



16º


COLÓQUIO
DE MODA

EDIÇÃO ONLINE
DE 09/09 A 13/10 DE 2021

DECOLONIAL OPTIONS FOR AFRICAN FASHION: SENSUOUS PRACTICES OF IWALEWA AND ÀŞÈ

Maia, Dandara; PhD; Universidade de Bayreuth, dandara.maia@uni-bayreuth.de

As part of the ongoing research about fashion in Nigeria and Brazil, this presentation aims to criticize categories such as tradition and modernity produced within coloniality and by which African textiles and fashion are subjected. Such categories have prevented artistic practices from the continent and its diasporas from being adequately analyzed and discussed. I propose a delink from strict modern categorizations of artistic objects to embrace decolonial options to – as defined by Walter D. Mignolo and Rolando Vazquez – the colonial aesthetics, for instance, *iwalewa* and *àşè*. *Iwalewa* (character is beauty) is, in Ulli Beier’s words, a Yoruba understanding of innate beauty beyond the form. An interrelationship between moral force, integrity, and accumulation of divine powers. *Àşè*, according to Rowland Abiodun, is a divine essence, an energy present in all living and non-living things, which informs and activates artistic processes and experiences. These two notions better locate African textiles and fashion as products of sensuous practices charged with image agency. Since these objects are part of the daily life of African societies, Western discourse encapsulates them as “traditional craft” in opposition to art. They occupy an ambiguous position in art discourse. Collectors, curators, and critics agree upon the visual and technical qualities of textiles and dress produced in Africa. However, in ethnographic collections African creatives become only transmitters of their traditional knowledge, lacking any individual agency. Their identity is erased, and their artistic production is reduced to an illustration of their cultural settings, deprived of contemporary aesthetic validity. As pointed by M. Angela Jansen, the dominant Eurocentric framework has rejected the existence of fashion outside Western systems and forced the “non-West” to an archaic past. Therefore, it has failed to account for the circulation and changing o clothing codes outside European societies and conceptualized



16ºCOLÓQUIO
DE MODA

EDIÇÃO ONLINE

DE 09/09 A 13/10 DE 2021

fashion as a Western privilege for the contemporary and the new. The research fieldwork has been showing that the so-called “traditional” African techniques have indeed changed over time and fashioning the body practices have been an arena of constant struggle and negotiation between Nigerians and the West. The power relations present in the categorizations of art and fashion, worsened in the neoliberal system, open the possibility of creative exploitation and improper or absent remuneration of those who fall under the artisan category. Thus, cultural appropriation has less to do with the circulation and exchange of knowledge, techniques, and objects among individuals and more with contemporary fashion epistemology and the place actors occupy within the colonial matrix of power.

Palavras-chave: African fashion; decoloniality; African textiles; material culture

