

ART AND FEMINISM: THE PLACE OF FEMALE TASTE AS A PROPELLING FORCE FOR THE PRODUCTION OF "GELE-HATS" AS AN ALTERNATIVE TO TYING

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Abstract

Women are known all over the world for their high taste for fashion. One aspect of taste that is common to Nigerian women, particularly the Southern women, is the traditional attire with headgear (gele) to match. However, it is observed that the major reason why most women go late to church, public functions or occasions and sometimes quarrel with their husbands is due to their struggle to tie the gele/headgear. This paper therefore, examines the possibility of making the female's gele, into ready made hats, known as, "Gele-Hats", to serve as an alternative to tying. It believes that, with the making of the headgear into "Gele-Hat", the problems associated with tying of gele will be solved, thus, relieving the women of the stress they undergo during the tying process of the headgear.

Introduction

The fashion of clothing is all about the way people dress. Unlike today, people did not initially wear clothes out of modesty, but to cover nakedness, for warmth and as protection against the physical environment. Gradually, the human desire for modesty began to develop resulting in sophisticated clothes. As their taste for sophistication increased, dissatisfaction with the natural body shape (especially that of females) was developed. Fashion that alters the female's appearance was then introduced, and aesthetic (artistic principles), began to play an important issue of modesty in female's clothing. This increasing taste for sophistication or modesty also extended to accessories, such as bags, headgear (gele), shoes, and jewelries, which come in different designs and colours.

According to Hazel (2000), what constitutes an accessory particularly for women is changing: body paint, body piercing, body tattoos, and hair extension can now be added to the list of shoes, headgear (gele), bags and jewelry.

Accessories have become an integral part of the female's dressing, playing an increasing important role on the image of the wearer. It can also change the look of what one wears. In an interview with Life Magazine, Miss Tourism Ambassador (Abigail Mayinolorun Lounge), speaking on her turn-off in dressing, emphasized, that every aspect of our dressing should harmonize. There should not be any colour disharmony in the clothing and accessories, but should all complement themselves. Accessories are meant to highlight or complement the dressing of the wearer, thus enhancing the general outlook or image of the individual wearing them.

One aspect of taste that is common to Nigerian women, particularly the Southern women, is the traditional attire with headgear (gele) to match. This gele which is often used for special occasion, church etc, adds elegance to the female's appearance.

It is observed that, most women lack the skill of tying the headgear, resulting in waste of time, lateness to functions, or church, quarrel between them and their husbands, discomfort, and distraction, which automatically affect their mood and consequently, their appearance.

This paper therefore, intends to examine the possibility of making the female's gele into readymade "gele-hats", as an alternative to tying.

Artistic Perception of Female

Generally, women are known for their peculiar natural physique which, compared to that of men is characterized by flexibility and grace which makes them have feminist look. According to Bailey (1996), at the turn of the 18th century, a pre-occupation with "beauty" dominated the discussion of art criticism. That Thomas Dewing (a European Artist), believed that, "the purpose of art is to see beautifully". Ezra Tarp complemented his opinion in the discussion, by adding that, "beauty was signified by the female form. That is, if an artist depicted a woman, it was common for the painting to be described in terms of beauty, grace, refinement and elegance".

In the 19th century, personal beauty was defined as an attribute that only female could possess. Theodore Child, a famous critic associated with aestheticism, stated that, "the artist is the inventor of

beauty and the inventor of beauty is a mysterious complexity defying ultimate analysis". That beauty exists within arts province and it is associated with feminine qualities, like: grace, taste and charm which is capable of elevating the subject (person) to a spiritual level above the materialism of modern life.

The artist believes that beauty was found in the human figure, especially the woman's face. Kenyon Gox was recognized as an artist, for whom the search for beauty in art led him to paint nudes. Whistle Symphony was another artist who was predominated with aestheticism in his visual art.. His contemporaries praised his art for exhibiting feminine qualities like, charm, taste and beauty,

A group of painters, who became identified, especially with the painting of beautiful women rather than with general concept of beauty in art, were: Philip Leslieffale, Fredrick Freer, Fredrick Friesakc and Robert Reid. One of the critics, in reference to Robert Reid, found that the artist "has-the happy gift of seeing lovely and highly personal colours, combined with a delicate appreciation of female, two desirable qualities". It is in this spirit, that, artists published several books dedicated to the beauty of women in art. Examples of these artists are George Sheldons: "Women in French art", Theodore Child, "Mirror of fair women", Philip Leslier, "Studies in beauty and Elegance", "Great portrait women" by Alexander Crush etc.

There were issues raised regarding the relationship and responsibility of artists to women, by Sitter (a critic) on how much women's beauty is important to the success of an artist portrait, whether the portrait painter should idealize her, in order to improve the portrait appearance, or whether she should be used as element in a decorative design etc. In each case, women were the raw material to be modeled and manipulated by male artists. There was no other vocabulary that could convey the beauty of art as a private aesthetic experience than women. Women were perceived of being capable of beautifying any setting. That, masculine gender was constructed too much in terms of strength and character to be beautiful, and was perceived as having too much ideological weight to be decorated.

From the above artist's point of view, it is obvious, that women are gifted with beauty, grace, charm and taste, and these characteristics made them models for the artists. Women always want to maintain that gift of beauty in whatever they wear or in their dressing, particularly with their headgears (gele) which they tie into different styles and this make them spend so much time tying it before the mirror.

Gele

The female headgear is traditionally referred to as, "Gele" by all ethnic groups in Nigeria. It has been in existence for long. It comes in different colours and textures, and intricate designs. It is used with traditional attires by women. They are made from materials like, Excelsor, Damask, Jubilee, Cenamen, Swiss, and Aso-Oke.

According to Bunmi Wuraola, (Life Magazine, June 11-17, 2006), they were initially head costumes meant to complement a women's dressing and were basically African traditional attires, but these days, fashionists now wear gele on western dinner wears. They can be tied into different styles having resemblance of shapes of different objects and others, named after popular actresses and people, such as: Ice Cream Cone, Aroplane, Butterfly, Umbrella, Madam Kofo (named after popular actress of the T.V. soap, Madam Kofo, Second Chance), and Amebo (a character from Village Headmaster).

The major problem of the gele is the tying. Some people can even waste as much as two days without getting it done. Some, in one to two times tying alone, would twist all its firmness and aesthetic values away, as it becomes too soft to be manipulated into any good shape. At that point, it gets you confused and frustrated. Some women will even get their dresses so soaked with sweat in the struggle to get it done.

Besides, for those who do not know how to tie it, they will have to go about, begging people to help them every time they need to use it. These days, most people that do the tying, use it as business. You have to pay to get it tied, which is the only way to solve the problem. Again, these people are very few in number, besides, where they live or the market place, where they do it may not be close to one's residence, so you have to spend extra money for transportation and if people are many, you will wait till it gets to your turn, wasting more of your time. All these make "Gele-Hat" necessary.

How Fashion and Accessories (Gele) Enhance Females' Personality

Unlike men, women think about creativity in the way they dress. They can spend heavily on looking good. They like to be well put together in their dressing at all times. They also like to appear remarkable in the public or in occasions with their outfits; the way a woman or female dresses can enhance her personality.

A woman, who for instance wants to be influential in the society and make some impacts, must be creative in her dressing. The type of outfits and accessories, such a women is expected to wear must be classic, before she could influence anybody. We are living in a dispensation where women seem to be celebrating their gift of beauty with what they wear.

A woman who has the carriage or good physique and comports to go with a well tailored traditional outfit with gele, and other accessories to match, will definitely have a transformation of personality with elegance that will place her in a gorgeous and classic position.

Factors that Influence Females' Taste in Choice of Gele

- 1. Colour:** Colours are very crucial to females when it comes to the choice of gele. They hate colours that clash. Colours therefore, have a way of inspiring or influencing the females taste. In fact, the colour of the outfit and gele can update one's look and give a contemporary appearance. Women place emphasis on getting the colour of the fabric and gele precisely right for the season. In an interview with City People, Aderonke Sodeka, said, "...I love colours and play around with colours"
- 2. Texture:** Texture is another thing that influences female's taste of gele. This is determined by touching or feeling with the hands. In an interview with Fashion and Style Digest, Funmi Goga, when asked what she looks out for when buying, she said, "the design and texture"
- 3. Design:** This is another factor that influences a woman's choice in the purchase of gele.
- 4. Quality of Material used:** Females place very high premium on the quality of gele they wish to buy. Once the quality is to their taste, they will not mind the cost, even if they will have to borrow.

Problems Associated with Tying of Gele (Headgear)

The following are some of the problems associated with the tying of gele which makes Gele-hat a better alternative.

- 1. Not economically viable;** Continuous twisting and tying makes it to loose its strength, thus, making the wearer look older.
- 2. Maintenance:** It requires chemical for treatment to keep its firmness. Sometimes, these chemicals are unavailable and dangerous to the health if not well applied.
- 3. Marital problem:** It wastes time to tie and men get irritated and sometimes leave their wives in the struggle to tie it.
- 4. Problems while on Bike:** Some women struggle with it while on a bike due to the wind, and it sometimes pulls off.
- 5. Embarrassment in church and parties:** It covers people's view, thereby making people to hiss at the wearer.

Materials Used

- 1. Headgear**
- 2. Scissors**
- 3. Gum stay**
- 4. Press hood**

Production Process of Gele-Hat

The Gele-hat is made in such a way that it can be adjusted into any style, and can also be detachable and folded back into a box or bag. This is to avoid having a heap of them in the house. There are many ways of making gele-hat; however, the following steps are the simplest method.

- 1. The hat is made into two segments:** the base and the main body that will be used to form

the style.

2. First consider the style you wish to make.
3. The base must not be more than 3-4 inches above the face, with the length of about 36 inches.
4. Cut out the base material: 36 by 6 $\frac{1}{2}$ inches long.
5. Cut gum stay: 35 by 3 inches long.
6. Fold the right side of the material in No 4, into two, with one side $\frac{1}{2}$ inch longer than the other.
7. Lay the gum stay inside the folded material and iron them together for firmness. Then fold the remaining $\frac{1}{2}$ inch over it and sew it up.
8. Cut out 2 pieces of press hood of 6 $\frac{1}{2}$ inches each and sew each on both ends of the width of the base material. The press hood must be of the same length with the width of the base.
9. Cut out a triangular piece of the gele material of 15 by 12 inches long and sew their edges up neatly.
10. Sew the triangular shape to the middle, of the base with the longer side facing it to form a flap.
11. From the remaining material, cut into 30 by 20 inches long and fold one side of the width over the other to form two triangular shapes on both left and right and sew them up to keep the shapes in position. Cut a press hood of 30 inches long and sew to the length of the triangular shape very close to its end.
12. Wear the base hat with the press hood facing the back, and then fix the top (main body), with the press hood over the base.
13. Begin to adjust the two triangular flaps to suit any desired style of your choice.



Findings and Recommendations

1. Gele -hat is financially or economically viable, since it is not subject to continuous twisting and retying which weakens its strength and defaces it, thus, destroying its aesthetic qualities. Especially for low income earners who cannot afford to spend about two thousand naira and more to buy one single gele, gele -hat will be very useful to them.
2. It is convenient especially when traveling or going on a long distant journey. This is because it can be detached and folded neatly into a bag until one gets to her destination before fixing it back on the head.
3. Safety: The fear of it falling off as a result of the wind while on a bike is no longer there. A lot of women are more conscious of it while on the bike than their very lives, which is dangerous (I learnt of a woman who fell down from a bike and died as a result of struggle to keep it in position because of the wind.
4. Lateness to church and important functions or social gatherings which causes embarrassment and in turn reduces one's personality will be reduced.
5. The quarrel or painful continuous bite, it often gives to marital love as the man/husband gets irritated over the waste of time by the wife who is in struggle to get it tied will no longer be there.

6. It saves time and reduces stress, that tying, subjects a woman to, as it requires only press wooding to fix it on the head.
7. Difference styles: The flaps of one single Gele -hat can be adjusted or folding to form several styles which enhance the female's aesthetic look, or appearance.

Conclusion

This paper asserts that, women are naturally beautiful, making the artists to use them as models in most of their works to depict beauty, elegance and charm. They are always conscious of these qualities in their dressing. One of the areas of their taste is in the use of gele which forms part of their traditional outfits. However, there are several problems associated with the tying of gele, which necessitated the production of gele-hat as an alternative to tying. This paper therefore, believes that based on the findings, gele-hats can be used as an alternative to tying.

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