




Textile design and traditional cultural properties in Nigeria: A batik textile exploration

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Received: 15 April, 2022 | Accepted: 30 May, 2022 | Published: 21 June, 2022

Abstract: The rapidity of moral degeneracy and bankruptcy in Nigeria and elsewhere is only symptomatic of the apparent fact that African cultures have been under serious threat, through the invectives of alien cultures through globalization. Efforts must therefore be made at arresting the drifting cultural values through the conservation and preservation of traditional cultural properties, such as traditional motifs and their cultural meanings. However, there have been scanty in-depth research to establish a possible nexus between textile design and preservation of motifs of cultural artefacts. This study examined the exploration of the utility of textile design as a veritable instrument in achieving the clarion call by Traditional Cultural Properties (TCP). In this study the Igbo oji isi ato and ududo motifs and their cultural significance were highlighted. The practice led research approach was adopted. The results showed that the batik textile design could be adopted in the preservation of traditional cultural properties in Nigeria. The oji isi ato and ududo batiks were specifically explored and found to be a veritable mechanism that could be leveraged upon in the preservation of symbols and motifs of traditional cultural properties. It is therefore recommended that scholars should explore more areas to achieve the conservation and preservation of motifs of cultural artefacts and traditional cultural properties to arrest the drift in moral values among the youth.

Keywords: Textile, Design, Traditional, Cultural, Properties, Preservation

1. Introduction

The Festival of African Arts and Culture (FESTAC 1977) held in Lagos, Nigeria was an attempt at reviving African culture. Nigeria as a country has continued to face certain cultural challenges. A lot of traditional beliefs, folklores, and practices as well as the moral lessons and values derivable from them have disappeared continuously from daily lives. The challenges of moral bankruptcy and degeneracy especially among the youth is a reflection of the disconnection between the old and the young in the transmission of cherished cultural heritage which were cords that tended to bind each nation and gave them their unique cultural identity. Biblically, God in His wisdom enjoined the Israelites to increase the visibility of His words in their sight, ostensibly because of the importance of God among humanity (Deut. 6: 6-8, 11:18-20). Similarly, traditional or cultural motifs and symbols should be robustly made available hopefully through batik fabric design in the clothes, and other textile materials that are visible to the sight of the younger generations. Through this mechanism, the moral ethos and values that bind the society together are kept alive among the younger generations. More so, Anyanwu (2022) argued that through the mechanism of appropriate choice of traditional or cultural motifs and symbols, the ethnicity of any group of people could be designed on fabrics and communicated to the outside world for their identification and possible characterization. When the sights of the youth are inundated with different designs from traditional or cultural motifs and symbols, it would necessarily

generate discussions as to the utility of such designs and from there, explanations could be made with respect to the moral values underpinning the utility of such motifs and symbols in the particular clime.

Fortunately, for about two decades, emphasis has been laid on the significance of preserving some cultural artifacts. For instance, in 1983, Americans took the lead in this regard, possibly to establish the requisite cultural nexus between their past and the present. The establishment of this nexus has become urgent and compelling, given the rapidity of cultural erosion and the degeneracy in moral values occasioned by the misplacement of the role of culture in national development. This call for the preservation, conservation and encouragement must therefore, not be limited to any country such as United States of America but should be extended across borders and disciplines. Contemporary erosion of cultural values in various climes has necessitated the globalization of the concept of TCP and the need for their conservation and preservation. In other words, there is further need to explore motifs and symbols of diverse traditional cultures other than those identified and recommended by certain countries.

Incidentally, Cyril-Egware (2016) rightly pointed out that fabrics or textiles could be leveraged upon both as instruments of cultural preservations and communications of cultural heritages. It implies that, motifs and symbols of traditional cultural properties (TCP) of Igbo of South Eastern Nigeria could be preserved through textile design. Scholars of different hues are therefore required to give traction to the call of Traditional Cultural Properties (TCP) to preserve the cultural heritages of any nation. This challenge and more therefore, constitutes the fulcrum around which this study on "Textile Design and Traditional Cultural Properties in Nigeria: a batik textile exploration" revolves. In the opinion of Cyril-Egware (2016), one could leverage on the versatility of textile art to serve as a mechanism for the preservation of cultural heritages in the form of clothes and souvenirs. It has become imperative therefore, to take advantage of textile design of traditional Igbo motifs on fabric as not only a mechanism of achieving the demands of TCP in cultural preservation but as a vehicle for the preservation, promotion and reviving of Igbo traditional motifs and their rich cultural implications in cultural transmissions.

From the prism of sustainability and socio-economic development, Qin, Song and Tian (2019) argued that some contemporary products derived from cultural properties were being used in marketing the beauty of some cultural heritages. Such innovative products could be found in the works of Anyanwu (2022) on textile designs entitled "Adaptation of Traditional Igbo Motifs on Fabrics: A Batik Textile Exploration". Therefore, this study on textile design and TCP in Nigeria: a batik textile exploration, will not only unveil the culturally innovative products derivable from TCPs but will also reveal the utility of textile design in cultural preservations in Nigeria. This study is therefore, geared towards reviving the fast-fading traditional motifs of Igbo cultural artefacts. In addition, the transmission of the moral lessons derivable from these Igbo symbols and motifs would serve as a mechanism of stability in the dilapidating Igbo cultural values and beliefs. This innovative batik fabric exploration will not only achieve the aforementioned objective but will also serve as a lynch pin in bridging this gap in knowledge in contemporary literature.

In order to achieve the objectives of this study, answers would be provided to the following research questions; (a) What is Textile design? (b) What are Traditional Cultural Properties all about? (c) are there TCPs in Igbo land? (d) Can textile design be leveraged upon in the preservation of TCP?

2. Literature review

2.1. Textile design and traditional cultural properties

2.1.1. Textile design

At this juncture, an appropriate understanding of the concept of textile design and its utility in contemporary times becomes imperative. Textile design could be visualized as the process in which the textile designers utilizes their initiatives and ideas, both on the fabrics and their products in the business or art of designing (Dereje &

Zhou, 2013). In other words, the issues at stake is the fact that these initiatives and ideas were derived from the socio-cultural surroundings of the designer. The cultural influence and other design concepts were always obvious during the process of the creation and distribution of new designs (Shin et al., 2015). For instance, Anyanwu et al. (2021) leveraged contemporary technological advances in the "adaptation of Igbo motifs and symbols on batik. This innovation, possesses the potentials of generating and advancing myriads of commercial interests in culturally based textile products.

More so, Awogbade (2010) argued that people from different parts of the world and traditional Africans used motifs as signs and symbols and as a means of identity. In Southern Iraq, for instance, Fatemeh et al. (2019) observed that a significant proportion of the motifs used on their fabrics have symbolic meanings. Similarly, in Lesotho, Kristin (2018) argued that the corn-cup motif, which appeared in numerous Basotho blanket designs referred to health and prosperity. It will therefore not be out of place to explore the textile design of traditional or cultural motifs such as *oji isi ato* (three lobed kola nut) which symbolizes life or *ududo* (cobweb) which symbolized the ingenuity of the Igbo as a way of preserving the Igbo Traditional Cultural Property (TCP) in Nigeria.

Olutayo et al. (2011) reported evidences of erosion of the constituents or attributes of African culture in his study, while Wahab et al. (2012) documented evidences of erosion of cultural values among Nigerian culture. The work of Udechukwu (2019) dwelt specifically on such erosions among the Igbo people and discussed the poor perception and understanding of indigenous culture vis-à-vis globalization found among Nigerian youths. However, none of these studies verified the link between culturally designed textile products – the batik fabric designs using cultural properties as instruments for cultural preservation in Nigeria. This current study is therefore geared towards filling this gap in knowledge.

2.1.2. The concept of Traditional Cultural Property (TCP)

Bulletin 38 defines Traditional Cultural Properties as historic properties whose significance derives from "the role that the property plays in a community's historically rooted beliefs, customs, and practices" (Lynne, 1993). The Igbo nation in Nigeria, places much premium on her traditional kola nuts (*oji isi ato*), as well as other traditional motifs and symbols.

A "traditional cultural property" is a property, a place, that is eligible for inclusion on the National Register of Historic Places because of its association with cultural practices and beliefs that are (1) rooted in the history of a community, and (2) are important to maintaining the continuity of that community's traditional beliefs and practices (Lynne, 1993: 1).

When a given cultural property is qualified for acceptance in the national register of historic places due to its long standing identifications with the life styles of a group of people such as the Igbo nation, it is regarded as a TCP. TCPs originated from the ways of life of the indigenous people and are significant in their communal cultural identity (Smythe, 2009). Often times the beliefs are of central importance, not the property and as such should make up the TCP. Physical items such as symbols, objects or motifs, buildings or sites make up the TCP. However, the preservation of any TCP in Africa must be as a result of the traditional or cultural beliefs associated with that object such as *oji isi ato* (three lobed kola nut), *ekwe* (metal gong) etc. in Igbo land (Anyanwu, 2022).

Hsu et al. (2011), contended that contemporary developments in the needs or desires of consumers serve as a signal in the transmission of the aesthetics of products derived from TCPs which made them to receive more attention in recent times.

There are many traditional cultural properties in Nigeria especially in Igbo land as outlined in Anyanwu (2022) "Adaptation of Traditional Igbo Motifs on Fabric: A Batik Textile Exploration. However, much emphasis would be placed on *oji isi ato* and *ududo* batik in this study.

3. Research methodology

The concept of "Natural Synthesis" propounded by Okeke (1996) on which the Zarianists based the creative revolution of 1958/61 guided this work. Natural Synthesis as a creative tendency contends that modern artists should absorb and adapt any good art technique or style from any part of the world in the creation of art in Nigeria. The efforts of the Zarianists rested on a foundation laid by Aina Onabolu and Kenneth Murray in the 1920s at the secondary school level in what was described as the preserve of our culture (Egwemi, 2009).

This study adopted the practice led studio approach.

The studio experimental batik fabric design for the preservation of Igbo traditional symbols and motifs for this study were analysed and described using the following as a guide:

- i. Inspiration for the production of the batik work.
- ii. Title, structure, and composition of the design on fabric.
- iii. Materials relatedness and method of production.
- iv. Wax and dye application and concept in the production of batik fabric design.
- v. The artistic implication in the production of the batik fabric design work.
- vi. Cultural, historical, and philosophical interpretation of content

The development of thumbnail sketches was produced through reflections and close observation of photographs from our environment, events, and issues using pencil, ink, and pen as a medium to produce the sketches which guided the production of the textile design. Thumbnail sketches are initial sketch drawings used to develop the design. The development of thumbnail sketches helped in the conceptualization and production of the textile design in this research work. According to Mitchell (2017), sketches are visual exercises in problem-solving and provide the opportunity to experiment with new techniques and expressive possibilities. Mitchell adds that rough sketches can serve as an effective visual communication tool.

Therefore, in this study, Igbo traditional motifs were transferred on the fabric through the waxing method. The waxed fabric was allowed to get hardened and then submerged in a dye bath for a specified period. The dyed fabrics were removed from the dye bath and allowed to oxidize for about 20 minutes. The fabrics were subsequently submerged in a pot of boiling water and stirred until the wax were melted out of the fabric. They were later rinsed and spread to dry. Finally, the designed fabrics were ironed with starch to make them have brisk look.

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4. Conclusion

Recent developments in the textile designs industry appear not to have factored in the need to leverage fabric designs to showcase the rich African cultural heritages. This current study therefore filled this gap in knowledge through the use of traditional motif designs on fabric as a billboard to advertise the rich Igbo cultural heritage in contemporary Nigeria. This study has shown that textile design could be leveraged upon as an instrument of cultural preservations across cultures in response to the call of traditional cultural properties.

It is therefore recommended that scholars should explore more areas to achieve the conservation and preservation of motifs of cultural artefacts and stem tide erosion cherished cultural values and bring back to rail the derailed train of moral sanctity among humanity. Efforts should be made by various agencies such as ministry of information and culture, museums and monuments to revive the positive aspects of Nigeria's nay Igbo culture to checkmate the afront of globalization and influence of internet of all things.

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