

Africa's Design Industry: From Creative Pursuits to the Business of Fashion

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Africa has inspired Western fashion and visual culture for decades. African design and textile ingenuity are constantly appropriated by the global fashion industry in a process that moves profits abroad and subverts cultural dynamics. Emphasis on the former is rarely tackled in the discourse on African fashion and design but is timely with the continued emergence of new African designers who have begun to gain well deserved global recognition as they pioneer strategies to market and brand fashion concepts grounded in cultural heritage. For the burgeoning African fashion industry to thrive, it has to become professionalized and business-oriented. To get African clothing to local, regional, and global consumers, production must capture the markets for haute couture, ready to wear, and mass market consumers more broadly than it currently does. African governments, in partnership with the design industry, should take the lead to incentivize, promote, and protect the African fashion and design industry, as well as contribute to establishing a manufacturing base that can underpin continued economic growth in an increasingly diversified economic sector. Strategic partnerships between government and business, especially smaller and medium sized enterprises, to develop and promote cultural industries is vital to the African fashion and design sector, and imperative for a continent on the rise.

Africa's influence on Western visual culture is evident but often unmentioned or conveyed as an afterthought. When the "tellers" of our story of creativity continuously fail to embody our voice, something is lost; this has been emblematic of the story of African Art and African fashion on the world stage. This is not a new pattern; in 1907 Pablo Picasso had an "African moment" that inspired his seminal work, *Les Femmes d'Alger (O.J.)*, a painting of two women with African masks. As Nigerian artist, writer, and editor Iké Udé rightfully states, "This masterpiece marked a paradigm shift, a tabula rasa for a radically new kind of modernism with an African foundation!" (Jennings, 2011: 7). The narrative, however, became one of how Picasso had "discovered" African Art. Associate Professor of Art History Sylvester Okwunodu Ogbegie points out that then "ALL modern and contemporary African art AFTER Picasso has been largely deemed mere mimicry of *Western styles*, even when African artists use cultural motifs and images from their own cultures" (Ogbechi, 2009). Art critics have often

questioned with significant skepticism the level of attribution one can place on Africa's influence on contemporary art and design (Flores, 2011). Dr. Thomas McEvelley sparked one of the most famous debates on this topic in response to a 1984 show at the New York Museum of Modern Art titled, "Primitivism in 20th Century Art," which sought to expound the connection between the work of European artists like Gauguin and Picasso with African "tribal" art. Nearly 20 years later, McEvelley remembered that experience in a 2002 article: "[T]here was harsh criticism of the fact that artists of the so-called 'Third World' were used as footnotes to Western Modernist art history, rather than being recognized as having identities of their own" (McEvelley, 2002).¹

Fashion has also had many "African moments," including in 1968 what *Harper's Bazaar* described Algerian-born Yves Saint Laurent's landmark collection as "a fantasy of primitive genius" (Jennings, 2011: 12). John Galliano's 1997 debut couture collection at Dior, featuring a series of reinterpreted Maasai warrior costumes, and Jean Paul Gaultier's Spring 2005 couture and Autumn/Winter 2010/2011 couture collections were all heavily African-inspired. Both Galliano and Gaultier have been widely praised by fashion critics for their use of African aesthetics in the context of "diversifying fashion" (Flores, 2011). Other prominent designers such as Alexander McQueen, Louis Vuitton, Marc Jacobs, Junya Watanabe, Diane von Furstenberg, Oscar de la Renta and Thakoon use clear elements of African aesthetic; this cultural commodification is usually described with terms like "borrowing" or "inspired by" (Chua, 2012). On the design front, the debate continues about whether this referencing of African aesthetics by non-African designers is exploitative due to the lack of real connection to African culture or African people. The argument has been made that many of these collections are created by design teams who convey a shallow knowledge or appreciation for the communities they reference. However, another perspective is that "it's those designers who collaborate with African artisans in order to harness authentic materials and techniques, and bridge the gap between African-born and African inspired by basing socially responsible production on the continent, who create the most meaningful results" (Jennings, 2011:14). Examples of producers of design content who are considered to be collaborating in an ethical way include SOKO Kenya (an ethical clothing production workshop that manufactures for clients such as ASOS Africa and SUNO), Indego Africa, Edun, and Vivienne Westwood.

¹ McEvelley further explained, "No attempt is made to recover an emic, or inside, sense of what primitive esthetics really were or are [...] The point of view of Picasso and others [...] is the only focus of MOMA's interest. By their absolute repression of primitive context, meaning, content, and intention [...] the curators] have treated the primitives as less than human, less than cultural – as shadows of a culture, their selfhood, the Otherness, wrung out of them (Flores, 2011)."

Despite this, a 2009 article in the *New York Times* entitled “*Designing to an Afro Beat*” by Ruth La Ferla showed why little has changed. Like many writing about African’s design influence on culture at large, La Ferla highlighted the pattern of a never ending retelling of Western imaginings of Africa that reinforce enigma. For example, a commentator in La Ferla’s article states, “Africa has never become quantifiable or entirely knowable, it still suggests romance, and a sense of the abundance of life. Threatening or benign, it has something to teach us.” As a designer myself, I am the first to claim that my multicultural heritage underpins my own inspirations and creativity; I experience firsthand that inspiration can be drawn from anywhere and the creative processes nourished with the exchange of ideas and resources. However, in an increasingly globalized world, if the “majority of these exchanges remain one-sided (as it is in this dispensation where African culture and resources are freely available for appropriation but not vice versa)” (Ogbechie, 2009), imbalance occurs and the continent is at a continued deficit as ingenuity is pilfered.

The constant retelling of the story of African Fashion has a more subversive economic agenda because “this recurrent pattern of discovery is also a ploy that allows African resources to be transferred to Western ownership” (Ogbechie, 2009). Furthermore, how the story is told over time legitimizes the work of other artists over Africans. There is a monetary implication; the work of African artists like Ghanaian born artist El Anatsui, whose body of work encompassing 30 years sells for less in comparison to many upcoming American and British arts with less than one-tenth of El Anatsui’s practice and international achievements (Ogbechie, 2009). The perspective of East Africa’s leading designer, Tanzania’s Ally Rehmtullah, is that the “lack of an international presence is also a big headache. We see our fabric, our textiles and our prints being showcased in the international market by Western designers and we can’t say anything [...] For example, in 2007 I launched a line using the Maasai fabric. In 2009 Louis Vuitton launched a similar line for men using the Maasai fabrics and probably made thousands of dollars out of that collection. This is not fair on us, but due to lack of international exposure we can’t do anything about that” (Brown, 2012).

Unauthorized adoption of elements of Africa’s cultural intellectual property is something that African artists and cultural ambassadors often have no ability to protect. In today’s highly globalized world, with new creative innovation sprouting up around the continent, African innovators must understand the value of their design and cultural ideas, and understand that by protecting and promoting their cultural intellectual property they can become narrators of the story of African fashion. We see evidence of indigenous cultures throughout the world which have fought to enshrine into law parameters to protect their cultural intellectual properties by patents or trademarks. The idea is not for African designers to

fight the uphill battle of patenting traditional design, but to better establish and enhance their economic gain on the global design platform to help propel them as the industry's leaders in African design content. Maybe more importantly, as founder and creative director of online African fashion and lifestyle boutique Heritage 1960, Enyinne Owunwanne, suggests "storytelling is one of the most meaningful methods of cultural proliferation. Fashion tells a visual story, oftentimes coupled with a story of history and tradition, and this is invaluable for promoting the sustainability of Africa culture (Pool, n.d.)."

Fashion contrasts and links past and future, tradition and innovation, old and new. Cultural commodification and appropriation is inevitable, yet overwhelmingly tends to reinforce already-present imaginings. How the story has been captured reflects certain Western assumptions that, for example, juxtapose supposed "traditional" and "static" African styles of dress with Western "fashion," which is typically associated with modern markets that grew from mid-nineteenth century Paris and spread to Milan and then New York. This dyadic analysis leaves no place "for Non-Western design of African design except of as sources of inspiration" (Rovine, 2009:133). "Postcolonial scholarship on African culture has criticized the traditional/modernity binary as it was used by missionaries, colonialists and anthropologist to oppose an Africa deemed traditional in the sense of primitive and static to a modern Europe as transmitter of enlightened values" (Rabine, 2002:11). So what has changed? For one, the emerging new crop of African designers is demonstrating that "Africa can't be pigeonholed by a handful of aesthetic clichés – animal prints, head wraps, safari chic [...] it's actually a burgeoning and varied field of fashion that is now offering a whole new realm of influences, crafts, materials and ideas to international fashion" (Hellqvist, 2012).

Africans all over the continent have been using their global suitcases to sell items for decades. From a business and accessibility standpoint, the industry has grown by creatively reaching new global audiences in response to demand and potential demand by African and non-African consumers. Senegal's complex historical religious connections allowed "women traders . . . [to] have pioneered the selling of Senegalese garments overseas to fellow traders, pilgrims in Jeddah and to the Senegalese Diaspora in Europe and the USA" (Mustafa, 1998:27). Today, in addition to their traditional networks, clothing merchants ingeniously use informal networks through Facebook and Skype to sell sought-after traditional and modern designs, particularly for important religious and cultural occasions. Enyinne Owunwanne, suggests that another characterization of how we as Africans may more informally characterize changing dress practices on the continent is that our parents and grandparents tend to view "'African fashion" as traditional dress coming from specific regions whereas the younger

generation may view "African fashion" from both the historical context of traditional attire and also the interpretations that grace the catwalks on the continent and overseas." (Pool, n.d.).

The global fashion design industry is a multimillion dollar business "from concept to consumer" (Pool, n.d.). If the African design industry is to continue its ascension and become sustainable, a more cohesive system needs to be nurtured to connect manufacturers and retail markets, design, production, sales, and distribution. Zainab Imichi Alhassan wrote an educative article, "Understanding the Fashion Industry-Where does Nigeria Stand?" Her holistic understanding of Nigeria's powerhouse fashion industry reflects what is happening industry-wide across the continent. She rightly claims that the creative element is where emphasis has been placed. I would argue that, as a whole, the industry (continentally) continues to revolve around the creative, but African designers are now learning how to work effectively within the other sectors of the design industry.

Africa's first internationally recognized fashion designers emerged during the independence era and came to be identified by their distinct and bold assertion of African design. Pioneers Alphadi of Niger and Oumou Sy of Senegal took control of the narrative and helped the African design industry find its voice on global catwalks; their haute couture, their individualized and theatrical pieces have earned them loyal followers worldwide. Upcoming African designers now use regional and continental expos to showcase and sell their brands. "In 2011 alone, 16 major events throughout Africa provided African based designers and entrepreneurs with platforms to showcase their designs" (Nkopane, 2012). Other platforms that have benefited the African design industry include trade shows that attract international business, such as South Africa's Design Indaba. The recent Zimbabwean Indaba and Ethiopia's Design Origin are other platforms working to bring attention to the work of local creative professionals.² Africa focused fashion lifestyle magazine *ARISE* and affiliated events like Africa Fashion International (AFI) have contributed significantly to the emergence of a more nuanced story of African design. AFI promotes and develops designers, producing two of the major fashion shows in South Africa and African Fashion Week. AFI and *ARISE*,³ which also showcases Africa's new design talent in all creative

² Some credit for getting African's fashion industry on the international fashion scene can be attributed to the backing and support from Nigerian wealthy media magnate, Nduka Obaigbena of *THIS DAY*, who is also *Arise* Chairman and Editor in Chief, and Africa Fashion International (AFI) founder Dr. Precious Moloi-Motsepe, one of South Africa's richest women.

Internationally other influential actors have also recently begun to showcase the potential of the "Made in Africa" label. The *International Herald Tribune's* Suzy Menkes in 2012 wrote a piece about "rebranding" the continent and led the *International Herald Tribune's* 2012 Luxury Conference entitled "The Promise of Africa ... The Power of the Mediterranean." Italian Vogue editor and Goodwill Ambassador for Fashion4Development Franca Sozzani has done much to gain understanding of the opportunities and challenges of the industry and recently published an exclusively Vogue African issue and helped launched "Discovered in Africa" on yoox.com" (Nkopane, 2012).

³ "*ARISE* magazine also hosted an event in Lagos, Nigeria in March 2011, where more than 51 African designers partnered with 81 models for five music performances and three days of shows and events. A panel of judges selected the top seven designers from the event; they were invited to participate in an IMG Mercedes Benz New York Fashion Week event titled 'Made in Africa'"(Nkopane, 2012)."

sectors, have successfully carved out a place for African cultural production, demonstrating that “in the information age, you have to stake out your own intellectual property lest someone else appropriate it” (Ogbechie, 2009). This African agency has had a ripple effect on many businesses and helped increase demand for the work of several emerging designers. This is the beginning, but the “end game [... is for Africa] to harness its own huge potential so that in the near future a ‘made in Ghana’ or ‘made in Kenya’ label has the same cache as ‘made in Italy’ or ‘made in England’” (Hellqvist, 2012). This can only be realized if Africans can first protect, produce, and purchase what is their own and command greater value and respect on the world stage.

African designers now need to succeed beyond the runway. “In Nigeria the creative part is present but there are not enough platforms for the sales functions. As an emerging industry, Nigeria’s fashion industry should be a determining factor in our economy and for this to happen we need to clearly understand how it can work” (Alhassan, 2011). Challenges remain around sales and market distribution, professionalization of the industry branding and marketing. As well as around basic infrastructural needs such as electricity. Additionally barriers such as bureaucracy, trade restrictions, corruption and red tape hinder the business of fashion all over the continent. Many designers manufacture their own supply and thereby retain production control, outsourcing locally as need arises, but as demand increases they need standardization and linkages with larger-scale local manufacturers and suppliers of textiles. Governments should facilitate these networks because “the appeal of manufacturing for developing economies is simple: Factory employees have high labor output per capita and can earn far more money than workers in most other sectors” (Fortin, 2013). To move this industry forward designers need to also work together to a greater degree to create “economies of scale in order to wield greater influence in the value chain” Palmi, 2007:5). In some cases where designers are better suited to focus on the creative, partnerships with backers who can “drive the commercial and marketing arm of operation” are what is needed (Palmi, 2007:4). Adiat Disu, President of Adirée and director of Africa Fashion Week in New York City, states:

“More organizations must work with African countries’ respective law centers and organizations like the African Cotton and Textile Industries Federation to build more institutional capacity in the region, identify key trade policy issues that limit exports of textiles and apparel, and to advocate for reforms that liberalize trade within the region, and with the U.S. At present, the industry is a loose amalgam of African designers worldwide, creative professionals, non-government organizations, small to medium-sized businesses, chambers of commerce, and others interested in the successful promotion and formal

establishment of an African fashion industry. What buyers, the press, and fashion enthusiasts need is a bridge to discover these African designers and to discover and increase [related] trade and investment opportunities” (Brown, 2012).

The more the African design industry diversifies to support all areas of production and distribution, the more it will carve out its global design niche.

Renewed African agency in the telling of the story of African fashion has been reflected in the remarkable shift in approach and orientation of Africa’s new crop of designers. A common theme is that these designers better balance their creativity and commercial success, with greater use of clear market segmentation, branding, distribution platforms, and marketing campaigns. Haute couture designers, such as Nigerian Deola Sagoe and David Tlale and Gavin Rajah of South Africa, have garnered international recognition, and designers with increasing international brand recognition include Mimi Plange and Duro Olowu. Other successful designers, such as Jewel by Lisa, Stoned Cherries, Phyllis Taylor, and Christie Browne, have established stores in their home countries but retail in selected outlets internationally. Those who are now expanding their flagship stores and outlets include Folarin Coker, creative director of the brand Tiffany Amber, who opened four shops in Nigeria and outlets in Ghana and South Africa, and plans to open a store in Angola. Many are also using the internet to sell their items; sites like ASOS Africa initiative, YOOX, Agnes and Lola, My Asho, and Heritage 360 either feature African designers or African-inspired design. Due to lack of physical infrastructure, Africa has the world’s most advanced mobile financial services, making mobile commerce a highly relevant strategy, especially in Kenya, Nigeria, and South Africa, where mobile payments are increasingly becoming the norm (Jätyri, 2012).⁴ There is significant opportunity for new business ground to be covered via collaborations between the information and mobile technology sector and Africa’s design sector.

International fashion retailers Mango, Zara, Levi’s, Nike, Puma, and Gap are recognizing emerging consumer markets in Africa. Their market analysis about African consumer patterns should be of interest to the African design industry because the markets they target are potential markets for African designers. Although only a small segment of the continent’s population can afford consumer goods and most purchases are at the very bottom of the price spectrum, consumption is steadily rising. According

⁴ “Africa now has more than 500 million internet users, and 25 million Facebook members. This allows e-commerce, new media and social medial to connect designers quickly easily and cheaply to their customers, and each other. Blogspot and Twitter both rank in the top 10 most visited sites in Nigeria, Kenya and South Africa, with fashion taking up no small part of the conversation” (Jennings, 2011:16).

to an Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU) report, by 2030, Africa's top 18 countries could have a combined spending power of \$1.3 trillion" (Jätyri, 2012). Home to six of the world's ten fastest-growing economies, Africa has encouraging indicators such as high GDP growth rates, a growing middle class with increasing spending power, rising per capita incomes, rising trade with the rest of the world, explosive growth of mobile phones and mobile phone banking, and growth in sectors such as tourism, retail, and banking (Rowden, 2013). Skeptics, however, warn that the overwhelming reality is that this boom is benefiting only the narrow sub-section of African elite and multinational interests on the continent, and note the rise of a new era of massive resource extraction catalyzed by Chinese demand without a focus on value addition or diversification (Rickett; 2013). It is imperative that the African design industry itself studies potential "local" and foreign consumers and develops infrastructure to start reaching them. Africans living in the diaspora remit more money to their families than official development assistance from traditional Western aid donors,⁵ so research about marketing through the channels used by Africans in the diaspora and target markets within the continent would be highly relevant to better optimize sales opportunities.

Greater synergy is needed between the African fashion design industry and the African apparel manufacturing sector to explore economies of scale with better standardization for domestic and global markets. In "The Myth of Africa's Rise," Rick Rowden (2013) picks up on the fact that proponents of Africa rising rhetoric "don't mention manufacturing, or its disturbing absence, in Africa." According to Rowden, a recent United Nations report shows that manufacturing has stagnated across most of Africa and even regressed in 23 countries. The huge economic impact of the manufacturing and design industry in Japan, China, South Korea, Bangladesh, and India is indicative of the importance of this sector to economic growth. African governments are increasingly seeing that growth without employment does not address poverty. In a recent article in *The Guardian*, "Africa is Not Rising," David Smith points out that despite "Africa's economies having grown by an average of 4.8% between 2002 and 2011," little has changed and poverty in some regions is on the increase. One solution, The Brookings Institution argues, is more focus on manufacturing because it is "the industrial sector most closely associated with employment-intensive growth" (Ighobor, 2013).

⁵ In April 2013 the BBC highlighted this trend and a cash flow analysis by Hong Kong-based Ghanaian academic Adams Bodomo. Dr. Bodomo's research shows that in 2010 the African diaspora remitted \$51.8bn (£34bn) to the continent. In the same year, according to World Bank figures, Overseas Development Assistance (ODA) to Africa was \$43bn (£28bn) (Doyle, 2013).

In the last ten years, African governments seem to have recognized the possibilities for economic diversification and made inroads reviving local textile clothing and manufacturing bases through international investment policies and protectionist measures to protect these industries (Matsinde, 2013). Traditionally, Africa's top industrial exporters were South Africa, Tunisia, Morocco, Egypt, Mauritius, and Algeria, but others are catching up. Ethiopia's government, for example, is looking to transform its largely agriculture-based economy by industrializing its manufacturing base, placing special emphasis on the textile industry and aiming to export more than a billion dollars' worth of apparel by 2016. Beyond increasing cotton production and making Ethiopia more attractive for foreign direct investment, key strategies include expanding into women's fashion, producing for top international labels, and developing local brands that speak to local demand. Rising wages in Southeast and East Asia could push international manufacturers to consider such centers in Africa, where labor is relatively inexpensive (Fortin, 2013).

Lesotho, Madagascar, Kenya, Ethiopia, Mauritius, and Swaziland have transformed their economic bases through apparel manufacturing, largely due to the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA), which was signed into law in 2000. This initiative was designed to expand U.S. trade and investment with sub-Saharan Africa, stimulate economic growth, encourage economic integration, and facilitate sub-Saharan Africa's integration into the global economy. Substantial trade preferences connected to the Generalized System of Preferences (GSP) allow virtually all marketable goods produced in AGOA eligible countries to enter the U.S. market duty-free. After a decade, exports from AGOA-eligible countries grew over 300% and supported over 300,000 jobs (Xu, 2010). The Office of the U.S. Trade Representative (n.d.) reports, "In 2011, U.S. goods imports from sub-Saharan African under AGOA and the related GSP program totaled \$70.6 billion, up 59% from 2010, and more than five times the amount in 2001." Lesotho's apparel exports increased from \$140 million in 2000 to nearly \$350 million in 2008; Lesotho is now sub-Saharan Africa's largest exporter of apparel to the U.S. (Xu, 2010). Despite its successes, AGOA is set to expire in 2015 and the lack of preferential status in U.S. markets will result in increased competition with other manufacturing centers such as China. In October 2013, contingencies of U.S. and African industry groups active in the textiles and apparel sectors made a plea for the U.S. government to extend the provisions of AGOA.

There has been an upswing of direct foreign investment in Africa's textile and clothing sector. Turkey, China, and India have been investing steadily in East Africa's textile and clothing sectors since 2010, and the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) has collaborated with Italy to boost sector development (Matsinde, 2013). Nigeria and Pakistan are engaging in a partnership to

develop several sectors of Nigerian industry, including textile manufacturing from cotton production to stages of fashion design. Facilitated by the International Trade Centre, the Swiss Government is working with Ghana's Trade Ministry on a \$3.5 million USD grant to support young Ghanaian entrepreneurs within the local fabric and fashion industry by helping recipients to expand their businesses and become more self-reliant; produce goods that can increase competitiveness in international markets while fuelling job creation; and establish sustainable supply chains (Matsinde, 2013).

Exports from the continent as a whole are low, as the exports of goods is still a nascent industry. Clothing is one area wherein the indirect competitive effect weakens African profits. East African designer Ally Rehmtullah highlights that, "even though cotton is the second largest export product in Tanzania, textiles still are not produced in Tanzania. Raw cotton is exported to different countries like China, where it is processed into finished goods and then brought back to Tanzania where we have to buy our own cotton at thrice the price. Hence it becomes expensive to work under those circumstances" (Brown, 2012). However, economists have also pointed out that African manufacturing does gain some advantages from abundant raw materials, as illustrated by the Ethiopian example, and advantages related to traditional skills that can be adapted to new products. Another distinct advantage relates to the innovative capabilities of Africa's design industry to propel itself forward.

South Africa is an interesting case study because the fashion design industry, government, and other key stakeholders have created an effective system to support the industry. Editor of *Arise* magazine Helen Jennings states:

"South Africa's fashion industry is a significant contributor to GDP that employs over 200,000 people and generates over R20 billion per annum (US \$2.9 billion). By working on a small scale and using local labor and resource, it is creating jobs, keeping traditional craftsmanship alive, developing fair trade networks, bolstering retail, and building a business model that benefits the African economy from the ground up" (Jennings, 2011:14).

By the 1990s South Africa's clothing industry was strongly affected by globalization and trade liberalization with an influx of Asian imports. Due to sudden inability to compete, apparel businesses reduced employment, outsourced production, or closed down altogether. South Africa's Department of Trade and Industry initiated various projects to assist the industry in addressing these challenges. Established in 2009, the Clothing and Textiles Competitiveness Programme (CTCP) aimed at structural

change by providing the clothing, textiles, footwear, leather and leather goods manufacturing industries with funding to invest in competitiveness improvement interventions. Simultaneously, a time of dialogue about South Africa's national identity fostered an artistic renaissance, with many new designers producing clothing for specialized markets by developing uniquely South African brands. Several initiatives were established between the design industry, various governmental economic development departments, and other stakeholders, including a new fashion cluster district⁶ called "Fashion Capital" in Johannesburg, the city of Tshwane's "Fashion in Africa" project to promote the development of young designers, and the Durban Chamber of Business' collaboration with a group of clothing manufacturers to establish "Freshly Made in Durban" (Palmi, 2007:113). Leading South African retail chains Woolworth and Edgars began to feature the most promising design talent and continue to demonstrate how other retailers could similarly entice consumers to support home grown initiatives (Rogerson, 2006: 221). In the October 2013 women issue of *Forbes Africa*, Dr. Moloi-Motespe says:

"The sector had been decimated by the increase in cheap clothing imports, particularly from Asian countries over the last decade. It continued to bleed jobs, as companies struggle to come up with dynamic ways to beat slow growth [. . .] government [needs to] work hard. There is a lot of upgrading to be done and there's a lot of re-skilling that needs to happen. The big retailers must support manufacturing. The fashion design industry can serve as a driving force. This is an industry that can absorb a vast number of people in employment [...] it absorbs a lot of women [. . .] and the small business it can create for other people" (Musgrave, 2013: 24).

The realization in South Africa that there is still work to be done, together with an active industry backed by government support, is a case study that other African countries can look to and adapt.

The tale of African fashion, and more broadly African art and visual culture, is embodied in the African proverb "Until lions have their historians, tales of the hunt shall always glorify the hunter." When our story is told by others, as has been done with the story of African design aesthetics and creative intelligence, others can take creative license. Relinquishing the telling of the story results not only in missed opportunities but also in monetary cost. The economic losses remain unquantifiable. Many scholars have challenged how African design ingenuity has been downplayed, which may be helping

⁶ The cluster concept is the coalescence of various enterprises that make up the informal clothing sector, including traders, manufactures, suppliers, and contractors for equipment manufacturing. This approach revitalized some inner-city areas and promoted South African fashion, but also created opportunities for new designers to enhance their skills while providing space for them to exhibit and sell their products (Palmi, 2007:113).

the pendulum to swing toward increasing recognition of Africa's design innovation. The fashion design industry and its ascent aid the resurgence of African agency and us telling our own story. Africa's design industry and its key stakeholders have roles to play at macro- and micro-levels and must creatively and strategically marry informality with formality, professionalize, value and protect, and set the bar high to compete in a highly competitive global field. For profits and competitiveness, focus on the creative has to shift toward deepening business processes that support mass production and marketing, and get products to consumers. African governments must simultaneously support the local development and promotion of all related fields of the fashion and design industries, particularly textile and manufacturing, to reap the most benefits. During this time of talk about the great promise of the continent, enhancement of fashion design and related industries can help deliver on this promise. As London-based Ghanaian fashion designer and philanthropist Oswald Boateng states, further actualization of African agency "can only occur when Africa itself realizes that it is time for Africa" (Boateng, 2013).

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