producers.

To begin with, the inception of Press Week, in the 1940s World War II prevented the annual gathering of international press and media in Paris inspiration, Eleanor Lambert identified this as an opportunity to promote American fashion designers to international audiences as well as explore the global marketplace (McAndrew 2010). In 1943, Lambert launched Press Week, invited notable international and national journalists to New York City and arranged fashion shows. At the end of the event

journalists and editors declared Press Week great success. This was the starting point for the growth of the American Fashion industry, the recognition of American fashion designers, and global exportation of American designs.

In the 1940s, New York City was recognized as a low-end, high-volume apparel-manufacturing hub (Hopkins 2012). That is to say, New York City was dominated by industrial garment factories, with the specific purpose of producing and making mass imitations of French fashion styles. With the emergence of Press Week, New York City's reputation dramatically increased, as physical production and social reproduction of fashion became concentrated. Also, Lambert founded the Council of Fashion Designers of America in 1962. The not-for-profit organisation was responsible for the management of the annual Press Week fashion activities, as well as representing the interests of American fashion practitioners nationally and internationally. Press Week became the platform for the diffusion of American fashion values and ideas to international audiences.

History of Fashion Week: New York

The fashion industry is comprised of various types of workers, some are engaged in the physical production of garments while others engage in the social reproduction i.e., constructing and assigning meanings to material and immaterial objects. Fashion practitioners including designers, factory workers such as tailors, seamstress etc are all occupy critical positions within the fashion industry. At the present time, discourse tends to focus on the production and consumption aspect of the fashion industry, mainly because garment production is about value creation. For this reason, to follow is an example of a fashion pioneer instrumental in modifying the meanings and

purpose of fashion week.

In 1990, Fern Mallis was appointed as the CFDA executive director. Fern is a key contributor in shaping fashion week around the urban city scape. A number of events and changes occurred during her appointment. Firstly she centralised Press Week activities, in an attempt to resolve logistical and management issues (Chavie 2015). For the fashion designers centralisation resolved some pertinent issues, for example it created ease of access for journalists and buyers, and highlighted the role and potential of Fashion as an economic generator. However, for CFDA centralized coordination of Press Week incurred significant costs, as well as created the conditions for new alliances to be forged.

By 1994, New York Fashion Week replaced 7th on Sixth. New York Fashion Week was instituted to reflect transformation in thinking, and the creation of a network of practitioners. The name situates and positions New York City at the center of the American fashion industry. Molotch (2003) affirms that place-based associations are often indivisible from the products, as consumers attach place-informed evaluations to all products. The value lies in the ability to persuade consumers of excellence, quality and innovation. The new title reflects city branding, representation of American cultural landscape, and the place-based promotion of fashion for a delineated length of time (Molotch 2003; Skov 2006).

For example, the CFDA lobbied the city's local authority for a central location to host New York Fashion Week. The City's local authority collaborated and supported the CFDA, this is evidenced by the temporary tents set up in Bryant Park from 1994 – 2010 (For 16 years), which played host to two annual events the Spring/Summer and Autumn/Winter fashion shows organized by the Council of Fashion Designers of

America. (Chavie 2015).

The transition from Press Week to 7th on Sixth, to New York Fashion Week indicates the juncture of evolution where Fashion became fully utilised as a collective economic activity by different sectors of the economy. While 7th on Sixth was considered as New York City's fashion cultural hub, in that it accommodated a cluster of showrooms and factories with technical mastery and manpower required for the stages of the fashion process from design, production to wholesale retail. New York Fashion Week became the site for the performance, creation and diffusion of ideas and meanings. To follow is a brief overview of the transition of NYFW as an instrument of corporate power.

IMG and New York Fashion Week

The International Management Group (IMG) is a global entertainment/Fashion conglomerate, with operation across numerous cities including Los Angeles, Miami, Berlin, Sydney, Mumbai, Moscow and Istanbul. In July 2001, IMG acquired New York fashion week from the Council of Fashion Designers of America (CFDA). Mallis, the CFDA's executive director was retained to become the senior Vice President of IMG. The acquisition of New York Fashion Week (NYFW) by IMG signalled another phase of evolution, which today has dramatically shaped the operations, purpose and public perceptions of NYFW. Most important transformation to have occurred is the business structuring of NYFW, which shifted from not-for-profit to for profit. NYFW became a profit-driven event within the free market system. Popik (2005) asserts

“The first organization in America to offer designers state-of-the-art venues, an experienced production team and maximum exposure through a wide variety of marketing benefits and advertising opportunities. Several thousand buyers, retailers and members of the national and international press from 32 countries attend the shows each season, generating thousands of articles and hundreds of hours of television coverage” (Popik 2005:2).

The development of NYFW as a profit generating enterprise, also led to the professionalisation of fashion business as indicated by the production teams and business strategies adopted to disseminate meanings about NYFW and fashion designers. For example, it is reported that New York Fashion Week generates nearly \$900 million each year (Maloney 2015). Under IMG, NYFW offered exclusive packages to fashion designers/houses. These range from publicity and exposure in international newspapers and magazines owned and managed by IMG subsidiary companies across the world.

Furthermore, IMG has diversified Fashion Week activities to incorporate a wider range of industries including electronics, automobile, drinks, entertainment (films, movies, sports) and technology. This is evidenced by the diversity of corporate sponsorship NYFW has attracted including Mercedes-Benz, American Express, The New York Times, Getty Images, WGSN, Samsung Galaxy, Maybelline New York and DHL. This clearly indicates fashion’s compatibility with sectors and industries. Fashion and the urban city are exploited in the social production of meanings. For instance, in 2000, Mercedes Benz became title sponsor of New York Fashion Week, which became known as Mercedes-Benz New York Fashion Week. Mercedes Benz is headquartered in Stuttgart, Germany, and widely situated across different cities. Title sponsorship describes Mercedes-Benz’s position within the larger economy as the

global manufacturer of luxury automobiles. Also, as personal vehicles emerged from within the urban cities, cars are material culture used to signify social status. Thus, clothing and cars are not so disparate in that these are common social instruments that are utilised to express individual lifestyle choices and aspirations in the world. Furthermore, raw materials for making clothing and cars are generally sourced from places which also supplied a significant proportion of the world's migrant labour.

Paris Fashion Week

The history of Paris Fashion Week is remarkable, held for the first time 1973. Since then the city of Paris has hosted an assortment of international fashion parties, grand openings, promotional events, lavish celebrity-studded parties and fashion extravagance. To follow is a brief account of the evolution of French couture fashion and the conditions that led to the inception of Paris Fashion Week. The Fédération Française de la Couture, du Prêt-à-Porter des Couturiers et des Créateurs de Mode was founded in 1973. The Federation Française is the executive body of the three Chambres Syndicales (trade association) including de la Couture, Prêt-à-Porter and Couturiers et des Créateurs de Mode. Altogether, these three trade associations represent the interests of couture brands and their efforts are focused on export. Membership of the Chambre Syndicale de la Haute Couture is open to companies designated as Haute Couture houses. The tagline Haute Couture is legally protected and assigned by the French Ministry of Industry. It is also responsible for reviewing the list of Haute Couture fashion houses annually. The Chambre Syndicale du Prêt-à-Porter des Couturiers et des Créateurs de Mode are Haute Couture houses and fashion designers producing women's ready-to-wear. The Chambre Syndicale de la Mode

Masculine is the pinnacle of men's ready-to-wear brands. This indicates that couture is highly regulated by the French government.

Paris Fashion Week known as *Semaine des Créateurs de Mode* demonstrate to the fashion industry what's in season, and what is not, through runway events and trade shows. That is to say, French designers still control to a great degree the idea of fashion as influenced by local sensibilities. Over one hundred shows take place across the city. Paris Fashion Week is divided into three categories: Men's Fashion, Haute Couture, and Prêt-à-Porter, these collections are shown at different times. Since the term *haute couture* is protected in France - only the very few fashion houses that meet the strict criteria can claim to have Haute Couture collections. The Prêt-à-porter also known as Ready-to-wear collection and Men's Fashion are exhibited during Paris Fashion Week. For example, international fashion houses, emerging designers and labels unveil their collections at the Carrousel du Louvre. More renowned fashion labels exhibit their collections at various iconic Parisian locations such as the Grand Palais or the Espace Eiffel while other emerging labels present their collections in high profile nightclubs and warehouses. This suggests the hierarchical structuring of the French fashion industry whereby emerging talents showcase their collections at more modern spaces i.e., a nightclub which is a reflection of an urban lifestyle.

Although hailed as the number one centre of style, Paris Fashion Week materialised much later than NYFW. Paris has long served as a source of style inspiration (Veillon 2002; Kawamura 2005; Gundle 2008). Zukin (2004) asserts that Paris had constructed its identity using extravagant clothing and lavish style of dressing. Paris design houses dictated colour schemes, skirt lengths and silhouettes. In turn American clothing companies drafted their own versions of Paris styles.

Among the many legacies of the French influence in fashion is the medium of dissemination. Entwistle & Wilson (2001) asserts that before the advent of fashion shows, or style presentations, “fashions were disseminated via fashion dolls or copper stitching displayed in portraits” (Entwistle & Wilson 2001:151). Since those early days, the diffusion of clothing styles has been transformed from material objects such as dolls and mannequins to live presentation in the form of models. Furthermore, it is argued that the idea of displaying clothes on women first originated in Paris (Evans 2001; Veillon 2002; Entwistle 2006). Charles Fredrick Worth is credited with the transformation of the French fashion industry, in that he played an active role in the regulation of the couture practice in addition he initiated the style show presentation. In 1858, the couture designer began by showing his elite clientele a pre-prepared selection of original designs (a collection) presented by female models. The tradition of bespoke style presentations in private residences or in a designer’s salon for aristocratic clients continued in France into the 20th century, thus securing France’s reputation as the fashion capital of the world. As the trend grew, the presentations became more and more extravagant, engaging all of the senses in a full experience of photography, music, sophisticated staging and sets and, of course, the paparazzi. Designers started calling them fashion “fêtes”. This became the juncture for the transition from salon, tea-room show to departmental fashion show.

The style presentation was an informal affair that occurred at the designers fashion house/studio. The display of selected outfits constituted the shopping experience for women at that time (Evans 2001). Today, the fashion show can be described as a combination of sale promotion, an image-making event and entertainment endeavour (Evans 2001; Dominique 2002; Entwistle 2006; Skov, Skjold, Moeran, Larsen & Csaba 2009).

The domination of French Fashion styles, ideas and culture can also be attributed to the establishment of Parisian couture houses and publications such as “*Gazette du Bon Ton* which propagated the authority of Paris fashion and until the outbreak of war” (Hopkins 2012:30). Ideas about French fashion were diffused via fashion magazine publications. Most notable of the magazine publications is Conde Nast’s *Vogue* magazine launched in France in the 1920s. *Vogue* is considered the world’s most influential fashion magazine owing to its wider readership, historical presence and pervasive influence in the fashion industry. *Vogue* is claimed to reach 11 million readers in the US and 12.5 million internationally. In 1909, Conde Montrose Nast purchased *Vogue* magazine. The latter was founded in 1892 as an American weekly publication dedicated to the ceremonial side of elite lifestyles (Oliva and Angeletti 2006). Conde Montrose Nast transformed the magazine’s readership and expanded operations across European countries. Today, *Vogue* magazine continues to represent and promote high-end, luxury fashion brands and lifestyles.

By 1939 with the outbreak of the Second World War Paris fashion economy transitioned from the epicentre of style to be described as the blackest years in French history (Veillon 2002). For instance, exportation of French fashion and garments suffered, the style presentation shows were also cancelled and the international media (journalists, newspaper reporters) were unable to travel to Paris for style inspiration due to the Nazi occupation.

Finally, fashion practitioners are the drivers of the growth within the fashion industries. In France, family-owned enterprises catapulted the French fashion economy in the global fashion, in that businesses are passed down from generation to generation to preserve wealth, expertise and knowledge. Most notable are the global conglomerates namely LVMH and Kering. These French conglomerates are at the

forefront in creating meanings of fashion, they respectively assume full ownership, and in some case the major shares of several leading fashion brands, including Alexander McQueen, Gucci, Marc Jacobs, Christian Dior and Louis Vuitton. In addition, the conglomerates maintain control over mass media representations and diffusion of fashion since they own several publications.

Milan Fashion Week

Camera Sindacale della Moda Italiana founded in Rome in 1958 was charged with the regulation of the Italian fashion industry. It was responsible for the promotion and diffusion of Italian fashion to international markets. It was subsequently replaced by *Camera Nazionale della Moda Italiana (CNMI)* also known as The National Chamber for Italian Fashion. Today, Milan Fashion Week is recognised for high-quality prêt-a-porter (Gilbert 2000; Breward 2003). Fashion Week is managed by *Camera Nazionale della Moda Italiana (CNMI)*.

In 1962, a new organization was established by Centro Romano Alta Moda in Rome (The Centre for Haute Couture). The non-profit organization has regulated the Italian fashion industry for over 50 years. The association draws its members from diverse spheres of the Italian clothing industry including fashion houses, textile manufacturers, and accessory producers, weaving factory, Jewellery and cosmetic companies. “Settimana Della Moda” Fashion Week first held in Milan, in 1975. The Centre for Haute Couture co-ordinates the activities at Milan Fashion Week, it is also responsible for the promotion of Italian fashion to world international media. Today, Milan Fashion Week is regarded as a highly influential clothing trade show that occurs twice a year.

It has been argued that Italian style has also influenced European fashion since the

Renaissance era (Hopkins 2012), albeit not to the degree in which Paris held monopoly over style. The city of Milan, once known chiefly as an industrial powerhouse (SergeReinach 2006) was dominated by craftsmen and women. For instance, in 1969, the first fashion trade fair and showcase *Milano vendemoda* was held in Milan, and featured Italian designers, textile companies and promoted the products of local designers. SergeReinach (2006) observes that Milan has long been the financial and industrial heart of Italy. The concentration of textile and clothing manufacturing industries in the Lombardy region makes it the largest in Europe. Similarly, Hopkins asserts that:

“A ‘Made in Italy’ label adds kudos to a design and confirms Italy’s distinctive position as a centre of excellence. Milan is one of the four major fashion capitals alongside Paris, London and New York” (Hopkins 2012:31).

Italian producers are considered experts in the field of leather craftsmanship and made in Italy products communicate this meaning – excellence. The emergence and positioning of Milan as fashion capital is attributed to several factors including the tradition of fine craftsmanship, and the production of textiles such as lace and leather. Italian designers are not only skilled; they also draw from a solid heritage.

London Fashion Week

Although a latecomer in comparison to the NYFW, PFW and MFW, London Fashion Week has positioned itself as one of the most important industry event in the British and international fashion calendar. The LFW has served as the platform to establish the career of numerous designers including the highly acclaimed John

Galliano, Alexander McQueen, Luella, Stella McCartney, Jasper Conran, Henry Holland and Louise Goldin.

London Fashion Week emerged in 1984. Annette Worsley-Taylor created an outlet in London for the celebration of uncommon fashion tastes and aesthetics that were described as edgy, raw and experimental. London Fashion Week was created to promote distinctive British style designed by local British designers. The British Fashion Council is the trade association formed out of the trade group Fashion Industry Action Group. It is comprised of designers, cultural producers and manufacturers working in the British fashion industry. The British Fashion Council was founded in 1983, as a non-profit organization, its activities range from fashion shows, seminars/conference, and exhibition to award ceremony. The council is responsible for the coordination of London Fashion week, as well as promoting British fashion designs to global markets. In addition the Council also influences and shapes fashion design in higher education through partnership affiliations with Design Colleges including Central Saint Martin's and the London college of Fashion.

The British Fashion Council portfolio of events is supported and sponsored by the British government through the London Development Agency, The Department for Business, Innovation and Skills. It is estimated that over 5,000 people including press and buyers attend London Fashion Week. At the opening of LFW in 2014, it was announced that the direct value of the UK fashion industry is worth £26bn to the UK economy, up from £21bn in 2009. Orders worth more than £100m are placed during LFW each season, (The Guardian, September 12, 2014).

The intended purpose, uses and meanings of Fashion changes across space and time. At the present time, Fashion Week is a co-ordinated industry event that draws

fashion practitioners to a specific place and time for the purpose of promoting their products and services, to develop and facilitate exchange, to define a fashion identity specific to place, sensibilities and time. This is evidenced by the not-for-profit structure of the CFDA, British Fashion Council and *Camera Nazionale della Moda Italiana*. In contrast to other Fashion Cities a major transition that occurred in New York Fashion week is the restructuring of business operations from non-for-profit to a profit generating apparatus. This indicates New York Fashion Week reflects the prevailing traditions and societal value – the free market economy that is transnational in nature.

Global Fashion Capitals: New York, Paris, Milan & London

As fashion week activities has been constructed around four key cities, fashion serves as an attraction for creating cosmopolitan culture and economy. Skov (2006) notes

“Fashion Weeks in Paris, London, Milan and New York present couture designer brands for an exclusive clientele of buyers from boutiques and department stores as well as for the international press. These are no doubt the best-known fashion fairs. They are widely reported in fashion magazines and newspapers, and therefore of great importance for readers without budget or taste for couture” (Skov 2006:765).

Although, fashion weeks are defined collectively as international fashion weeks, yet, individually these cities engage in politics of cultural signification to affirm national identity, and location. The modern city characterised by diversity of workers, sectors, resources and finance, gives prominence to the local cultural industries and the economy. For instance, fashion brands and labels use the cities as an instrument to

construct their specific fashion identity by incorporating brand name and the city i.e. DKNY – Donna Karan New York (Breward and Gilbert 2006), or Africa Fashion Week New York.

Hopkins (2012) argues:

“Fashion has become synonymous with geographic locations, sometimes referred to as fashion capitals. Historically in Europe the earliest centres of fashion were defined through the royal courts with the reigning monarch or high nobility dictating the accepted dress styles and protocols of the day. Status and displays of wealth were central to early expressions of what passed for fashion, while sumptuary laws maintained and reinforced social distinctions” (Hopkins 2012:30).

Fashion conveys meaning as well as construct distinct identities not only for individual and groups, but equally for geographical locations as the terms ‘New York, London, Milan and Paris’, indicates. Historically, European royal courts were common forms of fashion centres, at the present time, geographical locations i.e. urban cities are spaces where fashion meaning are created and diffused. The city is a product of globalisation in that the city is a complex interplay of processes and continuously changing. Major city break traditional boundaries by connecting diverse points of production, consumption and corporate power (Sassen 1998).

Fashion across the Western European cities namely New York, London, Paris and Milan are widely reported in global news coverage and magazine. Together these cities are considered major centres for the social reproduction of meanings within the global fashion hierarchy. As previously mentioned in chapter 1, there are various encounters of Fashion Week across the world, in cities such as Sao Paulo, Mumbai, Tokyo, Cape Town, Lagos, Dakar and Congo. Yet, fashion media discourse favours the discourse that fashion “happens” in New York, London, Paris, and Milan. Non-

Western cities are regarded as regional events and potential feeder sources for local design talent (Weller 2007). This indicates a disproportionate share of global corporate power is concentrated within cities such as New York, London, Paris and Milan (Sassen 1998). For example, Fashion Week across the big four is synchronised in that the annual takeoff begins in New York, followed by London, Milan and then culminates in Paris. This indicates the big four are bounded to each other by dynamics of economic globalisation (Sassen 1998) including cheap labour, distant manufacturing factories and physical production. Although, synchronization of fashion week activities can be viewed as a strategy to maximise visibility, increase exposure for brands, attract tourists to cities, and to prevent conflict and competition arising from scheduling and speciality. The existence of tension cannot be overlooked.

Sassen (1998) argues that “Globalisation is a process that generates contradictory spaces, characterised by contestation, internal differentiation, continuous border crossing. The global city is emblematic of this condition” (1998: xxxiv). Therefore, tensions are bound to arise within these fashion capital cities as the powerless and disadvantaged i.e., migrants, women and the oppressed resist inequalities and make claims within the global city. Sassen argues “the city is a strategic site for disempowered actors” (1998: xxi). That is to say, cities enable immigrants to gain presence, to emerge as subjects, and make new claims. This itself is powerful and reveals the tensions in transnational identity politics. In the field of fashion are differing subject positions (Entwistle and Rocamora 2006), yet, the dominate culture i.e. White fashion practitioners are represented extensively in mainstream fashion media. Lewis (2003) argues that the incomplete understanding and acceptance of the fashion cultures of the African diaspora by the mainstream has

created a situation such as lack of access to production facilities, and to promotional media, thus confining the diaspora fashion practitioners to their own communities.

The field of fashion therefore is best understood as a field of struggle defined by differentiated positions and position-takings' (Entwistle and Rocamora 2006). This logic creates possibilities to explore the perspectives and strategies of minority groups such as immigrant women, who use fashion as an economic and cultural instrument for incorporating into the city as a resident/ global citizen. Further to this, mainstream accounts of fashion omit the multiple dimensions of fashion activities within these western cities, in particular diaspora fashion cultures in global cities as New York and London. In the dominant mainstream account, fashion conglomerates such as Kering, IMG and LVMH are the key drivers in the business of fashion (consumer goods and services) , and fashion week activities in London, Milan, Paris, New York, more recently Shanghai, Tokyo and San Paulo are considered to wield major influence on dissemination and reception of fashion trends among consumers.

In summary, the concentration of fashion activities across four metropolitan cities establishes Western cities to be central to the dissemination and circulation of fashion, thus excluding others, in particular non-Western cities. Fashion is an economic activity, and these cities serves as a conduit for mediating commercial relationships between divergent producers and consumers, as well as in the formation of collective identification for players within the industry. Further to this, although London and New York are considered multi-cultural cities, fashion week activities including catwalk presentations are dominated by fashion designers and models that identify as white. For so long, the dominant racial group have controlled the media houses, and determined what gets represented as fashion. In this current era of accelerated change and complexities advances in information technologies have introduced new

challenges for these established fashion insiders and gatekeepers. New and emerging fashion territories in non-Western space including Cape Town, Lagos and Uganda (Pool 2017) are competing along side western cities in the global fashion industry. Infact, technology now mediates the circulation of fashion, individuals and groups are creating highly visual fashion contents on websites, video blogging and blogs that are rapidly disseminated to audiences across space and time.

Before turning to an analysis of the emergence of African Fashion Week New York, in the next chapter I offer my own autoethnographic perspective on fashion, class and identity within the industry.

Chapter 7

Autoethnographical reflections on the fashion industry

Introduction

This chapter is informed by reflections on my experiences, events and processes including childhood socialisation and self-growth.

Negotiating a space within a racialized fashion industry

During my modelling days in Ireland, specifically between the years 2002 to 2010, I was frightened to openly challenge the indignation and prejudices I experienced from interactions and encounters with white model agents, models, photographers, designers and makeup artists. I was scared because I sought external approval and validation. This made me reticent to confront issues of inequality in particular, non-payment for work done and racial prejudices. The dominant narrative at the time was, ‘do not rock the boat’, ‘grow a thick skin’, ‘be strong.’ Thus, I consented and adapted to the disrespect, rudeness, bullying, intimidation, patronizing behaviour, offensive and ignorant comments which undermined my self-confidence and self-esteem. My consent and silence resulted in tremendous feelings of internal inadequacies and psychological trauma. I became unsettled within myself, yet, I couldn’t articulate these feelings not could I see beyond my circumstances.

In *Black Beauty* Arogundade (2003) argues “The closer an African became to the dominant beauty ideal, the more they would be accepted” (2003:5). Working in the industry dominated by White values and tastes, and where Blackness is

constructed as the opposite of Whiteness demanded great efforts. To gain entry and be accepted into this space black models intentionally assimilate the prevailing aesthetics standards. In popular culture and media representations, blackness is perceived through the oppressing lens of un-relinquished stereotypes and biases (hooks 1991). That is to say, European cultural imperialism's strategies of disempowerment are totalising. Not only are African people reproduced as stable category fixed in a position of subjugation, as a result of internalising these biases Black subjects are unable to recognize the authentic selves or see beyond these oppressive representations.

Embodying White Beauty Aesthetics: Black Skin White Tastes

White or light complexion is highly regarded, and the prevailing beauty standard in Western and global fashion industry. Sekayi (2003) argues that the mainstream definition of beauty “consistently includes immutable qualities found less frequently among populations of African descent” (2003:469). That is to say beauty is narrowly defined in popular fashion media discourse i.e., long wavy hair, slim figure and white complexion. And those who do not fit this definition are subjugated and disempowered by fashion's gatekeepers i.e., model agents. Similarly, Nickson et al., (2003) asserts that racist practices are masked by appeals to aesthetics. It is customary for employers to desire workers with a particular look, and workers will invest their personal resources to style that look for the job.

Drawing from my experience as a fashion model in Ireland and Britain, I relocated to Limerick with my family in 2002 and sought representation from an Irish model agency. I visited agencies around the country, however I was told to check back in a few months or we are not looking for new faces. Yet, I never gave up in my

search to be represented by a model agency; since I was convinced modelling would increase my social status and legitimise my being. Months later, one of the leading model agents demanded 350 euro as payment for representation I assumed it was a means to an end; I worked hard and paid up. Months went on by; I was not booked for any job. The only memorable job the agency booked was for me to hand out flyers one cold winter's night in December, standing at a busy junction in Limerick. I was given a sexy Santa costume (very short dress), and stood outside for approximately 3 hours, that crippling cold evening. After the job, I waited several months to get paid, I demanded payment for my work, but the agency ignored my calls and requests. No payment, no jobs, and 350 euro short, this was the end of my interaction with that model agency. At that time in 2003, model agencies were reluctant to represent black models; this is a reflection of discriminatory practices and anti-black attitudes. Yet, the model agencies were not reluctant to exploit black models, in that they demanded payment for representation. Within the context of the broader fashion industry, payment is an issue. For instance, in her book Mears (2011) reveals the disparities in wages, white models receive more pay than Black models, even when they did the same shows.

Not only are white models paid more, black models have to spend more resources, i.e., time, money modifying themselves to fit the narrowly-defined ideal, in order to ensure visibility and exposure. In my situation, I must confess I internalised white beauty ideals, in that it was commonly represented as the high form of beauty and sophistication in my immediate environment. For instance, in my modelling profession, agents have told me to do something about my hair. Also, during a casting call, my model agent barked at me, "Tuck in your buttock"!! I was stunned. I had

never suffered any degradation on the basis of my buttocks before. In fact, in the African orientation, the buttock is admired and celebrated. After that incident I became greatly distressed and self-aware, I looked around me and noted that my butt did indeed protrude in comparison to the other White models.

I learned early on that to be a successful model, it was imperative to assimilate and appeal to white tastes and aesthetics. And I was able to perform this using my body as an instrument.

Hair was a problematic area to contend with and negotiate. From my childhood days, hair was an important feature of the girl child. In my childhood years, my sisters and I couldn't wait until the weekend when we got our hair made into plaits or weaves. Getting my hair done up was exciting. My sisters and I looked forward to the weekends. We would take out the plaits and get our hair washed on Saturday and on Sunday we would pick out a style for the week. In my teenage years, (secondary school) hair was considered a distraction and time consuming, I wore my hair short. As a young adult (at 18 years old), for me long hair was perceived as more lady-like. Chemical relaxers are applied to natural hair in order to alter the texture from Afro to straight and long hair. I applied chemical relaxer to my hair every 6 – 8 weeks solely to facilitate hair growth. When my hair did not grow fast enough, I began using synthetic hair extensions for length. For the next 10 years, this became my hair regime – I wore my hair in braids for 3-4 weeks, got synthetic hair sewn into my scalp twice in a month and applied relaxer every 6 – 8 weeks.

It was in Limerick I became fully aware of my hair. During an appointment with one of Ireland's leading model agent, she remarked, "oh you need to do something to your hair", I asked, what? She replied "make it long, or I won't be able to get you work". I

was conflicted, how else do I make this hair longer!! As it is, I use chemical relaxer and wear long weaves (synthetic hair) to add length and look the part.

As I deliberated over the hair issue, a few weeks later, I picked up an advertising leaflet delivered through the letter box in my home. This was when I began to nurse the idea of getting a hair transplant. Subsequently, after my consultation with the hair and scalp clinic in Limerick, I began saving money for a hair transplant. Excitedly, I informed my brother of my decision to get a hair transplant, he was shocked!! I felt embarrassed, “If this agent won’t represent you cause of your hair, then you must go to another agent”, he said. I replied, “but she is the top agent in Ireland”, to which my brother said, “You cannot change yourself to become an idea of what she thinks you should be”. What followed was a series of questions in his attempt to make me understand the hair transplant process to which I had until then only a superficial understanding.

I perceived my decision to undergo a hair transplant as the next level to my necessary body transformation. My thinking at the time was I had used harmful chemical relaxer which damaged my scalp and prevented further hair growth. Also, I had invested in expensive synthetic hair weave and hair extensions (for braids and plaits) to fit and gain acceptance in the fashion industry. More so, my female cousins, family and friends all used these (foreign imported) products for stylization. So to me, it was a perfectly normal behaviour and method of stylisation.

Presentation at Fashion Shows: Hair, Makeup and Blackness

My common beautification and stylisation practices basically entailed styling my hair in braids, using synthetic weaves and wigs. In 2004, I signed with a new agency in Cork City. When booked for jobs, i.e., photo shoots and fashion shows, my

agent would instruct, “bring your wig”. I was validated. As I have invested thousands of euro buying wigs, long, short, blond, brown, black, wavy and straight human hair. My acceptance of white beauty aesthetics became normalised, I embodied the taste to get more work and appear non-threatening to casting agents. This practice described as aesthetic labour (Entwistle and Wissinger 2006) was normal and became a strategy for me to get jobs i.e., fashion shows, promotional events and editorial campaigns. I made no fuss nor did I resist my aesthetic labour, in fact the meaning I attached to my action to me was relational, in that my goal was to be a successful model.

With this goal in mind, I directed all my energy and efforts towards its realisation.

For instance, I never took it personally, when the hair stylists at photo shoots complained about my hair, or when photographers lamented about the difficulties they experienced in setting up lighting equipment for my skin. Even makeup artist disregarded my complexion and facial structure. For instance, makeup artists complained about finding the right tone of foundation for my skin. As it was too tedious a task for them to get the right mix for my dark skin. I invested in my own foundation and makeup kit. (A similar experience was highlighted in 2015 by Sudanese model Nykhor Paul, who used social networking (Instagram) to compose an open letter to makeup artists about dealing with Black Skin - www.vogue.co.uk/article/nykhor-paul-racism-in-industry-model-complains-about-make-up-artists).

I didn't take it personally, when model bookers at casting calls refused to offer me work, because they already booked a black model. I remember quite vividly, my agent telling me in 2009 “there is only room for one black model; you have to compete with

other black models for work”. He further told me about these girls and who they were; I took an instant dislike to them. After all, these black girls were my competitors. And my goal was to become a successful fashion model like Naomi Campbell. Also, I attended social events and volunteered to work for free at charity fashion shows. This was in order to situate myself within the industry and to be visible to casting agents. I remember one time I was booked for a show, as the only token black girl. To this my agent exclaimed: “you are very lucky, you are the ONLY black girl picked for this show”. I rationalised the statement as a reflection of my hard work and eventually internalised it as normal. As the token black girl at fashion shows, soon, I felt like I was better than every other black model. And I worked harder on my body in order to position myself as a professional model to bookers and clients (Entwistle 2002).

Entwistle and Wissinger (2006) argue that modelling is both mentally and physically demanding (Entwistle and Wissinger 2006). For me, modelling was a means to an end, fame and fortune. Therefore, my aesthetic labour was deemed necessary, and rationalized in my mind. Entwistle and Wissinger (2006) describe aesthetic labour as the “ongoing commitments to body maintenance far beyond the fleeting productions of a smile at work” (2006: 777). This indicates the body is constantly being modified via dress as a means to fit and align with societal perceptions of beauty. After all, the body is a visual moving vehicle. For black models aesthetic labour practices are significantly influenced by material, symbolic and political resources which include access and opportunities to the labour markets, environment, and knowledge about the structure of social relations.

Similarly, Witz, Warhurst and Nickson (2003) define aesthetic labour as the “process by which workers’ corporeality is appropriated and regulated for organizations commercial benefit” (2003:158). That is to say, organisations benefit from aesthetic labour of workers, in the context of the fashion industry which is composed of several sub-sectors including hair, beauty, cosmetics clinics, fashion magazines, etc. Gatekeepers such as fashion agents, and editors regulate and define the fashion model. For instance, most fashion agencies have specific body conventions, they expect fashion models to be a certain height 5’8, weight 50-60kg, dress size 2 -6, bust size 32, hip size 30 and waist 24-26 (also known as vital statistics). The fashion industry regulates and standardise these conventions as the idea model body, and I modified my body through exercise and diet to fit the narrow ideal. However, Tate (2009) asserts that beauty and aesthetics are socially and politically constructed. That is to say fashion is an image-making industry wherein race, gender and class significantly influence and determine inclusion and exclusion of individuals (Entwistle 2002; Mears 2008). The aesthetic judgment of fashion is created by individuals and institutions. These are influential people such as fashion editors and celebrities, institutions such as fashion magazines and newspapers help spread fashion ideas (Kawamura 2005). The field of fashion is a field of power and control over bodies and appearances.

These personal reflections and insights have informed my study, as well as directed me to investigate this under-researched area of sociology in order to generate academic focus on these concerns. My reflections on these events and my actions indicate to me a lack of understanding of self and the wider processes in which I was immersed. Reflecting on these experiences, I now realise I was a powerless and

voiceless observer; I failed to respond to situations, encounters because I my outlook was dominated by prevailing ideologies and lens. So, I normalised my actions and selected the best fashion discourse that aligned with my understanding of self at the time. Drawing from Gramsci (1971) who wrote about the power of ideology to reproduce the social structure via institutions like media, religion and education. These institutions appear organic and normal, yet, they are instrumental to socialising people into the norms, values and beliefs of the dominant social group. The media is a powerful institution for circulating meanings and normalising certain behaviours. To illustrate, fashion magazine such as Vogue is considered to be the fashion bible in the industry. As a young girl, and later into my adulthood, I was heavily invested in buying Vogue magazine. Photographers and agents would express personal/professional opinions that models should have a copy of the current Vogue magazine, in the magazine are carefully selected poses, and styles created by the best stylists and photographers, featuring the best fashion models. For me, and many other models this was normal practice to become a successful model.

Personally, as an African woman I wrestle between African and Eurocentric orientations. The difficulty stems from my social conditioning and socialization process in which Western values, orientation and frame of reference are highly regarded. I have been indoctrinated to embrace western cultural values as supreme and to disassociate from my African cultural heritage and roots. Reflecting on these issues have helped me transcend these socially constructed limitations imposed on my being via my conditioning. I am aware of my choices, thoughts and epistemology. I have found great satisfaction and awoken my consciousness by engaging with African spirituality and African roots. I believe that self-knowledge is essential as we (black

African women) are experiencing profound transformation in the ways we have been taught to act and think. An ancient African proverb advocates, “Freedom comes from knowing who you are. Man know thyself”. Prior to engaging in research my self-knowledge was greatly informed by society, my religious beliefs and prevailing cultural ideologies, to which I now turn.

Socialisation Process

“When people have knowledge of self, they gain power of self. . . then they realise who they are, what they can do and what they have done in the past”
Kefa Nephphys

I situate my experience of my socialisation process in the home, school and Christian gatherings. Socialisation is commonly described as the process by which human beings acquire their norms, values, beliefs and expectations and learn the skills to navigate the social world. Born in Lagos, Nigeria, a post-colonial territory formed in 1914 by British colonial administration. The country Nigeria, a colonial invention was the result of the amalgamation of the Southern and Northern protectorates that is to say, the consolidation of a variety of peoples, clans, families, languages and cultures.

My childhood was adventurous, class and religious differences hindered the marital bliss of my Christian father and Muslim mother. Therefore, we, my brother and sister, lived with my dad and mother, at grand parent’s house at various points in our lives. I see these moments as points in my socialisation process. When my father remarried, we went to live with my father. My father is a strict disciplinarian, and had high expectations for all his children. To my father, education is highly important, and he wanted his children to be educated and proficient English language speakers. So he

enrolled us in a reputable private primary school in Lagos, Nigeria. Children who attended the school are considered excellent English speakers. So my father instructed, no speaking Yoruba in the house, English only.

As English is established to be the national language in Nigeria, as young children we didn't ask questions concerning how and why we speak the language. The private English speaking school distinguished us, my brother and sister from the other kids in the neighbourhood who attended public schools. At the time, private school was considered to be better than public school owing to Western influences, class room size, discipline, structured learning and resources. Public schools received negative reviews, thus regarded as a place for common folks, pupils and teachers communicated via 'broken English' also known as pidgin (Gut 2008) and other indigenous languages to include Igbo, Yoruba and Hausa.

English speaking and my enrolment at a private school were both indicators of higher social class. More so, we lived in a big house, the biggest on the street. From that moment, I ceased speaking in Yoruba, especially in the presence of my father. At family social gatherings while my older relatives and cousins communicated in Yoruba, I delivered my response via the English language. I would laugh at those who couldn't speak proper English. Many assumed I couldn't speak the Yoruba language anymore. At that time, my self-perception became dependent on my mastery of the English language. I read Mills and Boon and other European fantasy fictions novels to further develop my understanding and command of the language and culture. From an early age, I became exposed to American and British culture via mass media i.e., representations movies and music. My mastery of the English language was validated and approved by my father and people around remarked on my fluency. This is how I

adapted English language as an instrument of differentiation and class distinction. As English was also the language of transmission of religious doctrines, I now turn to my Christian indoctrination.

Religious Indoctrination

As previously mentioned, my mother was raised in a Muslim family home, while my father in a Christian family home. My father was raised in the Jehovah's Witness faith, thus when we visited my grandparent for summer breaks attendance at Christian meetings was unavoidable. My grandparents attended the Yoruba speaking Christian meetings, for me it was boring. Many times, I fell asleep during bible meetings. After my father re-married, we attended the English speaking Christian meetings as a family. I enjoyed the bible meetings for two reasons, first, I was with my family, and the medium of communication was in the English language.

I was raised as a Jehovah's Witness with two key beliefs, to begin with, I was born a sinner, and secondly, eternal life awaited me in paradise. The organisation also required its members to show a deep level of commitment in the service of Jehovah God. This implies going door-to-door to preach 3-5 days during the week; all those activities and unpaid labour to include, field service (where new recruits are acquired and Christian memorabilia are sold to the public). Dedication to the organisation and Jehovah is expressed by regular attendance at Christian meetings three times a week. Furthermore, for young children, I was about 10, it was necessary to have weekly one-on-one bible study session with an older mentor; every four months I make a 10-15 minutes public presentation reflecting my knowledge of the bible during the weekly bible meetings. I enjoyed the presentations, because it was an opportunity to

show your knowledge of the bible, presentational and communications skills. These activities culminate in the baptism. Baptism is a public ceremony where believers publicly declare their life purpose is to be of service to the organisation. More importantly, baptism is an affirmation to dissociate from non-believers and the affairs of the world including critical analysis of political and economic issues, philosophy, sociology, world politics, history and economics were considered worldly. Thus engagement with these subject areas and the topical issues they elicit were discouraged and barred.

Although, we were mocked in school for our faith, I found comfort in the fact that we spoke better English. On reflection, in the late 1990s, being a Jehovah's Witness in Lagos, was considered the highest form of refinement, Jehovah Witnesses are well dressed, neat and spoke fluent English. Western Christianity and English became the instruments of civilisation people.

For me fluency in English can be attributed to the organisational agenda, the Christian congregation encouraged education and literacy. This is evidenced by the range of biblical materials published by the Watch Tower publication, (a division of the organisation headquartered in New York). These publications include the revised edition of the Bible (written in English, Yoruba and other African languages), magazines dealing with topical Christian issues, illustrations of biblical stories in My Book of Bible Story and books targeted at adults, teenagers and children.

As a member of the Jehovah Witness organisation, I began reading at an early age, yet I never cultivated the consciousness to question common truths and knowledge claims in Christian publications. For instance, why are Adam and Eve always represented as White people? Why is the Christian organisation head quarters

located in New York? As a member of the Jehovah's Witnesses, I developed a consciousness of care, patience, compassion and empathy; as these are deemed necessary for interacting with fellow believers and for mentoring new recruits. However, for the members of the Jehovah's witnesses, comprising of people from diverse ethnicities, social class, and background, ideology was the basis for solidarity. For instance, this ideology is best reflected in their ontological and epistemological understanding of social world and reality. Social relations are regulated in the sense that members of the Jehovah Witness organisation are prohibited from intimate association, encounters and exchanges particularly with non-believers including their family members. People who do not share their faith/belief are considered to be a danger to the survival of the organisation and the spiritual well being of its members. As a result, members are encouraged to excommunicate non-believing family members or face 'dis-fellowship'. This too became normal behaviour for members of the Jehovah's witnesses.

This is a picture of the culture I was raised in; reflections on my past experiences from my childhood into my adult years have proven invaluable. While this has been an overwhelming process, it has however instilled courage within me. Courage is needed for deep and honest introspection and for healing to occur. More so, this process has provided an opportunity to ask questions, not accept things on face value, and challenge my beliefs, knowledge and self-perceptions. Foremost, these self-reflections and self-assessment have created the conditions for a healthy expression and interpretations of my experiences, and incidents as I may find them.

On reflection, being raised as a member of the Jehovah Witness shielded me from the 'evil' clutches of the outside world to include peer pressure, immorality,

fornication, teenage pregnancy, gang membership, alcohol and drugs etc. I am not entirely sure the origin of these narratives about the advantages of living in the faith. However, I am aware that I was indoctrinated to value European culture, values, practices and its people. In my modelling experience, my desire to fit in, to be accepted and adoption of White beauty aesthetics stems from the normalisation of these practices and my internalisation of European values. In the process, I placed greater emphasis on individualism, and consumption as a way to fill my internal inadequacies.

Western cultural outlook place great emphasis on beauty, religion, media, academic and cultural institutions because these concepts are linked in the pursuit and attainment of European power and domination (Ani 1994). As I was socially conditioned in European cultural outlook, and frame of reference, I was colluding in my own oppression and subordination. Wiredu asserts (1996) that African people have received unsuitable conceptual schemes and categories via religions, languages and politics which has led to the perpetuation of intellectual, spiritual, cultural dependency among the generality of Africans. To reverse the European cultural hegemony decolonization is necessary to critique the logic, epistemological influences that persist in African cultures (Wiredu 1996; 2007).

An apt illustration of the disproportionate conceptual maps I became exposed to a young child stems mainly from the language and discourse about African cultures and experiences. In Christian publications such as magazines, books and journal articles produced by the America-based organisation. Take imagery as an example, black bodies were often portrayed in subordinate positions to White bodies wherein the man man appeared to be in leadership roles, Black males were rendered incapable of leading. White women were always well dressed in colourful clothing, while Black

women's clothing was marked as tribal and bland, as if in contrast to the White woman's. Through the course of this study it occurs to me that discourse from the perspective of White male have the effect of dehumanising and devaluing African lives and ancestral heritage. To illustrate, the magazine publications *Watch Tower* and *Awake*, both served as instruments of socialisation, as well as for the transmission of European cultural values and thoughts. Through visual illustrations and representations of Whiteness - European culture including language, dressing, music and cultural practices were undeniably celebrated. At the same time, in these Christians magazines African spiritual systems and cultural practices were either omitted or projected in less aesthetically pleasing manners as idolatry, primitive and very wrong. Exposure to these imagery, and Christian discourse, i.e., I am a sinner, and everlasting life is the highest form of love influenced and shaped my outlook and attitude. More so, it led to self-censorship. The Jehovah Witness's Christian discourse omitted European history, the proselyting mission and cultural imperialism in African societies. The reality is Christian discourse creates whiteness as pure and Blackness as sinful. Further to this, Jehovah's Witnesses propagate the discourse that members of the organisation are persecuted for their faith in all parts of the world, through such interpretation and framework of understanding people of all ethnicities, racial and social class become bounded and unified. Reflections and critical interrogation of my upbringing and indoctrination in this form of Christianity, indicates customs and practices established through the medium of coloniality and cultural imperialism of African societies by American and European thoughts and values remains powerful, as it permeates the consciousness of the peoples. As previously alluded to, coercion is no longer required as built-in habit implies people will act in a certain way they have

been indoctrinated to act, they will self-police in the continuation and continuity of European cultural hegemony, domination and white supremacy.

Critical Self-Knowledge

“For Black women as well as Black men, It is axiomatic that if we do not define ourselves for ourselves, we will be defined by others – for their use and to our detriment” (Lorde 1984:45).

In the process of self-reflection, I have come to an understanding that it is crucial to examine my deeply held-beliefs and assumptions about so-called African sensibilities, orientations, history and cultures, as well as the concepts dominance and resistance (Collins 2009). My upbringing is a combination of African and European cultural values; however, European cultural outlook has significantly influenced my self-perception and worldview. It has equally influenced the direction my life has taken with regards to education, religion and romance. For instance, in my romantic life, I have only ever dated White men. My disinterest in Black male companionship can be attributed to literary and media representations in European fiction novels, representations in movies and films. Moreover, upon meeting Black males, I judged them prematurely in the ways I didn't judge their white male counterparts i.e., does he speak fluent English? Is he university educated? Throughout the course of this study, it was uncomfortable to examine these past actions, so I resisted recalling memories. Resistance, created tremendous amount of anxiety, fear, and inability to function in my daily life, until I accepted it was necessary to provide explanations for my actions, the implications and meanings. Also, in examining my deep-seated beliefs, about black men and class, I discovered it was equally important to examine and interrogate ideas, events and thoughts in order to ascertain the guiding philosophy and agendas.

Before the embarking on the study, my perception was my upbringing and background instilled in me accurate knowledge of self, now I have found that this was in fact based on a false premise or false consciousness. For instance, growing up as a member of the Jehovah's Witness, I feared African spirituality systems and took the necessary actions to stay away from that aspect of my heritage. My earliest socialisation process overtly devalued and degraded Blackness, as well as the corpus of African sensibilities. Due to these narrowly defined epistemological and ontological perspectives, I struggled to articulate my innate feelings, understand social processes and critically examine my social relations and interactions with others.

It has been argued that the purpose of education is to advance the interests of a group of people to secure their survival (Woodson 1933). My education was informed by Western values and cultural outlook, which foisted particular thoughts, values, tastes, as well as uprooted African peoples from the original matrix of existence and interests. Being indoctrinated in European frame of reference and beliefs implanted a particular worldview in which oppression are reproduced and normalised. This idea of indoctrination and the social reproduction of oppression is aptly illustrated by Woodson (1933/1990), he argues that when you control a man's thinking you do not have to worry about his actions because he/she have been socially conditioned to accept particular outlook, and accept it as normal.

As I was indoctrinated from a young age to accept the organisational practices and ideologies of the Jehovah's Witnesses as the "truth", as a result I lacked the tools to critically examine my beliefs, expectations and concepts such as paradise, everlasting life, memorial of Jesus Christ and the basis of Christianity in African societies. Consequently, religious indoctrination created deep-seated insecurities and

internal inadequacies in me, in particular as it relates to understanding my life experiences, events and life purpose. Also, it created a peculiar way to look at non-believers, yet it was a non-believer who introduced me to modelling at age 15. On reflection, I believe I was drawn to the world of modelling to be free from the restrictions imposed by my Christian upbringing and to see the world from an alternative lens. Also, religious ideologies tend to center the family as its base. I see the family as a psychological ideology to maintain the structures in society. For instance, Christianity has a symbolic meaning for me, it represented, family closeness and bond. To denounce and reject all that I have been taught through Christian bible meetings, implied taking a different path, and breaking the family bond.

On reflection I have come to the realisation that it is imperative to venture outside the restrictions and limitations imposed by my conditioning and the social construct. While this is an arduous exercise, in that demands courage, time and honesty, yet it facilitates a shift in existing roles and practices. Baldwin asserts “The paradox of education is precisely this – that as one begins to become conscious one begins to examine the society in which he is being educated,” (Baldwin 1963:34). In an examination of my life including the events, actions and experiences, I now realise that identity is an ongoing process that is determined and shaped by the ruling class through prevailing national, ethnic, race, class, religious and gender discourse. Individuals and groups are programmed by society (education, family, media) to reproduce these social structures i.e., class oppression. Conscious awareness of one’s subject position, social processes, and contradictions within the social structures in which we operate are necessary for removing the veils of oppression and illusion.

This study fulfils several purposes; personally, it has provided an opportunity for self-discovery. I have discovered the extent to which I have been deracinated from indigenous practices, customs, beliefs, and values of the African peoples. In the course of this study I have experienced a whirlpool of emotions including feelings of shame, anger, anxiety, fear, downheartedness and happiness. Secondly, I am happy because the study has provided an opportunity for self-growth, to develop critical consciousness, practical and scientific skills. In relation to skills acquired, I now understand it is best to examine beliefs and evaluate ideas and events in order to reveal the underlying meanings and agenda. Finally, growth is remarkable in that I now articulate, express and provide explanations for the meanings attached to my actions, and engage sociological theories in the process.

The next chapter provides a visual analysis of selected promotional campaign images utilised as part of its marketing strategies. AFWNY promotional campaign highlights one aspect of the strategies adopted by the African diaspora in attempts to self-define, reclaim the status and recognition of the black body in global fashion practices.

Chapter 8

A Visual Analysis of AFWNY Promotional Campaign

I have argued that AFWNY is a platform and space for African fashion practitioners from different diasporas, cultural and ethnic backgrounds to come together to construct and articulate Black fashion identities, share narratives of their lived experiences and express their aspirations, challenges, successes and struggles through their design practices. Lewis argues that “separation between the diaspora and mainstream exists on financial, diagnostic, logistical and ideological levels but not on the level of talent” (2003:165). Utilizing fashion week as an instrument, AFWNY attempts to consolidate the efforts, skills and talent of fashion practitioners who are African around a single objective – to re-brand and re-claim the image of Africa through craft, design practices and technology.

Here I consider how this objective is achieved by conducting an analysis of visual materials (images and photographs) produced by the Adiree fashion company to communicate meanings about the event, its mission statement and fashion practices to global audiences. As social media technology laid the foundations for the development and rapid proliferation of AFWNY to global audiences (Appiah 2011). This analysis attempts to understand the meaning of these images as well as their significance in constructing, communicating and presenting Africa and African fashion practitioners as luxury brand and producers. Thirteen images are presented with accompanying commentary to elucidate their meanings including situating the Black body in the contemporary context - in New York City and positioning African fashion practitioners as fashion content producers, creators and diffusers.

Since the inception of AFWNY in 2010, highly visual representations have been created by Adiree and its collaborators to express ideas and themes underpinning the aims of AFWNY. These collaborators include makeup artists, wardrobe stylists, hairstylists, models, and photographers. The visual representations focus on design practices, garments and bodies through mediums as photography including computer generated graphics, advertisement and public relations, meanings about contemporary styles and design practices of African fashion practitioners are reconstructed.

Photographs are a source of systematic information (Wagner 1979) that provides visual evidence about the body, race, identity and communication strategies. I will explore these images as a medium of communicating and circulating meanings about black bodies, identities, cultural and design practices of the African fashion practitioners. In the selected images annotated below I note the existence of themes relating to ownership, symbolic meanings, politics of representations and identity and I provide possible explanations for them.



Image#1 Adiree AFWNY 2011

AFWNY 2011 Photo Campaign – “Where Fashion Began”

In this image are two signs - text and photo thereby yielding two messages whose substance are linguistic and pure image (Barthes 1977). I begin with a description and interpretation of the image. Ada Emihe, a New York based photographer of Nigerian descent produced this photo of a black female model in overflowing red dress, for the 2011 advertisement of AFWNY. I first came across this image on facebook, it has been shared and distributed via social media platforms including Facebook, twitter, Instagram, Pinterest, Flickr by African bloggers, magazines and fashion followers.

The photo shoot was staged in a room with white walls, wooden floorboards, white-framed chaise lounge sofa, and with matching wine-coloured sofa seat and bolster

cushion. The fashion model is dressed in a multi-layered sleeveless red debutant style ball dress and adorned in silver necklace with matching earrings and bracelet bangles, is seated leaning back comfortably in a chaise lounge sofa, her red dress overflows from the sofa onto the wooden floor, her left hand is rests softly on a wine-coloured bolster cushion, forming a v-shape, while her right hand is stretched softly over the edges of the sofa. Although, the model appeared to be sprawled-out on the sofa, yet, her posture is graceful and powerful with her head held upright, she gaze away from the camera, and her lips are covered in red lip stain.

The photograph produced by Ada at Avaloni Studios is part of a collection of promotional images directed by Adiree for its 2011 AFWNY campaign. This aesthetically pleasing campaign is targeted at young, female black middle class; it communicates the idea that the Black body is desirable and fitting for the purposes of high fashion. This is illustrated by the vital statistics of the model - slim figure, clear skin and height. The image not only conveys meanings about the black female body but also about the expertise of practitioners of African descent in material culture of fashion including the clothes, jewellery, accessories, styling and creative direction.

In relation to the linguistic message of the image, captioned in written text (blurb) "Adiree AFWNY, Where Fashion Began, New York | July 11 - 17".

The sign Adiree is taken from the Yoruba language 'Adire' which signifies Yoruba heritage, women's technique for making tie and dyed textile cloth in South-western Nigeria (Byfield 2002). Drawing from tacit knowledge of her roots, and the indigenous Yoruba tradition of craftsmanship and textile production, Disu constructs a transnational brand and fashion identity. To illustrate, in New York City Adiree

coordinates the activities of AFWNY as well as provides, other services including communication and brand management services to selected fashion practitioners and non-African brands. The Yoruba word 'Adiree' is inserted into African and wider fashion discourse, thereby constructing an identity informed by ancestral heritage and traditions.

Furthermore, the text 'Where Fashion Began' is employed to hail New York City as one of the 'big four' fashion city, and to signify the enduring legacy of Yoruba design practices in contemporary fashion design. Disu explains best her rationale for the text, "The second annual African Fashion Week New York (AFWNY) will bring designers from countries in Africa and the African diaspora to display their work in shows based around the theme "Where Fashion Began". The theme was selected to explore the idea of Africa as the birthplace of fashion and to reference New York as the fashion capital of the world" (AFWNY 2011). In other words, New York is considered to be a global meeting point for fashion practitioners seeking global brand exposure and business opportunities. The theme typifies an attempt to memorialise the African past by exposing the hidden discourse in relation to the contributions of Africa to world history. Lewis (2003) argues that this is one of the key reasons for the separation between the mainstream and diaspora fashion. "The diaspora's separation from the mainstream is illustrated in the mainstream's relentless push to subsume new ideas, and the Diaspora's pull back to a near or distant past (Pre-Atlantic crossing) that is distinguishable but not traceable for most individuals" (2003:165).

Tradition and modernity is an ongoing debate in fashion discourse (Rovine 2010), it is worth mentioning that one aspect of contemporary African diaspora to New York is the result of immigration of African people for further studies and work. Unlike, descendants of the slave trade who have been dislocated, contemporary African

immigrants for instance Disu, can go back home, as their families and friends are there. These immigrants adopt various strategies from within the host country and the country of origin in their creative practices.



Image#2 - Nigerian Designer - Igwedimma Rodney Emeka of McMeka

The image is a montage collection of three runway (motion-still) photographs, featuring three tall dark male models in male fitted-garments. The montage was created by AFWNY as part of its 2014 press release statement to announce the participation of the label McMeka.

The first photograph features a Black male model wearing chequered black and white suit jacket, matching trousers, and white shirt with brown shiny shoes. The second photograph is a White male model in a red blazer jacket, matching red trousers, white

shirt, slim black tie accompanied with a bright brown straw-type hat with red and blue lacing. Finally, the third photo is a Black male model of slim build in a white and black flower-pattered suit jacket, black trousers, white shirt and a matching black bow tie. This image is intended for male audiences. I chose this image for my analysis to indicate how gender roles are embedded in fashion practices at the event, as well as to reveal how African fashion practices are developed. The Nigeria-based designer launched the brand McMeka in 2011. He is considered a leading men's wear fashion designer in Nigeria owing to his contemporary cuts, craftsmanship and use of colourful materials. The men's wear bespoke label produces shirts, blazers, suits and trousers for occasions including dinner, corporate and social events. In 2013, Rodney Emeka emerged the winner of the MTN Young Designer of the Year competition at the Lagos Fashion & Design Week (Obiwevbi 2014). The brand name itself is a mixture of English and Igbo 'Mc' and Emeka shortened to 'Meka'. The cultural influences of the English reflect in the design and tailoring of McMeka. Unlike male designers who use greys and black colours for their tailored suits, McMeka's use and choice of colours and aesthetical tastes sets him apart. More importantly, this image advances the notion that African male clothing and designs are a mix of (contemporary and indigenous) styles and influences. Further to this, the male models represented here, presenting tailored-male suits communicate the message that Black and white males are confident to wear colourful/multi-toned garments.



Image#3 - Page 17 Hilda Mauya of Dahil Republic of Couture Fashion House

This image is a montage of three catwalk photographs, featuring three black female models in formal/evening dresses, with matching braided hairstyles, makeup and red lip stain. The first model wears a long short-sleeved burgundy coloured transparent embroidery dress. The round, raised neckline see-through garment reveals the models underwear and body, the outer layers of the gown is covered in beautiful sequined flowery embroidery designs. The second model wears a fitted, long, front slit, symmetrical strapless plunge dress made from a blue and silver lace fabric and lined with cream materials. Finally, the third model is dressed in a silk damask texture floral long fitted gown; the neckline is sleeveless made with a light-brown transparent fabric and fitted fishtail design.

I chose to analyse this montage for two crucial reasons. Firstly, this has much to do with the choice of materials, style and target audience. Haute couture is a term that is commonly used to refer to exclusive high fashion and exceptional craftsmanship. In Paris, couture is regulated and monitored by the state through the Ministry of Industry

(Kawamura 2004). Through governmental intervention and policies, Couture in Paris is regulated, and the city has established itself as the centre stage for couture excellence and craftsmanship. Dahil Republic of Couture Fashion House is a Minnesota based fashion brand. The designer Hilda is a qualified nurse, was born in Kenya. This image shows that the design practices of African fashion designers are wide-ranging and extensive to areas such as luxury, couture, made-to-wear, ready to wear, lifestyle and prêt-a-porter. Furthermore, African designers are often expected to use materials and fabrics that have been commonly associated with Africa in popular western imagination i.e., animal print. A second reason has to do with the medium of promotion and representation of Black beauty aesthetics – black models. Unlike the selected lighter-complexioned black models (such as Jourdan, Naomi, Chanel, Jessica White) presented at mainstream fashion week fashion showcase as the representatives of black fashion. In this montage, the black-skinned model is a symbolic gesture that

reflects the heterogeneity of blackness as well as diversity of black beauty aesthetics, black body shape and stylisation (Tate 2009). Here, the models are not adorned in hair extension weaves or wigs, yet, braided extensions have been added to their natural hair in order to achieve the desired look and vision of the designer - elegance and grace. Hence, this image here refutes the common idea that Black models are unfit for high fashion promotion.

Image #4

AFWNY

2010

Promotional

image:

Source

Adiree

In this image are four female Black



models gazing straight into the distance, strolling towards the camera and smiling.

The models are captured in slow motion on a rooftop; in the background are a semi-cloudy skyline and a tall skyscraper building. The model's garments are a combination of different fabrics including plain grey, black and patterned (dark brown, purple and gold) Ankara also known as African or wax prints. In this image, the first model on

the right wears a long fitted dress, the top part comprising of the bust is a mix of grey and patterned print fabric and from the waist to floor is the patterned Ankara material fabric. Accessories include an open-toe sandal, slim brown belt and chunky bracelets which sit on the model's left and right wrists. She approaches the camera in front facing, smiling and with both hands visible by the sides. The second model wears a sleeveless over-the-knee short dress, with a big bow hanging over the right side shoulder of the dress, paired with black open-toe ankle booties. The fitted dress is made from light grey fabric material, and the bow is made of Ankara print. The model wears medium sized round earrings and two matching hand bracelets on both wrists. She also approaches the camera in full frontal pose, with her right hand slightly raised and her left hand left hanging by her side. The shape and style of the dress reveals the model's neck and shoulders. The third model's dress is a mix of grey satin fabric and patterned prints. She wears a long sleeveless dress; the grey material covers from bust to the knees, while from the Ankara material fabric flows from the knee to the floor. On her raised right wrist seats a beaded-type looking chunky bracelet. She approaches the camera with her right side slightly twisted, rendering her left hand invisible. Finally, the last model wears a sleeveless boob-tube thigh-length dress, made from Ankara material fabric. On her neck is a shiny black choker necklace with matching hand bracelet. The model wears black high-heeled open-toe sandals. Her left hand is stretched slightly as if reaching out for a handshake while her right hand is pocketed in the dress. The style of the dress reveals the model's legs, neck and shoulders. In summation, in this image there are more similarities than differences between the models. For example, the models have matching hairstyles, which is swept away from their faces, either to the side or piled on top of the heads. This practice of uniform hairstyles is widely practiced at mainstream fashion show presentations. The models

are also wearing matching colour black shoes (heels) and matching bracelets. Finally, the models in this image exemplify the different shades of blackness from light skin complexion to dark brown. This image is targeted at young black (ethnically diverse) girls, and fashion retailers, it communicates youthful elegance, style, fun and elegance. Also, in relation to the aesthetical styles and design of the garment, this photo is intended for a variety of audiences who like short sleeves, sleeveless and boob tube, long and short dresses. The jewellery used in the shoot indicates the different ways in which the bracelets can be worn. And that the so-called African fabric can be styled and matched with different probs.

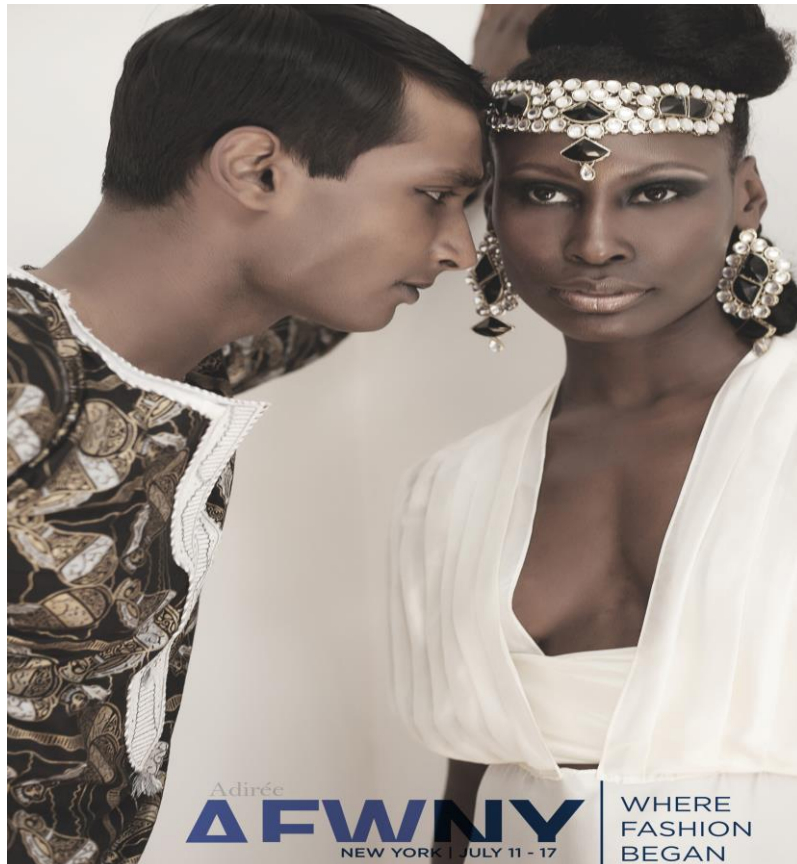


Image #5: AFWNY Runway Shot. Source: www.stylehousefiles.com

This image is a visual report that has been compiled by Style House Files, a Nigeria based fashion promoter and producer of Lagos Fashion and Style Week. A montage of runway images captured at the AFWNY 2011 edition, and downloaded from the web. My rationale for including this image is to indicate the design practices of African fashion practitioners from the perspective of a fashion insider. In this montage is a collection of 6 photos of female models on the runway. The first image on the top right corner is a model wearing a honey brown boob tube ruffled formal long dress with bow, made from plain fabric material. She wears on her neck a matching colour necktie. In the image below is a model wearing sailor style short pants with short sleeves peplum blazer, made from printed fabric material. In the middle row, the top image is a black model wearing a long slim-fitted boob tube dress with one shoulder and tail. The fabric used is a blue printed Ankara fabric with brown and green colours. The model in the middle photo is wearing a formal boob tube gown with lace trimmings on the bust and a big bow on the left. The dress is made from a creamy white fabric with gold satin and cream lace trimmings. The model wears a silver necklace with matching hand bangle. The last image in this row is a model wearing a folded long sleeve peplum jacket with raised collars and purple bow. With large collar cape, the bow sits on the waist to cinch in the waistline, and the long sleeves are folded to expose the wrists. The fabric used is multicoloured Ankara printed material. Finally, in the last row, this image is of a model wearing a knee-length skirt and sleeveless blouse. The blouse top is made from multicoloured (brown, dark chocolate and yellow) Ankara printed fabric contrasted with grey lace, while the skirt is a plain slightly ruffled mustard cotton fabric.

In common parlance, the designs and sartorial practices of African people are described as traditional costume, pre-modern, unpolished and unfashionable (Allman 2002). This image here tells quite a different story. It positions fashion designers of African descent in contemporary fashion discourse. This image indicates the variety of techniques, styles and fabrics the fashion designers employ in their design practices; it is an apt example of the heterogeneity of style practices, preferences and tastes as reflected in African cultures. This image is intended for those with a narrow view of what African fashion designers produce and create. Some of the design techniques used i.e., bow, peplum, large flaps/collar design are prevalent and common in modern fashion design discourse.

July 11



Image#6:

- 17 2011

AFWNY

Promotional campaign Where Fashion Began.

This image was downloaded from AFWNY's Website; it is one of the collections of images produced for the AFWNY 2011 promotional campaign. I have selected four images from this collection for analysis in order to illustrate the variety of meanings about race, gender, class, dominance and agency embedded in the 2011 advertisement campaign.

In this image is a black male and female model. The male model is wearing a patterned Ankara shirt blouse commonly known as Buba, and in place of a button and buttonholes, white embroidery is stitched around the neckline down the middle of the

shirt. The female model wears a white plunged v-neck dress made from plain cotton fabric. Her hair is swept on top of her head, revealing her facial features, makeup and accessories. The model's forehead is accessorised with black and silver coloured head jewellery, and matching earrings. This image is intended for, and targeted at couples, black African male and female consumers. The image communicates warmth, attentiveness, intimacy and dominance; this is indicated by the way the male is posed sideways, with his face away from the camera, leaning with his right hand on the wall to look steadily at the female model. The body language of the female model on the other hand signifies ease and vulnerability with her body twisted facing the camera, yet point towards the male, slightly parted lips, unsmiling upright posture and looking intently into the distance. The meaning of this image is significant, in mainstream fashion advertisement; it is common to see a black female with a white male model exerting his superiority. This image indirectly promotes black companionship and solidarity.

Image#7:

July 11 – 17,

WHERE
FASHION
BEGAN

WNY
YORK | JULY 11 - 17



2011 Promotional campaign Where Fashion Began.

With white wall, wooden floors and framed oil painting in the background, in this image is a black female model dressed in an overflowing Victorian-style sleeveless formal gown, made with printed floral Ankara and silk fabric. With her posture front facing, it appears as if she is squatting uncomfortably or sitting upright on a high stool chair. Her left arm is crossed across her chest, and her right hand is stretched out resting in front of her dress. With head facing sideways, her eyes look fixedly away into the distance. The makeup is minimal and on her head is a blonde straight, long wig.

In this image, the model is presented in relation to the framed painting hanging on the white wall. In the painting is a representation of a lively yet clean city street, populated with rows of tall buildings and trees on both sides of the street, and trading shops light up the street sidewalks, as cars, and stylishly dressed people pass by.

In this image, are two core meanings, firstly, although the black model is presented stylishly, yet, she is accessorised in ways that aligns with European aesthetics i.e., long straight blond hair. The hair appears to be the central message here, in comparison to the minimalism of the make up look. Secondly, in relation to the juxtaposition of the painting and black model in Victorian inspired dress, the intended audience are fashion and art lovers. The model in this photo communicates ideas about femininity and politics of stylisation – that is Blond long hair synonymous with white beauty aesthetics?



Image

#8: July 11 – 17, 2011 Promotional campaign Where Fashion Began.

This is the final image from the 2011 advertisement that will be analysed. The props used in this image have been previously analysed including white wall, wooden floorboards, purple sofa lounge and gold-framed wall painting. In this image are three black models, two males and a female. The male model on the right is of a lighter complexion with blondish orange haircut; he is dressed in orange pant trousers, white shirt, black boots, brown belt and a navy blazer jacket. Front facing with hands in trouser pockets, slightly bent right knee, head and shoulders are tilted slightly to the right side towards the female model seated in the sofa. Next in the image is the female model with eyes wide shut, crossed legged, sat upright with her head and bust tilted to the left towards the second standing male model. She is wearing a black silver necklace, earrings and sleeveless gown, made from orange and blue printed Ankara fabric and black lace. Her dress covers her legs and overflows onto the floorboards. The model's makeup is simple; her hair however, is parted in the middle and brushed to the sides, revealing her features, neckline and facial structure. The final model in this image is a black-haired male model, his is body bent forward towards the female model and his right palm rests inside the edge of the sofa. He is dressed in white shirt, Ankara printed bow tie, tailored high-waist trouser with belt and black boots. In this image, the styling of the models indicates that it is intended for young black male and female. In relation to black males, this image signals information pertaining to male sexuality, role and tastes from causal street-look, basic to tailored-fitted styles. The female in this image communicate meanings relating to glamour, attention, body shape and hair.

In these advertisements are verbal and non-verbal cues, non-verbal cues such as facial expression, clothing, postures, skin colour and hairstyles. Furthermore, in this

advertisements the venue, time and ticket information have been omitted. This implies that, these images serve one central purpose – to position the company Adiree, AFWNY and African practitioners including models, designers, makeup artists, hair stylists, photographers and wardrobe stylists in wider fashion discourse. It is utilised as an instrument to represent information, thoughts and ideas about African fashion designs and sartorial behaviours in modernity.



Source: www.afrizion.com/adiree-launches-ad-campaign-for-africa-fashion-week-new-york-2012-luxury-untamed/

Image#9- 2012 promotional shoot - Luxury Untamed

This image is a montage of 6 photos produced as part of the promotional and advertising campaign for the 2012 edition of AFWNY. In the press release Disu asserts, “The photo shoot represents designers showcasing in Africa Fashion Week in New York, and our mission to define some of Africa’s Fashion as synonymous with the word Luxury and as competitive in the luxury markets as European brands have been. Again we are [Adiree] are constantly redefining the perceptions of fashion coming from the continent or being made in Africa” (Disu 2012). These images have

been combined into one storyboard in order to indicate how the event was represented and portrayed in 2012. Adiree is vested in the positive representation of African fashion practitioners and their fashion culture. In doing, so it positions itself as the pioneer of luxury African products, whilst operating within a European dominated market in New York.

The images used in the montage features all female models one black and two white females. To begin with the garments and accessories provided by participating designers including Kachi designs, Mirembe designs, Jo Black Craze, MABM Designs, Studio D'Maxsi, Afritalli and Ani Siyah.

The image in the right top row is a black model with short curly Afro haircut, wearing a sleeveless long-fitted formal gown with ruffles. The fabric used is silk. The model is posed front facing and looking straight into the camera, her right hand sits nicely on her waist while her left hand is stretched and glued to her side. The white background contrasts nicely with her black skin.

In the image below is a white female model in a black lace thigh-length dress. The sleeves on this dress are short and long, that is on the right shoulder is the long sleeveless while the left is short-sleeve. The model's face is forward facing and lowered, down while her body is twisted sideways, with her right leg raised on to a wooden chair, leaving her left knee slightly bent and toes pointed towards the chair. Her strappy high-heel sandals are silver grey in colour, to match the long silver necklace round her neck. Her hair is swept neatly off her face, to reveal her features, makeup in particular her blue lip stain. While her right palm rests on her raised thighs, her left elbow is bent. Behind the model's left elbow is a black transparent fabric floating in the air.

In the middle row top and bottom are two images behind a white background. The top

image is a black model sitting on the floor with her legs wide-open; her extended right arm rests elegantly on her right kneecap and grips an Ankara fabric clutch purse. Her left elbow is bent to rest on her left knee whilst touching the side of her head. She is wearing a yellow sleeveless one-shouldered strap gown, red lip stain and her short curly Afro hair. Her loose-fitting dress is raised up into her thighs, and folded in between her legs to provide cover for her underpants. She sits with her body forward-facing the camera, while her head is slightly tilted to the right side. She looks sideways away from the gaze of the camera.

In the fourth image, is a white model with short hair wearing a slim-fitted white blazer, Capri pant trousers and high heels strappy sandals. Her hair is parted at the right side of her head and gelled for the funky sleek look; her makeup is simple with blue lip stain. She is posed standing, with her right knee slightly bent, while her left leg is stretched. Forward facing and looking straight at the camera, her torso is curved and tilted. A blue scarf is wrapped over her right and left palms, her right hand is stretched over her head and her left hand is half raised to grip the other end of the scarf.

In the final column to the left, at the top of this image is a white model with short blond hair wearing unbuttoned blazer top, gold and green coloured multi-layered neck jewellery. Her make up is simple, except for her lips covered with blue lip stain and nails painted green. Facing forward and looking straight at the camera, with her elbows bent, the model grips her collars with both palms. In the final image is a white model with short black hair, parted as the side and sleeked to the back. With side facing posture, her head and facial features are barely visible. Looking away from the camera, her right leg is raised up revealing slightly bent knees, while she stands on

her left leg for balance. Her right elbow is raised and bent, and with her palm grips a multicoloured (pink, blue, purple black) printed clutch purse with tassels. Her left hand is placed behind at her back. In this image, the model is wearing an unbuttoned white blazer, a printed Ankara short sleeveless peplum dress and white open-toe wedge heel platform ankle boot.

In my appraisal and examination of these images, several themes have emerged including politics of representation, beauty practices and aesthetics, performance, female sexuality and domination. In the meaning making process, various devices (semantics and semiotics) have been employed in communicating ideas about Africa and AFWNY to different audiences. For example, in this montage, two white models are employed to perform the idea of luxury, using white bodies reinforces stereotypes and perceptions about black female bodies and sexuality. Yet, strategically, using white bodies signals and communicates the meaning that AFWNY is open to all people, and that products of black fashion practitioners are equally enjoyed by white consumers. Disu explains the rationale for its 2012 event theme, 'Untamed Luxury' "The campaign, photographed by Avaloni Studios and styled by Kiara Holt, reflects the unpolished side of high-end lifestyle. That is, the man or woman who is all about the luxury lifestyle who has a wild and contradictory "unsophisticated side to them as well", regardless of how "how class" one can be perceived to be. Those statement-making photos simultaneously represent the free spirits of the emerging African designers—their talent and unique fashionable aesthetics which cannot be tamed by social constraints" (Disu 2012). This implies that the use of one black and two white models are strategic decisions taken by the organisers, as it aims to be highly visual, and drawing the interests of specific audiences. Still, whiteness is associated with class, sophistication and luxury, while blackness is swept to the sides.

Furthermore, although, the textile commonly known as African prints are associated with African heritage (Rovine 2009; 2010), in these images are salient messages about the idea of African identity and heritage. These fabrics are in no way indigenous to Africa, the means of production are wholly owned by European and Asian companies, yet, the preferences and tastes of African women have played a central role in the popularity of these printed fabrics.

Image#10 2013 promotional campaign shoot - Titled Pattern of Sustainable Luxury (Adiree AFW - changed from Adiree Africa Fashion Week New York to Adiree Africa Fashion Week).

In this advertisement set against a light blue background colour with repeated layers of triangle or pyramid shapes in purple and yellow colours, is a photo of a black female model standing tall and straight with both hands on her waist. The model is dressed in a multi-toned short dress, with embroidery patterns on the neckline, the hem of the skirt and on both sides of the dress. The material used is a shiny fabric in purple, yellow mustard and black. The model wears glittering silver earrings. On her head is a headpiece, with minimal makeup on her face, a hair fascinator on her head and



brown chunky sandals. Her fingernails are covered in paint red. On her right hand is a ring shaped like a flower, and on her left wrist are two gold and cream coloured bangles.

Although, she appears poised with her head raised, front facing with shoulders held back. She looks over, beyond the camera, as if unaware of its presence.

The text: Patterns of sustainable luxury is packed with meaning, to begin with, it is a progressive continuation from the 2012 installation of AFWNY titled Untamed Luxury. This campaign is created to communicate the position of AFWNY within the

luxury fashion industry; it does this by adopting popular fashion discourse including 'ethical fashion practices', 'sustainable consumption' and the 'challenges of mass-production'. By adopting these existing issues, AFWNY situates the event as well as designers as intervening to fulfill a need. To illustrate, Disu reveals the distinctive characteristic of fashion practitioners "Brands from Africa have authentic and indigenous stories and in many cases, produce products that are one of a kind" (Disu 2013). This is one way of explaining the financial challenges facing African fashion practitioners in relation to mass production of their products. This message is carefully crafted to communicate the idea that fashion brands are also located in Africa, they offer bespoke and exclusive items to select clientele. Drawing from Jiyoung Kim and Ko (2012), luxury brands produce one-off, exclusive products i.e., dresses. They retain customers by providing novel values through quality products and services, customer management, retail strategies and innovative marketing mixes. Adiree is at an advantage, using marketing communicative mediums such as social media and public relations to compete and situate itself within the luxury industry. The rationale for moving into the luxury sector is well articulated in the press release "Luxury is an industry that is worth over 100 billion USD. The global demand for luxury goods has been consistently increasing at a rate of 25 to 50 percent for the past many years, with the only exception being the year 2009, during which the market experienced the impacts of the US sub-prime crisis. It is excited to see that the African luxury industry is now sharing the pie in a traditionally European dominated market" (AFWNY 2012). In other words, the luxury sector is a space that is dominated by Western design houses including Chanel and Louis Vuitton, and dominated by conglomerates such as Kering, IMG and LVMH. These companies and designer houses are considered as fashion industry leaders, "Luxury fashion business

is considered high value added with guaranteed high profit margin and secure regular customers” (Jiyoung Kim and Ko 2012). By taking the position of a luxury brand in a multi-trillion dollar industry, AFWNY communicates the message that African fashion producers are contenders in the business of fashion. With AFWNY and Adiree situated in New York City, a global fashion city with a mix of capital, resources, international media groups, immigrants and transnational diaspora, AFWNY is strategically positioned in the center where real economic impact and changes can be attained. For instance, AFWNY subverts mainstream fashion media discourse, by signifying and representing an idea of a luxury African fashion brand, one that is owned and operated by a Black African designer.

The semantic (terms), Adiree AFW - Africa Fashion Week New York, Where Fashion Began signifies and signals a brand that can be easily recognised.

Adirée

AFRICA FASHION WEEK JOINS THE NEW YORK
FASHION WEEK CALENDAR AFWNY 2014

THURSDAY
SEP04

FRIDAY
SEP05

SATURDAY
SEP06



Image#11Adiree - photo postcard digital advertisement of 2014 scheduling - Sept 04-06

This postcard is a digital announcement of the new scheduling of AFWNY. The text reads Adiree Africa Fashion Week New York joins the New York Fashion week calendar AFWNY 2014.

The days Thursday 04, Friday 05 and Saturday 06 September are explicitly stated to prevented ambiguity. Thus making it easy for people to remember, as well as save the image as a reminder on their computer devices and to share on social media platforms. By aligning AFWNY with mainstream fashion week, this is an attempt at diversification of models which Balance diversity has systematically stressed. It also provides an opportunity for higher visibility and exposure of AFWNY and its fashion practitioners.

Additionally, the advertisement features a black female model wearing white-feathered dress on the covers alongside the texts. The model is positioned with her back to the text and her hand right hand on her waist as she looks over her shoulder at the texts, thereby revealing her hairstyle. This is a cultural code recognised by young fashionistas and contemporaries.

Off The Runway

Africa Fashion Week 2014

The Business Exchange That Invests In Entrepreneurs,
Young Creatives & Women in the Multibillion Dollar Fashion Industry



THURSDAY
SEPTEMBER 4th
6 PM - 8 PM

Hosted By

UNITED NATIONS
FOUNDATION

Adiat Disu & Associates

801 2nd Ave, 9th Floor, NY NY 10017

Image#12 AFWNY 2014 Photo Advertisement of event itinerary - Africa fashion Week Master Class Off the Runway

This is another advertisement that was created by Adiree for the AFWNY 2014 event hosted at the United Nations Foundation offices in New York. In this image, are key texts including 'Off the Runway, Master Class; Africa Fashion Week 2014; Hosted by United Nations Foundations; Adiat Disu and Associates, September 4th, 6 - 8 pm.

Organisers describe the event as “the business exchange that invests in Entrepreneurs, young creative and women in the multibillion-dollar fashion industry” (AFWNY 2014).

In an online press release dated August 22 2014, the event Off the Runway is

described as 'the business exchange that invests in entrepreneurs, young creative and women in the multi-billion dollar fashion industry'. That is to say, this event is an investment forum to highlight business and investment opportunities for African practitioners in Africa. This is indicated by the line-up of African speakers comprising of motivational speakers and fashion practitioners (5 males and three females) whom the organisers deemed "as leaders committed to the advancement of women, entrepreneurship and Africa and have made a significant impact in the lives of others in Africa" (AFWNY Press Release 2014). To me this suggests, a juxtaposition of capitalist business opportunities and charitable cause using an engendered narrative i.e., women as passive spectators in their own realities. Also, the line-up of speakers reinforces the idea that women drive fashion while men set the agenda. To me any forum about women should be heavily shaped and driven by female narratives or a balance. On the other hand, as women are mostly portrayed as fashion workers, it is equally important for the male to have an understanding of how women are affected by working conditions and other factors.

Furthermore, the press release declared that a portion of the proceeds from tickets sold would benefit the Dikembe Mutombo Foundation. A Charitable organization established by the Congolese NBA player *Dikembe Mutombo* to improve the health, education and quality of life for the people of the Congo (www.dmf.org).

Although, AFWNY since its inception has donated to various charity organisations, the donation to the Dikembe Mutombo is strategic, as this foundation is linked with UN activities (Diallo 1999).

From 2010 to 2013, this is the first advertisement campaign that has on its covers an image of the skyline of New York City. This indicates that AFWNY deems its partnership with the United Nation as a remarkable progress. Nonetheless, being

affiliated with a globally recognised institution as the UN has the tendency to bring new opportunities and access to resources.



Image#13 Adiree photo postcard digital advertisements: Adiree grabbing global opportunities for Africa Fashion designers

This is an advertisement created by Adiree to promote its business services to include online marketing and advertising. This image is valuable for those who warrant quick insight into the services provided by Adiree. It is a marketing approach for modern businesses to represent their services in simple and visual terms, just as the business card, this is an online business card.

In this image is a hand gripping a clutch bag made of Ankara printed fabric. The text font and colours are a mix of Blue, Pink and dark brown to match the fabric and

background. This image has been selected in order to highlight some of the strategies employed by Adiree to compete in the luxury sector.



Image#14

Adiat Disu - Founder and Director AFWNY and Adiree

This image is a montage of two photos. Image one is a bust-size shot in which Adiat is seated and smiling. Her hair is made in long twists, which covers the left part of her face. She wears a fitted printed patterned short dress made from Ankara. A calm yet playful shot of a young black woman purported to be driving the growth of the African fashion industry from New York to Lagos.

Visually, this image communicates to spectators Disu's hair styling and Ankara patterned dress which are common cultural codes that signify cultural ties to Africa.

Image two: Full-length photo of Disu posing, in the background is the 2014 AFWNY backdrop. She wears her hair in long twists. She wears a long strapless and sleeveless dress that drapes to the floor. Her dress is a combination of materials including blue cotton, blue feathers and multicoloured floral printed Ankara.

In the white backdrop poster are keywords of partners and sponsors including Adiat Disu and Associates, AFWNY, Adiree PR and Communications, United Nations Foundation and Adiree Sustains Africa Program (ASAP).

Further, in this image, is the idea ASAP, my investigation reveal that this is a social responsibility program that was initiated by Adiree for emerging industries in Africa.

The central themes are

Promoting Africa's Growth in Style, through Education & Entrepreneurship

Awarding & Supporting Africa's Young Women Creative Entrepreneurs

Transforming Lives through Talent Grooming

Creating Success Stories That Inspire and Resonate Globally

Helping Brand Development, Business Management and Revenue Generation

It is a remarkable endeavour for young people of African descent to pioneer and elevate the African narratives and experiences; yet, careful consideration must be given to the wording and discourse used to describe these marginalized experiences.

Adiree as a Public relations and communications firm has found a business niche that appeals to African fashion practitioners globally dispersed. Adiree is driven to render positive representations of Africa in relation to African fashion design practices, narratives of African fashion culture and African peoples to global audiences. To me, its project ASAP can be considered as a form of social responsibility program. A common practice used by firms to assert themselves as pioneers of empowerment and agency (Richey and Ponte 2012). In a capitalist economy, it must be said, businesses are driven to make a profit, this involves maximizing and drawing resources (to include United Nations foundation; common practices i.e., Africa as a commodity to sell products, services and ideas), from various channels to achieve the aim and function effectively.

In conclusion: My analysis of these images indicates that the African fashion practitioners participating at Africa fashion week New York are well-known within

their immediate environments and communities of influence. Yet, these practitioners seek international exposure and global recognition for their brands and talents in globally recognised fashion capital such as New York, Paris or London. AFWNY as a platform offers opportunities for these local brands and transnational practitioners to become visible to global audiences. AFWNY aligns its vision to provide positive representations of African and break down stereotypes, with the aspirations of these African designers as indicated by its selection of specific African fashion designers. Also notable is the scheduling of AFWNY to coincide with mainstream fashion week (IMG) activities held in September, as well as the renaming of AFWNY to New York Fashion Week Africa.

More importantly, although in West African cultural viewpoint fashion is not considered to be as prestigious as science professions such as doctor and surgeon. Yet, Fashion (design and tailoring) is a key aspect of socialisation and daily experience. For example, fashion practitioner Rodney Emeka recounts his experiences of forgoing his passion in the arts, to pursue a career in the sciences due to pressure from family. His passion for the arts is attributed to his socialisation, growing up in a household with a tailor, his mother. Through her small-scale practice, she instilled in him the values of craftsmanship, creating, ownership and the belief that craftwork is crucial to survival and for sustenance.

Fashion capital cities are highly sought after and still considered by designers as the space to acquire brand recognition and reach global audiences. While African practitioners based on the continent do not talk about African heritage, Africans in diaspora talk African heritage as a precursor in their fashion design practices.

For local models, while being represented by a model agency is highly desirable and

can present better opportunities for work. Black models have had to actively position themselves in the industry by engaging with other creative workers such as makeup artists, photographers, and designers, stylists in collaborative, unpaid work to develop their practice and to be taken seriously in the fashion industry. Unlike the white counterparts, who are employed and recruited by agencies and magazines and paid for promotional and editorial campaigns.

In addition, to compete in the multi-trillion dollar capitalist industry and to reach global audiences, a major challenge is access to resources such as buildings, capital/revenue, investors, energy, entrepreneurship, information, expertise, management, and time.

The term luxury is a commercial strategy that has been adopted by Adiree in order to change western-led negative perceptions and stereotypical associations of Africa as primitive and uncivilised. The contention is that these narrow representations of Africa have created complex challenges, in particular economic opportunities, and ownership of means of production, exclusion and active participation in the global fashion markets. In analysing these images and written reports, evidence suggests that the aim of AFWNY is expose the design practices and talents of African fashion practitioners, as well as position Africa including narratives, sensibilities, repertoires and lived experiences in ways that uplift rather than oppress. Through AFWNY, Adiree is vested in changing the mindset of middle-class Africans living in different diasporas and on the continent to experience and desire African fashion brands. Using fashion as a medium, AFWNY is creating, defining and installing culture specific symbols into wider public discourse, highlighting the variety of African cultures, affirming cultural pride, forming empowering identities and influencing cultural viewpoints in relation to African fashion identity, creativity and innovation based on

digital communicative and marketing strategies.

Chapter 9

Africa Fashion Week New York: Leverage, Resources and Strategies

Introduction

The fashion cities of New York, London, Paris and Milan are bound to each other by the dynamics of economic globalization such as cheap labour, capitalist economy and social inequalities. In 2009, Africa Fashion Week New York emerged to address some issues perceived to be critical for the visibility and economic success of African practitioners who are Black in New York, and globally. These include representation of blackness, definition, identity, ownership, solidarity, community building, and education. This concept to provide a platform that centered the design practices of African fashion practitioners across major fashion capital cities in the West was initiated by Adiat Disu. The event is a mix of exhibition, trade and fashion show activities held annually in New York City.

Purported to be, and described as a pan African activity, the study interrogates the extent to which Africa Fashion Week New York advances Pan Africanism in the 21st Century? In this chapter I provide a general overview of the concept Africa Fashion Week, its emergence in New York City as a strategic site for empowering Black African fashion practitioners in the diaspora and strategies adopted in representing AFWNY to global audiences.

The concept Africa Fashion Week has rapidly proliferated across major cities from the African diasporas in Europe, Asia, Canada and North America to the African Continent. More specifically, Africa Fashion Week London, Spain, Paris, Italy, Berlin

and Washington are off shoots developed to promote the design practices of Black African fashion practitioners. Disu argues,

“I founded the Africa Fashion Week (in fashion capitals: New York, London, Paris, Milan, Berlin, Tokyo and LA) concept in 2009 (at age 21) with the drive and passion to promote and create a demand for African brands globally, mainly in fashion capitals. I had no idea that it would perpetuate others, let alone catch on as a trend” (Whoot Africa Interview with Adiat Disu 2015).

My observation of the different encounters of AFW as found across these major cities, suggests AFWNY’s emergence is in response to the political, social, cultural and economic contexts in which African fashion practitioners are considered as disempowered and powerless members of the population. While the concept has evolved due to different implementations across space and time, AFWNY remains the source of the idea. This chapter also identifies the ways in which capitalism allows African immigrants to incorporate into the wider political economy of the global fashion industry, using the city of New York as its base. I begin with the history of AFWNY

History of Africa Fashion Week New York

AFWNY fulfils several aims; to begin with it emerged as a medium to provide proportionate and positive representations of the design practices of African people, to increase appreciation and confidence in African cultural heritage and to promote economic advantage for Black African practitioners in fashion. It is also perceived as a platform for inspiration, exchange and identity formation.

Africa Fashion Week New York held for the first time in 2010, in resistance to the struggle for visibility, self-definition and exposure of African fashion practitioners

including models, designers and other creative workers to wider audiences. Since then the event holds annually in September, over a three-day period. The event broadly attracts and is targeted at Black African fashion practitioners and consumers from different diasporas and the African Continent. More recently, the event New York fashion Week Africa 2015, which held on 11th September 2015 to coincide with mainstream annual New York Fashion Week activities, indicates AFWNY is regarded by internal stakeholders as an essential part of the Western fashion system in that it operates within the same geographical location. I analyse AFWNY as a particular intervention in the political economy of the fashion industry, foregrounding African commercial interests, stylization and aesthetics.

It is common tendency in popular culture (media) to homogenise and make unfounded stereotypical generalisations about Africa, African people, traditions and customs. Particularly relevant to this study is the generalisation that African people all over the world are similar in outlook. This thinking erases the interruptions and dislocations endured by African people as a result of the Transatlantic slavery, colonialism and imperialism, and migration. Furthermore, it creates tensions and omits the differences in thought, beliefs, cultural outlook and social values that have been acquired by African people living within different spaces and time. Owing to the complex interplay and processes, I situate AFWNY as a distinct transnational politics of identification in the metropolis (New York City) as it originated from the consciousness of Africans in the diaspora, as a means to survival. However, fashion practitioners living and working on the African Continent have long recognised New York City as a global fashion center and platform for gaining international success. Arise fashion collective is a prime example.

Arise Fashion Collective and Africa Fashion Week New York

In 2008, Nigerian media publisher Nduka founded Arise Magazine. The magazine is described as Africa's first and foremost international style magazine and a global style and culture magazine targeted at young, educated and affluent readers. Arise is published quarterly and sold in over 20 countries. The magazine was initially launched in Lagos Nigeria, followed by a European launch in London in 2008. The American launch was held during Mercedes-Benz New York Fashion Week in 2009. The global lifestyle magazine celebrates and highlights African achievement in fashion, music, culture and politics. Just like Africa Designs, the magazine aims to provide positive portrayal of Africa, in particular to highlight the contributions of African people in contemporary societies across the world.

The magazine publisher Nduka and editor Helen Jennings are completely conscious of fashion's crucial role in the creation and diffusion of meanings, produce and services in the global economy. For instance, Arise created the African Fashion Collective, for three seasons, from 2009 to 2011, the collective showcased designs and collections from the African continent. The collective is a group of extraordinary African fashion designers, selected and sponsored by the magazine to represent the African fashion design industry at Mercedes-Benz Fashion Week New York. The Arise Magazine Fashion collective was the catalyst for the inception of Africa Fashion Week New York in 2009.

In 2009, the first Arise Fashion Collective, in 2009 comprised of four African labels including Xuly Bet by Lamine Badian Kouyate; Tiffany Amber by Folake Coker; Momo by Fati Asibelua and Stoned Cherrie by Nkhensani Nkosi. The fashion show

featured Black fashion models including Sessilee Lopez, Arlenis Sosa, Chanel Iman and Oluchi and attracted members of the African communities in New York to include Adiat Disu.

Adiat Disu and the African Fashion Network

Adiat Disu is credited as the founder and originator of Africa Fashion Week New York and Adiree. Adiat Disu is a Nigerian immigrant and a graduate of information technology and corporate communications.

Disu attended the first Arise African Fashion collective group presentation at Mercedes Benz Fashion Week New York in 2009. The 15 minutes long fashion show featured the collection of four designers namely Lamine Badian Kouyate from Mali; Folake Coker from Nigeria; Fati Asibelua from Nigeria and Nkhensani Nkosi from South Africa. The presentation was described as a spectacle, for instance the event was opened by the singer Grace Jones. With a multiracial cast of models including the most celebrated African-American male model Tyson Beckford and the black supermodels, Alek Wek and Chanel Iman (Alexander 2009).

In an interview, Adiat revealed that she was dissatisfied with the time duration of the event and she wanted to do something about it.

“we are too big, too beautiful to be restricted to that limited amount of time. New York needs to get more time with us, more time to explore the beauty that comes from Africa” (Interview B 2011).

Although, the Arise African Fashion collective showcase in 2009, was described as a spectacular display of vibrant designs, craftsmanship from the African Continent.

However, Disu argued that the fashion show was restricted to a just few minutes and was entirely marginal to the main event. She decided that African designers needed more time to express, articulate, share and centre their stories and lived experiences. This marked the beginning of Africa Fashion Week.

Disu founded the public relations company Adiree to co-ordinate the activities of the first and subsequent Africa Fashion Weeks in New York. The debut event held in 2010 featured designers from various countries in Africa and those of the African diasporas. The event included exhibitions, runway shows and industry networking events. Among the featured designers were Frank Osodi, Kosibah, and Côté Minou. Also in attendance were members of the press, media, celebrities and fashion insiders including New York Times, New York Daily News, NFL NY Jets Safety James Ihedigbo, Supermodel Oluchi and Miss World 2001 Agbani Darego.

AFWNY is an African-centred activity, staged by African migrants in New York and attracts the interests of various audiences. Disu believes that the African fashion industry is fragmented with no central agenda and objective, therefore she is convinced that the African fashion industry needs to be professionally structured i.e., business structure, professional and creative workers, production companies and supply chain. She proposed the creation of an African fashion network across western fashion cities including London, Milan, Paris and New York. Within these cities, the Africa fashion network would serve a number of key objectives. To begin with, a forum to educate and shape fashion industry practices. Secondly, to develop an exchange system to valorise the cultural production of Black producers through different channels, thirdly, claim a stake in the multi-billion dollar industry, and finally portray a positive image of Africa, its cultures, values and peoples.

AFWNY can be described as an ambitious political and economic project. For instance, it aims to portray a positive image of Africa, and African people. This notion of correcting the inaccurate portrayal of African people and stories is not unique to Disu and AFWNY as it has been tackled using different mediums including arts, literature, music, philosophy and culture. For example, *Things Fall Apart* was written to criticise and counter the negative portrayal and stereotypes of African cultures and peoples (Achebe 1994; 2001). In this sense, Africa Fashion Week New York is a political platform and forum. In that it is part driven to counter negative portrayals of Africa and African people in Western mainstream media. This indicates imagery and perception are considered to be tied to economic opportunities. The platform serves an economic purpose in that it aims to disseminate and circulate the design products of fashion designers in New York. AFWNY also addresses wider contemporary issues as ethical and sustainable production of fashion. This includes fair trade issues, working conditions, and exportation of African product in a fair and free market. As an instrument of change, Africa Fashion Week is not simply about buying and selling. It also raises the issues of trade and sustainable fashion production practice.

Africa Fashion Week: Strategic Approach

Ever since the debut of Africa Fashion Week New York (AFWNY) in 2010, the organiser has become recognised as transnational global powerhouse. In that, AFW the concept itself has proliferated, across American cities. Using the city as a strategic site for economic and political city, disadvantaged women, immigrants and black practitioners have created for themselves African-centered fashion events, thus embedding themselves within the national community and global fashion industry.

For instance, in 2015, Disu was honoured as one of Forbes magazine's youngest most powerful African women under 30.

As has been previously mentioned fashion is an economic booster in that it is used to recreate dominant values and meanings. For instance, it increases the reputation of cities as commercial, cultural and touristic destinations (Hopkins 2012). New York City already enjoys its reputation as a fashion capital of the world – with the Mercedes Benz New York fashion week, flagship luxury stores, boutiques, magazines and over 5000 industry show rooms. New York city is often regarded as the place where fashion ideas take root and trends are defined. The cluster of fashion and creative workers is not enough to make New York the capital of fashion, the City is the switching center of ideas as a range of multinational organisations (Banks) and institutions (education and cultural) including the UN, Fashion Institute of Technology (FIT), Conde Nast (Publisher of Vogue magazines), IMG (International Management Group owner of New York Fashion Week), the annual Met Ball are located there. Specifically, in relation to the cultural industries, New York city is regarded as the launching grounds for the success of entertainers such as Madonna, and international businesses, such as CR magazine launched in 2012 by the former editor of Vogue Paris (Sassen 2006; <http://www.crfashionbook.com/>).

I now turn to some of the strategies adopted by Adiree to coordinate and promote AFWNY fashion activities.

Public Relations

In 2011, I found the AFWNY website while wandering mindlessly in virtual space. The highly visual, high tech and interactive features of the website captured my

interest. My attention was retained as I read that the Mayor of New York City Michael Bloomberg had endorsed AFWNY (AFWNY 2010 Press Release). I said to myself, this is worth checking out, if the Mayor can support this, then the organiser must be highly influential and enterprising. I started following the activities of AFWNY and its founder on social media platforms as well as media coverage of it received (Arise 360, CNN international).

Public relations capture interests and retain attention. It is a medium highly regarded by organisations, in particular political parties to describe the communication activities of organisations (Grunig 1992). AFWNY communicate its activities using a range of techniques including press releases, publications in blogs and articles and audiovisual materials including videos, and images. Also Adiree, organiser of AFWNY performs several functions including publicity, promotion, media relations and marketing support to communicate event activities, values and as a way to interact with various audiences. It is argued that the function of public relations is more than communication; another function is to formulate public policy that is working with government officials to create policies (Grunig 1992). Sometimes, however, the organisation does not have to work with government officials to create policy, government officials utilise public enterprise to promote their own political agenda. For instance, earlier in 2010, the Mayor of New York proclaimed July as the social media week in order to celebrate how social media and new technologies are changing business transaction, especially in New York. AFWNY proceeded to use the month of July to stage its annual event activities. In its press releases and on its websites, it claims the Mayor of New York endorsed AFWNY. This to me communicates the notion that the mayor personally put a stamp of approval on the event. By staging its annual event activities in July, AFWNY

conveys the message that the Mayor endorsed the event. So this is to indicate that public relations are an effective communication tool for organisations to present favourable messages to the public.

Adiree has successfully created AFWNY as a brand, drawing from public narratives, discourse and meanings. For instance, Disu describes her mission as at AFWNY and Adiree as, “Helping other entrepreneurs achieve their goals and vision; and rebranding people’s perceptions about Africa” (Whoot Africa Interview with Adiat Disu 2015). Drawing on the discourse on Africa, AFWNY is an effective medium for the branding and commodification of Africa (Ponte and Richey 2012). In this process of commodifying Africa, contemporary values and meanings are assigned to Africa, for instance, the continent is re-presented via language of texts and images as producers of luxury goods (Abrahamsen 2012), as opposed to the customary Eurocentric practice of representing Africa as the primitive, dark continent (Hawk 1992). AFWNY adapts communication strategies to shift the discourse about Africa away from meanings such as uncivilised, savage and primitive (Hochschild 1999; Ejorh 2006). By so doing, it presents to audiences a different lens and set of values from which Africa may be viewed including skilful, design thinking, quality product and innovative services.

Furthermore, in creating a brand that will appeal to the fashion industry e.g. Africa as a production and consumption destination, AFWNY utilise common cultural codes associated with fashion, including fashion photography as a medium for creating and conveying powerful visual messages. Disu sums this up perfectly.

“With Africa rising as a result of macro and micro economic developments, political development, you have more individuals on the continent inspired to move products and more people from the US, looking to enter Africa’s

markets (such as Nigeria with 900 million potential consumers), such need for an African-focused, pr and media agency is necessary, thus Adiree. Our first endeavour; developing the retail industry and contributing to the Africa's Fashion Industry were again, a burden on my heart, which I had to answer to" (Whoot Africa Interview with Adiat Disu 2015).

In its attempt to provide positive cultural representations of Africa, Adiree has created a role for itself to become recognised as the business management solutions provider and fashion communication expert. It recognises the exclusion of African related brands within mainstream channels and that African markets are emerging markets with immense potential.

Disu explains the position and contributions of Africa in the global fashion apparatus:

"While about 44% of the population in New York is part of the African Diaspora there are very few African brands that are given the opportunity to showcase or be a part of New York Fashion Week festivities. Africa is the inspiration for clothing and brands, and it has become the range and widely adopted by many. We simply wanted to inform the international scene and the world of the potential of Africa", (Whoot Africa Interview with Adiat Disu 2015).

AFWNY is described as a platform for African fashion practitioners in that it recognises that these practitioners encounter a range of challenges, most notable is access and opportunities to showcase at mainstream fashion week activities. Thus, AFWNY is created with the intention of giving opportunities to African fashion practitioners in New York, as well as to give people of African descent a medium in which economic benefits may be gained through the commodification of African heritage and cultures.

AFWNY is created to operate within the framework of the global capitalism, in which personal profits, individualism are promoted. The promise of financial independence

for African fashion practitioners is communicated using prevailing ideas (Pan African) and values (Entrepreneurship) permitted within the capitalist economy. This idea is explained better by Disu,

“As an entrepreneur I’m focused on establishing pan-African entities that I love. Two major traits that all of these entities have in common are the following: Helping other entrepreneurs achieve their goals and vision and shifting “Rebranding People’s Perceptions” about Africa and developing Africa through public relations, communications and media” (Whoot Africa Interview with Adiat Disu 2015)

This indicates, Adiat Disu recognised a niche in the fashion industry, and as capitalism permits innovation and entrepreneurship, AFWNY is the product. To illustrate, located in the fashion capital city New York, it can be argued that based on the characteristics of the city from which it operates i.e., competition and free market economy, Adiree is driven by pure market economics (demand and supply), the need to acquire economic power and claim a stake within the multi-trillion dollar luxury industry.

In 2012, Adiree re-defined itself as a luxury group; this is to convey a specific meaning that the company is relevant and influential with a strong focus on product development and promotion (Okonkwo 2007). It is argued that shifts in political and economic system, globalisation, technological advancements, changing attitudes in spending patterns (Sassen 2006) have increased competition, the emergence of new luxury markets (e.g. China, India and Russia) and lowered barriers to entry in the sector (Okonkwo 2007). Operating from the fashion capital city, AFWNY a luxury brand provides a source of identity for African fashion practitioners. The location in New York City is the reason African fashion practitioners associate themselves with AFWNY and Adiree. And in turn Adiree creates and sustains the interests and

attraction of consumers and the desire for African fashion from New York.

New Media Technologies

Technological advances have simplified as well as facilitated access to extensive information to bring greater opportunities for awareness and understanding of class-consciousness. Therefore, technologies have facilitated the creation and designation of AFWNY as a black cultural production, this is to suggest technologies is useful in creating positive representations, constructing identities and self definitions that are crucial to the ownership of African agency and economic group power. For instance, AFWNY uses new technologies to create new interpretations and contest dominant interpretations of African realities, past and future and identities of the African people globally dispersed. In doing so, AFWNY creates a sense of community and connection with other fashion practitioners. Disu acknowledges the technological influence

“We are architects in multi-cultural content (digital and print) and events, targeting diversity, women, youth, and emerging markets (i.e., Africa). We especially take pride in developing and marketing premium ethical and social enterprising brands which we consider “the new face of luxury” (Whoot Africa Interview with Adiat Disu 2015).

Technology also plays a central role in the transmission of meanings about AFWNY to global audiences. As I didn't have to travel to New York, I have been able to gather data including interviews, videos, images and covering the event activities and designers involved. According to Disu, her vision for AFWNY is to promote a different version of Africa. To do this, new media technologies have been

deployed and have proven highly effective. The event uses a range of technologies including multimedia videos, pod casts, blogs and digital adverts in traditional magazines as well as online media. Through new media, AFWNY mediates knowledge and information about Africa, and African fashion design practices to audiences without having to travel to Africa.

Fashion

AFWNY has captured the interests of diverse audiences in the diaspora; this is particularly due to the careful selection of trained and skilled fashion designers and producers showing at AFWNY. Disu believes Africa fashion is generating and creating awareness of the design practices of African practitioners.

“You’re seeing that the promotion of Africa Fashion outside of Africa begin to heighten the interest and intrigue individuals concerning Africa and it’s propensity to produce quality brands and for potential business partnerships” (Whoot Africa Interview with Adiat Disu 2015).

AFWNY adopts a range of cultural codes to encode meanings of about African styles to people already part of the culture – the African diaspora and Western audiences. For the African diaspora, AFWNY utilises memory of past achievements to inspire consumers and producers. For instance, AFWNY centres African cultural heritage in that it draws from Africa’s influences in the fashion industry (Global Post Interview with Adiat Disu 2013):

“Fashion from Africa has a history of trade and creativity. African Fashion and style has transitioned from decade to decade. The traditional African style has decided to make its presence known to the fashion market, and at the hands of new creators. The various countries in Africa each have a definable fashion piece that highlights its culture” (Whoot Africa Interview with Adiat Disu 2015).

This indicates African fashion is considered to be related to trade and creativity. Creativity brings about change, i.e., changes from the traditional African style to reflect modern living as imagined by African fashion designers. Therefore, there are several items that represent African fashion in that, various countries have a distinct piece of clothing that reflects its culture. AFWNY represents an opportunity to claim and control images of Black people.

Meanings and Transformations of AFWNY

AFWNY was held for the first time in September, to coincide with mainstream Mercedes Benz Fashion Week New York Spring/Summer 2015. This is a significant transformation to have occurred in the meaning construction of AFWNY. Historically, the event held annually in July. Disu reveals the motive for this new change, as well as the importance of New York,

And also, New York is probably one of the largest cultural hubs in the world. Every nation can be found in New York City. By joining in on the Fashion Week activities in September, we can use our platform to promote up and coming African brands” (Whoot Africa Interview with Adiat Disu 2015).

Positioning AFWNY in the mainstream fashion calendar suggests that AFWNY event activities will be running concurrently as part of the New York Fashion Week held in September. The rationale for this scheduling is to situate AFWNY activities within the existing framework of fashion week activities, as well as provide more opportunities i.e., exposure to international press and buyers deemed necessary to ensure the visibility of African fashion designers to key players within the industry.

Africa Fashion Week New York facilitates connections amongst various stakeholders, in particular consumers and producers. To illustrate, Disu asserts that

AFWNY

“provides a platform for designers to showcase their products and also establish a community that allows a kid go to school and allow a mother have a business” (Interview B, Multimedia 2011).

This indicates that fashion is a selected medium because of the influences it exerts.

For example, Disu observes that:

“From an interactive marketing standpoint, Adiree has experienced that events bringing together fashion designers, African textiles, apparel and footwear exhibitors, and leading buyers from across Africa, Europe, and the United states to facilitate sourcing relationships and networking opportunities will continue to develop the African Fashion Industry” (Whoot Africa Interview with Adiat Disu 2015).

AFWNY is non-government funded and independently executed. That is to say, AFWNY operates within an urban economy embedded in a global economy but still manages to bring those designers outside in the margins into mainstream fashion discourse. AFWNY is a significant occurrence as it fosters the gathering and congregation of Black African people to construct and express meanings. AFWNY provides spaces for African practitioners to represent their own interests and create their own stories. This is better explained by Disu who claims that Black African fashion designers are creating economic opportunities for African people on the continent. African designers she suggests are not solely driven by economic incentives but rather by ethical values to create jobs for their kin people on the Continent.

“The fact is that at the end of the day, these designers create economic opportunities for the people from their country. I think that is the real beauty of fashion... not being superficial.. more so who it benefits at the end of the day” (Interview B, multimedia 2011).

AFWNY is also constructed as a platform for building solidarity with charitable

causes and underpaid workers within the value chain. For example in 2010, proceeds from the week's activities were donated to non-profit organizations to symbolise and express support for African related causes. The charities were Bisila Bokoko African Literacy Project, Hope Africa Foundation and Fashion Feeds Foundation.

Following the descriptive account of AFWNY above, the remainder of this chapter is a discussion of the findings along four categories as informed by the literature namely cultural representation, identity formation, self-definition, and economy. This is to identify connection between the data and the literature review and see where they converge/intersect and diverge.

Cultural Representations

As indicated in Chapter 1 and 3, fashion is highly regarded in Western cities. Fashion is regarded as an economic booster (Hopkins 2012), tourist attraction (Skov 2006) and spaces for socio-cultural exchanges and networking (Rocamora 2009; Entwistle 2011). AFWNY operates within this space, in New York City and draw resources from the city's infrastructure in order to become a part of the "infrastructure for global civil society" and rather than confining African fashion practices to project nationalist and racialized meanings and identities (Eicher 1995; Rabine 2002; Rovine 2015). Thus, New York City enables the experience of participation in global, non-state networks (Sassen 2006), more so, AFWNY enables African fashion practitioners to contribute to global fashion discourse, as indicated by the array of media attention and coverage the event has generated. To include CNN international, BBC, Forbes, Arise Television and other national and international news outlets.

Drawing from Said (1978), language constructs its own truth and there are no real truths outside of it. Eurocentric view of black and Africa as primitive, unproductive and underdeveloped (Hawk 1992; Wallace 2005), this to me is a system of representation and truth wherein the oppressed are marginalised and rendered powerless (Spivak 1988). However this system of representation exists as it contributes the reproduction of European cultural imperialism and hegemony (Hall 1997). The implications are that European hegemony and imperialism has created the conditions for complex formations, representations and diverse understandings of African subjectivities as opposites of European subjectivities (Fanon 1963).

Representation is the production and exchange of meaning through language (Hall 1997). AFWNY as a current practice of African fashion practitioners represents a shift and transformation of identity, knowledge, power, and black alienation in white capitalist society. AFWNY creates meaning as well as diffuses meanings about the multiple identities and experiences of black fashion practitioners and Africa. Hall (1989) argues, what united black people was no longer the most important, rather it was the study of diversity in black culture and its new cultural politics of representation.

Cultural representation is crucial, in the sense that AFWNY serves as a conduit and medium to produce and manage knowledge about Africa, fashion identities, fashion knowledge about African fashion and the design practices of Black fashion practitioners (Rabine 2002). In a quick google search of Fashion Week in New York, New York Africa Fashion Week is among the top ten listings. This indicates technology is a crucial component used in mediating knowledge, creating meanings and new dialogues about Africa, African identities and African fashion.

In the meaning creation process AFWNY utilises language to create symbolic

representations of black African fashion design practices. For instance on its website www.africafashionweeknewyork.com a mix of language, signs and visual imagery (Barthes 1967) used to define and describe the garments and clothing designed by African designers include ‘high fashion, luxury, fashion, African style, haute, African fashion, African inspired looks. As a medium for mediating knowledge and producing meaning about African fashion practitioners, the website creates and publishes blog postings and featured articles about events, (i.e., Black history month) fashion designers, brands, the countries from which they originate as well as their inspirations. To illustrate, in the section titled Designer Profile, on the website, cultural codes and keywords typically used include Africa, African heritage, and female designers. Article captions/title typically reads:

“Twin sisters are taking over the fashion industry! Mataano, founded by Somali twin sisters Ayaan and Idyl Mohalim are continuing to break ground” (April 27, 2012)

“African-Australian designer duo is bringing haute, funky fresh design” (January 10 2013).

“Born in Nigeria, Fumilayo Csilla Deri is a London/Budapest based fashion designer. Funlayo Deri pieces are luxurious and wearable” (AFW, February 6, 2013).

While AFWNY attracts African practitioners from diverse social-cultural landscapes, it serves as a medium for emerging designers to gain exposure, even if they have not participated at the annual AFWNY fashion show or other activities. In this sense, AFWNY scavenge for, and garner African fashion designers in order to promote the different spaces and identities of these African designers. Thus showing the global dispersal of African people and places (countries) in which they are incorporated.

This is not so different from how Vogue and other fashion magazines operate. Godart (2012) argues that fashion meaning is created by fashion gatekeepers such as press and media editors, who select from a range of clothing/garments what is fashionable and what is not. To me, AFWNY has adapted conventional industry practices as well as common approaches to create and disseminate meanings about the design practices of African practitioners.

AFWNY activities can be divided into two distinct spheres, namely real time (physical events) and online. First, interactions at AFWNY occur through a range of activities such as fashion shows, exhibition and seminars. In relation to its online presence, AFWNY use technologies in creating and diffusing meanings, and to communicate the meaning that African fashion is global, transnational spanning across the conventional boundaries of race, national, gender and ethnic identification. Online medium such as digital technologies, social media including Facebook, are used to disseminate meanings about Africa and African fashion practitioners as creative, innovative, high fashion, luxurious and classy. To me, this reflects contemporary values predominantly associated with Western civilisation i.e., innovation and advancement (Beward and Gilbert 2006). There are several contradictions in constructing and representing Africa and African fashion practitioners this way. Firstly, African practitioners are represented as a distinct group of people, characterised as young, trans-global, educated and an upper class social standing. Indirectly, it renders the design practices of the highly skilled, Lagos-based tailors as local and invisible from the global stage. The fashion designers participating at AFWNY are distinct by virtue of their class membership and access to upward mobility.

New media technologies now serve as the dominant medium of communication for the cultural industries including commerce, politics and diffusion of ideas and culture (Hopkins 2012). Technology facilitates greater access to information, building networks and participation in the global economy (Maathai 1995). Advances in digital technology suggest diffusion of power, formally monopolised by the fashion conglomerates as Kering and LVMH, with fashion week activities concentrated around four Western cities including New York, London, Milan and Paris. Today, increased competition from new emerging markets around the world is destabilising old powers. Technology facilitates rapid transmission and dissemination of ideas, services, for instance, individuals with digital cameras and video devices send byte-sized information in easily accessible forms across space and time. New media technologies such as e-commerce, electronic emails and cloud storage systems, social media platforms, online TV and pod casts mediate relationships, connections, consumption and production (Rocamora 2012).

Identity formation

In my study of AFWNY and its history, I am of the opinion that it is equally important to focus on its founder Adiat Disu, in that Disu is the driver of the AFWNY and Adiree. I analyse the proliferation of AFWNY in particular Adiat Disu's construction of African fashion Week New York as a reflection of her social and cultural capital. I now draw from Bourdieu's (1986) theory of cultural capital. Disu's understanding and knowledge of fashion, public relations and Africa is accumulated through migration, her socialisation and her class membership. From Bourdieu analysis, cultural capital is the accumulation of knowledge, behaviours, skills that one can tap into to demonstrate one's social status, and cultural competence in the society.

Disu is a Nigerian-Ghanaian immigrant in New York. She worked at the multinational organisation IBM following her graduation from Bentley University, New York, where she majored in communications and IT. I argue that her migration from Nigeria to U.S., her education in New York provide access to different resources and forms of knowledge, are cultural capital in the embodied state (Bourdieu 1986). Cultural capital exists in the embodied state, this is manifested in Disu's knowledge and awareness of fashion practices, public relations, communication management and English language. Bourdieu argues that individuals act out and display embodied form of cultural capital in social interactions, relations and performance with others. For instance, her knowledge of public relations is reflected in the media coverage and attentions she has received from CNN international and Arise 360 (Interview B 2011 and Interview C 2011). Disu's disposition and comportment affirms her knowledge, social standing and class. Also on the AFWNY website, her achievement as founder of AFW concept across major cities in the West is publicly stated for all to see.

AFWNY is an apt illustration of cultural capital in the objectified and institutionalised states (Bourdieu 1986). As an object AFWNY is used as a medium to convey specific meanings about Africa and African fashion identities to global audiences, in particular international press and media. Furthermore, in the institutionalised state, Disu is ranked and measured according to her academic qualification, and title as the founder of AFWNY and Adiree.

Knowledge of the economic system, in particular business transactions and management acquired through education and work experience are necessary in social relations. Disu's tacit knowledge of the political economy in which she is situated as a black Nigerian migrant in New York city is a valuable asset, therefore, her cultural

capital plays a central role in the process of constructing AFWNY as a meaningful system of representation.

On the issue of system of representation, participants at AFWNY are defined according to country of origin, place of birth and host country. This is one method used at AFWNY to resist the homogenisation of African practitioners. It further indicates the economic and political purposes of AFWNY. For instance, it is alleged that 70 percent of participating designers at the 2010 event were international visitors from the African continent. These self-funded designers rationalise the trip to New York as financial investment in the quest for global recognition and success. On the material level, African practitioners encode symbolic meanings into their design practices thus garments, clothes exhibited at AFWNY project national, ethnic, and religious identities. These culturally encoded meanings are evident in the type of textile, fabric, cut, patterns, and techniques adopted during the garment making process. Designers utilise a wide range of fabrics i.e., Ankara/African print, chiffon, aso oke, kente, cotton, silk in their design practices. This indicates that African fashion is not simply 'traditional costume' (Allman 1995), but practical everyday wear as a way to communicate ideas about culture, race, class, gender, nationality and ethnicity. For instance, in creating her collection Paris-based Adama Paris, utilised local fabrics i.e., African print in creating a tailored-business style, thus introducing new uses for the African print. This ensures cultural continuity as the African print remains the preferred fabric among the lower classes. Most importantly, it also reveals that African fashion designers operate within different segments of the fashion industry, typically in the small scale prêt-a-porter (Skov 2006).

In its online AFWNY magazine, African designers are described in ways that reflect and represent heterogeneous identities, i.e., 'African-Australian' fashion

designer reveals the intersecting parts of identities across two different geographical locations. AFWNY manages the identities of African fashion designers, and Africa through a system of representation. For example in order to project African designs as luxurious and modern, images created are coded to meet the approval of consumers and mainstream fashion gatekeepers including buyers, press. An example of this impression management is evidenced in the creation of AFWNY's annual promotional campaign. A team of experts including photographer, models, wardrobe stylists, hair stylists, makeup artist and creative director (Disu) get together to create promotional images for its media press release. These images are strikingly beautiful, sharp and polished.

However, to me these images are staged, in that they are created to manage impressions and to convey the message that African fashion identity is innovative, and productive. On the basis of the literature, my findings reveal that although race plays a central role in determining the material outcomes for African fashion practitioners, identity is beyond the outcome of socialisation within a given environment, it is also managed (Goffman 1969).

Self-definition

The power to self-define has been highlighted in the literature on Pan Africanism (Nkrumah 1964) and Black feminist thought (Collins 2009). For the marginalised and oppressed, self-definition is crucial in the formation of identity and position taking in the society. Self-definition is one way to resist taken-for granted definitions and established boundaries foisted on the individual i.e. Black body, via colonial knowledge claims of the world. A part of the impression management

strategy at AFWNY, is self-definition. An instance of this self-definition can be seen in the description of AFWNY defined as

“a consortium of African designers worldwide (those on the continent and outside of the continent), creative professionals (www.Adiree.com), NGO’s, small to medium sized businesses, chambers of commerce, and those interested in benefiting both in the US and Africa through successful promotion and establishment of the African Fashion Industry”

The term ‘consortium’ signifies association. Therefore African fashion is regarded as global association of sectors and industries bounded together by trade and profits. This to me indicates a shift from “emotional, traditional and mystical basis” for African identity and solidarity to more calculated and rational action (Weber 1965; Turner 1996). Evidence that AFWNY is a calculated activity is seen in Disu’s rationalisation for AFWNY

“You may see easier access and promotion of African designers based in Europe and North America, but I don’t believe it is limited to designers based in these areas. As you know, African designers can be well known and successful on the continent, however those that are competitive and garnering more support are those who are able to travel globally (specifically, in Fashion Capitals like New York). What buyers, press and fashion enthusiast need is a bridge to discovering these African designers, time to discover and increase trade and investment opportunities. This can only occur if Adiree has the support and companionship of organizations and programs that reinforce African reform efforts, provide funding and training for fashion designers, establish good governance, transparency, sustainable democracy and human rights in Africa” (Whoot Africa Interview with Adiat Disu 2015)

Three key issues emerging from the quote above are firstly, the recognition of capitalist cities such as New York and London as the centres of success for international fashion designers. Secondly, unique set of challenges including underdevelopment, lack of democracy, abuse of human rights, and lack of support for human resource development, contribute to the invisibility of African fashion

practitioners in the global fashion industry. Finally, Adiree, the New York based public relations and communications company will mediate as the middleman to connect foster trade and investment for international investors in Africa.

To provide an analysis I draw from Weber's theory of rationalisation, "as a set of interrelated social processes by which the modern world had been systematically transformed" (Turner 1996: xix). Processes of globalisation have transformed contemporary societies, as boundaries and local traditions are broken down and old certainties are challenged. Operating within a capitalist economic system, Disu's rationalisation for AFWNY is on a commodification basis. AFWNY garners the interests of African fashion practitioners as well as media coverage in that it aligns with their aspirations, generates specific world-view and fulfils a purpose i.e., administration of African fashion industry. However Disu's interests as represented by her statement above are separate from the purposes of Pan Africanism. While Pan Africanism considers geographical location, Africa as the center for liberation of African people against all forms of oppression, in particular economic exploitation (Nkrumah 1965), AFWNY diverges from the tenets of Pan Africanism in its choice of geographical location – New York City.

Economy

Africa is deemed the next 'fashion frontier for fashion retailing'; its apparel and footwear market is worth 31 billion dollar (BOF 2012). The perception is the African market offers unique investment opportunities for foreign investors and Black capitalists.

Based on the literature, Pan Africanism and Black feminist thought, described

capitalism as an oppressive economic system that creates tensions and conflicts in society, for instance conflict arise between Black and White, African worldview and European worldview, Nigerian and Ghanaian etc. These conflicts and tensions arise because power and access to material, economic and political resources are unevenly distributed in the society.

Albeit, AFWNY espouse some basic tenets of Pan Africanism i.e., resistance against oppression and exploitation, unity, community solidarity, ownership and knowledge creation, the event is created and operates within a capitalist economic system. Underpinned by socialist principles, Pan Africanism ideology advances the distribution of power and resources among societal members and rejects the concentration of the means of production in the hands of individuals. Unlike Capitalism, Pan Africanism advocates the eradication of the capitalism system which favors profit generation and the exploitation of workers in the society. To me this suggests that AFWNY is a social product of its environment, therefore the platform can be described as creating a space within capitalist economy, thus perpetuating systems of oppression. The prevailing economic system is unequal in that it perpetuates inequalities among people on the basis of nationality, class, gender and race. AFWNY has opportunities to make real impact, however, its omission of the historical root cause of the challenges encountered today, means ignorance is fully reproduced.

By way of summary AFWNY operates from within a Western political economy, therefore Western social cultural outlook including values, tastes and ideas are dominant. Drawing from the literature, diaspora is the point of convergence for AFWNY and Pan Africanism. Pan Africanism evolved from an intellectual political

discourse to a radical ideology as articulated by Nkrumah (Nkrumah 1964). On the African continent, Ghana in particular, Pan Africanism became the ideology to connect divergent colonial territories peoples, tribes, languages, religions and ethnicities into one unified territory (Anderson 1983). AFWNY is an attempt at Pan Africanism, a different type of Pan African unity in which African people are producers of cultural goods and services. Drawing from the literature, fashion is a tool for marking differentiation and distinction (Simmel 1904), inclusion and exclusion on the basis of race, class, gender and nationality. On class distinction, AFWNY is utilised as a platform for a particular class of African fashion practitioners, educated, young, men and women, with access and resources to upward mobility. For this social class, major Western cities, such as New York, London and Paris are crucial in the quest for international recognition and success in their business endeavours (Skov 2006; Breward and Gilbert 2006).

The intersections of race and class (Collins 2009) can be seen in the fashion production process. For instance, the founder of AFWNY claims that negative portrayal of Africa in Eurocentric representations has created the conditions for anti-black attitudes (Turner 2002) prevalent in the fashion industries. Therefore, the event is purported to be Pan African, in that it is led by African immigrants in New York city, and serves as a platform to represent the design practices and produce of African fashion practitioners from around the world. Cultural representation, self-definition, identity, solidarity and ownership are important themes in the creation of AFWNY, and central tenets of Pan Africanism (Nkrumah 1964, 1965) and actions highly favoured by black feminist thoughts (Collins 2009). However, the point of divergence is the superficial understanding of the genesis of the negative portrayals of Africa and

other anti-black attitudes (Nkrumah 1965; Hawk 1992; Turner 2002) prevalent in mainstream Western media. While Pan Africanism is convinced that Capitalism breeds exploitation, oppression and injustices (Sherwood 2012), evidence suggests that AFWNY is designed to craft a space for African fashion practitioners within this system. Therefore, reproducing the system of oppression (Collins 2009) along the lines of class, race and nationality.

Furthermore, AFWNY utilises images and texts to create positive representations of black fashion models and the design produce of designers. For instance, at AFWNY fashion shows, and editorial campaigns, based on my observations black models are predominantly used. In doing so, AFWNY extends the definition of beauty (Sekayi 2003), in that dressed black bodies are represented and assigned meanings such as beautiful, natural, and fashionable. This reflects Kawamura's argument that fashion is a "symbolic product which has no content substance by/in itself" (Kawamura 2005:2). However, in the process of constructing fashion social forces such as race, class and ethnicity are central in the production of meanings (Lindgren 2013; 2015). Drawing from the literature, fashion has been categorised into Western and non-Western fashion, with Western fashion signifying urban cities, change and innovation, and the latter non-fashion (Niessen 2003; Craik 1995; Hopkins 2012). AFWNY constructs and produce the meaning of fashion, by coding (Hall 1997) and assigning specific meanings to black bodies and African design practices. It draws from conventional system of representations used in mainstream fashion production practices to describe African clothing styles and designs including haute, couture, high fashion and luxury brand. This reflects Rovine (2012) theorisation of fashion as a process in which different clothing systems such as Western and African fashion are "points on a

continuum”, a set of interactions. Also, the production of African fashion in New York City, a Western space as opposed to cities on the African Continent, shows the whole interconnectedness of social processes and practices. This reflects Simmel’s (1904) argument that the city influences individuals, and permits individuals from lower strata (this can be extended to include oppressed minorities within a given city) to become conscious of the styles and fashions of upper classes. African fashion practitioners are not only conscious of the styles and fashions of the dominant race in New York and in the global political economy. They are also cognisant of inequalities within the global value chain. For example, AFWNY seeks to create a formal structure around African diaspora fashion, it takes into account the living and working conditions of local workers and producers of clothing and garments in African societies. The situatedness of AFW in New York supports the claim that fashion (meaning) is created in Western cities, while non-Western spaces, such as Cambodia, Lagos, Accra, Bangladesh, and China remain cheap production centres for Western designers and brands (Lindgren 2015).

In conclusion, through AFWNY, fashion practitioners of African descent stake belonging and claim to the city of New York and the global fashion industry. Evidence of this can be seen in the appropriation of mainstream fashion practices and systems such as the fashion week apparatus, fashion occupations and positions including models, designers, fashion photographer, fashion stylists and fashion magazine as attempts to increase the visibility of African diaspora fashion identities and cultures. Further to this, through the fashion week apparatus AFWNY convey meaningful messages about the essence and dynamic nature of African identities – unfixed and in a constantly changing. Evidence of this is illustrated in the design

practices of fashion designers of African descent who utilise and exploit various techniques including contemporary Western styles and indigenous ethnic sensibilities. Further to this, fashion practitioners through their creative output i.e. fashion photography create and re-construct ideas about the black body, black beauty aesthetics, multiple identities, class and race. Photography was a medium used to convey knowledge of primitive cultures in the politics of colonialization i.e. knowledge about the black body, Africa, African peoples and classifications of the races and white supremacy. At the present time, advances in technologies, in particular visual technologies such as personal camera, video equipment and software has created opportunities for individuals and groups to record information, report events of importance and social exploration of communities, subcultures, institutions and discovery of cultural themes. AFWNY makes use, and capitalises on the power of photograph as visual language to communicate a different kind of statement about black bodies, African identities and cultures. Unlike mainstream representation of a homogeneous, fixed type of black body, representations at AFWNY construct and establish the heterogeneity of black bodies, the talent and innovations made by fashion designers of African descents.

Further research might consider a comparative study of AFW across different diaspora sites such as London, New York and Berlin; to explore the strategies adopted by fashion practitioners of African descent in the negotiation of identities and positions in the formal and informal fashion economy. Also, an exploration of AFW in diaspora sites such as New York, London and Lagos, Nigeria offer possibilities for investigation.

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Appendix A: Fashion designers and Labels at Africa Fashion Week 2010 –

2014

<i>Label/Designer & Nationality</i>	<i>Label/Designer & Nationality</i>
54 Kingdoms – Ghana	De Valasko Gallery - Morroco
Afritali - Ghana	<i>Editalo Designs</i> - Nigeria
Ani Siyah – Ghana	Elikplim Gordon – Ghana
Attolle Collection - Nigeria	<i>Enduexus Creations</i> - Zimbabwe
Agama Label - Nigeria	Eki Aggrey Orleans - Nigeria/Germany
Allex Kangala - Angola	Eaden Myles - Canada/Ghana
Atal Stella Uganda – Uganda	Farai Simoyi - Zimbabwe
Arewa Designs – Nigeria	Firkirte Addis - Ethiopia
Atelier/Couture - South Africa	Fienes Couture - Nigeria
<i>AAMAA a la Mode - Nigeria</i>	Francis Hendy - Trinidad and Tobago
<i>Asakeoge Couture - Nigeria</i>	Fabulous Fingers – United Kingdom/ Nigeria
ASIKERE AFANA – Jamaica/Ghana	Gavin Rajah – South Africa
<i>Adama Paris - Senegal</i>	<i>Gloria Wavamunno</i> - Uganda
<i>Admas</i> - Eritrean and Ethiopia	Gustavo Garcia - Bolivia
Aliakim - US	Geraldo Fashions - Angola
Blackbird Designs - Kenya	Henna flower – Middle East
bebe Grafiti – Nigeria Niger Delta	Haly Diallo - Cameroon
Bill Witherspoon – African American	House of Marie - Nigeria
Csilla Deri - Nigeria	House of Bunor- Nigeria
Chianu International – Nigeria	Jo Black Craze - Nigeria
Cinnamon and Pearl - Nigeria	Josefa Dasilva - Cape Verde
Côté Minou- Cameroon	

Charlene Amankwah - Ghana Dahil Republic of Couture Fashion House - Kenya	Ill la la Designs - Ghana Igwednma Emeka of McMeka - Nigeria
Danielle Martin - Nigeria	Issa by Issa - Nigeria
Darryl Jagga – South Africa Demestiks - NY Design by U - Ghana	<i>Kachi Designs</i> -Nigeria Kibonen New York - Cameroon KikoRomeo - Kenya
KiRette Couture – Cameroon Kososhi - Togo Kozby World - Nigeria	Peter Walden - Tanzania Rue 114 - Ghana Sara Karay - Kenya
Korto Momolu - Liberia	Sheaffa Delince - Haiti
Kosibah Couture - Nigeria Kumba Wear – Senegal Leonche – Sierra Leone Lisa Keating - France	Solome-Uganda Studio D-Maxsi - Ghana Sarfo of Styles - Ghana Saint Wobil – West Africa
Lin-Z Inc. – African American	
Mary-Ann Kai Kai Madam Wokie – Sierre Leone	Suakoko Betty - Liberia SFGK - Kenya
Morocco Caftan - New York and Morocco Mirembe Collections - Nigeria McMeka - Nigeria	Syl Anim - Cameroon Stephanie Owusu Ansah - Ghana Tori - Nigeria
Mcensal - Kenya	Toriola Custom Design - Nigeria
Mafi - Ethiopia Marianne G.G - Egypt Ms. Ray Couture - Nigeria MABM - Ghana	Vanessa Mukasa - Uganda Vee Fashion House- Kenya Washington Roberts - Nigeria Weiz Dhurm Franklyn - Nigeria
Mustafa Hassanali – Tanzania	William Witherspoon - Nigeria
Mesanga Fashion House - Cameroon Nadir Tati - Ghana	Yashika - Mauritius
Nakuin - Cameroon	
Osun Designs - Jamaica Qétura – Nigeria Rouch -Nigeria	

Africa Fashion Week New York - <http://www.africafashionweekny.com/press/gallery/>

