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The Evolution of Contemporary Indigenous Textile Practice in South West Nigeria

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This paper examines changes that has occurred in the Nigerian textile from its cradle and the influence it had on both contemporary and Indigenous textile practice. Indigenous textile practice in South West of Nigeria has evolved over the past years. This study is an attempt to evaluate contemporary indigenous textile in Nigeria, to understand the difference between the two terms contemporary and indigenous. There is the need to exploit the potential of indigenous textile practice. Therefore, to understand the contemporary evolution that has affected it is important. The aim of this paper therefore, is to investigate contemporary indigenous textile practice evolution in South West of the county. The research used historical method in analysing the evolution of contemporary indigenous textile practice in south west Nigeria. Findings and conclusions were made that the South West has a very rich heritage of contemporary indigenous textile practice which is culturally unique, and this study will act as a stimulus to textile designers, textile cottage industry, students, art historian, and art scholar.

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INTRODUCTION

Textile is a common term that is used to refer to any material made of interlacing of fibres such as carpet, fabric, clothes, mats, and belts. Also, textile can be defined as a flexible woven material made of a network of interlacing of natural or artificial fibres, which are often known as yarn or threads. Britannica (2021) defines textile as any filament, fibre, or yarn that can be made into fabric or cloth, and the resulting material itself.

The importance of textile to the survival of man from harsh weather conditions cannot be overemphasized. According to Cyril-Egware (2019) as quoted by Cyril-Egware (2021) describes "textile as being important as food and shelter to man. It is used for clothing, furnishing, and toys. It implies that in Nigeria today, the production of indigenous textile designs has thrived tremendously both at the international and local levels. Study has reviewed that textile has been one of the greater employers of labour, apart from farming and the discovery of crude oil. It has contributed to the socio-economic and cultural development of the country.

Indigenous Textile Practice

From the above, indigenous textile can be said to be a practice that has existed before the influence of the western world. The earliest forms of indigenous textile practice have long been produced in Nigeria with different techniques and approaches by different tribes of the country. There is evidence from the Bible that craftsmen in textiles have existed even in the Old Testament days, according to the book of Exodus 35:35. They have unique talents as weavers, designers, and embroiderers of exquisite line cloth using blue, purple, and scarlet thread, which the Lord has given them. They have all mastered the technique of textile craftsmanship, and they are all excellent craftsmen and designers. Indigenous

textile in Nigeria has long been practiced and produced even before the arrival of civilization (Monalisa, 2019). However, primitive needles made of animal bone show evidence of sewed leather and for garments from at least 3000 BC. The oldest clothes were created from natural elements: animals' skin and furs, grasses, leaves, bones and shells, clothing was commonly hung or tied. This suggests that textile practice is almost as old as human existence and as time passed, textile practice developed with time. Furthermore, Uwagbale (2021) tweeted that the ancient Benin cloths were made using cotton as well as fibre from raffia palm tree. This discovery was made from lab analysis of the cloth fragment from Connah's archaeological excavations in Benin. Carbon dating shows the cloth was made about the middle 13th century.

Based on the producing technique of indigenous textile in Nigeria, indigenous textile consists of different types and methods as quoted by Salihu et al. (2012, p. 160) "there are hand spinning, weaving, tie-dye, batik, cassava paste resist which the Yoruba people called "adire- Eleko", garment embroidery (both hand and machine) screen printing, hand block printing." The implication of the statement by Salihu et al. (2012) indicates that the indigenous textile is a peculiar practice that is commonly found among the south west part of Nigeria. Hence, in this view, this paper seeks to investigate the evolution of changes that have affected contemporary indigenous textile practice in Nigeria and to explore the impact of contemporary textile designs in Nigeria while examining the factors affecting indigenous contemporary designs in Nigeria.

Contemporary Textile practice

Contemporary textile refers to the practice of art that has been produced in the last decades by indigenous designers, who have been exposed to Western-oriented art programmes either directly or

indirectly through schools or self-education (Frank, 1991, p. 80). As expressed by Akinmoyo et al. (2016), the Yoruba indigenous textile product such as hand woven and adire fabrics are commonly used as aso-ebi {aso- ebi is a Yoruba word in Nigeria that refers to a uniform dress that is traditionally worn in Nigerian parties to identify with the person celebrating either birthdays, marriages etc.} Lately, there has been a sudden change in the use of indigenous textile products aso-ebi by the political class in Nigeria.

Ojo (2004) as cited by Akinmoyo and others identifies the heaviness of aso-oke (aso- oko is a prestigious Yoruba attire that is hand worn and it is usually worn on special occasion like marriages, burial etc) as one of the reasons why it is not being patronised and thereafter light-weighted hand-woven textile product that can accommodate printing of different motifs were constructed. Despite the improvement on the existing aso-oke both in design and in weight, the desire for contemporary textile products among the old and young, educated and illiterate has increased. It can be suggested that it is not surprising today with the new rebranded aso-oke, to see beautiful sewn or tailored fitted aso-oke or adire fabric on the runway in London fashion week or in Nigerian fashion shows. Contemporary adire designers in an indirect way have consciously or unconsciously converted Indigenous adire patterns into the sphere of “temporary fine art”. This idea has reintroduced adire and has deliberately or deliberately has positive impact in its usage and presentation. Also, salihu et al opines those contemporary techniques

like folding (adire Kika), knotted (adire siso), starch resist (adire eleko) the hand marking process of the indigenous producers has been replaced by stencil technique application by the contemporary producers.

Machine stitch (adire on machine), meddle stitch (adire alabere) that is not so prominent in the contemporary era has been taken over by the machine stitch. It is no record today to see contemporary adire designs appear in a wide variety of colour, styles, and fashion. Also, the famous indigenous indigo dyeing is gradually disappearing with the replacement of imported synthetic dyed such as vat, fibre reactive, basic sulphur dyes, and a lot of others. Also, even the indigenous motifs of old are being redesigned back to meet the current demand for creativity in designs, most contemporary designers are mostly semi-literate or illiterate and acquire knowledge of craft through inheritance and apprenticeship (Ogunduyile, 2000).

Aims/Objectives of the Paper

The main objective of this article is to investigate the evolution of contemporary indigenous designs in Nigeria. In order to achieve this, the following specific objectives are used to guide the study.

- To access factors affecting indigenous textile practice in Nigeria
- To explore the impact contemporary textile design has on indigenous textile designs in Nigeria.

Plate 1: Old Traditional Yoruba Ageada



Source: Pinterest .com

FACTORS AFFECTING CONTEMPORARY INDIGENOUS TEXTILE PRACTICE IN NIGERIA.

There are various factors that have attributed for the declining performance of indigenous textile practice in Nigeria.

High-Cost of Production

The indigenous textile industry in Nigeria is a multi-millionaire investment. This industry has a hard time accessing funds from a financial institution, as a result, depends on what stage and mode of production you are in your business. Unfortunately, money is not readily available for indigenous textile producers in Nigeria, even when finance is made available through loans, the interest rates are high to payback.

Shortage of Local Raw Materials

The shortage of local materials in the country has made production of indigenous textile stressful. The basic raw materials used in the production of indigenous textiles such as cotton dyestuff, silk, and chemicals among others are in short supply. According to oloyede (2014) as cited by Odey et al.

Plate 2: Traditional Yoruba attire



Source: Art and culture.google.com.

(2018), even when the raw materials are available the quality are low, scarcity, and not of commercial production capacity. Most of the raw materials used by indigenous artist are usually imported due to the country's inability to produce them in large quantity and quality. At this juncture, it should be observed that when raw materials are imported to produce any finished products, the disadvantage are too numerous to mention in the Nigerian economy. Cases like high costs of finished products, unemployment among the youths and reduced men power expert will be felt.

Creativity / Innovation.

Creativity is the act of creating a new concept, imagination, and possibilities in the art world. Since ancient times, indigenous textile practice has been considered as an intense and repeatable job which is performed by only those who have creative skills and innovation. Creativity and innovation have always been the bedrock of all invention. If the indigenous textile in Nigeria must survive, the youth must embrace the act of creativity and innovation as a way of remaining in business.

Royalties Issues

This is another factor that is a big issue in indigenous textile. Many indigenous textile designers have a hard time protecting their design work from being copied by other artists. There is not any legalized law as of today to help indigenous designers to register their design and protect it in the case of an infringement. Imitations of these designs are both done within and outside Nigeria. There is the urgent need for concerned stakeholders to enable indigenous artists' products to assess the copyright registration with ease. This will enable other artists to be creative rather than recycling old designs into the market.

Imported Cheap Products

The Indigenous textile in Nigeria been have infiltrated with imported cheap products usually obtained from China. This makes it difficult for local producers to oppose the imported ones. These products come in from countries that have high basic structures. It is usually very difficult for locally produced textiles to compete with imported cheap ones.

Impact of contemporary textile design on indigenous textile practice in Nigeria

In recent times, the interference the western world has had on indigenous textile practice in Nigeria has affected it a great deal. Today's contemporary indigenous adire are more creative and aesthetic. The availability of imported materials, fabrics, dyes, machine-printed fabric, etc has ironically

encouraged innovation and expanded the indigenous textile in Nigeria. Initially, adire which was produced and worn among rural dwellers has currently evolved into the class of high fashion category of the world. According to an article published by Dumota.com (2020) states that adire material not only comes in cotton as we have always known but also in silk and can be sewn into various styles. A lot of creativity has been put in place, combining both the monotonous and modern styles to produce new wonderful, and unique fashion statements.

Furthermore, Dumota.com also stated that contemporary adire can be sewn into handbags, bedspreads, pillowcases tote bags, etc. A totally new forms of technology have emerged as imported cloth provides a softer and smoother texture for easy manipulation, unlike the coarse and heavy handwoven fabric (kigipa). Also, drying is now processed through industrial manipulations (in the ancient times, few colours such as white, black and blue were available). In recent times, there are several colours and shades provided to meet individual and group interests to ease patronage. John (2003, p. 63) agrees that most contemporary tie-dye in west Africa, is done with synthetic dyes on cotton, damask, or synthetic fabric. According to the New York financial time news newspaper that the popular traditional adire designs have received a modern twist and celebrity sparkle, where the likes of Michelle Obama, Lady Gaga, and other has used indigenous adire design to promote African culture through fashion statement.

Plate 3: Contemporary Adire gown



Sources: Domuta.com

Plate 4: Runway model on Adire fashion



Source: Financial time.

FINDINGS

The following are some of the findings

This study has revealed that indigenous textile practice has Evolved from its cradle to the outside world, this particular practice has been able to reintroduce Nigerian culture from a different view. It Also, shows that the quality used for adire and aso-oke has improved a great deal. Furthermore, it has been observed that indigenous textile practice in

Nigeria can be used to interpret various angles of fashion statements. It also, revealed that if stakeholders can invest in indigenous practice, it will Create more employment for the youth and increase the social-economic income of the country. During the studies, it was revealed that indigenous textile fabric in Nigeria can compete with the other fabrics in the international market.

CONCLUSION

From the discussion above, there is no doubt that indigenous and contemporary textile practice has brought Nigerian into the globe world and it has also shown to the world that Nigerian designers have what it takes to maintain that standard. Also, this study has been able to examine the evolution of contemporary textile designs on indigenous textile practices in Nigeria. This study has further revealed that Nigeria has a unique cultural heritage and practice that is of great value.

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