

INDIGENOUS TEXTILE PRODUCTION: A STUDY OF WEAVING TRADITIONS IN ISEYIN

Azuka Abigail Nzoiwu-Ogbogu PhD
aa.nzoiwu@unizik.edu.ng
Fine and Applied Arts Dept.
Faculty of Environmental Sciences
Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka
Anambra State, Nigeria.

&

Johnson Ezenwa Arua PhD
Johnson.arua@unn.edu.ng
Fine and Industrial Arts Department
Faculty of Arts,
University of Nigeria Nsukka, Enugu State
Corresponding: Author: Johnson Ezenwa Arua@unn.edu.ng

&

Omotoso Emmanuel, Adekola
Fine and Applied Arts
University of Benin, Benin City
Edo State

Abstract

The purpose of the study was to examine weaving and textile design in Iseyin. Specifically, the study sought to examine modern trends in weaving as well as strategies for improving weaving in Iseyin. A descriptive ethnographic research design was adopted for the study. The population of the study comprised three weaving locations, with a minimum of nine centres, each centre having between 10 and 15 apprentices and masters. The sample size for the study comprised 36 weavers selected through an accidental sampling technique. A questionnaire was used to collect data for the study. The data collected were analysed using mean and standard deviation. The findings of the study revealed that the use of synthetic yarns, which are more colourfast; the merging of traditional Aso-Oke with other textile materials such as Ankara and lace; the cultivation and use of traditional cotton; and the use of Aso-Oke to create various products such as bags, shoes, and furniture, among others, are modern trends in weaving in Iseyin. Based on the findings of the study, it was recommended that the National Directorate of Employment should prioritize the art of weaving by ensuring that the skills of weavers are fine-tuned through exposure to seminars and workshops. This is with a view to ensuring employment opportunities for the teeming unemployed youths through weaving.

Key Words: *Indigenous, Textile, Weaving, Traditions, Iseyin.*

Introduction

Clothing is a basic need of man. Thus, engaging in production of clothing and artistic design is a money-spinning venture for individuals, and the nation at large that seeks to diversify its economy to reduce their dependence on oil. Cloth production has been vital to the Yorubas for almost three centuries. Before now, Yoruba art traditions have been legendary for some of the finest native dexterity as it concerns Africa art since the turn of twelfth century. The diverse art exhibitions of the Yorubas have immensely contributed in the global positioning of Nigerian and African with reference to their artistic practices such as terracotta, pottery, calabash carving, wood carving, blacksmithing, leather work, stone carving, cloth weaving among others (Wande and Oyewole, 2024). Prominent among these art practices and of interest to the researcher is the cloth weaving and textile design.

Cloth weaving is reckoned to be as old as man on realization of the dire need to have certain parts of his body covered. In a bid to achieve this in medieval times, leaves and animal skins were thoughtfully used for the protection of the body against weather conditions and by extension to provide cover to man's nakedness which ultimately metamorphosed into cloth weaving. In Nigeria, cloth weaving blossomed both in the Northern and the Southern parts but it's more prevalent in the south especially among the Yoruba and Igbo people. It is identified as "Aso-Òkè" among the Yoruba people and as "akwete" among the Igbo people. It is a way of showcasing ideas as well as belief systems. Prior to colonial contact, cloth weaving thrived in Yoruba land, specifically in Iseyin, Owo, Ede, Ibadan, Ondo, Oyo, Ogbomoso, Ado- Ekiti (Olutayo, Olayinka & Fadina, 2011).

Iseyin is known as the home of "Aso-Òkè" given the preponderance of people in the town that are engaged with Aso-Òkè. The industry that thrives the most in the area is cotton-based textile; hence, its reputation as the home of Aso-Òkè. The production of Aso-Òkè is done by the Yoruba people of Oke Ogun area of which Iseyin is located in the present Oyo State. In most parts of the country noted for weaving, the art is dominated by women, but in Iseyin land, reverse is the case, as the art of weaving is largely men's occupation. However, Bray (1968)

explained that “cloth weaving by men and numerable women on a narrow horizontal loom is the most vital craft in Iseyin in terms of number employed”

Today in Iseyin, the trade and tradition of *Aso-Òkè* weaving and designing center around three prestigious cloths; Etu, Sanyan and Alaari. The afore-mentioned cloths are still associated with deep sense of respect for tradition and a consciousness of identity as Yoruba. Nevertheless, *Aso-Òkè* is losing some of its value in the sense that some people see it as an occasional dress worn only once in a while. Others feel that it is a sectional dress limited to the Yoruba-speaking areas of Nigeria alone, while some of those who patronize the cloth are of the opinion that the fabric is too heavy to wear. It is in view of the foregoing that the study seeks to promote better acceptance of the weave for international consumption.

Objective of the Study

The rationale for the study was based on the following objectives:

1. To examine modern trends in weaving in Iseyin.
2. To ascertain strategies for improvement of weaving and attraction of more local and international recognition.

Literature Review

In this section, literatures that are of relevance to the current study were reviewed. The review is thus done:

History of Local Textile Design (Aso-oke)

In days of old, the weaving (local textile design) profession was something that children inherited from their parents. Much as the precise date of the evolution of *Aso-Òkè* in Iseyin remains indeterminate, Oluseye (2019) found that *Aso-Òkè* which is as old as Iseyin, was founded about 1732 by Ebedi and his brother Ogbolu who were natives of Ile Ife. Oluseye added that in a bulletin by the Oni of Ife, Oba Enitan Adeyeye Ogunwusi Ojaja II, *Aso-Òkè* was said to have evolved about four centuries ago in Ile Ife. Oluseye added that Oba Enitan Adeyeye Ogunwusi Ojaja II; the Ooni of Ife claimed that *Aso-Ofi* was invented in Ile-Ife and later taken to Iseyin by Olu-Ofi. This claim by the king could be affirmed as being true as a result of the existence of Olu-Ofi in the history and origin of Iseyin. It is a technique that thrives on the production of fabric through the utilization of a loom in which two sets of threads (warp and weft) respectively interlace at right angle to each other (Nkeonye, 2013). Similarly, Atunda (2015) noted that weaving consists of interlacing of warp and weft threads. It is difficult to trace the history of *Aso-Òkè* specifically to Yoruba land in particular, and Nigeria as a whole. “*Aso-Òkè*” is the shortened version of “*Aso Ilu Oke*” otherwise known as “*Aso-ofi* connoting clothes from the country’s highland area. Literally, *Aso-Òkè* connotes “Top Cloth”.

Local *Aso-oke* textile is a thriving textile on the African continent. At the expiration of 20th century, *Aso-oke* was a staple cloth for the Yorubas; adorned during events such as child dedication, weddings, special festivals, burial ceremonies among others. In recent times, the fabric appears to be experiencing dwindling popularity as a consequence of European printed cloth. Much as locally hand-woven clothes do not often receive patronage given the relative low cost of clothing, Aworemi, Abdul-Azeez and Opoola (2010) averred that, it is still deemed a vital form of both clothing as well as art. The low cost of *Aso-Òkè* could considerably contribute to its use in naming ceremonies, marriages and village festivals.

Weaving in Iseyin (Production of *Aso-Òkè*)

The patrilineages, known as ‘*Idile*’ in Yoruba languages comprise all those who can trace their descent from a common male ancestor. Since the *Idile* may have several family members, it therefore snowballed into extended family compound known as “*agbo ile*”. It is on this pivot that weaving in Iseyin strongly rests. The extended family compound “*agbo ile*” is the unit of the production for weaving, and for the intermediate process of spinning and dying. The place of residence coincide with workplace, whether there is a row of fixed loom in the central open space of the compound or as a single portable loom alongside the weaving house. Some weavers have a subsidiary occupation such as tailoring or trading for which a shop is rented from the local council or private owner. These shops are situated near the market place and long the main roads through Iseyin. The loom is set up outside the shop during the day and the weavers return in the evening in their own compound.

One of the most striking locational features is the concentration of weavers in district quarters of the town. Six of the seven town quarters, that is Oke-Ola, Oke Babadudu, Idiase, Oke Oja, Koso, and Ijemba contain 85% of the fulltime weaver in Iseyin, 66% of the compounds in these quarters have at least eight weavers. Part-time craftsmen are found in the farming quarters of Isalu, Itan and Ekunle, where less than 11% of the compounds include many weavers. In the six weaving quarters, 51% of the compounds return this as occupation of every adult male. In the farming areas, no compound consists exclusively of weavers.

In the process of weaving, production commences with preparing yarns for weaving which is proceeded by shedding, picking, battening/beating, letting off and sorting. These processes are repeatedly followed until the expected outcomes of stripes are woven (Diyaolu *et al.*, 2020). In recent times, while the processes that characterize production remains the same, the cotton as well as dying processes are no longer in vogue. Again, while the loom apart from the olden days mud loom remains the same, the materials have undergone modification to meet

contemporary preference. These modified materials include: silk, crayon, sewing threads as well as metallic yarn (Atanda, 2015). Weavers in Iseyin today, the tradition of *Aso-Òkè* weaving and dyeing in Iseyin center around three prestigious cloths of Etu, Sanyan and Alaari.

Forms of *Aso-Òkè* Weaving in Iseyin

Weavers in Iseyin today, the tradition of *Aso-Òkè* weaving and dyeing in Iseyin center around three prestigious cloths of Etu, Sanyan and Alaari. They are thus discussed;

Etu. It is a deep blue, almost black, indigo dyed cloth, so dark that a costly dyeing process involving many immersions in fresh pots of indigo was needed, offset by very thin warp and weft stripes, often only in a single thread in width, of lighter blue. The name Etu (Fig. 1), literally in Yoruba means Guinea fowl, the cloth is likened to the bird's plumage. It is described and regarded as father of all cloths by the Yoruba (Clarke, 1998).

Sanyan. It is woven from the beige silk obtained locally from the cocoon of the anaphe moth forming a rather uneven pale brown cloth. It is quite prestigious and has perforations. Sanyan (Fig. 2) is deemed the most expensive of all the Yoruba woven fabrics. Consequently, the Yoruba refers to it as "Baba Aso" which is the father of fabrics (Ajala, 2010).

Alaari. It is a Yoruba name for cloth woven, using magenta waste silk that prior to the early decades of this century was imported across the Sahara from Southern Europe, via Tripoli. Cloths ((Fig. 3) woven entirely with this silk were extremely rare, and it was more usual to weave it as stripes or weft float decorations into an indigo dyed cloth (Clarke, 1998).

Some samples of contemporary Aso-oke on Display Photography of Ogundipe, 2018



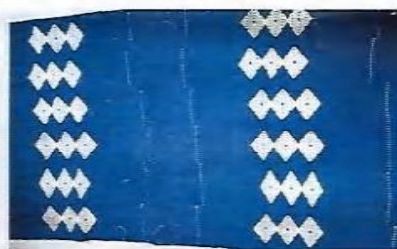
No 1



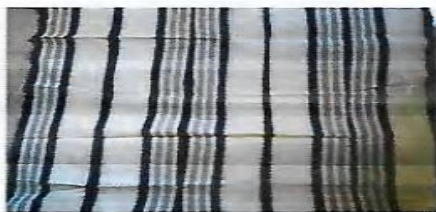
No 2



No 3



No 4



No 5



No 6



No 7



No 8

Methodology

Descriptive ethnographic research design was adopted for the study. The choice of the research design was underlined by the fact that the current research is an in-depth study of people, cultures and habits. The population for the study was made up of three weaving locations with a minimum of nine centres with each centre having a minimum of 10 to 15 apprentices and masters. The sample size for the study comprised 36 weavers obtained through accidental sampling technique as those that were available for the research were considered. Questionnaire was used to collect data for the study. Questionnaire was titled ‘‘Weaving and Textile Design in Iseyin Questionnaire (WTDIQ)’’ WTDIQ sought information on modern trends in weaving in Iseyin as well as strategies for improvement of weaving and attraction of more local and international recognition. WTDIQ was structured in such a manner that the respondents gave their response using a four-point response scale of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree (SD). WTDIQ was validated by three experts in Department of Fine and Applied Arts. The reliability of the validated WTDIQ was ascertained using Cronbach alpha statistics to obtain a coefficient of 0.73 which is high enough to confirm the WTDIQ as reliable as the coefficient falls in line with the recommendation of Shrestha (2021) that the adequate threshold value for Cronbach alpha should be >0.70. In other words, the variables within the factors are internally consistent. Mean and standard deviation were used for data analysis. The decision on the questionnaire items of the objectives were based on item and cluster means relative to real limits of numbers as shown below:

Response	Rating Scale	Real Limit of Numbers
SA	4	3.50 – 4.00
A	3	2.50 – 3.49
D	2	1.50 – 2.49
SD	1	1.00 – 1.49

Result and Findings

Table 1: Mean Ratings on Modern Trends in Weaving in Iseyin.

	Mean	SD	Remark
1. Use of synthetic yarns which are more colourfast.	3.01	.94	SA
2. Merging of traditional of Aso-Oke with other textile materials such as ankara.	2.92	.80	SA
3. Merging of traditional of Aso-Oke with other textile materials such as lace.	2.77	.76	SA
4. Use of traditional cotton cultivation.	2.82	.81	SA
5. Use of Aso-Oke to create various products like bags, shoes, furniture among others.	3.12	1.03	SA
Grand Mean	2.93	.87	SA

Data in Table 1 show that the respondents agree that use of synthetic yarns which are more colourfast, merging of traditional Aso-Oke with other textile materials such as ankara; merging of with traditional Aso-Oke with other textile materials such as lace; use of traditional cotton cultivation and use of Aso-Oke to create various products such as bags, shoes, furniture among others are modern trends in weaving in Iseyin. Corroborating this, the grand mean of 2.93 shows the strong agreement of the respondents on the afore-mentioned items as modern trends in weaving in Iseyin.

Table 2: Mean Ratings on Strategies for Improvement of Weaving and Attraction of More Local and International Recognition in Iseyin.

	Mean	SD	Remark
1. Use of new patters, colours and motifs that blend traditional techniques with modern techniques.	3.17	.98	SA
2. Expansion of product lines to include scarves, shawls and home décor items.	3.00	.94	SA
3. Ensuring a steady supply of high quality materials such as cotton, silk and wool for weavers.	3.31	1.06	SA
4. Use of social media platforms to showcase woven products globally.	2.93	.91	SA
5. Organization of regular workshops to enhance weavers' skills in design, production and marketing.	3.42	1.10	SA
Grand Mean	3.17	.99	SA

Data in Table 2 show that the respondents agree that use of new patters, colours and motifs that blend traditional techniques with modern techniques; expansion of product lines to include scarves, shawls and home décor items; ensuring a steady supply of high quality materials such as cotton, silk and wool for weavers; use of social media platforms to showcase woven products globally and organization of regular workshops to enhance weavers' skills in design, production and marketing. Consistent with this, the grand mean of 3.17 shows the strong agreement of the respondents on the strategies for improvement of weaving and attraction of more local and international recognition in Iseyin.

Conclusion

In view of the findings of the study, it was concluded that weaving and textile design in Iseyin require modern trends such as the use of colourfast synthetic yarns to create new products such as bags and furniture. It was further concluded that weaving in Iseyin can attract international recognition when the skills of the weavers are enhanced in the production and marketing of their products.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, certain recommendations were made. These include:

1. National directorate of employment should prioritize the art of weaving by ensuring that the skills of weavers are fine-tuned by exposing them to seminars and workshop. This is with a view to ensuring that employment is provided through weaving to the teaming unemployed youths.
2. Ministry of finance should ensure that every financial assistance needed by weavers to showcase their products is provided. That way, their marketing of their products can add to the nation's revenue.

References

- Ajala, O. (2010). Aso-oke: Yoruba Hand Woven Textiles. Guardian News Paper.
- Atunda, F.A. (2015). An evaluation of the indigenous textile (Aso-oke) industry performance in Yoruba Land, Southwestern Nigeria. *Foundation Journal of Management and Social Sciences*, 4(2), 20-27.
- Aworemi, J. I., Abdul-Azeez, O., & Opoola, N. (2010). Impact of socio-economics factors on the performance of small-scale enterprises in Osun State. *Journal of International Business Research*, 3(2), 92-99.
- Bray, M.J. (1968). The organization of traditional weaving in Iseyin, Nigeria. *Africa*, 38(3).
- Clarke, D. P. (1998). *Aso-Oke: The evolving tradition of hand-woven textile design among the Yoruba of South-Western Nigeria*. PhD thesis, School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London.
- Diyaolu I. J. & Omotosho H. R. (2020). Aso Òkè weaving techniques and perception in Iseyin, Oyo State, Nigeria. *Textile Society of America Symposium Proceedings, University of Nebraska - Lincoln*.
- Nkeonye, P.O. (2013). Introductory textiles for home economics students of art and beginners generally. Asserkome and C.O. Publishers, Zaria, Nigeria.
- Oluseye, O. (2019). *Iseyin: Home of Yoruba's Aso-Ofi*. Retrieved on November 2, 2021 from www.sunnewsonline.com.
- Shrestha, N. (2021). Factor analysis as a tool for survey analysis. *American Journal of Applied Mathematics and Statistics*, 9(1), 4-11.
- Wande, A.R. and Oyewole, A.J. (2024). Semiotic tendencies in the production of modern Aso-Òkè: A Study of Iseyin Weavers in Oyo State. *Port Harcourt Journal of History & Diplomatic Studies*, 11(1), 119-145.