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A Dialogue Between Cultures

Fashion throughout time has been used to send various messages. These messages can be seen through African fashion during pre-colonial, colonial, and post colonial times. The different textiles, colors and garments have helped Africans preserve their heritage through colonization, while also blending with their colonizers' fashion to form a new hybrid of fashion, which is synonymous with the country itself as it adopted and blended with the colonizers' cultures. One piece in particular titled "A Dialogue Between Cultures" created by Maison ARTC (Morocco, 2022) helps display a message¹. The piece is made of organza, cotton embroidery, sequins, plastic fish bones, and satin ribbon. The textiles exhibit a blend of these with traditional african fabrics with a mix of synthetic and modern fabrics. Therefore, the piece "A dialogue between cultures" by Maison ARTC reflects the way that Africa has been affected by colonization leading to a blending of traditional, colonized and post-colonial Africa.

The piece depicts many pieces of traditional African fashion. For example, the entire garb is a light beige color as it's base and the material itself is very light and sheer. Traditionally, African clothing is normally very bright and colorful. Additionally, the fabric itself would not be as light and airy or made synthetically in a factory it would be a cotton or batik. Another appearance of traditional African fashion is the presence of the garb being a burka. Morocco is a traditional muslim country. Therefore, having the garb with western/colonized influences be a burka helps symbolize their religious roots. The mask that covers the face completely is an homage to African masks, as well. Furthermore, the embroidered hands of Fatima, or Hamsa, are displayed in the garb. The hands of Fatima are a symbol of good faith and help ward against bad luck in Arab cultures. The embroidery was done with traditional techniques in Marrakech. Overall,

¹ Image at end of essay.

displaying the traditional elements present in the “A dialogue between cultures”.

The piece also displays many parts of colonized Africa. The piece has direct western influences present. The piece is displayed as burka. However, it also is identifiable as a British trench coat. The piece is displayed as an oversized British trench coat, which is one of the most recognizable British garments. The duality of the piece expresses the western/colonized influence on Africa, while also acknowledging its religious origins. The color is a traditional trench coat color. The color also represents nudity, a symbol for pureness. Overall, the neutral colors and organza fabric is because of western influence, since organza is a synthetic fabric and neutral colors are not typically worn in Africa.

Lastly, the piece shows a blend of the two by displaying some postcolonial elements. For example the burka/british trench is sheer. The piece is sheer because burkas are meant to conceal what is inward, but the piece is prompting the viewer to look through the burka completely to display the effects that colonialism had on Morocco and Africa. There is also a quote embroidered into the garb. The quote is from Marianne Williamson, who is an author from Houston, Texas. The use of a white woman from Texas’s quote on this piece that is supposed to display a mix of African and western influences seems strange. However, the quote itself is very meaningful and inspiring to those fresh out of colonization. It empowers people to embrace the unknown and to not dim their light and ambitions and to take the freedom of colonization and to embrace it and take back control.

As seen, the piece “A dialogue between cultures” by Maison ARTC displays a beautiful unification of traditional, colonial, and postcolonial influences on Africa. The garb tells a tale of the new Africa/Morocco. The garb shows western influence through color, fabric among other things, while still showing its heritage and origins through religious and cultural influences. The quote on the back helps display that western influence will forever taint Africa. However, it also displays a sense of hope as Africa can become the best of both worlds taking the positives from the colonizers and maintain their traditions at the same time.



[Photo submission: Devhara Weeratung]