

Aso-Oke Production and Use Among the Yoruba of Southwestern Nigeria

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Abstract

Culture is a dynamic phenomenon which could experience radical changes that may gradually lead to serious damages. It may become weak or lose its validity as a result of internal social change, which could be due to overshadowing outside influences (Ogunbameru, 2000; 560). One of the effects of such changes or influences is the gradual extinction of some aspect of our traditional arts and crafts. The tradition of *Aso-Oke* (Yoruba hand-woven textiles) for clothing among the Yoruba of southwestern Nigeria is thus an example of such changes and influences via the introduction of Western values, and internal social-cultural changes. This paper therefore traces the evolution of traditional *aso-oke* production and its uses among the Yoruba of southwestern Nigeria, reveals the factors that are responsible for its declining patronage; suggests a revival of its traditional uses, and advocates for an alternative usage of *Aso-Oke*.

Introduction

The production of traditional handcrafted textiles among the people of Africa is long rooted in their culture. These textiles are produced from locally sourced materials ranging from cotton, local silk, bark, goats wool to raffia, commonly used in weaving (Renne,1995;102). While felted backcloth acclaimed to be the oldest form of indigenous African cloth, woven cotton fabrics dating to the eight century have also been found in burials in Niger (Clarke 1998;18), and fragments of plain patterned strip woven cloth dated to the eleventh century were also discovered at the Tellem burial cave in the Dogon region of Mali. Thus, both provide evidence of a long standing clothing tradition in Africa (Bolland 1992; 13). Although the origin of textiles productions and usage in Nigeria, most especially among the Yoruba remain unknown, there are evidences of Yoruba's long use of textile as apparel as reflected in ancient sculptures, which has been dated back to the 10th and 12th century A.D.

W. Fagg (1977; 29-39), mentions that these sculptures depict the use of accoutrements which include loin cloth, cap, sashes badge, hats and others He, also suggests that materials used for the manufacture of these clothing are derived locally because, they resemble today's traditional Yoruba hand woven strip cloth '*Aso-Oke*'. While relative dating of the local production of *Aso-Oke* among the Yoruba remain difficult due to its ephemeral nature, the association theory of Krigger (1990; 39) brought more confusion when he claim that the earliest use of textiles made from men's loom among the Yoruba came via the introduction of Islam to Kano through Nupe, and later to Yoruba land in the 15th century.

However, the diffusion theory used by Krigger to establish the evolution of weaving among the Yoruba is tenable considering Picton's comments in Ademuleya (2002; 35) that "the distinctiveness of the West African narrow strip loom (Yoruba inclusive) is a pointer to an independent tradition." He thus cautions' against the popular speculations that there must have been only one point of origin or source of inspiration; it could therefore be argued that the Yoruba production of textiles, *Aso-Oke* in particular could have been developed by the Yoruba before contact. Furthermore, since the radio carbon dates confirms earlier existence of these sculptural pieces to between 10th and 12th century date which was prior to the introduction of Islam or contact with the Nupe people in the 15th century, one can conclude that the Yoruba use of textiles as apparel or as clothing is an age-long tradition which predates contact with Islam.

Weaving Tools

Yoruba traditional weavers according to chief Onakanmi of the Fedegbo compound in Ogbomoso use two types of loom for the production of their traditional hand-woven textiles '*Aso-Oke*'. First, the upright single heddle loom, also known as the broad loom (used by women) is a fixed vertical frame upon which the warp is held under tension used to weave cloth of a predetermined length with about 30 to 90 cm width to allow two or three pieces stitched together to make a wraparound "*iro*" for women. The fabric produce on this loom is what Aremu (1980; 18) refers to as *kijipa* (see plate 2 below)

Second, the double heddle loom (used by men) is an horizontal loom with the unwoven warp yarns stretched out several yards in front of the weaver with a heavy shed to maintain tension (see plate 3 below). The loom produce strips of woven fabrics which is about 14-15cm wide; the fabrics are cut and edge stitched together to make larger piece of cloth which could be used for clothing or coverings. The men's horizontal loom compared to the women vertical loom uses more accessories and provides opportunity for the use of a variety of warp threads which often determines the types of design found on *Aso-Oke*. Ojo (2006;105), identifies these accessories to include: heddles (*omu aso*), treadles' (*itese*), beater (*Apasa*), shuttle (*oko*), winding shaft (*gogowu/ikawu*), shedding stick (*oju/poporo*), and pulley (*ikeke*) to describe for the varieties of warp threads and the means for introducing the weft thread.

Weaving

Picton (1979: 99-102), defines weaving as a simple process of interlacing a set of thread (warp and weft) at right angles to form a web or fabric. These two sets of thread which are interlaced together on the loom create a structure that holds the cloth together. The weaver may change this structure into a more complex design by adding supplementary wefts (threads), or by alternating the colour of the warp and weft threads. The striped patterns found in *Aso-Oke* are made by alternating the colors in the warp. The pedals that are attached to the loom lift up a set of threads so that the weft can be laid at right angle. Depending on how many of the warp threads are lifted, the fabric can be either warp or designed in weft-faced patterns (*Aso-Oke* is usually warp-faced). Picton (1979:16) also reports that many factors go into the design and weaving of *Aso-Oke* which depends upon three variables: the nature and colour of fibers employed, the kinds of relationship between warp and the weft, which may be affected by the loom, and the possible methods of embellishing a fabric after manufacture.

Also, according to Onakanmi, *Aso-Oke* patterns are predetermined using a calculated process before the actual weaving wherein the weaver knows what the final creation is going to look like. Hence, the weaver must pick out all the colors of the threads and decides the structure of the weaving pattern before beginning. Thus, *Aso-Oke* strips are usually about 14-15cm inches and are usually stitched ¹together to make a dress, and of course, the number of strips needed however depends on the type of cloth, but about 22 strips of *Aso-Oke* are required to make a wraparound for traditional Yoruba women attire².

Aso-Oke Types

Basically, there are three major *Aso-Oke* types; *etu*, *alaari* and *sanyan* with many variations, which is achievable with the use of extra weft brocading technique which are identifiable by their patterns and colour to inform their uses at a designated traditional ceremony.

First, *Etu* (fowl), via blue and white stripes in the warp direction with a light blue checkerboard having pattern weave structure, a type of traditional *Aso-Oke* with blue and white stripes in the warp direction with a light blue checkerboard with a pattern weave structure. The strips are woven using local wild silk fiber, thus *Etu* is dyed repeatedly in traditional indigo blue dye, which is brought out at intervals for drying and stretching. In the ancient times, *Etu* was used as important social dress by chiefs and elders among the Yoruba (see plate 9 below).

Second, we have *Alaari*, crimson in colour, it is traditionally woven with locally spurned silk yarns dyed in red cam wood solution severally to achieve permanence in colour fastness. The use of *alaari* is not limited to a particular ceremony but traditionally used for all events among the Yoruba of Nigeria (see plate 5 & 6 below). And third, *Sanyan*, an expensive Yoruba hand-woven fabric, grayish in colour with white strip running through the middle of the cloth; traditionally produced from fibers made from the cocoons of the *anaphe* silk worm. Hence, the silk fibers are hand spun into silk threads, washed and soaked in corn-starch to strengthen the yarn for fabric production in the ancient times. In addition, *sanyan* is regarded as the most expensive of all Yoruba woven fabrics, thus, the Yoruba refer to it as *baba-aso*, the 'father of fabrics' (see plate 7 & 8 below).

Traditional Usage of Aso-Oke

Yoruba women generally use *Aso-Oke* in a number of ways which can be casual or ceremonial. Aremu, (1982; 3, 6); Asakitipi, (2007; 101-115). Oyelola (2004: 132) mention that *aso-oke* is reserved for special occasions where formal and dignified dressing is required. Yoruba women use *aso-oke* as girdle (*oja*) to strap babies), (wrapper) *iro* head-tie (*gele*) *buba* (blouse) and (*ipele*) or shawl *iborun* which is usually hung on the shoulder of the user. Yoruba men use *Aso-Oke* in the ancient times as work dress on their farms and they also use it for social, religious and traditional ceremonies. They wear a complete dress consisting of *sokoto* (trousers), *buba* (top), *agbada* (large embroidered flowing gown) and *fila* (cap). *Aso-oke* is highly valued as special gift for dignified people, clapperton (1826; 13, 16) reports that he collected a gift of *aso-oke* from Alaafin Abiodun in old Oyo in 1920, while Amubode, (2001;109) confirms the importance of *aso-oke* as wedding gift for the bride's family in Yoruba land in addition to being used to placate the witches

Aso-oke is also used as *aso-ebi* (commemorative cloth) among the Yoruba people of southwestern Nigeria. *Aso-ebi* connotes the wearing of a chosen or commissioned cloth as a uniform dress to commemorate or celebrate an event or occasion. Judith, (1999:180), and Aremu (2006:18) explain that *aso ebi* is seen as strong expression of communal, solidarity and love. *Aso-Oke* is also used for religious purposes as *egungun* costume. *Egungun* is an ancestral worship among the Yoruba, which refers to 'masked men' who represent the spirits of the living dead (Idowu, 1962; 93). *Egungun* costumes vary among communities. Some communities like the Oyo use *aso-oke* in elaborate costumes that have a long trail behind them. A new strip of *aso-oke* is added to the *egungun* costume to add up to its beauty every year which implies that the age of an *egungun* can be calculated from the strips. *Aso-oke* is also used as a sacred cloth by the *ogboni* society among the Ijebu-Yoruba. it is referred to as *itagbe*, an insignia of the cult of *Ogboni* people. It is used to cover some religious objects e.g. *ere-ibeji*, *osanyin*, *edan* and used as shrine decoration.

Aso-oke is also used for the making of hunter's shirt and knickers (*gberi ode*) which is attached with many charms and amulets. Chief Odetola mentions that a type of *aso-oke* was used as spirit-protected covering among the Yoruba. Charms in form of wristlets are also made from *aso-oke* when combined with the skin of the alligator, and supported with some rituals and incantations which the Yoruba people refers to as "*ifunpa*" (armlet) or "*ounde*" (waist band). In an attempt to protect 'abiku' (believed to be a "spirit-child" with the ability to die severally and be born again by the same mother). Ashes of *aso-oke* are usually combined with other magical substances in making protective charm to break this cycle of death and rebirth. He concluded that for couples to remain happy in their marriage, the *Ifa* priest prescribes for this couple the use of *aso-oke* dress for use in the traditional ceremony.

Decline in Use and Production

The colonial masters systematically tapped the resources of the African colonies including Nigeria (Rodney, 1972: 112-116). The British policy in Nigeria from 1886 was design to knock down the home industries in order to guarantee continuing importation of British made goods to her colonies which Sir Lord Lugard implemented. These policies, which sought markets for the British goods at the expense of the indigenous textile industries in 1904 recorded the beginning of decline in the production and patronage of indigenous textile industries (Okeke 2005:141). As a result of these colonial policies on the Hausa, Nupe and the Yoruba handcrafted textiles with smuggling activities along Nigeria coastal towns and land borders became a major obstacle to the growth of the indigenous textile industries³.

Available written and oral records show that from the pre-independent Nigeria up to 1976 (the time of oil boom) locally produced cotton served the cottage industries and contributed to their growth which positively improved the nation's economy. The introduction of cotton cloth and European-style garments in the early years of 1900 changed the consumption patterns and created stiff competition for the indigenous textile industries. In addition, availability of fairly used cloth, known as '*aso oyinbo*' (Whiteman's cloth) among the Yoruba had negative impact on the indigenous textile productions and dress traditions. Renne (1995:18:12) observes that factory printed cloth has broad spectrum of colours and designs; they are lighter in weight, more comfortable to sew, wear, and care for. For these reasons imported damasks, velvets, satins and silks gained popularity as prestige garments while indigenous cloth was rejected.

In addition, the introduction of foreign yarns for use in the traditional cottage textile production killed the local technology of handspun (cotton and silk) fiber manufacture which adversely affects the social and economic life of the weavers. Ojo (2006: 112) in support of Judith (1999:178) remarks that, from 1990 to date only a few weavers produced *etu* and *sanyan* using traditional hand-spun yarn.

For instance, *alaari* types of *Aso-Oke* are no longer produced in 'Iseyin' the acclaimed home of *aso-oke* because; the vegetable dyes are no longer processed. Judith, (1999:180) mentions the attitude of people towards the use of *aso-oke* at ceremonies as negative while some educated elites among the Yoruba refer to this tradition of *Aso-Oke* use as 'old, local, and uncivilized. Due to lack of sufficient patronage for the local handspun yarns, its producers turn to other occupations and generational transmission of the skill died. Ojo (2006; 103-112) identifies three main problems in the use of *Aso-Oke*, which include; exorbitant price of raw materials, limitation in traditional and contemporary uses and modernization. The limitation in fashion use is probably due to hard, stiff and heavy nature of the fabric compared to the factory printed '*ankara*' fabrics. The introduction of Islam and Christian religion to Yoruba land brought along with them a new dress tradition that was readily accepted by their converts.

However, the changes that came over the Yoruba were however not all negative on *aso-oke*. Clarke (1966; 17; 18) confirms that *aso-oke* weavers readily accepted the new fibers and industrial dyes introduced by the British trading firms. The introduction of these imported yarns brought a change in *Aso-Oke* structure, visual and textural qualities. From 1960 onward, *aso-oke* became softer with lustrous look, which was actually missing in the traditional ones. The importation of foreign textiles into Nigeria during the colonial era, injected into *Aso-Oke* new designs, which encouraged weavers to imitate them creating lace designs by creating holes and weft flow on woven fabrics as demanded by their new patrons. These new *Aso-Oke* types are what Aremu (1982:4) refers to as '*Eleya*' which Oyelola (2004; 15) refers to as "open work". They resemble the modern day Spanish lace, which is now in vogue among the elites. The importation of European textiles to Nigeria influenced the structural nature of *Aso-Oke* and redefined its surface and textural quality. It also generates new knowledge and production skills among the weavers. In addition foreign motifs such as ball, diamond, computer, star and other fabricated objects now appear on *Aso-Oke*, which gives it a global representation. Small stripes of imported lurex fiber was added to cotton warps to create a new look in *Aso-Oke*, which gradually became the characteristics of the contemporary *Aso-Oke* making it more shining in outlook from where they derive their names "*shain-shain*". see plate 10

The use of *aso-oke* decline following the acceptance of *ankara* as *aso-ebi* (commemorative fabrics) in place of *aso-oke* which was traditionally use among the Yoruba people of southwestern Nigeria. The new *ankara* (African wax prints) technically differs from *aso-oke* due to the following: it is mass produced; it can accommodate portraits and graphics as motif in the surface design, and in addition it is also cheaper than the locally produced *aso-oke*. In plate 11 the People's Democratic Party of Nigeria (PDP) commissioned *ankara* fabric which was used as commemorative fabric for its nation-wide political campaign in 1998. According to the state treasurer of the party Alhaji Waahab Abass, over a million supporters bought and use these material. From year 2000, masqueraders, the traditional patron of *Aso-Oke* in Ogbomoso also shift their interest to factory printed fabric (*Ankara*) which they use as *aso ebi* constituting a great lost to the home weavers.

Sustainable *Aso-Oke* Production

To sustain *Aso-Oke* production and use among the Yoruba people of southwestern Nigeria today requires a total change of attitude towards its uses as occasional dress for traditional ceremonies and local festivals. The love and acceptance of Yoruba youths for anything foreign as a mark of modernity does not help matters. This attitude must be discouraged while youths are encouraged to patronizing homemade textiles. During the field studies carried out by this team in 2006, an octogenarian weaver Pa Adepoju of Fedegbo Compound, Isale Afon quarters in Ogbomoso reveals that, youths among the Yoruba prefer foreign materials to *aso-oke* because of their flexibility, adaptability and suitability for English type of dress which is now in vogue. Hence, Yoruba weavers must change the structure of *aso-oke* to be adaptive to these modern dress forms.

The Yoruba people of southwestern Nigeria are traditionally sociable people who love to celebrate their successes with remarkable parties. Such moments often attract very large crowds where commemorative (uniform use of dress) use of fabrics is often required. This Yoruba dress tradition was also mentioned by Akinwumi (1990; 13). Therefore, adapting the structure of *aso-oke* and increasing the colour range that makes it colourfast will help in promoting it among modern users. Flexibility in the colour range and mix will further promote its use and empower it to compete with other materials used for such occasions while increasing weavers' creativity.

The possibility of using *aso-oke* as school uniform will be very high when it becomes adaptive to modern usage. Since *aso-oke* manufacture comes in various colours and textures, the school proprietors/proprietress and other school administrators only need to select the appropriate type of *aso-oke* in terms of colour, pattern and design. The weavers in this regard must ensure that, the quality allows for a smooth, durable and washable texture. If these can be guaranteed, the use of *aso-oke* as school uniform will be ensured. To start with, the seven southern Yoruba states of Nigeria can introduce it as their school uniforms.

A survey carried out by this team at Ogbomoso in 2008 reveals that five Baptist churches dedicated their churches where commissioned commemorative fabrics (*ankara*) were used plate 12. The population of members in this church is not less than a thousand (1000) each. Each church was made to pay a deposit of 1.5 million as minimum production levy to the producing companies. Also in that year in Ogbomoso, two occasions were held to honour some prominent members of the society with titles.(see plate 13). The celebration attracted people from far and near with a population of not less than three thousand (3,000) people who use the factory produced uniform dresses '*ankara*'. In the 24th December, 2008, a fund raising carnival was also organised in Ogbomoso with five states' governors, two cabinet ministers, several states commissioners and other important members of the society were in attendance using the same Ankara type of dress. Unfortunately, none of these events was celebrated using *aso-oke*. It is advised that such celebrations in future should be commemorated with *aso-oke*. Yoruba leaders (obas, politicians and others) in the society should lead in the use of *aso-oke* to encourage the larger society.

Aso-oke has been tested and confirmed as a good material for home furnishing. An experiment in the Obafemi Awolowo University has demonstrated that *aso-oke* can be used for home furniture to make upholstery and other interior decorations, e.g. bed spread, throw pillows, pillow cases, lamp shade as shown in fig (16,17&18) (Komolafe, 2005). The chairs made during that experiment are still in use at the Department of Fine and Applied art, Obafemi Awolowo University. Curious members of the public have come to take photographs of the project while questions were asked on how to achieve the designs. Its use for car interiors is also advised. Seat covers in *aso-oke* can be further finished with some accessories (beads, Sequim, e.g.) added for aesthetic qualities.

The report of Ojo (2006;113) also confirmed the use of *Aso-Oke* as room dividers, blinds, bed spread table covers, foot rests among others. Today, a very good mix of *Aso-Oke* with leather can provide a very good appliqué that will appeal to the sensibility of the people. If fifty percent of homes in the southwestern Nigeria should start commissioning such today, it will go a long way in solving the problem of youths' unemployment in Nigeria.

The use of *Aso-Oke* as masquerade costume was popular in the ancient times among the Yoruba of southwestern Nigeria. Though, the introduction of Christianity and other foreign religions to Yoruba land have washed away many masking traditions which earlier sustained *Aso-Oke* production, something can still be done to salvage the demand of *Aso-Oke* for religious use. In view of this, the catholic mission has incorporated *aso-oke* and other traditional hand crafted textiles as part of the priests' regalia. This is a good development for the survival of *Aso-Oke* production and use. With time, church choirs will also form part of the users.

The use of *Aso-Oke* as troupe costume for our contingents going on international outings should be encouraged in order to project our image abroad and popularize the traditional fabric. Yoruba and Nigerians in general should borrow a leaf from Ghana where the president dresses in *Kente* wrapper since the days of President Kwame Nkruma of Ghana to attend official engagements and recently at the installation of the president of America, Barak Obama in 2009.

Why *Aso-Oke* must be sustained

The survival and continuity of *Aso-Oke* production and use is very important to the socio-cultural growth of the Yoruba people of Nigeria. For the of *Aso-Oke* production to continue, relevance of use must be established and sustained. The achievement of this will lead to a revival of the art which no doubt will provide the following benefits:

Employment opportunity for youths in the society. Youths' unemployment is inimical to the growth of any nation. Continuity in *Aso-Oke* use will definitely improve the quality and quantity of production which in turn will lead to a gainful employment of the youths.

Sustainability of *Aso-Oke* will allow cultural survival. Its sustenance ensures cultural preservation because it is culturally symbolic of the Yoruba tradition and traditional textile technology.

Aso-oke is a potential foreign revenue earner. The proper packaging of *aso-oke* and its popularity internationally can lead to more demands from the international market. Already, the fabric is being smuggled to places like London and America and mostly Europe.

The popularity of *Aso-Oke* will add to the good cultural image of Nigeria. The international packaging and promotion of *Aso-Oke* will be a contribution of Nigeria to the cultural market. This will go further in improving our cultural image in the World culture market.

Decline in Aso-Oke

With the importation of primary textile materials which runs into several millions of naira into Nigeria yearly, the European countries were able to engage fully their citizens in the production of these primary textile materials at the expense of Nigerian citizens. Finally, the importation of manufactured and finished textiles from Europe for the interiors as window or door blinds and furniture is another factor that adversely affects our traditional handcrafted textile (*Aso-Oke*) productions. Today, due to urban influence and some agents of civilization, most Yoruba people in the villages now use machine-produced fabrics for their interiors and furniture items in place of *Aso-Oke* the traditional handcrafted textiles of the Yoruba as a mark of civilisation.

Electrically powered roller printing machine use by these textile industries enables them to cope with the demands in volumes without any fear of disappointment. Since *aso-oke* weavers cannot guarantee prompt mass production for larger consumption, uniformity in design, quality and promptness in product delivery, patrons now shift attention to the factory where such is guaranteed. The tradition of using foreign factory printed textiles mostly '*ankara*' and '*lace*' in place of *Aso-Oke* at traditional ceremonies as '*aso ebi*', contributed mainly to the growth of these modern industries. More importantly, the use of *aso-ebi* due to bulk purchase by the people allows for instant and reasonable profit. The use of these factory printed fabrics in place of *aso-oke* has now popular and acceptable among the people. With this, traditional *Aso-Oke* weavers are without any hope for buck sales to realize meaningful gains that will encourage sustainability of *aso-oke* production.

Commemorative fabrics which are specially commissioned are found to be cheaper upon investigation in price compared to the regular fabrics sold at the open market due to; mass production, ready market, bulk sales and instant marginal and maximum profit level that accrues to the coffers of the producer's company. As at 2003, 6 yards of 'ankara' sells for between #1,000:00 and #1,500:00 while commissioned commemorative 'ankara' fabric sells for between #700:00 and #1, 000:00 per six yards.

Recommendations

Ojo (2006:106) mentions that traditional festivals in the ancient times used to attract audience of greater magnitude where the Yoruba people use *Aso-Oke* as *aso ebi*. This used to be an advantage for the indigenous handcrafted textile producers in the time past. However, due to certain influences afore-mentioned, *Aso-Oke* use now suffer a neglect, which the Yoruba people can revive by reverting to their old use as commemorative fabrics or *aso ebi* in the celebration of any of their local, religious, political, social and other relevant ceremonies today. Traditional weavers of *Aso-Oke* should be commissioned and encouraged to produce commemorative fabrics where portrait, names and other personal information are not required as part of the commemorative fabrics design.

The use of *Aso-Oke* should go beyond what Asakitikpi (2007) mentions, where Yoruba men use a strip of *Aso-Oke* for a traditional cap or as 'ipele' (covering) for women. *Aso-Oke* is better used and appreciated as complete traditional attire for men and women in the traditional society. It has every quality as material for home and car furnishing in addition to its traditional uses. Government should revitalise the growth of cotton while they discourage the importation of foreign fibers as a starting point for local textile productions. However, the move by Nigerian government through series of electronic media campaign to stop importation of foreign textiles into the country is highly encouraging. Government should do more to bring back the cotton pyramid of the pre-colonial days to recall the old glory.

The challenges facing us now are to discover more creative ways of adapting *aso-oke* to modern use in social ceremonies. Researches and experiments have proven that *aso-oke* can be used to make bags, shoes, table covers, curtains, chair backrest and other home accessories. *Aso-oke* can be solely used or combined to achieve these aims. Students and academic staff members of the department of Fine and Applied Art in Obafemi Awolowo University have carried out several experiments in this area. see fig (19). The modern fashion designers should be encouraged to create interesting and attractive designs with the admixture of *aso-oke* and other textiles. Amubode and Adetoro (2001:29-39) have proven that modern wedding gowns can be made in *aso-oke*.

Finally, the importation of second-hand clothing goods, which Ojo,(2006;45) calls '*bosikoro*' and other tailored dress into the country, should be frowned at, while the act should be treated as economic crime that would attract heavy penalty without an option of fine to serve as deterrent to people. It is believed that these recommendations when carried out will encourage the use of indigenous handcrafted textiles '*Aso-Oke*'.

Conclusion

Colonisation has had a negative impact on *aso-oke* use and production among the Yoruba of southwestern Nigeria. It gradually replaced the traditional technology of handspun cotton and silk fibers used in the production of these handcrafted textiles (*aso-oke*) among the Yoruba. With it went the knowledge of dye extraction (indigo dyeing) which was defeated by synthetic dyes. Most of the ancient dye pits now serve as refuse dumps or pit toilets in Oshogbo and Ede in Osun state of Nigeria where the traditional indigo dyeing used to be a family pride.

Though, it is evident that, the introduction of foreign textiles brought innovations that resulted into the creation of new *Aso-Oke* types; it is not without implications. Imported clothes became a regular daily wear while *Aso-Oke* became very occasional. The arrival of the Christian and Islamic religion which encourages new dress cultures further ensured the near extinction of *Aso-Oke*. Recent development which has made machine produced fabrics to replace *aso-oke* use as *aso ebi* (Identical dress) or as commemorative fabrics at traditional festivals and occasions is inimical to the survival of *aso-oke* use and production.

The love for anything foreign by today's youths among the Yoruba further ensures the loss of the *aso-oke* tradition. Dressing in complete Yoruba traditional attires has now been left for the politicians and few important personalities at occasions. The modern Yoruba women now prefer trousers, bikinis, and second hand clothing from Europe which reveals their feminist, sometimes to embarrassing levels. Fadipe (1970:34) observes this whole-hearted admiration of everything British led to the adoption not only of Christian names but their dresses.

Lastly, the Yoruba, and Nigerians in general, must go back to the drawing board and redesign our school curriculum to accommodate the study of indigenous art and technology so that we can develop materially and culturally. Scores of educated textile artists today do not have the knowledge of indigo dye extraction not to talk of traditional hand-spun cottons and silk yarns as reported by (Ojo.2006). The country will have the opportunity to employ her numerous young graduates if only we can change our attitudes towards the use of foreign imported textiles. Today, we are witnessing a new turn of events. *Aso-oke*, which used to be a significant indicator of self-expression and an expression of cultural identity, has ceased to be relevant in this regard. It is no longer required as commemorative fabric which could have encouraged its productions. A wise saying states that 'a man is not dead until he loses his culture'.

Weaving is an integral part of Yoruba peoples' culture, while *Aso-Oke* is their inheritance that must be preserved for generations through adequate use as *aso ebi* and commemorative cloth at any of the relevant traditional and modern ceremonies from now on. The Yoruba adage also says "*Omo eni o sedi bebere ka fi ileke siidi omo elomi*" meaning; we cannot go ahead to adorn other peoples' child with beads when one's child is around to be decorated. We can only ensure the survival of our cultural and economic heritage by making sure that *aso-oke* is not out-dated. Lastly, the observation of Judith (1999; 16) confirms the importance of cloth is reflected in commissioning and production practices, in distribution and consumption patterns, and in meanings it acquires through use" is very important in this discuss. We can ensure this by sustaining the commemorative use of *aso-oke* and attaching proper value to our culture and indigenous arts.



Plate 1: A master weaver, Jamnat Ijake weaving Kijipa on Yoruba traditional women broadloom.

[Photo: T.M Akinwumi Sept 1987, Owo



Plate 2: Kijipa Fabric: a product of traditional Yoruba women broadloom.

[Photo. Makinde D.O January 2009]



Pate 3: An apprentice weaver Tunde Obisesan weaving *aso oke* on Yoruba men's horizontal loom

[Photo Makinde D.O January 2009



Plate 4: Contemporary strips of *aso oke* called 'Shain-Shain' it is woven on traditional Yoruba mens horizontal loom.

[Photo Ajayi J.B December 2008



Plate 5: Alari (Patterned aso oke) is a red crimson traditional *aso oke* use for formal and ceremonial events

[Photo Makinde D.O May 2006]



Plate 6: Alari (ii). pre-dyed in red camwood before weaving. it is woven on Yoruba men's traditional loom.

[Photo Makinde D.O May 2006]



Plate 7: Sanyan (I) sanyan is woven using locally manufactured silk yarn on the traditional mens loom of the yoruba

[Photo Ajiboye O.J March 2009]



Plate 8: Sanyan(ii) This *aso oke* type has white stripe and brownish in colour. it is the most expensive of all the locally produced yoruba *aso oke*

[Photo Ajayi J.B February 2009



Plate 9: Etu is blueish in colour mostly use during chieftaincy ceremonies and other important traditional festivals

[Photo Ajayi J.B February 2009



Plate 10 :Strips of contemporary woven patterned *aso oke* manufactured from traditional Yoruba men loom.
[Photo Aiboye O.J February 2009]



Plate 11: Commemorative fabric for presidential campaign of the Peoples Democratic party. of Nigeria I October 1999. The fabric contain the portrait of the presidential flag bearer and his vice
[Photo Makinde D.O October 2009]



Plate 12: Commemorative fabric for Ayegun Baptist Church, Ogbomosho
[Photo Makinde D.O October 2009]

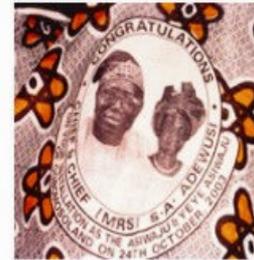


Plate 13: Commemorative fabric for the coronation of Chief & Chief Mrs Sunday Adewusi (Former I.G P of Nigeria)
[Photo Makinde D.O October 2009]



Plate 14:Home furniture (single seater)made of locally produced *aso oke* at the department of Fine Art, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile Ife [Photo Makinde D.O October 2009]



Plate 15:Home furniture (double seater)made of locally produced *aso oke* at the department of Fine Art, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile Ife [Photo Makinde D.O October 2009]



Plate 16: Contemporary Lamp Shade Holder made of *aso oke* .
[Photo Ajiboye O.J]



Plate 17: Throw pillow made of *aso oke*,
[Photo Makinde D.O October 2006]



Plate 18: Contemporary Lamp Shade Holder made of *aso oke* .
[Photo Ajiboye O.J]



Plate 19:Window Blind made of *aso oke* of the head of department office ile-ife
[Photo Ajiboye O.J]

Notes

1. Chief Onakanmi (head of weaver's guild in Ogbomoso) confirmed that traditional Yoruba men use horizontal loom while their female counterpart the vertical loom. Traditional weaving was in the ancient times an indoor activity but later developed to be a full profession starting from 1960s. Personal communication on March 15, 2006.
2. Pa Onakanmi, an Octogenarian weaver in Ogbomoso confirmed that weaver of *Aso-Oke* usually predetermine the outcome of their weaving using what Yoruba people refers to as *oju-inu* (inner eyes). Personal communication on May 20, 2005.
3. The *Apena awo* (The priest of an important secret society) of Ogbomosoland, mention that sacred religious objects are revered because of their potency in religious worship and sacrifice. Where fabrics are used to cover these objects the fabrics also become sacred and an object of worship. Personal communication on September 30, 2006.
4. According to chief Odetola, an *Ifa* priest in Ikoyi, Ogbomoso, *Aso-Oke* serves as basic ingredients in the preparation of local charms which seriously depends on the type of ailment or purpose for which it is dedicated to serve. He confirms its use as protective, preventive and cure of spiritual problems. Personal communication on September 28, 2006.
5. According to Yemi Tejuoso, of the Nigeria customs and excise, Lagos, Nigeria, over 125 arrests were made in connection with smuggled foreign fabrics along Nigeria - Republic of Benin land boarder in 2007 only, which in effect has resulted into the closure of many textile industries in Nigeria. It also constitutes a major setback for the indigenous textile productions. Personal communication on October 20, 2006.
6. Ahaji Wahab explains that, using *Aso-Oke* for an exercise like campaign demands for an acceptable use of uniform dress among the various tribes of Nigeria. *Aso-Oke* is limited in design and may not be suitable for some styles of dresses, whereas, Ankara is flexible and can accommodate party logos, portraiture and others. Personal communication on February 10, 2007.
7. Pa Adepoju, (chairman Ogbomoso weavers association) mention that youths among the Yoruba have extreme love for foreign textiles because of their suitability, flexibility and adaptability for modern dress. He confirmed that youth's lack of interest in *Aso-Oke* is psychological which he claims needs to be resolved psychologically. Personal communication on August 22, 2008.

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