RE-ENGAGING TRADITIONAL FASHION AND TEXTILE DESIGN FOR SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN EAST AND SOUTHERN AFRICA

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Abstract - From unequal income distribution, lack of formal employment to poverty, poor education and healthcare systems, communities in various parts of the world face perilous challenges that underscore the need for creative ideas and solutions. The use of art can alleviate some of the challenges. Artists can shed light on the truth, offer excellent understanding in a far too general world as viewed through the lens of their creative products – the apparel (fashion or textile designed related crafts). A shift in the production of textile and apparel in China is due to cheap labor costs and use of appropriate technology for efficient productions and quick deliveries. Contrary to China's success, Africa's fashion and textile production is downhill due to lack of competitive advantage in the quality of materials, delivery time and pricing. Amidst these challenges, a few traditional fashion and textiles have survived the mayhem in the market. This paper analyses traditional fashion and textile crafts in a few selected African countries, and describes how culture plays a major role in the success of design. Designing new items (crafts) regularly attract customers and such practices have contributed to socio-economic development of the communities in the selected countries. Traditionally designed apparel and textile crafts such as the Masaai, the Ndebele, the Zulu and Turkana beadwork/jewelry and others have a large and growing sociological impact on East and Southern African people. This impact can also be seen on regional economic development; both through direct spending, and through the establishment and operation of the craft businesses that continue to thrive nonetheless.

I. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

The creative and cultural industries are described as a set of tangible (products) and non-tangible (services) profitable activities through creative and innovative processes that leads to the production of value-added products and services (Kabanda, 2014; Ubunifu, 2016). These creative goods and services are focused around arts and culture. Such goods and services come about not only because of people'scultural creativity andintuition but also by their inspirationand lifestyles, among other factors. These goods creates wealth through employment and property rights (Ubuntu, 2016). East and southern Africa's rich cultural heritage contribute to national development. The apparel (fashion) and textile industry is one of the leading income-generating activities of most developing African countries and it largely employs women and youth (Ubunifu, 2016). Textiles and fashion crafts that fall within the cultural and creative industries are mainly fashion accessories. These crafts have lately become lucrative business opportunities in countries where rich indigenous cultures are still practised. Textile and fashion crafts are described as mainly accessories designed and manufactured by small-scale entrepreneurs as inspired by material culture of certain community predominantly identified with such dressing styles. In spite of western ideologies and influences on the African dress, a few tribes in east and southern Africa continue to practice their traditions to date.

1.1. East Africa

In East Africa, such tribes include the Masaai people living in the southern part of KenyaKenya and northern part of Tanzania, and the Turkana people living in the northern part of Kenya (Lotte, 2006). The Maasai people constitute the largest pastoralist community in East Africa (Ibid.). They have retained their traditions and lifestyle despite pressure from the East African government to replace their traditional dress, especially after independence (Mastamet-Mason, Van Der Merwe and Muller, 2017). Although these people do not wear hides and skins anymore, they have adapted shúkà, which consists of sheets of fabric of specific, colour schemes (see figure 1); and have not deviated far from their customary dress and ornamentation to date (Kenneth, 1995; Muller, 2019). Further, they have also remained loyal to their beautiful culturaladornment mostly expressed through women's clothing. Today, this culture is now the trademark of the Kenyan government as a tourist attraction symbol alongside that of the wild animals (Government of Kenya, 2019).The Masaai people are the leaders of the world-renownedMasaaitraditional regalia in East Africa.

The second tribe in Kenya with distinguishable material culture is the Turkana people who live in the northern part of Kenya bordering South Sudan. They are the second largest pastoralist community after the Masaai people. Their regalia compares very closely with that of the Masaai, except in the colour scheme. The common colour between both tribes is red. Turkana's conspicuous colour scheme include, black, red and yellow used by both the men and women (see Figure 1).

Crafts influenced by the two groups include various modified accessories such as the sandals, neckpieces, bangles, bracelets, bags and dresses amongst other

goods. Thesegoods are sold in various market places throughout all the major cities in East Africa and some international markets.In East Africa, such markets, which are open to both local and international consumers,are calledMasaai Market, thus referring to the people whose merchandises denominate it. The goods are usually made in view of targeting tourists. They range from wooden sculptures, beaded necklaces, beaded bangles, batik wall hangings, shoes/sandals, soap stone carvings, sisal bags, textiles such as kikois, Masaaishuka and Turkana beadwork and basketry (seeFigure 2).
Some of the Chinese touristspurchase thesegoods in order to copy them for commercial use. The counterfeited products are cheap, but are not exactly as the authentic traditional ones seen in figure 2.

1.2. South Africa

In South Africa, the predominant tribes among the 11 different ethnic groups include the Ndebele, and the Zulu people, whose regalia stands out from the rest, although most of the other tribes toexpress their traditions through clothing. The focus of this paper is on the Ndebele and the Zulu people's dressing styles as largely manifested in their arts and crafts (Mastamet-Mason et al., 2017). The Zulu people of South Africa are the largest ethnic group living mainly in the province of KwaZulu-Natal. Their material culture includes their way of dressing, their huts and housing amongst others. Men are famous for wearing leopard skins, while women wear colourful beaded skirts and ornaments as seen in figure 4.These traditional dressing styles have influence on crafts sold locally and internationally to any willing buyers and South Africans in diaspora

The Ndebele people are one of the largest tribal groups with a distinctive regalia which comprises clothing, embellishments in the form of beaded neck pieces, bangles and anklets among other things(see figures3 and 4).The Ndebele and the Zulu material cultures have also influenced the creation of textile fabrics such as toys, hair bands, belts and other arts and crafts.Traditionally inspired fabrics are sold in major textile stores in South Africa, and fashion designers use them to design clothing for most tribes living in South Africa, irrespective of their ethnicity. South Africans in Diaspora as well as tourists visiting the country also buy these artefacts and carry them along to their respective countries.

CONCLUSION

Although East and South Africa are far apart, the beadwork are very similar in colour scheme. The Masaai beadwork does not differ much from those of the Zulus and the Ndebele. As such, the African crafts have minimal distinguishable characteristics particularly the modernised beads. In the period 2007-2009, the creative economy in Kenya was worth approximately85 billion Kenya shillings translating to US$83 Million (Haines, Kenya Economic Update, 2016).

In 2014, Tanzania accounted for US$1.2 billion from cultural and creative industries in general (Fleming, n.d). According to Hadisi and Snowbal, (2016) South African cultural and creative industries contributed US$391billion to the economy between 2010 and 2016. These are significant economic contributions notwithstanding the challenges faced by this sector. Currently, East African and South African schools provide more supportive measures to science-based education and less to Arts education. University students pursuing engineering and medical courses are likely to get scholarships for undergraduate and postgraduate studies, while those pursuing Arts or Design courses hardly get any scholarship. Most entrepreneurs emanate from the Arts-based courses and the economic contributions by this sector should encourage governments to re-think their strategies. Both the East African and South African governments need to provide more support to the industry in the form of copyright protection and in policy and regulatory framework. Additionally, both governments should establish and support cultural and Arts educational programmes as well as research and innovation activities in the cultural and creative industries sector.





Figure 1. Examples of Masaaia and Turkana regalia and ornamentation (Source: Zoede in Warren Glam, 2018; Masai in Masai Mara Bookings, 2019;https://i.dailymail.co.uk/i/sitelogos/logo_mol.gif; http://thegreatestmasaimara.com)

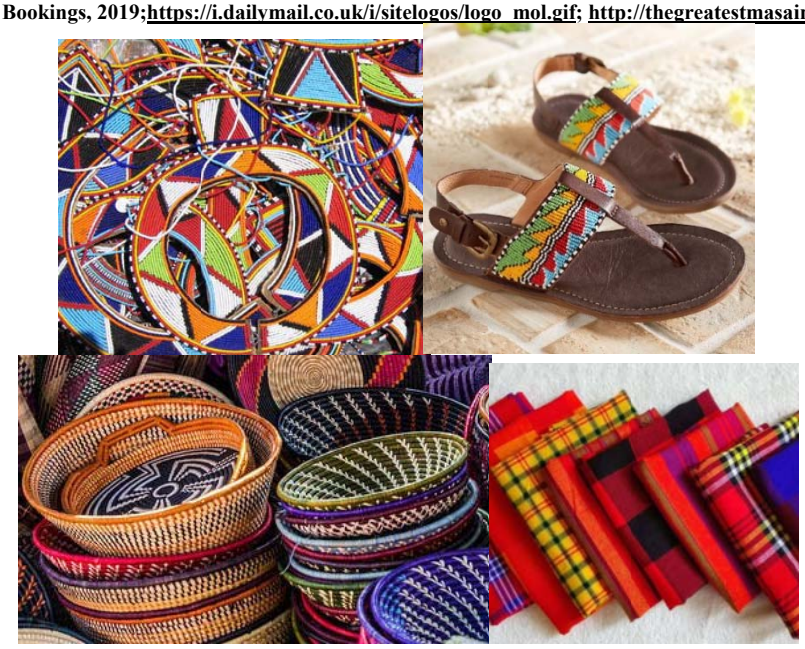


Figure 2: A display of merchandise sold in the Masai Market in Nairobi, Kenya (source:https://theculturetrip.com/)



Figure 3: Ndebele women in their colourful regalia comprising of ornaments, blankets and house decorations (source:http://www.krugerpark.co.za/)

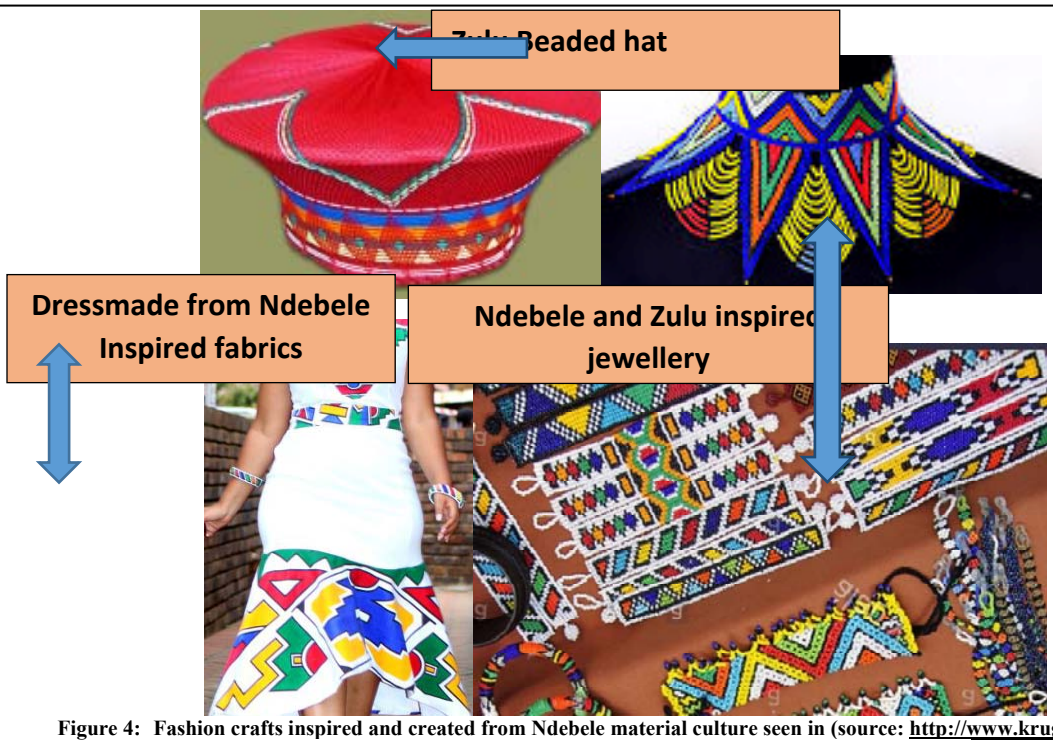


Figure 4: Fashion crafts inspired and created from Ndebele material culture seen in (source: http://www.krugerpark.co.za/; https://earthafricacurio.com/images/LOGO/earth-africa-website-logo-6.png)

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