

ADIRE TRADITIONAL (TIE-DYE) CLOTHING STYLE IN ABEOKUTA, OGUN STATE

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Abstract

This ethnographic paper deals with Egba dress culture with emphasis on the tie-dye clothes called Adire in Yoruba language. In this study, the evolution of Adire in terms of technology and designs are explained. Various ways in which Adire is worn by men, women and children for ritual and religious ceremonies are also discussed. Also revealed are Adire motifs and their meanings. The prospects of Adire as a traditional dressing style of the Yoruba people in Ogun State are documented. Kemta Itoku Adire market in Abeokuta is the research location. Data were collected through interview method, and supported with facts in the extant literature. Findings disclosed that modern dressing patterns had influenced Adire traditional clothing style. It is recommended that Adire industry should be boosted through funding and patronage.

Introduction

Adire, tie-dye textile is an indigo cloth made in Abeokuta, South Western Nigeria by Yoruba women, using a variety of resist dyeing techniques. This traditional tie-dye clothing material epitomizes the creative and entrepreneurial excellence of the Egba people of Abeokuta town. Abeokuta is the capital of Ogun State. It is situated on the East Bank of Ogun River. Abeokuta was founded in 1830 by Sodeke, a hunter and leader of the Egba refugees who fled from the disintegrating Oyo Empire. The Sierra Leone Creoles, in 1840s, settled in Oyo Empire and later became famous as missionaries and cloths dealers. Some techniques of tie-dye cloth making in Nigeria consist of the pit dyeing in Kano, indigo dyeing in Osogbo, and Batik Processing in Abeokuta. The earliest pieces of *Adire* were simple tie-dye designs on cotton cloths which were hand-spun and woven. In the early decades of the 20th Century, the large quantities of clothing materials brought by European textiles merchants to Abeokuta and other Yoruba towns caused a boom in *Adire* industry. Thus, *Adire* became the local craft in Abeokuta and Ibadan which was attracting buyers from all over West Africa. What was known then as *Adire* clothes were pieces of clothing materials stitched together to create women's wrapper. Later, new methods of resists dyeing were invented. Among them was *Adire* "Eleko", which was made by painting designs on cloth with cassava starch paste before dyeing it.

A new style more suited for rapid mass production was later created. It involves the use of metal stencils cut from sheets. Most of the designs were named after popular ones including the jubilee pattern first produced for the

silver jubilee of George V and Queen Mary in 1935, Olokun (goddess of the sea), and Ibadan dun ("Ibadan is sweet") (Victoria, 2009:25). However, by the end of the 1930s, the use of synthetic indigo and caustic soda, and influx of poor skills caused quality problems and the collapse in demand for *Adire* attires. Despite the revival prompted largely by the interest of the United States' Peace Corps workers in the 1960s, *Adire* clothing never regained its earlier popularity (Dee, 200:19). Today, simple stencilled designs are produced alongside the other higher quality tie-dye stitch-resist designs, but *Kampala* multi-coloured wax resist cloth, which a few people call *Adire*, are produced more.

Adire Clothes Makers in Abeokuta

Abeokuta, the capital city of Ogun state is popularly known as the home of "Adire making". It is the only market in the whole of West Africa where one will find such high concentration of people selling only tie-dye fabrics. As a result of this, people from all parts of the country and abroad have come to appreciate *Adire* attires as true indigenous African heritage. *Adire* making in Abeokuta is an age-long craft. According to the Iyaloja, Alhaja S.A Akamo, the trade started as a family craft and it is passed from one generation to the next. The compounds where tie-dye clothing originated from are Ebu Iporo Ake, Agbo Ile Akilo, Agbo Ile Amule and Agbo Ile Gbongolo. The informant added that in Abeokuta, certain trade used to belong to specific family. For instance, pottery belongs solely to the Ijaye, while firewood and broad leave for wrapping (*Ewe*) is the craft of the Itoko. The Otun Iyaloja Mrs. Odunlami who is a producer and a dealer says that though their Association still reckons with originality in the craft, the emergence of civilization has brought varieties into *Adire* making in Abeokuta. However, history still accords them their due recognition as *Adire* originator in Nigeria.



Adire Mall in Abeokuta

The producers and dealers of *Adire* apparels belong to a professional body tagged the Kemta *Adire* Kampala Market association. It is a well-organized and registered Association. Anybody who wants to go into production and selling of *Adire* must belong to the body. According to some members of the association, there are rules and regulations guiding the Association. Also, there are protocols regulating the production processes of *Adire* clothes. These precautions include the following; First, the fabric used must be tied very well to prevent it from losing and failing to produce the desired pattern. Second, mixing of dye should be done according to specification. Where one is to use two teaspoons of dye, four teaspoons must not be used and vice versa. Third, the ideal quantity of boiled water and other dyeing materials should be put together before dipping the fabric in it. This is the way to produce quality tie-dye fabric. Flouting the foregoing precautions might hinder the coming out well of the dyed clothing materials.

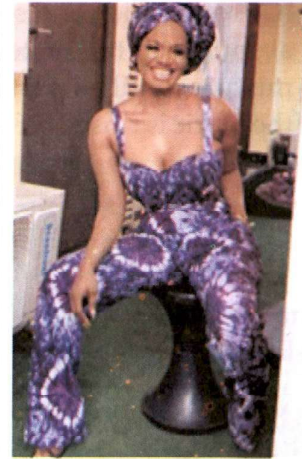
The Association celebrates the "Odun *Adire*" festival annually. The colourful one-week celebration has no ritual associated with it. They do invite Muslims, Christians as well as Traditional religion worshippers to pray for the market's continuous peace and progress. The Iyamapo whose statue is at the entrance of the *Adire* market is one of the earliest generations in the trade. Hence the reason for making her statue as a mark of honour, but nothing is offered to her as sacrifice. *Adire*, which used to be a family trade, is now a public craft. Individuals, corporate bodies and the government through the National Directorate of Employment (NDE) send unemployed graduates and young school leavers to learn the trade. There are many young agile men in the craft unlike in the past when there were only three men in the entire market learning how to produce *Adire*. All the apprentices need to do to be signed up is to obtain a form from the Association and book for a specific period of time, which depends on how much such individuals want to know about the handcraft. The period of apprenticeship varies from between three months and three years, it attracts fee for apprenticeship. Certificate of discharge is issued after the training. The trained individuals will have to register with the Association if such persons want to earn a living through the craft. It is vital to note that anyone found producing or selling *Adire* attires without belonging to the professional Association is sanctioned. Members of the Association benefit from the soft loans and credit facilities that are given by Bank of Industry (BOI) and other Financial Institutions.



Adire Fabrics Shop



Adire Vests



Adire Jumper

Processes of Making Adire Cloth

Making *Adire* involves sourcing of fabrics and soaking of processed leaves called "Ewe Elu" inside mordant water for three to four days to make them soft. This aids the proper extraction of indigo colour that is used for dyeing inside the "Ikoko Aro", a pot. The finished product is called "Eluba". There are skilled artisans that undertake each process. The first step is to get the native dye, potash, *hydrosulphide*, and indigo well mixed in a bowl or basin. The piece of cloth which is to be dyed is tied with raffia on different parts to form various designs. The design on the fabric depends on the preference of the owner. A sketch is made on the fabric after the design has been decided. In most cases, guinea brocade is the preferable material for the production. The guinea brocade material is dipped inside cold water to remove the wax. Hot wax is inflammable and so, it is never heated directly over the open flame. After melting, a wooden or foam stamp, usually square in shape, depending on the intended design, is then dipped into the melted candle wax and stamped on the Guinea brocade material in horizontal or vertical form. Doing this brings out a desired pattern or design (Tomori, 2011). This particular process is done as quickly as possible, because wax cools and dries rapidly on the device for applying it. Thereafter, the candle wax stamped on the guinea brocade material is left to dry.

After drying, the next stage is dye preparation. The dye is prepared by first of all pouring hot water inside a pot before caustic soda is added in the correct proportion. The mixture is stirred until it bubbles. The person stirring the mixture must put on face mask to avoid being affected with the toxic emissions from the boiling pot. Afterward, the dye of choice is added and stirred the more. The said dyes are extracted from grasses and leaves soaked in water for some number of days. However, with new innovation,

hydro sulphide and soda ash are used to make sure that the dye is perfectly absorbed in the material. The waxed cloth is dipped or immersed in the mixture, until all parts of the cloth are thoroughly dyed. The excess dye on the fabric is rinsed off completely. After that, the cloth is spread out to dry.



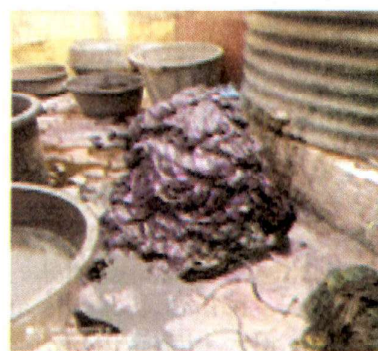
Adire producer at work



Tied fabrics



Dipping of fabrics



Removal of fabrics from dye



Dyed Fabrics



Adire designer at work

There are four major types of *Adire* fabrics as described below:

***Adire Oniko*:** This type of *Adire* is made via the following procedures. Resist is made on the fabric by tying a particular area of the cloth with rope, knitting wool, rubber band and clamps. Several small sections of the cloth are tied with thread before it is dyed. *Adire Oniko* is known as 'Alaketa' because it comes out like the raffia mat used for covering one's head in the sun.

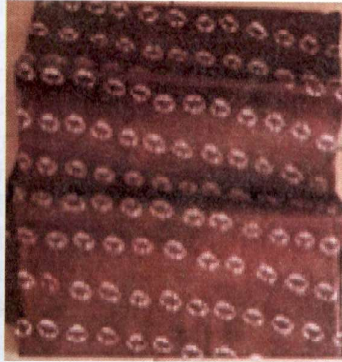
***Adire Eleko*:** This refers to hand-painted designs typically applied by

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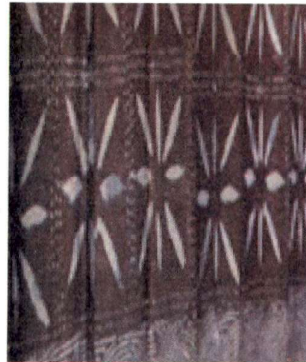
women. The artist paints the motifs on cloth using cassava starch paste as the resist material. The cloth is dyed in an indigo bath. Afterward, the starch is washed away before it is dried and packaged.

Adire Alabela: This type of *Adire* is also known as batik. It is made by using wax and stencil forms (or stamps) to create patterns on the fabrics so as to produce some attractive designs.

Adire Onibatani: This resist method is achieved by printing patterns on fabrics. These are colourful patterns that were previously cut into stencils before printing them out on fabrics.



Adire Oniko



Adire Eleko



Adire Alabela



Adire Onibatani

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Uses of *Adire* Apparels in Ritual and Religious Ceremonies

In Yoruba culture and tradition, *Adire* serves both religious and ceremonial functions. Yoruba people who share common ancestry and are progeny of noble tradition hold traditional festivals regularly so as to offer sacrifices to the spirits of the ancestors and appease numerous deities. Each of the festivals is accompanied by specific rituals and sacrifices. In the process of performing rituals and sacrifices during some of these festivals, *Adire* garments are often worn. The pervasive use of *Adire* as dresses worn to religious houses by worshipers, as altar cloths, and other sacred objects in religious worship is a common phenomenon in Yoruba land. In many parts of Nigeria, whether dyed, printed or embellished, *Adire* apparels are valued by communities as cultural objects.

In many occasions, cloths are considered as sacred items and had been used for ages as offerings to the gods and for their adornment. The various festivals in Yoruba culture in which *Adire* attires are mostly useful are Ojude Oba in Ijebu Ode. When this festival is going on, different age grades select the attires they will wear to parade in paying homage to the paramount ruler at the event venue. The other festivals during which *Adire* is worn are Lisabi day in Egba land, Orona festival in Ilaro, Sango (god of thunder), Ogun (god of iron), Egungun (masquerade) among others. Each of these gods and festivals has its mode of dressing which distinguishes its worshippers and celebrants from one another. Various types of fabrics of *Adire* colours and patterns are used in making costumes during these festivals. Even the Christians and Muslims also wear *Adire* attire for religious ceremonies.



Music Band in *Adire* Drummers wearing *Adire* A Woman wearing *Adire*

Adire Dressing Patterns of Yoruba Men, Women and Children

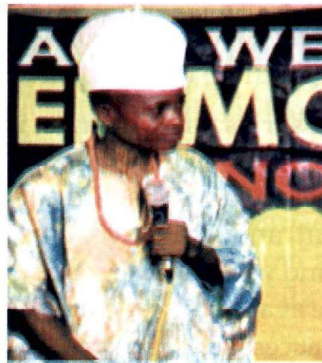
Among the various ethnic groups in Nigeria, the Yoruba people have their peculiar dressing patterns. *Adire* fabric is a common feature in their choice of clothes when it comes to dress making. In the past, Yoruba men used *Adire*

tie-dye fabrics to sew the same styles for themselves and their male children. They wore *Adire* uniform attires to occasions and ceremonies. The trending styles then were *sokoto kembe*, *sokoto soro*, *buba*, *dansiki*, *agbada*, and *fila abeti aja* but presently the new styles are fitted *sokoto* and *buba*, *sokoto baramu*, suits, waist coat, jacket and trouser, shirts, short (*sokoto penpe*), vest, (*Ewu penpe*), face cap and the likes. These are worn by fathers and sons to various occasions such as weddings, birthdays, funerals, graduations, coronations and project commissioning.

Old Styles



Dashiki & Sokoto.



Adire Danshiki



Adire with Sokoto and Buba

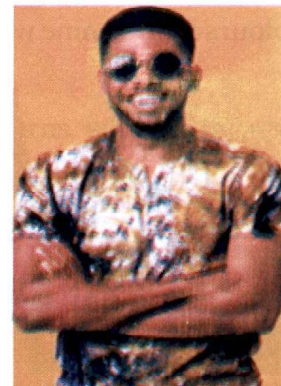
New Styles



Adire Suit



Adire Short & Shirt



Men's Buba Style

In the past, woman and their daughters sewed *iro* and *buba*, and *ipele* with *Adire* tie-dye fabrics. They wore these same clothes to attend different functions such as weddings. Nowadays, women use *Adire* tie-dye fabrics to sew gowns, jump suits, and female version of *Danshiki*. Some other styles made with *Adire* fabrics include shirts, modern *Iro* and *Buba*, leggings and free tops, and some other evening wears. *Adire* fabrics are as well sewn in form of uniform outfit known as *aso-ebi*, and worn to important events and occasions.



Adire Iro, Buba & Gele



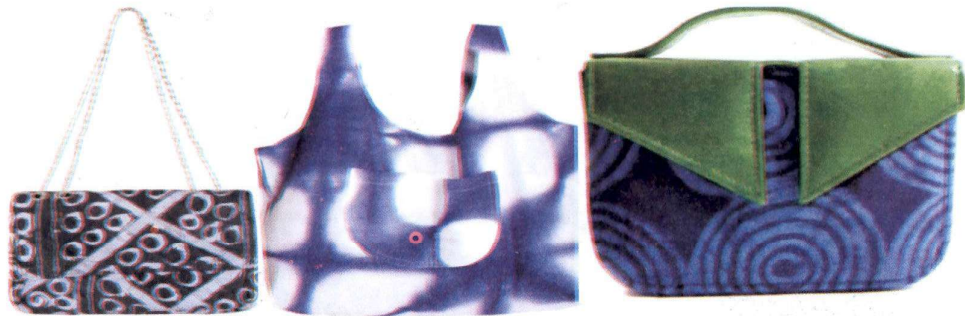
Adire Gown



Adire Danshiki

The Place of *Adire* Accessories and Fabrics in Modern Day Fashion Industry

Adire accessories are decorative items that are added to apparels in order to make them more beautiful and attractive. The introduction of modern technology has improved and widened the scope and usage of *Adire* clothing materials, the reason for the availability of many *Adire* accessories made with *Adire* tie-dye fabrics. *Adire* accessories are produced to be used by both male and female such as face caps, chairs, pillows, aprons, hats and slippers. Most often, Yoruba people prefer the use of fashion accessories made with *Adire* fabrics because out of them, they can choose the ones which textures, designs and colours are the same with the clothes they decide to wear.



Varieties of Adire Bags



Varieties of Adire Slippers

Adire is one local fabric that is revolving round in the fashion world. It has transited from the former *iro*, *buba* and *agbada* to various modern fashion designs. It has gone from being a local fabric to a global one due to the modern technology used in its production (Idowu, 2022). The production of *Adire* clothes and accessories is experiencing steady growth in the fashion industry, and this has helped in promoting the Yoruba cultural dressing. *Adire* fabric gives the fashion world a new look in clothing styles. Quite often, *Adire* attires and accessories are worn in fashion shows. Lots of people also prefer to bedeck themselves in *Adire* apparels when going to special occasions (Jolaosho, 2022). More foreign designers and runway models wear *Adire* more than ever before. Combining *Adire* fabrics with any other clothing designs gives them brilliant colours and dazzling effects. This is what makes the *Adire* apparels more attractive and desirable to most fashion enthusiasts across the globe.

Availability of silk and linen materials has made it easy for designers to engage in more production of *Adire* clothes and accessories. When they are spun into yarn and woven into fabrics, silk and linen materials are sometimes used in producing *Adire* for beddings, curtains and other similar uses (Ogunfidodo, 2022). The more the Yoruba society develops, the more the fashion designers make new *Adire* clothing designs like T-Shirts, beach wears, bikinis, gowns, interior decorations, suits, waist coats, shoes, jackets, caps, belts, and bags.

Meaning of Motifs on *Adire* Attires

Adire textiles are special fabrics with intricate patterns, which is the result of hand painted work done on the fabric during production. All patterns on *Adire* fabrics connote occurrences which is either a present or historical event. The motifs and designs are presented in various forms and shapes. Most of the patterns designed on *Adire* attires are in form of stylized representations of animals, plants, abstract paintings, and other objects. However, the motifs and designs of *Adire* tradition are classified into five types. These include Geometric patterns, Letters patterns, Figural patterns, *celestiomorphic* patterns and *skewmorphic* patterns.

The geometric motifs are dots, lines (such as Straight, Spiral, Hatching and Cross Hatching lines), and circles, semi circles, square, rectangles and triangles. The letters are the alphabets of the Yoruba language, cities, names and proverbs. The figural motifs are two sub-types: zoomorphic and floral. The zoomorphic motifs are of subgroups: Avian (such as *adaba* - dove, *Agbufon* - crowned crane, *opeere* - brown eared bulbul, *Pepeye* - duck and *Tolotolo* - turkey). Reptilian such as (*ejo* -snake) and mammalian species,

arthropods, annelids, mollusca, pisces and amphibian. The floral motifs are (*ewe ege*, *ogede Agbagba* – plantain, *koko* – cocoa pod, *odan* – fig tree, *fulawa* – petal, *koro owu* – cotton seed). The figural motifs also come in human forms such as kings or queens. The celestiomorphic motifs are based on celestial bodies or planets such as *irawo* – star and *osupa* – moon. The skewmorphic motifs are the representation of manmade objects and tools such as (*opon ifa*) *ifa* divination tray, (*yeti*) earring, (*Ileke bebe*) waist bead, (*amuga*) scissors, (*sekere*) gourd rattle, (*akete*) straw hat, cassava leaves and (*ilu-gangan*) talking drum.

The motifs and patterns connote different meanings; specific symbols convey a particular message to the Yoruba people. Cowries represent money, cassava leaves represent life. The beating of talking drums conveys messages and festivities. Earrings mean that good news is being conveyed. T-junction represents the crossroads of life. Mirror symbolizes a reflection in life. Guinea corn is saying that the hands that feed another person will never lack. Some of these motifs are pictorial while others are tokens of remembrance of what they represent.

Effects of Modern Technology on the Production of *Adire* Fabrics

The Influx of machine made *Adire* constitutes problem for the industry. The synthetic *Adire* design (polyester) is more affordable than the original cotton *Adire*. Someone who does not know the difference will settle for the machine made *Adire* because it is cheaper. The fabric for machine made *Adire* is synthetic and it is the end product of petrochemical substance which is not good for the skin. The process of making the printed one is machine based, whereas, the traditional *Adire* is handmade. The similarity between the machine made and handmade one is so much that one can only differentiate them by touching.

Another effect of modernization on *Adire* making is in the area of intellectual theft. According to Babalaje Kemta *Adire* Kampala Market, there was a particular design he created that was reproduced by the makers of synthetic *Adire* clothes. Producers also complain about scarcity of genuine fabric, unlike their counterpart in Mali, Guinea, Sierra Leone, Ghana, and Cotonou. Government policies that placed a ban on the importation of some commodities into Nigeria have led to the scarcity of certain fabrics which tends to limit their ability to produce excellent designs. They emphasized that they are as creative as their counterparts in other countries, but lack enough fabrics to work with.

Conclusion

Adire clothing style is an ancient aspect of Yoruba culture that is undergoing development. Its impact on modern dressing is overwhelming. *Adire* has since evolved from the former *Iro, Buba, Sokoto, Danshiki* to become a modern fabric worn for various occasions ranging from corporate to casual. Hence it has a place in the fashion industry today. The Abeokuta *Adire* has remained a force to reckon with in Africa. The ability to sustain the existence of *Adire* attires in the fashion world says a lot about the skills of the producers. There is need to promote the production of *Adire* fabrics, and on this basis, the following recommendations are made.

Recommendations

1. It is important to encourage the patronage of local *Adire* factories and expand the local *Adire* markets in Nigeria. In this sector, the farmers cultivate the cotton and indigo plants which are raw materials for skilled designers of *Adire* clothes. If well developed, this craft can provide employment for the teeming unemployed youths as farmers, weavers, and dyers. Large scale production of *Adire* clothing should thus be encouraged by supporting the industry with more funds and expertise.
2. The production of *Adire*, tie-dye fabrics should be encouraged by making it a core course in higher institutions in order to guarantee its spread and sustainability.
3. As the demand for various designs of *Adire* attire is increasing, the production of assorted designs of *Adire* should always be worked out by the producers.

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List of Informants

S/N	NAME	AGE	OCCUPATION	DATE	ADDRESS
1	ALHAJA S.A AKAMO	55	ADIRE PRODUCER & DEALER	18/01/22	KEMTAADIRE KAMPALA MARKET, ITOKU, ABEOKUTA, OGUN STATE
2.	MR. IDOWU TAIWO	60	DYE MERCHANT	18/01/22	KEMTAADIRE KAMPALA MARKET, ITOKU, ABEOKUTA, OGUN STATE
3	MRS. SULIKAT BADMUS	48	ADIRE PRODUCER	16/01/22	KEMTAADIRE KAMPALA MARKET, ITOKU, ABEOKUTA, OGUN STATE
4	MR. SERIF JOLAOSO	47	ADIRE PRODUCER & DEALER	17/01/22	KEMTAADIRE KAMPALA MARKET, ITOKU, ABEOKUTA, OGUN STATE
5	MRS. MODINAT OYETOLA	42	ADIRE DEALER	20/01/22	ADIREKAMPALA INTERNATIONAL MARKET ASERO, ABEOKUTA
6	MR. MICHAEL OGUNFIDODO	50	ADIRE PRODUCER & MERCHANT		ADIREKAMPALA INTERNATIONAL MARKET ASERO, ABEOKUTA