

## ASSESSMENTS AND POTENTIALS: AKWETE HAND WOVEN TEXTILES IN IGBO WOMEN CONTEMPORARY FASHION.

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### **Abstract**

*Akwete Igbo woven cloth which centres on tradition and historical significance is an ancient vocation of the females of Akwete town situated in Ndoki and Asa areas of Ukwa East Local Government Area in Abia State of Nigeria. The colourful ornamented cloth decorated with various symbolic design motifs woven into the fabric to create striking designs in the history of traditional weaving in the world today is credited to the Igbo. They are normally woven to be utilized as two wrappers for women; usually complemented with a matching blouse and a headgear. The men also wear them. This study has observed that Akwete woven fabrics are not frequently utilized in the contemporary fashion scene like some of its indigenous counterparts hence it has become imperative to access the weaving tradition. A survey research design was adopted and a five-point liker scale questionnaire, in depth interviews, focus group discussions and observations were also adopted as research instruments. The results were observed and analyzed using qualitative tool of photography and descriptive statistical tools of mean and standard deviation. One of the findings is that there is a decline in the use of the woven fabric for contemporary fashion. It recommends that the Igbo should adopt these woven fabrics during special occasions instead of the penchant for foreign fabrics, this will spur the weavers to produce more that will serve as many as possible and also project it to limelight. And this will in no doubt be appreciated by the Igbo and beyond, thereby meeting the yearnings and aspirations of the potential users in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.*

**Key words:** Akwete woven fabrics, contemporary fashion, Igbo, women fashion, woven textiles

### **Introduction**

Fashion now serves as a vehicle for identity and self-expression rather than just covering the body. People express their affiliations, views, and even moods through their clothing. The clothes people wear convey a lot about them and their values, telling powerful tales (Bochoidze, 2023). A dynamic and always changing cultural phenomenon; fashion is inextricably linked to the culture in which it is practiced. It is an artistic medium that conveys culture, social identity, and personal style. It is also a long-standing, visually appealing industry that lives on innovation and reinvention. It serves as a window into the society, reflecting the social and cultural shifts of the contemporary era. The sector is always changing.

The Nigerian contemporary fashion has recorded mass growth, and new trends keep on coming out every now and then. It encompasses rich fabrics, vibrant colours, prints and woven designs which showcase the culture and heritage of her people. Several cultural endowments in Nigeria have been almost neglected over the years, for instance, the traditional woven textiles. They are one of those cultural heritages that are sparingly used for special occasion in some cultures. Although they have provided varieties of designs and patterns based on their cultures in different colours and quality to the particular tribe that own them, they are still being not sufficiently utilized. They are stored mostly in boxes but might also be re-used, sold in some cases or given away. Akwete woven fabrics of the Igbo is an example. The weavers of Akwete-Igbo fabrics have created a wide range of eye-catching designs with meaningful motifs. The community of Akwete town, where these textiles are made, is the source of their name. Dada Nwakata was the pioneer weaver who unraveled some woven cloths brought in by the Portuguese in Akwete town in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. According to Ikegwonu (1999) in Chukuggu and Ogu (2013), the West German Government noticed the highly skilled work displayed by the Akwete weavers, as a result, the weavers obtained a

technical training assistance for the study of modern techniques in weaving, but this act has not really lifted the weaving culture to greater heights. The colonial authorities of Nigeria established handloom weaving workshops in Akwete town and all the other areas that produced textiles locally. They also assert that British textile personnel oversaw the importation of looms for utilization at the training facilities. According to Chukueggu and Ogu (2013), machine spun, imported bleached threads known as yarn are now being used in Akwete weaving this was confirmed during a field trip to Akwete in 2021 in which the researcher established that. The use of manually spun and dyed cotton threads from nearby farms has been discontinued. The only native resources that the Akwete women are still employing are the looms and their accessories created by local artisans, as highlighted by Ikegwuonu in Chukueggu and Ogu (2013). According to Chukueggu and Ogu (2013), the quality of Akwete woven fabrics has seen significant transformations, emerging as one of the most captivating and exquisite Nigerian hand woven textiles today. This study has observed that, Akwete woven fabrics continue to have poor patronage even though Okeke (1996) and Ogu (2012) have noted the desire by some people for Akwete fabrics. They also discuss how weavers have modified their weaving styles to reflect the changing times as a result of honing their craft. Despite all of these advancements, Akwete continues to struggle to exist in the modern fashion of the Igbo women.

Ndebilie (2011) states in Chukueggu and Ogu (2013) that Akwete textile weaving is essential to Igbo civilization and cannot exist without it. It is a way for Igbo culture to be passed down from generation to generation. Chukueggu and Ogu (2013) and Okeke (1996) observe that Akwete fabrics are woven into a variety of patterns and sizes in contemporary fashion, and people wear them to events and ship them abroad to represent the cultural history of the people who made them. Though they made the same observations, Chukueggu and Ogu (2013) are of the view that the usage of these fabrics in contemporary fashion are on the decline. They also mention that Akwete woven fabric has gained international attention due to its qualities. However, this study observes that, Akwete hand woven materials haven't had much of an impact on modern fashion of the Igbo and Nigeria at large, recently. In addition, Ekwueme (2009) reports that Chief Rufus Nna James's efforts led to the inclusion of the renowned Akwete woven fabrics in an American show in 1963. She explained that Akwete fabric's appearance catapulted it to the status of an Igbo cultural symbol in Nigeria, increased recognition of the fabric's aesthetics, and enabled it to continue gaining attention across the globe. In spite of all these efforts aforementioned, Akwete hand woven fabrics are still finding it difficult to compete favourably in the contemporary fashion. As a result, this study carried out a survey in Abia state to assess this weaving tradition and find out if there are prospects and potentials.

### **Statement of The Problem**

Even though the Akwete people's weaving techniques and fabrics are vital to their continued cultural, economic, and technological advancement, there is a clear risk that they will go extinct very soon (Chukueggu and Ogu 2013; Ikegwuonu 1999). Thus, drastic steps must be taken to reverse the current circumstances in order to preserve, rehabilitate, popularize, and include Akwete fabrics into contemporary fashion. The Igbo have respected traditional cloth weaving culture which has been in existence before the coming of Europeans, according to Ntagu (2013). He further mentions that this culture has not been exempt from the cultural devaluation perpetrated by western society. This study has observed that, the young of today are enamoured with foreign clothing, which does not do much to promote the weaving culture. The majority of young females favour miniskirts, skirts, leggings, pants, bikinis, suits, spaghetti tops, gowns, and other vintage western apparel from the *Okirika* wake up or bend down boutique, some of which expose their obscenely nudeness. They have foreign names, speak foreign languages, and appear dressed in foreign clothing. To promote cultural growth, the Igbo and Nigerians in general need to reflect on the decline of their traditional fabrics and seek ways of resuscitating and re-launching them into the global fashion scene. Thus, this study evaluated the hand-woven Akwete textiles used in contemporary Igbo women's clothing and identified various opportunities that could help this weaving heritage to thrive and withstand competition in the fashion market.

### **Objective of the study**

1. To assess the Akwete woven textiles in contemporary Igbo women's fashion and highlight its potentials.

### **Research Question**

A research question was formulated to guide this study.

1. How can the Akwete woven textiles in contemporary Igbo women's fashion be assessed to reveal the potentials?

### **Theoretical Study**

A comprehensive and multifaceted theoretical framework, incorporating elements from cultural studies, fashion theory, and material culture studies, is necessary to evaluate the non-usage and potentials of Akwete hand woven fabrics in Igbo Women Contemporary Fashion. The emergence of cultural studies theory in the late 1950s and early 1960s was largely attributed to Stuart Hall. With a focus on popular culture, media representations, and daily behaviours in relation to larger social and political institutions, this theory critically analyzes the interactions between culture, power, and society. It explores the traditional usage, symbolic meanings, and historical settings of Akwete textiles within Igbo society, as well as their historical and socio-cultural value. The examination included the function of Akwete textiles.

The multidisciplinary discipline of fashion theory emerged in the latter half of the 20th century, and Joanne Entwistle played a significant role in its development. The field explores how clothes and fashion shape and reflect social and cultural conventions, as well as how they affect individual and community identities. It also closely examines how media, consumer culture, and globalization affect fashion trends and behaviour. It gave readers a thorough grasp of the relevance of Akwete fabrics in modern Igbo women's fashion. This looked at how Akwete fabrics are used in contemporary apparel designs, how they are incorporated into the fashion industry, and how they affect the way Igbo women's cultural identities are changing. This theory also give an insight on how tradition and modernity intersected when using Akwete textiles, taking into account how these fabrics are modified to fit current fashion trends without losing their cultural uniqueness. In the latter half of the 20th century, Jules Prown invented the theory of material culture. This idea emphasizes the significance of examining items in order to understand culture and history. It makes the argument that tangible objects can provide insightful analyses of social values, attitudes, and behaviours and can be examined as historical artefacts to learn more about the past. The materiality of Akwete textiles, including their production methods, material composition, quality, and sustainability, was carefully examined through the lens of material culture studies. This included showcasing the distinctive qualities of Akwete textiles and their potential to boost the local economy. Additionally, the study looked at the ethical and environmental effects of producing textiles from Akwete, taking sustainability and the preservation of traditional skills into account. A comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the cultural, social, economic, and environmental aspects surrounding these textiles within the contemporary fashion landscape were provided by the integration of these detailed perspectives in the assessment and potentials of Akwete hand woven textiles.

### **Literature Review.**

#### **The Igbo and Akwete Weaving**

The Igbo people reside in the South-east region of Nigeria, West Africa, (Afigbo, 1981). With a thriving population, it is home to one of the largest ethnic groups in Sub-Saharan Africa. According to Anni (2015), archaeological findings have demonstrated that members of this ethnic group engaged in the Akwete weaving tradition, mostly done by the women using the women's vertical loom. According to Ikegwu and Uzuegbu (2015) and Nwachukwu and Ibeabuchi (2012) and Chudi-Duru (2017), women in Ukwa East Local Government Area, Abia State, Nigeria produce Akwete cloth. They further mention that the towns and villages that house these traditional industries are Ndoki in Abia State, which is part of a cluster of weaving communities that also includes Ndoki, Ijo, and Ogoni in Rivers State. Asa towns where this weaving is practiced till date are Umunteke, Ohuchu, Mkporobo, Umuebulungwa and Owo. Ndoki

prominent towns where the weaving tradition is still practiced till date are Akwete, Ohanso, Obunku, Ohambele, Obeaku and Obehie. Ndoki in Rivers State where this weaving tradition is still practiced has many towns among which Umuagbai is most prominent. Ekeke in Ikegwu and uzuegbu (2013), named cloth weaving in Umuagbai – Ndoki – Rivers State “Akuruaku,” while in Ndoki – Abia State it is called “Akwete” meaning something woven. According to Afigbo (1981) in Ikegwu and Uzuegbu (2013), the reason why the weaving is termed Akwete is because, in addition to residents of other towns in the Ukwu East Local Government Area, Akwete people make weaving their primary source of income. Other people, however, combine weaving with farming. It is part of the clan's shared history. They assert that Akwete is a traditional technology that is firmly thought to be an indigenous practice known to the people of Igbo land, and that it was brought to light by intellectuals through their interactions with the colonial masters. The emphasis placed on the 1938 Igbo-Ukwu archaeological finds by Isaiah Anozie, who discovered a vibrant regalia and other artefacts while excavating a water cistern in his yard, supported this fact. They further affirm that Thurston Shaw was invited to participate in an inquiry in 1964–1965, which was authorized by the Federal Department of Antiquities (Federal Commission for Museums and Monuments) as a result of this discovery. Shaw's results were made available in 1970 and 1977 and were radiocarbon dated. Additionally, colourful materials (regalia) dating to the ninth century AD were discovered.



**Plate I: Akwete weaving.** Mrs. Nneoma Okere, an Igbo of *Akwete*, working on an *Akwete* cloth in *Akwete* town, utilizing the *ikaki* (tortoise), *igbe akwukwo* (box of books) and *ute* (mat) motifs as designs. Photograph by Chudi-Duru, C.C (2017).

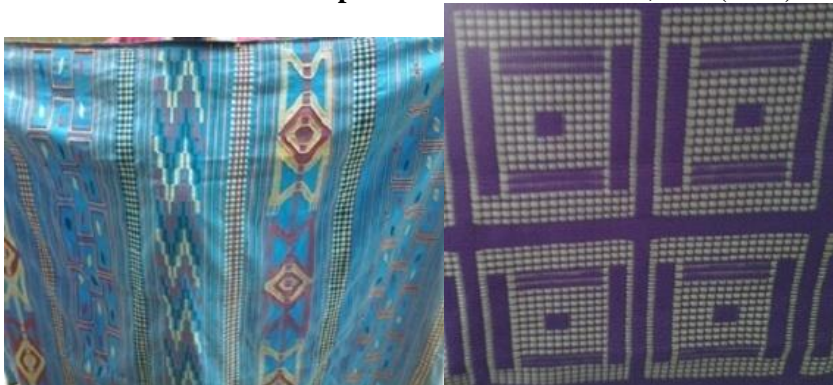
The Akwete-Igbo weavers (Plate 1) decorated their fabrics with some motifs based in their world view. They had more than a hundred motifs they wove (Lamb and Holmes 1980). According to Aronson (1980), there is evidence of the earliest known weaving in Nigeria from woven bark fragments found at the Igbo Ukwu archaeological site dating back to the 9th century A.D. However, the exact nature and purpose of these textiles remain unknown. These textile finds in Igbo Ukwu were connected to the native weaving materials used by the Akwete people. Other Igbo groups that weaved, according to Lambs and Holmes (1980), include the Nsukka women, the Abakaliki women in Ebonyi State, the Umuagbai women in Rivers State, and the Aniocha women in Delta State.

**Contemporary Fashion-** Contemporary refers to items from the current era. Anything that follows the latest trends in style and design is considered contemporary in the world of fashion. Cloth fashion is constantly exhibited in a modern manner in today's globe. If not, individuals will find it challenging to dress in the clothing of their ancestors without making any alterations to fit the newest fashions. Jennings (2011) avers that Africa is the next frontier in fashion. For more than fifty years, mainstream fashion kept it out of circulation, but today, the continent's indigenous industries are demonstrating to the rest of the world how

African design is truly made. She further declares that by striking a balance between the pursuits of modern fashion, today's gifted designers are drawing in consumers from around the world. The quest of the new in modern fashion is achieved while appreciating the beauty and ornamentation principles that are ingrained in African culture and society. These patterns can be seen in most African cities where the Igbo people reside; their ladies wear various textiles most of the time but rarely wear Akwete woven fabrics. Some samples of Akwete hand woven fabrics are placed on plates 2 and 3 below.



**Plate 2: Akwete woven samples. Source: Chudi-Duru, C.C (2017).**



**Plate 3: Akwete woven samples. Source: Chudi-Duru, C.C (2017).**

**Methodology** - This study is a survey. It made use of a mixed research method (qualitative and quantitative) in collection of data, and adopted five research instruments. The qualitative was used because the Akwete weaving tradition was observed, studied and assessed. In quantitative method, the descriptive statistical tools of mean and standard deviation were employed because they used measurable attributes and information to create statistical data about the population that was studied. The results from the questionnaire were thereafter analyzed and presented on a table.

**Area of study**- The research area is the woven fabric production center, Akwete, Abia State.

**Population for the study**- The study's participants include weavers as well as some employees and students from a few chosen higher education institutions in Abia State. This formula, developed by Krejcie and Morgan (2001), was applied to reduce the population to a sample size that was used to investigate the phenomenon. The known estimated population of 48,324 came from the three tertiary institutions surveyed in Abia State University Uturu, Abia State Polytechnic, Aba, and College of Education (Technical) Arochukwu, Abia State. 381 is the calculated sample size for this investigation. Purposively, these responses were chosen according to their departments and faculties. The Faculty of Environmental sciences was chosen because it is thought to be educated enough to offer helpful answers for this study.

**Instrumentation** - This study used questionnaires, interviews, focus groups, photography, and observations to investigate Akwete weaving tradition. The five-point Likert scale was used, with a theoretical mean of 3.0. The study involved 381 respondents, including the oldest weaver, Madam Edith Akpara.

**Reliability and administration of the instrument** -The questionnaire, interview guide and focus group discussion questions were designed by the researcher and scrutinized by some experts in the field. The study used purposive sampling to administer the questionnaire to respondents in higher institutions, as they are the most accessible and representative of the entire Igbo land and Nigeria as a whole. The questionnaires were distributed among three institutions in the study area: 161 questionnaires were administered to Abia State University, Uturu in Abia South, Abia Polytechnic Aba in Abia Central was administered with 120 questionnaires while Abia State College of Education (Technical), Arochukwu in Abia North was administered with 101 questionnaires. After the coding and processing of data, 337 questionnaires considered valid at an 88.5% return rate.

**Research question 1:** How can the Akwete woven textiles in contemporary Igbo women’s fashion be assessed to reveal the potentials?

**Table 1: Assessing the Akwete weaving tradition and textiles.**

S/N	ITEMS	Mean	Std. D.	Remark
1	I think that promoting Akwete hand woven textiles in contemporary fashion can help preserve traditional weaving techniques.	4.29	0.96	Accepted
2	I am willing to pay a premium for fashion items made from Akwete hand woven textiles.	3.55	1.27	Accepted
3	I have not seen Akwete hand woven textiles being used frequently in modern fashion designs.	3.77	1.24	Accepted
4	I think there is a demand for Akwete hand woven textiles in the contemporary fashion market.	4.24	1.14	Accepted
5	I am interested in learning more about the process of creating Akwete hand woven textiles.	4.13	1.15	Accepted
6	I have incorporated Akwete hand woven textiles into my fashion designs	2.38	1.35	Rejected
7	I will consider using Akwete hand woven textiles in my future fashion collections.	3.66	1.46	Accepted
8	I own some Akwete hand woven textiles.	2.12	1.37	Rejected
9	I believe that Akwete hand woven textiles have the potential to influence contemporary fashion trends	3.56	1.26	Accepted
10	I am aware of the cultural significance of Akwete hand woven textiles in Igbo tradition.	3.75	1.32	Accepted
	Grand mean	3.75		Accepted

Key: 1 = Undecided, 2 = Disagree, 3 = strongly disagree, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly Agree

Source: Chudi-Duru, 2017. Std. d. stands for standard deviation

From the computations presented in Table 1, the Akwete weaving tradition was assessed. From the table, eight items from the questionnaire were accepted while two other items were rejected. From the mean rating scores recorded, on the items that were accepted, they show that: promoting Akwete hand woven textiles in contemporary fashion can help preserve traditional weaving techniques with a mean score of 4.29, some people are willing to pay a premium for fashion items made from Akwete hand woven textiles a mean score

of 3.55, most people have not seen Akwete hand woven textiles being used frequently in modern fashion designs with a mean score of 3.77, there is a demand for Akwete hand woven textiles in the contemporary fashion market with a mean score of 4.24, people are interested in learning more about the process of creating Akwete hand woven textiles with a mean score of 4.13, most people will consider using Akwete hand woven textiles in their future fashion collections if made available with a mean score of 3.66, it is believed that Akwete hand woven textiles have the potential to influence contemporary fashion trends when used with a mean score of 3.56 and majority are aware of the cultural significance of Akwete hand woven textiles in Igbo tradition with a mean score of 3.75. Here also on the table, the respondents, however, disagreed to two items on the table as follows: many people have incorporated Akwete hand woven textiles into their fashion designs with a mean score of 3.38 and most Igbo own some Akwete hand woven textiles with a mean score of 3.12. Based on the value of the weighted mean average of 3.75 (that is the overall mean response of the respondents divided by the number of questionnaire items), it can be deduced that *Akwete* weaving tradition is part of Igbo cultural heritage as regards to textiles which when promoted could help to preserve the weaving tradition.

From the Focus Group Discussion conducted with the weavers in *Akwete*, they revealed that *Akwete* woven art has great potentials, if properly harnessed can empower many females in Igbo land and influence the Igbo women contemporary fashion; but it is on the decline as the patronage is quite slow compared to previously and most Igbo do not utilize the fabrics but mostly the Ijaw. Mrs Edith Akpara (85yrs) (interviewee) a weaver who spoke throughout the discussion in Igbo language, she was taught how to weave by her sister-in-law at the age of eight. She said that “*Akwete* weaving tradition is a part of Igbo cultural heritage which has a strong history attached to it and this history has brought the woven art into limelight in the textile history of the world but it is on the decline because of lack of patronage by their owners, bad roads, financial constraints and lack of weaving materials”.

**Discussions and Findings-** Despite being well-known in Igbo land, Nigeria and world textile history, these distinctive Akwete woven fabrics are not often used in modern Igbo clothing. According to Ndebilie (2011), the Akwete people's ability to survive economically has been derived from their weaving technique. She adds, that this locally woven fabric has attracted a reasonable increase in demand by consumers locally and internationally. However, the study discovered, in an interview conducted in 2022 with Mrs. Patience Odor, one of the Akwete weavers, and Mrs Edith Akpara that the demand for these fabrics by consumers peaked during the oil boom in the 70s and then gradually declined. They mentioned that many women have made a living solely from weaving, and the money they made from it helped them to provide their children with a quality education. They further decry the absence of customers. Most of their woven fabrics are hung with no seen customer to buy. According to Okeke (1982) and Ntagu (2013), youths should be forced to concentrate on production and discoveries in Akwete weaving, because they will inspire people to use their creative sense to repurpose classic materials in modern ways, so helping to advance the nation's socioeconomic standing. This study found out that the Igbo people preserved their ancient cloth-weaving traditions, which predates the arrival of Europeans and has not been spared from the cultural erasure perpetrated by western society. The following issues were found to be affecting Akwete woven fabrics in contemporary fashion:

In terms of surface ornamentation, Akwete woven fabrics have not undergone significant alterations. Numerous surface embellishments adorn the majority of Indian madras being imported into the nation, now referred to as georges, which the Igbo have adopted as their own traditional attire. They are embellished with mirror works, light metallic coins, embroideries with golden and silver yarns, swarovski crystals, trims, ribbons, laces, stones, beads, and sequins, among other decorations. The designers have utilized these elements to improve the surfaces of factory-woven garments, making them more appealing, shiny, richer, and suitable for the occasions for which they are intended. Sadly, Akwete woven fabrics are limited to being woven with no surface embellishment except the usual added weft used to weave in designs for surface decorations. Chukueggu and Ogu (2013) stress that the Akwete fabric's finishing should be improved. They

further mention that since finishing treatment is thought to be the most significant element in modern textiles that highlights aesthetic appeal and drives demand, modern finishing treatment is necessary to improve the fabric's surface appearance in line with current trends.

Another is the paucity of empirical research on the generation and production of design ideas. In order to keep up with technological advancements in the textile sector, the government should enhance the tools and materials used in the manufacturing of Akwete cloth. Another issue is a shortage of these resources as this discouraged business activities, creativity and expertise. According to Chukuegu et al. (2013) and Ndebilie (2011), small-scale local textile industries in Nigeria play a significant role in the country's economy and produce textile goods using locally available equipment. If they receive assistance in providing adequate workspace, they are expected to increase their contribution even further. The researcher found out during this research that there weren't enough looms because some of the unidentified weavers had taken them away. The cooperative workshop appeared to be abandoned and messy, and many thefts occurred there, according to Madam Helen Brown, an Akwete weaver, who was interviewed in Akwete, 2021. This was because there wasn't enough maintenance and this resulted to a decrease in the number of weavers as well as the quantity and quality of textile manufacturing.

There are no financial resources available. According to Ndebilie (2011), in order to sustain the manufacture of Akwete woven fabrics, it is imperative that these weavers have access to financial resources. During a field trip in 2021, this study conducted interviews with three women weavers, Mrs. P. Ordor, Mrs. Nneoma Okere, and Madam Helen Brown. It was discovered that the weavers had established a cooperative society that would aid in the procurement of materials required for weaving, the marketing of woven products, and the provision of small loans to some weavers wishing to launch a weaving enterprise. It acts as a go-between for the government and the weavers. Generally speaking, its purpose is to manage the weavers' business and well-being in relation to their line of work. Unfortunately, though, neither the state government nor any other sources of help have been offering any support recently. This is one of the things that has greatly discouraged the Akwete weavers. Originally, the cooperative society established a rule stating that the weaver that sold an Akwete wrapper was expected to give a particular amount of the sale to the cooperative. The Cooperative would then use the money that weavers pay to provide loans to other aspiring weavers so they can launch a weaving enterprise. However, because they hardly make enough money, the dejected weavers no longer donate a portion of their sales to the cooperative. Even when they are discovered to be marketing to certain clients, they typically refute the behaviour. As a result, the Cooperative Society building is no longer maintained. They have taken most of the looms because there isn't enough money to engage a security guard to watch over the machinery in the society building. The government has given up on the renovations it began some years ago, as this research observed. The entire area appears abandoned in contrast to how it was in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s. If the government help the cooperative, it would promote unity. If they receive funding, they will also be able to tackle the difficulties that Nigeria's modern fashion is currently facing. According to Mrs. P. Ordor (2021) an Akwete weaver, most of the weavers struggle to produce small orders to high standards within a particular time frame because of no funding. Some also sparingly weave, only after coming back from their farms. There is lack of training and re-training of Akwete weavers. In line with this, there are barely new ideas in usage, enhancements, techniques and designs. As a result of this, there are no competitions amongst the designers and this has decreased and discouraged creativity and productivity. There is a void in the transmission of this weaving technique from one generation to the next as a result of the large number of females leaving Akwete town for white collar employment in neighbouring towns. Every weaver who was interviewed acknowledged that she had learned the craft between the ages of 8 and 12. However, they expressed dissatisfaction about some of their daughters' lack of enthusiasm for the woven art forms. This suggests that eventually there might not be any weavers in the foreseeable future. The weaving practice won't be consistent or long-lasting and might be utterly slow in modification.



The weaving practice only takes place in Akwete town, which has little traffic and no good roads leading there. This greatly discourages a lot of weavers, clients, and researchers. Since the woven fabrics are not found in various markets, it might be cumbersome for the potential users. It is unlikely that majority of the fabrics will be purchased and put on display if people are unable to visit Akwete town. Additionally, if no fabric is purchased, there won't be any to enhance, construct and display the modern Igbo fashion style. If there is little sponsorship, as the weavers claim, how can people from other regions of Igbo land and outside know what this woven fabric looks like?

Disseminating the weaving technique throughout Nigeria. According to this study, several younger female Akwete weavers (girls) have moved to the southern region of Nigeria and carried on with their weaving because their owners don't give them much business. They discovered that, in contrast to Igbo land, the locations they had gone to use some woven cloths in some of their festivities more frequently similar to that of Akwete. Although there are many distinctions, some residents of those areas mistakenly believe that Akwete woven fabrics are the same as Aso-oke. While Aso-oke is made up of strips that are sewn together to create a larger piece of cloth, Akwete is woven on a wide vertical loom. Even so the women's vertical loom is used in some Yoruba areas, it is not as widespread as the Akwete loom (Lamb and Holmes 1980). They also noted that, in Nigerian indigenous weaving history, Akwete looms are the largest. According to this analysis, there would not have been a need for this exodus if the Igbo had used and patronized Akwete woven garments. This weaving tradition proves to be auspicious if all these problems are solved.

#### **Recommendation-**

Weaving is a crucial part of Igbo culture, and Akwete woven fabrics hold great significance as their heritage. Preserving this legacy for future generations involves using them appropriately for uniforms and memorial cloth at relevant occasions in Igbo land. Despite some Igbo churches, like the Anglican Church, using Akwete hand woven materials for their uniforms, the fabric doesn't receive the recognition it deserves. To ensure the continuity of Igbo cultural heritage in textiles, it's essential to keep Akwete fabrics in style. "The importance of cloth is reflected in commissioning, production practices, distribution, consumption patterns and meanings it acquires through use," according to Judith (1999) in Ojo(2004). This can only be achieved through sustaining the commemorative use of Akwete fabrics, valuing Igbo culture and indigenous arts and crafts. It is well known that the introduction of foreign textiles led to the innovations that enabled Dada Nwakata to weave new designs for the Akwete people (Afigbo (1981 and Okeke 1982). The traditional woven textiles of the Igbo is gradually disappearing and replaced by imported goods. While the Akwete woven cloths have become incredibly rare and nearly forgotten by Igbo people foreign clothing has become the norm. Akwete woven fabrics have been supplanted by machine-made commodities, which are detrimental to the continuation of both the weaving tradition and Akwete fabrics. As a result, Akwete woven fabric should be enhanced to suit the contemporary fashion in Nigeria. The study posits that if only the Igbo will change their attitude towards the use of foreign imported textiles Akwete woven fabrics will be utilized instead in the contemporary fashion thereby making it much more relevant in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and beyond.

There is need for an International Igbo Costume Day to be established for showcasing and safe-guarding the traditional cultural heritage. On that day, Akwete woven fabrics should be worn and displayed. To maintain, preserve, and promote the Igbo cultural heritage with regard to textiles, museums dedicated to Igbo traditional apparel ought to be constructed in every Igbo state. This study suggests that the wives of the Eastern States governors should be adorned in beautifully constructed Akwete woven fabrics. Most people have this penchant for what celebrities put on in terms of clothing, whether appropriate or not. This study is of the view that this group of people could help tremendously through the wearing of these hand woven fabrics.

It also suggests organizing annual conferences, weaving contests, beauty pageants, and exhibitions to showcase traditional Igbo weaving goods. Establishing Akwete cloth weaving centers in each state's council

for arts and culture can provide instruction and promote sales, especially to those unable to travel to Akwete town due to distance and poor infrastructure. Encourage weavers to share their knowledge with interested individuals for skill development and employment opportunities could further enhance the industry. Additionally, there is an emphasis on changing Nigerians' perception of locally woven fabrics to foster a more prosperous weaving industry and ensure sustainability.

**Conclusion**– The historical significance of Akwete weaving in Nigeria's economy as a tool for women's empowerment is undeniable. It has historically contributed to economic prosperity, job creation, and poverty reduction. Many individuals have relied solely on weaving for their livelihoods, enabling them to provide their families with access to quality education. Despite its historical prominence, concerns have arisen regarding the potential disappearance of this traditional occupation and its limited integration into contemporary Nigerian fashion. To showcase the cultural value and potential modern relevance of Akwete hand weaving to the Igbo and broader society, an assessment of the traditional hand weaving was undertaken. The outcomes of this evaluation would play a pivotal role in preserving the fabric's relevance in the fashion industry and bolstering its appeal to a wider audience, thereby unlocking its full potentials.

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