

DESIGN AND MARKETING OF TEXTILE AND CLOTHING IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

The origin of textile and clothing in Nigeria predates modern history just like in many other cultures of the world, textiles were produced in Nigeria long before European contact. There was evidence that a bundled fibre was woven in Ugbo-Ukwu in the present day Anambra State over 1000 years ago and later in the thirteenth century, there was also evidence that cotten was woven in Benin in Edo State. Dyeing also has a long tradition in Nigeria, Kano and Abeokuta feature prominently as fabrics dyeing centres in Nigeria. Design is a process of purposeful visual creation. It is the arrangement of independent parts to create a co-ordinated form. Design is a human cognitive reaction, implies conceptualization, innovation and creativity which translates to the creation of visual structures and organization of forms and motifs. In Nigeria, there are many peculiar designs by which certain ethnic groups are identified. The 'akwete' cloth for instance, is produced mainly in Akwete; a town in South-eastern Nigeria (Igbo land). Adire, is a name given by the Yorubas to their indigo resist dyed cloth. They also produce the aso-oke cloth by which they have gained world-wide recognition. The Fulanis are known for the production of a woven cloth called 'khassa' while the Ibibios produce the 'ukatt'. At some point, fabric becomes clothing. Clothing traditions vary with each ethnic group. Each society has its own name for different types of clothing made out of traditional cloth peculiar to that people. Textile marketing is achieved in Nigeria through extensive distribution (place) of products, the product itself, price and promotion. There are two main channels of distribution employed by textile industry in Nigeria, the direct method and the indirect methods. The major serious competition facing the textile industry in Nigeria is the significant quantity of textile products entering through unrecorded trade, mainly from the Asian countries. Because the products are brought in illegally, the relevant duties are not paid thereby making the products even cheaper than products made in Nigeria.

INTRODUCTION

The origin of textile and clothing in Nigeria predates modern history just like in many other cultures of the world. Ohiorhenuan (2001) posits that textiles were produced in Nigeria long before European contact. Sieber (1972) states that there was evidence that a bundled fibre was woven in Ugbo-Ukwu in the present day Anambra State over 1000 years ago and later in the thirteenth century, there was also evidence that cotten was woven in Benin in Edo State. Dyeing also has a long tradition in Nigeria (Barbour & Diog 1971). Kano and Abeokuta feature prominently as fabrics dyeing centres in Nigeria.

Design as described by Wong (1993) is a process of purposeful visual creation. It is the arrangement of independent parts to create a co-ordinated form (Ohiorhenuan 2001). Oguntona (1996) asserts that design as a human cognitive reaction, implies conceptualization, innovation and creativity which translates to the creation of visual structures and organization of forms and motifs. Iloeje and Edeh (2006) opines that in Nigeria, there are many peculiar designs by which certain ethnic groups are identified. The 'akwete' cloth for instance, is produced mainly in Akwete; a town in South-eastern Nigeria (Igbo land). Adire, is a name given by the Yorubas to their indigo resist dyed cloth. They also produce the aso-oke cloth by which they have gained world-wide recognition (Okeke, 1990). The Fulanis are known for the production of a woven cloth called 'khassa' while the Ibibios produce the 'ukatt'. Many other tribes in Nigeria have different types of locally produced textiles. These indigenous fabrics are mostly woven from locally grown cotton. Cotton is strong, absorbent, comfortable to wear, and washable (Waber, 1990). Modern textile firms involved in large scale production are also located in different parts of Nigeria.

Designs of textile in Nigeria can be described from two broad categories based on the method of production, the traditional and the contemporary. The traditional textile consists of two classes also and this is based on the method of decoration; (a) woven (structurally) decorated textile and (b) surface decorated textile. The structurally decorated fabrics are those produced on the horizontal men's loom and the vertical women's loom and these include the Akwete, Akwaocha, Okene and Aso-Oke weaves and others. Ohiorhenuan (2001) says that the traditional hand woven fabrics have unique features, handle, heavy and texture. These fabrics are not usually worn on daily basis but are mainly reserved for important occasions such as wedding, child naming, Sunday outing. The surface decorated fabrics, on the other hand consists of tie and dies and other fabrics made through resist methods of dyeing. These fabrics are mostly used as daily wears although some of these designs have found their way into high culture.

STRUCTURALLY DESIGN FABRICS

Nigerians have local fabrics which are indigenous to particular parts of the country. For instance, the Akwete cloth is made in Akwete, Abia state, the Aso-oke is made locally in Yoruba-land i.e. South-West of Nigeria, while the Okene cloth is made locally at Okene in Kogi state. Other locally woven cloths are the Kano cloth, the Benue cloth, and the Fulani milk-maid cloths. The weaving of these cloths is done mainly by women on weaving looms (Iloeje and Edeh (2006); Obasi, Badmus and Osuji, 2009).

AKWETE CLOTH

The Akwete Cloth is produced from dyed, spun and twisted cotton yarn. Assorted, coloured, and thick sylkos are used to weave various designs unto the cloth. Different designs have different names and meanings. For example, there are designs for an unmarried lady, engaged but not yet married, a married lady, a widow or a divorcee. There are designs tailored to mark specific local or national ceremonies such as yam festival, independence anniversary etc. Akwete cloth is mostly used as a ceremonial wear as it is not cheap to produce and it is usually very beautiful. In the mid to late nineteenth century, weaving grew from part-time activity that occupied some women, to full-time occupation in which all Akwete women participated. At this period, Akwete weavers responded to the patronage of neighbouring Ijaw people of the Niger-Delta, devising novel techniques to create desired patterns in new textile materials (Aguiyi, Ukaoha, Onyegbulam & Nwankwo 2011)..

ASO-OKE

Aso-Oke is a locally woven fabric commonly found in the South-West of Nigeria. The weaving is fine and neat. Sometimes metallic threads are arranged in small groups on the warp to produce a striped effect. When the weft threads are shuttled through, the finished fabric has stripes of metallic thread. This usually looks very attractive as women's wrappers and head ties. The plain woven Aso Oke is neat and strong. In some areas, the warp threads are arranged to give small, oval holes like button holes on the finished fabric. Rayon and silk threads, slightly thicker than the yarn, are sometimes interwoven in the fabric to produce very effective designs. Aso Oke is used at traditional occasions such as weddings, engagements, funerals and other festivals. The fabric is used by both men and women. It can be used to make bedspreads, oven pads or inner mattress covers. LeBlanc and Van Lowe (2000) states that Aso-oke, has three main designs: *etu*, a dark blue indigo dyed cloth (a verse from an Ifa divination text describes it as the "father of all cloths") *sanyan*, a brown cloth woven from the beige silk of the Anaphe moth; and *alaari*, woven from Southern European silk obtained from the Sahara via Tripoli. For the Yoruba, cloth made completely of silk is rare. Strips of silk cloth are communally used as decoration for indigo dyed cloth.

OKENE CLOTHS

Weaving of fabric is a common trade among the people of Ebira who are mostly found in Okene part of Kogi State in Nigeria. It is something that the older women do to keep themselves busy in order to fight boredom. It has come to be identified as a common feature of a typical Ebira woman's wardrobe. Most buyers come from different parts of the country to patronize them.

KANO CLOTHS

Kano Cloths are woven with cotton yarn by craftsmen who make an industry of it. The cloths are coarse and thick. They can stand up to frequent washing. They are most suitable for making articles such as mattress covers, cushion covers, floor and oven cloths.

KHASA

Khasa consists of heavy woollen striped blankets that are woven by the Fulanis. The textile is typically 6 to 8 feet long and woven in 8-inch wide strips. Although the traditional blanket is white, it is also common to have yellow, black, or red strips. Khasa is usually ordered for the cold season.



Some Nigerian Traditional fabrics
Source: NCMM (2010)

SURFACE DESIGNED FABRICS

The traditional surface designed fabrics consist of adire produced with the resist methods in the South-western part of Nigeria and whole piece dyed fabrics produced in the Northern part of the country.

ADIRE FABRICS

Adire is a colorful dyed cloth found throughout Africa. The best known and most valuable, adire, is a deep blue cloth made by the Yoruba of the South-Western Nigeria. The design is created by a process of resist dyeing, which prevents dye from being absorbed by some parts of the cloth. There are different types of resist dyeing methods used to create adire cloth designs. Oniko is a method of tying patterns into the cloth. Eleko designs are stencilled or painted onto the cloth with starch (usually from cassava or yam). While another method, called Alabere, uses raffia to stitch designs into the fabric. Once the designs are complete, the white cloth is then dipped into a deep blue dye. When dry, the fabric is untied, or the starch and stitches are removed, to reveal a beautiful design.



Adire Fabrics Displayed at Gbagi Market, Ibadan

Source: Researcher's Fieldwork

WHOLE-PIECE DYED FABRICS

Indigo dyed cloth for turbans, beaten to high sheen are said to be the best example of Nigerian textile which is dyed without imposing a pattern (Eicher 1976). The turbans are sought after by the Tuareg nomads who travel in and out of Kano. The cloth comes from the town of Kura which is about twenty miles south of Kano. The fabric used for dyeing is hand spun by women and hand woven the men in the nearby village of Makoro. Nowadays, piece dyed turbans are mostly used by the palace and emirs' traditional security personnels.

COMTEMPORARY TEXTILE

Traditional textiles have been produced in Nigeria for many years as stated earlier, but real industrial activity in textile production is comparatively recent, the Kaduna Textile Mills was established in 1956, followed by Nigerian Textile Mills in 1962. From inception, these companies were conceived as vertically integrated mills, to convert locally available raw materials - mainly cotton - through spinning for the production of yarn, weaving for the production of grey cloth, and dyeing, printing and finishing, for the production of finished textiles. The major textile enterprises in Nigeria are located around Lagos which has the majority of the country's spinning mills and weaving mills. Other significant textile operations are located around Kano and Kaduna. The sector has developed to incorporate fibre production, spinning, weaving, knitting, lace and embroidery makings, carpet production, dyeing, printing and finishing. The sector produces a varied series of fabrics annually, ranging from African prints, shirtings, embroideries, etc., to Guinea brocades, wax prints, jute and other products.

Of all the textile products mentioned above, the Nigerian industry dwells so much on African prints otherwise known as Ankara. This can be said to have narrowed down the Nigerian textile target market to Africans both in the continent of Africa and in diaspora. African Fabrics (2011) opines that ankara is a fabric that was normally reserved for cultural festivities. People felt that this fabric was too flowery, and too colourful. African Fabrics (2011) went further to say that there was a time, when ankara textiles were regarded as the fabric of the poor. But today, the fabric has undergone a magic transformation to become a choice of the rich and famous. Fabrics which were once considered as out of fashion has changed to become a sizzling fad. Ankara fabric has become an inevitable part of any social functions in Nigeria, credence is given to this position by Ojo and Akinrujomu(2007) who posits that fashion designers have sensed this trend, and are coming up with appealing designs to capture the apparel market.



African Prints on Display at Balogun market Lagos.

CLOTHING STYLES IN NIGERIA

At some point, fabric becomes clothing. Clothing traditions vary with each ethnic group. Each society has its own name for different types of clothing made out of traditional cloth particular to that people. However, one finds similarities across cultures. And with migration and interactions over time, ethnic groups have adapted and shared customs of dress (LeBlanc and Van Lowe 2000).

Styles of clothing vary from the simple, plain shirt, and wrapper; to the intermediate in which there is the beginning of design and slight detail; to complex, more detailed formal cloths. Clothes include tops, bottoms (trousers, $\frac{3}{4}$ length pants, and shorts), and gowns (ankle, calve, and knee-length). Different groups have their own name for a particular piece of clothing. To illustrate this, the Hausa call a top *riga*, a bottom *wando*, and a gown *buba riga*, the Yoroba call a top *buba*, a bottom *sokoto*, wrapper *iro* and a gown *agbada* while the Igbos and their Niger Delta neighbours adorn two wrappers called *ogodo* and blouse *nwe elu* for women, chieftaincy gown/shirt for the top and wrapper or trousers *nwe uku* for men.



Cloth Designs at Display
Source: NCMM (2010)



Calabar Designs for Male and Female
Source: NCMM (2010)



Typical Yoruba Women Outfit of *iro, buba and gele*
Source: NCMM (2010)

NIGERIAN TEXTILE MARKETING

Textile marketing is achieved in Nigeria through extensive distribution (place) of products, the product itself, price and promotion. There are two main channels of distribution employed by textile industry in Nigeria, the direct method and the indirect methods (MBendi

2007). The direct method, as stated by MBendi (2007) involves the sale of goods directly to the final consumer through retailer-ship and on the spot selling by the firms involved, while the indirect method entails only the use of a wholesale channel of distribution. In this method, the appointed distributors are only licensed for distribution and sales in the market. These distributors are financially strong and play advisory roles to the firms with regard to the designs of the products and customers' preferences.

While this indirect marketing approach is highly practiced by the formal textile industries in Nigeria, the same cannot be said of the informal sector like the adire, aso-oke, akwete and other traditional textile producers who operate mainly on a small scale and probably one man business. Textile marketing exists in all the nooks and corners of the country where general markets are created for goods and services (Ojo and Akinrujomu 2007). Ojo and Akinrujomu (2007) further says that from Northern to Southern Nigeria, big cities and towns provide popular sections in their central and mini markets where textile products are received from merchants. Warehouses and stores are in existence and owned by big time merchants who buy in bulk to sell to retailers.

PRICING OF NIGERIAN TEXTILE

The major serious competition facing the textile industry in Nigeria is the significant quantity of textile products entering through unrecorded trade, mainly from the Asian countries. Because the products are brought in illegally, the relevant duties are not paid thereby making the products even cheaper than products made in Nigeria. Even the mode of production and the operating environment of the local products have not helped matters for the products lack competitive edge when it comes to pricing due to high operating cost. Since the most important motive of any investor is to break even the selling price will have to rise and this has become detrimental to the textile sector.

NIGERIAN TEXTILE PRODUCT

Previous studies have shown that Nigerians have unfavourable attitude towards home made goods because of the perception that local made goods are inferior in quality to imported substitutes (Aire 1973; Kelegha, Okechukwu, & Soyeye (1983). Poor product packaging has been said to negatively affect marketing of home made goods (Sobowale 1997). However Njoku (2004) opines that the profile of made-in-Nigeria textiles goods has improved significantly both in absolute and relative terms over the previous studies Textile products are no exception to this trend. The production of traditional fabrics, be it adire, akwete, aso-oke and others are still done manually which does not guarantee uniform standard in terms of colour fastness, durability, innovation and creativity.

Even the contemporary textiles that are produced with machines still have to contend the usage of appropriate chemicals. Ojo and Akinrujomu (2007) says that the truth is that the absence of some chemicals in fabrics can make them diminish in quality.

Ohiorhenuan (2001) posits most textile mills Nigeria operate on “copycatism”, they just copy designs which had been produced and marketed in other countries and sell them as their designs. Adetoro (1980) says that in the past, because demand surpassed supply, the mills paid little attention to quality. This could have accounted for the unfavourable of Nigerians towards the made in Nigeria textile products.

ADVERTISING OF NIGERIAN TEXTILE

Advertising which is an aspect of promotion is usually given back seat in Nigerian textile business activities, Ojo and Akinrujomu (2007) corroborates this position with the statement that fabrics are not usually advertised on television like other consumer goods and services. Alego (1992) also posits that a major problem inherent in marketing local products is inadequate advertisement.

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An informative site including information about many different African textile traditions, images of cloth and photographs of people making textiles.