FASHION CONCEPT AS CULTURALLY PROJECTED WITHIN GHANA'S MOST BEAUTIFUL (GMB) BEAUTY PAGEANT IN GHANA

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ABSTRACT

The orientation toward continuous change can be found in the modern society through beauty pageants (Chalactatpinye, Padgett and Crocker, 2002). Fashion is one of the most visible media of change which is reflected in aesthetics, politics, economics, cultural and social life. The Ghana's Most Beautiful pageant has as its objective, redefining beauty and projecting Ghanaian cultural values to unite the country. Varied opinions of the general public continue to pour out every year regarding pageants which sometimes result in disagreements on the weekly evictions and final crowning of the overall winner of GMB. Fashion is one of the main tools engaged in beauty pageantry to achieve objectives. However, the contribution of fashion within the GMB pageant has not been clearly defined. The purpose of this paper is to illustrate the role played by fashion in beauty pageants such as GMB and the vital contributions made. The research is qualitative with Ghanaian TV3 pageant stakeholders forming the population. It was revealed that fashion played a major role in beauty pageants and has the tendency to change lives through its activities. It is recommended that the fashion concept should be studied carefully to ensure it does not go against the main objectives of the pageant.

Keywords: Fashion, Beauty Pageant, Culture, GMB

1. INTRODUCTION

The orientation toward continuous change can be found in modern society through beauty pageants (Chalactatpinye, Padgett and Crocker, 2002). Fashion is one of the most visible media of change which is reflected in aesthetics, politics, economics,

cultural and social life. Ghana's Most Beautiful pageant has as its aims, uniting Ghanaians through redefining beauty and the projecting of the country's diverse cultural values. As Individuals and society use fashion to communicate their lifestyle (Barnard, 1996) due to its potentials of causing change, so does GMB pageant engage fashion as a tool to achieve its objectives. Sproles (1974) defines fashion as a culturally endorsed form of expression, in a particular material or non-material phenomenon, which is discernible at any given time and changes over time within a social system or group of associated individuals. Beauty pageants whether on the local or global stage are lively sites for the production and contestation of cultural meanings (King-O Riain, 2008).

Beauty has always been a craft which is very local in its products and traditions with no global standard of what is meant to be beautiful. Standard of beauty varies from nation to nation but remain similar in value to the society at large. Beauty pageants normally select a woman to serve as a symbolic representation of their collective identity to a larger audience. A contestant represents common tastes and life of her community. The common tastes and lifestyle of members of society collectively form and represent the tastes and lifestyle of its people. The fashion and culture of a particular time symbolize the spirit of the times (Chalactatpinye, Padgett and Crocker, 2002). For a beauty pageant, fashion and culture work together in achieving a common goal.

In the United States of America, a pageant is a competition for young women who are judged on their beauty and other qualities. In the United Kingdom, it is a show, usually performed outside that consists of people wearing traditional clothing and acting out historical events. Pageants are competitions for ladies with beauty qualities determined by societal values and norms. It is mainly a performance art geared towards outlining beauty in all its totality within a nation or continent. Beauty pageants also bring happiness to people, just like singing and dancing. Pageants are a highly popular form of entertainment for recreational and leisure purposes around the world with their queens embodying a community's standards of femininity and morality.

Pageants are used to promote national unity among communities which enhance mainstream of cultures. Crawford, Kerwin, Gurung, Khati, Jha and Regmi (2008) indicated that for some time now, pageants such as Miss America encouraged education and social consciousness among its contestants. It, however, maintained the major values of the pageant by observing the swimsuit segment due to its attachment to the ideal body form of American beauty. Organizers could also engage pageants in achieving various objectives of which promoting cultural values is essential. Preserving culture through beauty has always been the dream of every nation but is normally interrupted by global fashion. Banet-Weiser (1999); Cohen et al (1996) as cited by Crawford et al (2008, p.61) indicated that "beauty pageants represent and reflect not only social constructions of gender, but also of nationalism, morality, modernization, and globalization." Within the fashion concept, contestants are required to give several presentations on culture in every activity such as clothing and behaviours. Contestants

who choose to sing or dance for the talent round must also complete it in a traditional newest style.

According to Frimpong (2016), President Osagyefo Dr. Kwame Nkrumah crowned Miss Monica Amekoafia as Ghanaian's first beauty queen, in the year 1957 after independence. The biggest and oldest national beauty pageant in the country "Miss Ghana" offers the independent Ghanaian woman a platform to positively impact on her society. Since the introduction of beauty contests in the country, more deserving intelligent young ladies have been successfully crowned in other similar pageants. Few that come to mind are Miss Malaika, Miss Tourism Ghana, Miss Earth and others in various institutions and at festivals. All of these pageants came with a unique set of approaches in addressing social issues affecting the country.

In 2007, an insightful pageant culturally educative and with national patronage called Ghana's Most Beautiful (GMB) pageant was established with the theme: "Redefining Beauty to Promote National Unity and Development." It is a reality show that became a replacement of the then 45-minute television programme on Ghanaian culture entitled 'Akwaaba'. Later the programme was extended to all ten regions of Ghana for a wider knowledge of the Ghanaian culture resulting in the name "Ghana's Most Beautiful" pageant (Prince Dartey one of the organisers who doubled as a staff of TV3 narrated this on 3rd August 2016). In the interview with Prince Dartey, he revealed that GMB pageant was an adaption of a beauty pageant in Malaysia called "Malaysia's Most Beautiful" in 2007 with the main objective of showcasing Ghanaian cultural values. The pageant is organised by TV3 which uses the female gender as a powerful symbol of communication.

Balogun, (2012) stated that in emerging nations, beauty pageants perform important dual roles by both creating a more diverse vision of femininity that places a nation squarely in the international arena and unifying vision of a country's femininity within itself. GMB pageant primarily focuses on "cultural values" and its potential contestants come from the numerous ethnic groups residing in all regions of Ghana. It also seeks to re-define Ghanaian beauty; promote cultural awareness and preservation of the regions of Ghana through the concept of fashion and among other things. It was also staged to re-unite the nation by showcasing national distinctiveness and pride, and the exhibition of Ghanaian culture. Hamashima (2012) indicated that from the beginnings, beauty pageants were a controversial and unwelcome venture. This is because people do not understand the purpose of existence except entertainment. Ghana's Most Beautiful, a pageant in Ghana is not an exception. Every year, viewers continue to agitate when a contestant is evicted or nominated. On "myjoyonline.com" in 2007 for example, once wrote "I am not a critic of the arts, but I'm sure just like most Ghanaians who watched the finals of the "Ghana's Most Beautiful" pageant on TV3 this week, no one needed a third eye to conclude that the wrong candidate was chosen". In one of October 2016 Daily Guide issues/volumes, Casely-Hayford and Mauhayu-Deen wrote with the title; "the case of a "stolen crown" and "verdict" which demonstrated their dissatisfaction on the selection of the winner. Fashion is the main tool that helps in the achievement of

objectives in beauty pageant. However, the fashion concept within pageants such GMB has not been clearly defined. The contributions of fashion in beauty pageants have not also been assessed. Due to the above reasons, varied opinions of the general public continue to pour out at pageants resulting in disagreements on the weekly evictions and final crowning of the overall winner.

1.1 Fashion and Beauty Pageants

Ocloo (2015) cited in Koomson, (2016) explains that pageants are public entertainment events of selecting young girls in an elaborate, colourful and competitive manner. It traditionally focuses on judging and ranking of a contestant's personality and physical attributes. Intelligence, talent, and ability to answer judges' questions satisfactorily help in defining a participant's beauty in a pageant. Fashion is a tool in beauty pageants. Sapir in 1985 stated that "Fashion" is not only clothing but essentially symbolism with relation to habits, arts, ideas, living and morals. Sproles (1974) affirmed Sapir's definition by further describing fashion as a behavioural phenomenon broadly based and evidenced in a variety of material and non-material contexts. Patrizia Calefato theory also describes fashion as an interdisciplinary field that sees fashion as a meaning system within which cultural and aesthetic portrayals of the clothed body are produced". In her book "Adorned in Dreams", Wilson (2005) refers to fashion as a kind of performance art, with clothes acting as a picture announcing our act. Variety of performance within a pageant required different outfits needed to serve as a picture announcing the act of a contestant. Fashion combines clothing with its behaviour to the wearer and her culture as one suggesting a strong relationship between the two. This explains the reason why Wilson delights in the power of fashion to mark out identity or subvert it. In the sense of pageants, clothing are signifying systems in which the individual and social order are defined, created, experienced, understood, and communicated (Barnard, 1996).

Fashion originates from the designing of body coverings to behavioural contexts. It reigns in modelling, a poorly perceived profession once associated to non-achievers which now provides some celebrities. This is because models represent changing ideals of beauty in all cultures, Breward admitted. Swanson and Everett (2015), describe fashion show as another promotional tool in the fashion industry with the most thrilling effect. Although fashion shows are produced for a variety of reasons, the primary one is to sell merchandise because it helps make an authoritative visual statement. Does this mean Ghana's Most Beautiful pageant is a product or possess something ideal for sale?

Finally, as questioned by Parsons (2012), does fashion have something unique to offer Ghanaians in the GMB pageant? This is what continues to linger in the minds of people. Sociologists Lang and Lang in (1961) answered this question when they defined the field as an elementary form of collective behaviour with a compelling power in the implicit judgment of an anonymous multitude. If it is underrated then it is because it is not well

understood by the public. Perhaps one weakness of the fashion field is in its tendency to be addressed in a singular manner, Breward finally claimed. If a pageant's practices are not well understood then it results from its organizer's inability to connect all activities to the main purpose.

Sproles (1974) defines fashion as a form of expression that is culturally endorsed in a particular material or non-material phenomenon, discernible at any given time but changes over time within associated individuals of a social system. Campbell (2018) indicated that clothes are repeatedly deployed in governance to enforce social controls. Similarly, the forces of fashion which are directly influential to the acceptance process are the dissemination and acceptance of ideological movements, educational practices, scientific pursuits, and emerging lifestyles Karunaratne (2016) asserted. The power of fashion in changing the world cannot always be overstated.

The question now is, to what extend is GMB pageant pursuing its agenda through fashion? Hurlock, Elizabeth (1929) a sociologist, a philosopher, an economist, and a psychologist affirmed, "The fashion impulse is the most astonishing and potent social force that influences upon the behaviour of the individuals due to its universality and rapidity. It has a close relationship to the social and economic life of nations. She tried to find out satisfaction derived from people's obedience to fashion and the motivational basis for this form of human behaviour. Economist Robinson (1958) explains that fashion in its most general sense is the pursuit of novelty for its own sake. A pageant with fashion as the main tool must continue to employ new ideas into its activities. This explained why Sproles (1974) asserted that "For centuries the phenomena of fashion behaviour have been the varied subject of social analysts, cultural historians, moral critics, academic theorists, and business entrepreneurs". Sproles again believed that the generalized concept of fashion has a significant interest in social and cultural scientists. This is because deductively, the universal definition could be modified to define any specific phenomenon. For example, in the classic arena of clothing fashion, the application of the generalized definition may be derived in solving other problems. The purpose of a local pageant is to influence the public into accepting desirable beliefs and values consequently the adaption of the fashion concept is ideal.

1.2 Fashion and Social Affiliation

An important need satisfied by fashion is the need for social affiliation and must not be understated if hoped to be accepted. Sometimes members of social groups adopt a clothing style that becomes a means of group identification. Individuals who want to achieve or maintain social approval, acceptance, and a sense of belonging conform to the group dressing norms (Sproles & Burns, 1994). For example, compliments about ones dress become a tangible component of group acceptance (Kaiser, 1997). The extent to which Ghanaian identify to a particular costume worn within GMB Pageants indicates their acceptance for the outfit. During the presentation segment of the pageants, individuals or group of people also identify with a reference group to which

they do not belong, and their clothing behaviour and the public might be strongly influenced by this group. This includes maintaining conformity within the group and emulation of taste of admired members within the group (Kaiser, 1997). This goes a long way to promote the region from which this costume originates.

2. METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a descriptive type of research basically qualitative with main focus on primary and secondary data. Observation and content analyses covered variables from GMB pageant directly linked to research problem understudied. Interviews were conducted on the concept of fashion within the pageant. The target population consisted of TV3 staff, producers, judges, contestants, traditional rulers and general participants of the GMB Pageant. The accessible population was made up of selected categories of people found on GMB event grounds during auditions, regional durbars, launching, reality shows from 2016 to 2018. Selected areas of GMB activities from Navrongo, Kumasi and Accra were studied. The event grounds of the participating towns were places with enough activities to answer the research problem.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 The Fashion Tool in Beauty Pageants

Fashion object is either a specific stylish product or non-material "social" product in the form of any behavioural practice or ideological philosophy. With reference to this, the fashion object is made up of appearance (clothing) and personal characters (behaviour or attitude) exhibited in Ghana's Most Beautiful pageant.

A fashion process is a mechanism of stages through which a potential fashion object moves from its creation to public presentation and public acceptance. In the fashion process, a potential fashion object is introduced to members of a social system and possibly adopted by certain leading individuals frequently referred to as innovators, which is ultimately diffused to other social systems. The fashion process represents a dynamic mechanism by which the object ultimately emerges as an accepted or rejected fashion. The pageant over the years presented various cultural activities including traditional clothing in various forms to the Ghanaian society. It also presents ladies of all forms but at the end, the rate of acceptance or rejection determined the success of fashion role within a pageant.

Both an object and a process have unique characteristics that differentiate one phenomenon from the other. A summary of some of the critical characteristics and elements of fashion then illustrate how an object could be differentiated from specific behavioural ones (Sproles 1974).

Figure 1. Fashion and culture in the display as regional representatives are led into a durbar ground accompanied by traditional dancers.

3.2 Characteristics of the Fashion Object

The fashion object particularly in all pageant activities and physical products have a number of unique characteristics as outlined by (Sproles 1974) theory.

i. The fashion object is a non-permanent object/activity which is subject to change, undesirability, and eventual replacement by "newer" objects. Fashion object may be modified from its present state (physically or functionally). Fashion requires pageant activities to be dynamic. In designing these activities especially contestants' costumes, they must not be the same designs of outfits always seen. A traditional costume should be stylish. For a pageant like GMB to be successful, it must continually place its activities especially the traditional wear in continues modification.

ii. The fashion object may have characteristics of functional utility, but in general, the acceptance of the object is largely based on qualities other than functional utility. Qualities unique to the fashion object may include styling, aesthetics, social acceptability, ego gratification, status symbolism, and other psycho-social qualities. A behaviour or object in a pageant must be symbolic, tasks purposive and results-oriented.

Figure 2. GMB contestants clothed in traditional costumes

iii. In any given period of time, the "current" or "acceptable" fashion objects are subject to and defined by public "tastes." The fashion objects of any given time symbolize the "collective tastes" of social system members who have adopted the fashion object. Every fashion product at any given period is either accepted or rejected but the acceptance level must be high. A pageant activity or personality must be endorsed by its community.

iv. When an activity or object is initially introduced, the fashion object must be characterized by conspicuous newness and novelty, and therefore becomes "exclusive" when compared to existing and accepted fashion objects. There must be a high level of creativity in designing all aspects of a pageant. Fashion object loses this exclusiveness as a desired characteristic when the object is accepted, utilized, or conformed to by a large number of persons. To what extent has the Ghanaian society adapted the local traditional way of dressing through the GMB pageant? The absence of any adaption suggests a review of the pageant's vision.

v. The fashion object may contain directly relevant psycho-social characteristics such as high social visibility or conspicuousness, and high ego-involvement. All contestants do not possess personal and social high-class attributes, it is fashion that helps bring out these characteristics. The social characteristics of the fashion object may constitute the critical motivations for its acceptance. Are the presented ladies' outfits imitating, expressing and instrumental in the Ghanaian context?

vi. The fashion product may represent a "luxury" rather than a necessity or commodity product. Specifically, in physical products, the fashion object may qualify as a luxury product in that a premium price is discretionarily paid for "desirable" design, or design which is perceived to be newer, more novel, more aesthetically appealing, or generally more "attractive" as compared to other choice alternatives. Does the public view the queen or GMB pageant ideas as a necessity or luxury as they are optional and not forced on the public?

Figure 3. Conspicuous novelty at GMB Pageant

vii. The fashion object is socially differentiated for various cultural utilizations such as the creation of sex appeal, social role performance, life-cycle position, occupational position, prestige position, and other life-style functions (Karunaratne, 2016).

Figure 4. Clothing distinguishing `gender and traditional function (a fetish) at GMB reality show

viii. Fashion object is socially differentiated by distinguishing the sex, the role played, social status etc. Apart from the fact that fashion (clothing) certify basic functions of protection, adornment, modesty, and expression of social status, there are other reasons for adopting fashion which serve to satisfy social, psychological, and cultural needs. Fashion also satisfies the need for differentiation, individuality and association

within a pageant. Azuah (2012) stated that one of the earliest theories which formed the hypotheses of wearing clothes was the modesty/shame theory.

3.3 Fashion Differentiation and Individuality

According to Inglessis (2008) study on "Fashion, Culture and Communications", fashion provides a way for individuals to differentiate themselves from others; to express their egos; to feel overconfident; to proclaim their uniqueness; to create self-symbols; to express personal creativity and aesthetic talent, and to cover or hide feelings and manage their moods. Clothing reveals some information about an individual's personality and economic standing. But here again, the above traits of fashion does not operate in a vacuum. It is normally situated within an acceptable environment. An African must follow Africans' traditional norms, values and beliefs to be more appreciated within the same environment. A pageant that seeks to promote culture should not be seen do things contrary to the societies' norms. Henderson (2015) concluded that while culture and traditions inspire what one wears, events also influence one choice of clothing.

3.4 Fashion and Social Status

Fashion and clothing are also used to indicate social status, power distance, and prestige. People frequently judge others social worth and status according to what they are wearing. Clothing can indicate the status an individual has in the production or economic system of a given society by reflecting his or her occupational role. For example, in Ghana white colour is associated with the Ga people in the Greater Accra region. Green uniforms with white sleeve bands are associated with nurses and white-collar outfits with office work. In a durbar, traditional rulers are identified with various regalia symbolizing authority and power. In time past, in the northern region of Ghana, a married woman did not dress without cover cloth. This explains the reason why contestants from the three regions of the north dressed with a cover cloth on the shoulder. Similarly, a young lady from the southern part of Ghana wears the traditional costume with the length hanging above the feet.

Again, the use of clothing can also indicate status in other dimensions such as gender and age (Barnard, 1996). In general, cultures use clothing to differentiate males from females, and younger from older people. For example, the use of trousers, heavy materials and facial hair have been traditionally associated with masculinity, whereas the use of high heels, skirts, and delicate materials has been associated with femininity. Fashion as witnessed in Ghana's Most Beautiful pageant should be able to bring out these differences.

Barnard, (1996) affirmed that fashion also satisfies the need of recreation, the need to be modern and up to date, showing the individuals awareness of what is going on

in his or her environment. Consequentially, should the Ghanaian recreate from what is existing, modify or throw away all relating to culture?

Figure 5. Clothing fashion expressing social status (Fieldwork)

3.5 Fashion and Communication

Recent scholars now state that clothing represents one's identity and communicates nonverbally. Clothing in some societies is as functional as language. It represents a person's age, gender, marital status, ethnicity, social status and occupation. If a contestant is dressed in blue jeans with a smock top, she is probably trying to state that she wants to look foreign and traditional with the top identifying her region or nation. Clothing in the GMB pageant must reflect the vision of the event.

Fashion communicates meanings that go beyond material characteristics. A symbol in the Ghanaian culture is an entity that represents entities such as "Gye Nyame", "Sankofa", "Sogo Yi" which all communicates specific massages. According to the semiotic approach, fashion is a language and therefore systematically organized. Similar to the linguistic code, clothing and fashion have denotative (literal) meaning and connotative (implied, symbolic) meaning (Barnard, 1996). One thing that relates the fashion to a language is the fact that it builds its foundation from tradition, culture and continues to modify itself from existing structures. Fashion also allows for future projections.

In Ghana's Most Beautiful pageant, fashion and clothing are considered as traditional symbols and connotations accepted in the Ghanaian culture. Some authors suggest that the perception and interpretation of appearance take place in a holistic manner which is composed of the cues of the physical message and the context or background (Damhorst, 1990). It is normally necessary to consider the physical surroundings of the wearer and the cultural environment to aid information management in clothing.

Also, the meanings given to various styles, appearances or trends vary between social groups. Different clothing items or styles evoke different associations for diverse groups.

3.6 Fashion as a Symbolic Interaction

The term symbolic interactionism was invented by Herbert Blumer in 1969. The basic idea behind this approach is maintained through social interaction. Blumer, (1969) stated three basic premises central to symbolic interactionism; The first premise is that human beings act toward things on basis of meanings attached to them (p.2). Blumer refers to everything that people may perceive in their daily life. This includes physical objects, other human beings, situations, and institutions.

It can be said that human act toward other people on the basis of what their appearances hold (Kaiser, 1997). As people have different experiences, their interpretation of fashion might differ from one another. For example, individuals exposed to fashion through advertising in a high fashion magazine might perceive it as high fashion. Instead, if such styles are not witnessed before, it might be interpreted as strange or old-fashioned (Sproles & Burns, 1994). The gradual introduction of some traditional costumes into the fashion market could finally set a trend. Strange or old-fashioned costume could be modified into becoming a contemporary fashion. A traditional outfit can be transformed into a new type of clothing appropriate enough for all functions while still maintaining some traditional symbols or features.

The second premise of symbolic interaction is that the meaning of such things is derived from, the social interaction that one has with one's fellows (Blumer, 1969, p.2). This implies that the source of meaning is not intrinsic to the thing that holds it, neither is it a congregation of psychological elements in the person. Instead, meaning arises as a process of interaction between individuals. Meaning is a social product. Kaiser (1997) adds to this idea that meanings are not just passively received, but that people must learn and discover them. For example, children learn to differentiate people who would wear a certain kind of clothing from those who would not. The role of clothing becomes apparent only after understanding the elements of its symbolic system (Kaiser, 1997).

The third premise is that meanings are modified by a continuous interpretative process in which the actor interacts with himself (Blumer, 1969). As applied to clothing, individuals discover a certain meaning of a clothing symbol yet may reinterpret or alter the meaning according to a process of inner conversation along with subsequent interactions. This means that individuals are not only influenced by images of others with whom they interact but that they also make meaning through internal dialogue, a point very much required in a beauty pageant. Similarities of symbolic interactions from all regions must be well co-ordinated to achieve good results within a pageant that seeks to unite the country.

4. CONCLUSION

Fashion is a major tool in achieving results in beauty pageants. It has the potentials of reuniting the cultures and communicating the right information to the appropriate persons. It motivates the ordinary individual to the acceptance of a practice. A beauty pageant needs to engage in fashion theories in order to yield much acceptance.

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