

# **Expressing Power and Status through Aesthetics in Mijikenda Society**

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## **Abstract**

This article pinpoints the dynamic interaction of aesthetics, power and status in 'traditional' society. The article adopts the functionalist approach as being the most appropriate in understanding the multi-functionality of aesthetics as it pertains to elders of privilege. The article postulates that certain aesthetic elements articulated and legitimized the political, economic and ritual power of privileged elders, and that they visually, contextually and perceptually marked out elders vested with authority from those individuals with no authority in the society. It argues that it was in the interest of privileged elders to appropriate certain aesthetic elements and imbue them with ritual and symbolic value in order to manipulate them to their advantage within the Council of Elders system which, though it is said to have been relatively egalitarian in its mode of operation, nonetheless was ruled by a small elite group.