

## **Textile and Fashion Designs as tools for Personality Cult in Nigeria: Issues and Problems**

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### **Abstract**

The modern mechanized textile industry in Nigeria is in very poor condition. Most of the fabrics in Nigerian markets today are smuggled into the country creating serious competition between the local textile industries in Nigeria and their foreign counterparts. The foreign fabrics smuggled into the country outnumber those locally produced. Most of Nigerian indigenes prefer the foreign fabrics to the locally woven fabrics. The result is that Nigerian textile industries lose patronage. The patrons that modern mechanized textile industry in Nigeria rely on to remain in business include politicians and religious associations. Images of politicians and designs relating to religious associations are printed for them on fabrics by local textile industries that they commissioned to do so. Party supporters wear the fabrics as campaign strategy for the politicians. This can result to creating cult of personality out of some political figures in the society. The religious organisations dress in their customized designs to project their models, associations and events. This can also create personality cult of religious figures and events. Against this background, this study moved to discuss textile and fashion designs as media capable of building personality cult in the society. It advises that the Nigerian society should be careful not to become victims of the mishaps which could emanate from the present Nigerian society that is very conscious of featuring in uniforms. The study also disclosed personality cult as means capable of developing and generating business for the textile and fashion design industry in Nigeria.

**Keywords:** Textile and Fashion Designs, Politicians, Religious-Associations, Personality-Cult.

### **Introduction**

The textile industry of Nigeria has suffered derogation, degradation and negligence by the people and government of Nigeria ever since the modern automated textile machinery arrived in Nigeria from Lancashire north-western England in 1950 (Kilby, 1969, p.113). This Isichei (1977, p. 273) affirms that “every woman here weaves cloth from the cotton which grows on the trees in abundance and they do it beautifully, but foreign cloth is much coveted and their own cloth despised...” The outcome is that the textile industry in Nigeria is presently in comatose (Adu, 2003, p. 10). Thus, textile designers of Nigeria are in serious want of market for their products and are therefore struggling to keep afloat. The patrons that modern mechanized textile industry in Nigeria rely on to remain in business include politicians and religious associations. Images of politicians and designs relating to religious associations are printed for them on fabrics by local textile industries that they commission to do so. Party supporters wear the fabrics as campaign strategy for the

politicians. The religious organisations dress in their specially ordered designs to project their models, associations and events.

Textile and fashion designs in Nigeria, focused on the creation of specially ordered or commissioned designs on fabrics and the fabrics fashioned into different styles of garments for people to wear. The designs printed on the fabrics visualises the desires of the people that commissioned them. Such people include political party members and religious associations that require them. In partisan politics, portraits of political figures are printed on the fabrics to project their images via party supporters who dress in such fabrics as campaign strategy (See plates 1 to 4)

Religious associations also engage textile industries in printing of fabrics with portraits of their religious models, symbols, icons and letters that depict the characters and events of their religious groups. After which they engage the services of fashion designers in the design and production for their groups, garments in different styles.

Personality Cult is a circumstance, whereby a person is celebrated and exalted by his or her supporters like some kind of deity. His supporters sometimes manipulate his or her rightly acquired achievements for further propagative intentions. This study investigated political rallies, religious and their functions in postcolonial Nigeria as they are projected by their loyalists via textile and fashion designs. Encarta dictionary (2009) described cult as idolisation of a person or a factor which excessive admiration of the person or factor. Personality Cult is largely perceived as pejorative of the personalities that are projected and practically idolised.

The development of the society should be the focus of all especially politicians and religious bodies. The problem this study desires to address is to bring to the society's awareness is that of textile and fashion designs could create unnecessary idolisation of personalities to the detriment of the development of the society. This is because, this research have observed that of recent, it has become compulsory for members of every political party in Nigeria to dress in garments that bear the portraits of their respective vying candidates. It has been observed that fashion designing has crept into the church causing focus to be shifted from what is important to what is immaterial. The seriousness of this matter made the wife of the General Overseer of the Redeemed Christian Church of God, Pastor Mrs. Foluke Adeboye, to ban members of the church from celebrating church activities in customised design gears (Nwachukwu, 2017).

The aim of this study is to reveal the capacity of visual communication through textile and fashion designs, as tools capable of creating personality cult in Nigerian politics and religious associations and to also expose the capacity of personality cult as a resource for textile and fashion industries in Nigeria. The research examined the patronage of political parties of the modern mechanised textile industry in Nigeria and the various designs of uniforms worn by some churches and their groups. Religious associations and political parties patronage of the modern mechanised textile industry in Nigeria is so great that there is a notion that the textile industry in Nigeria can be said to have become dependent on the religious associations and political parties for sustenance.

### **The Role of Textile and Fashion in Nigerian Politics**

All the political parties in Nigeria, patronise the textile industries in the country. By commission textile designers to produce fabrics bearing portraits of vying candidates, their names and party logos. Political party members wear these customised fabrics to political rallies and at other functions as campaign strategy in order to publicise their candidates. (See the textile designs and fashions of these fabrics in plates 1, 2, 3 and 4)

Plate 1 depicts political party members dressed in *babariga* fashions with the portrait of a vying candidate printed on the fabrics. The President of Nigeria Muhammadu Buhari, former Lagos State Governor Bola Tinubu, former Governor of Edo State Adams Oshiomole and other top politicians are seen in the picture raising the arms of the chosen candidate before the public amidst cheers and jublations. Plate 2 depicts political party supporters dressed in fabrics bearing the images of political figures such as the incumbent Executive Governor of Anambra State, Chief Willie Obiano, the current Executive Governor of Anambra State. While plate 3 and 4 displays people dressed in fabrics that bear the portraits of former President Goodluck Jonathan of Nigeria.

In a third world nation like Nigeria, the generality of the public gets swayed by the sense bestowed on the wearers and thus they could be perceived as a sort of personality cult. The extremity of jubilation found during political campaigns registers the impression that the vying candidates have the support of everyone, unfortunately, a lot of elected politicians have in one way or the other failed in performing their duties. A number of them have even diverted and embezzled public funds meant for the execution of public projects.

### **Textile and Fashion Designs as Tools for Personality Cult among Nigerian Religious Group**

Most of the religious groups in Nigeria, patronise the textile industries in the country. The various organs of the religious bodies commission the textile industries to design portraits of their models on wearable fabrics. Where the pictures of their models are not available, the artist will produce an artistic expression of the model on wearable fabric. For instance, the ministries of women and men in some Churches in Nigeria such as the 'Mothers' Union' of the Anglican Church, the 'Catholic Women Organization (C.W.O), 'Women's Guild' of Presbyterian Church all dress in fabrics with artistic expressions of religious figures like Mary Slessor, Mary Sumner and Saint Joseph the carpenter printed on fabrics for them to dress in. See plates 5, 6, 7 and 8.

Plate 5 depicts Presbyterian Church Women's Guild dressed in fabrics that bear the portrait of Mary Slessor. Plate 6 depicts Anglican Church "Mothers' Union" general uniform in blue colour with Mary Sumner's image printed on the fabric, also depicted is the Anglican Church Women's Guild uniform in green colour. Plates 7 and 8 are artist's expression of Saint Joseph the carpenter designed for Catholic Men Organisation (C.M.O.) of Nsukka branch. Plate 9 depicts the fabric designed for the ministries of women in the Anglican Church which they ordered specifically for the celebration of 150 years of Anglican Church in Nigeria (1842-1992). These ladies made uniforms out of the fabrics to participate in the celebration. According to Iweka (2008, p. 13) "These ministries of women in their various respects are worldwide

movements and organizations.... The Nigerian chapter of these organizations identify themselves in their different uniforms”.

The objectives of these unions featuring in these uniforms include the identification of themselves as Christian mothers and as Christian fathers. It also includes the portrayal of the characters printed on the fabrics as models that should be emulated for a distinguished service which they have rendered to the society or in their lives. However, it should be noted that the excessive emphasis on these models, can constitute cult of personality of these characters which can turn away some members of the church from focusing on Christ who should be the actual focus of the church.

Besides the printed on the fabrics, some religious associations also engage in appearing in different uniforms that bear images that represent different events whenever a church activity holds. For instance, to attend the occasion of 150 years of Anglican Church in Nigeria, members of the Mother’s Union of Anglican church in Nigeria all turned out in Mothers’ Union uniform specifically branded for the celebration. The uniforms bore icons that depict 150 years of Anglican Church in Nigeria. When they were to feature in the standing committee organised by Anglican Mothers Union of Enugu diocese in 2007 all for the Bishops in Nigeria, the women all appeared in another uniform red in colour. At another function, which is the presentation of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Archbishop of Province of the Niger, Most Reverend Maxwell Anikwenwa they all appeared in another uniform designed specifically for the occasion (Iweka, 2008, p. 24). This changing of uniforms could constitute carnal standards that can distract the ladies from what should be their focus in the church.

### **Personality Cult as a Resource for Textile and Fashion Industries**

Costumes and uniforms are products of the textile and fashion design industry. Ever since the textile industry started producing fabrics, people of different professions and vocations have identified themselves in uniforms. For example students dress in uniforms. Other fields of life who dress in uniforms. These include professionals such as the nurses, the police, chefs, clergy, lawyers, doctors and sports people.

Dance groups also feature in uniforms and costumes. In the turn of this 21<sup>st</sup> century, it became the tradition of Nigerian politicians to feature in uniforms that bear portraits of vying candidates at political rallies and at functions where the uniforms can advertise these candidates. Party members are seen in uniforms that bear the portrait of vying candidates as is observable in plates 1, 2 and 3.

The strength of the uniform is that it identifies a people. It is also capable of uniting a people and propelling the aim and objectives of an organization. All these could culminate into bringing creativity and progress to the society. In Nigeria, most of the primary and secondary school students dress in uniforms, but the pupils and students of some schools in Britain do not dress in uniforms. Research has revealed that students of schools that dress in uniforms perform better academically than students of schools that do not dress in uniforms. The uniform also gives the students a sense of responsibility. This goes to prove that uniform propels hard work and progress with a lot of returns to the textile designers.

Personality cult is largely perceived as pejorative as the personalities that are projected seem to be idolised. Party members in order for their vying candidates to

win elections, magnify the achievements and capabilities of their candidates giving exaggerated impression about their candidates to the public thus misleading the public. So far, the result especially in Nigeria has been that most of the elected candidates have failed to meet up with the numerous impressions made to the public about them during the campaigns. However, personality cult also generates business and market for the textile and fashion design industry in Nigeria.

### **Conclusion**

This study discussed the place of textile and fashion designs in the making of personality cult in Nigeria. It exposed the advantages of uniforms in the society as a medium of solidarity amongst associations and bodies. It also disclosed the disadvantages of uniforms as campaign strategy for politicians because it leaves the ignorant in the public with wrong impressions about vying candidates. The research also disclosed the advantages of uniforms in the church in Nigeria as a medium of solidarity amongst the different unions in the church. Such as Mothers Union of the Anglican church. It exposed the disadvantages of uniforms where it obtains in some churches that fashion designing has crept into the church diverting away the focus of the church from the eternal immortal essence that should be the focus of the church. The research thus advises that the Nigerian society should henceforth be careful not to become victims of the mishaps that could emanate from the influence of personality cults in the present Nigerian society, created by excessive use of uniforms



Plate 1: Political party members dressed in babariga attires with the portrait of a vying candidate printed on the fabrics Source:<https://www.google.com/search?q=political+rally+in+nigeria&tbm=> Retrieved in August 2019.



Plate 2: Party supporters are seen dressed in fabrics bearing the images of political figures like Chukwemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu and Willie Obiano. Source:<https://www.google.com/search?q=gburugburu+asoebi&tbm=isch&source=> Retrieved in August 2019.



Plate 3: Fabrics with portraits of President Goodluck Jonathan on them.  
Source:<https://www.google.com/search?q=nigerian+political+party+fabrics>. Retrieved in August, 2019.



Plate 4: Presbyterian Church members of Women's Guild in Mary Slessor uniform.  
© Olive Iweka. 2008.



Plate 5: Anglican Church Mothers' Union general uniform in blue colour with Mary Sumner's image and Women's Guild in green colour. © Olive Iweka. 2008.



Plate 6: Artist's expression of Saint Joseph the carpenter designed for Catholic Mens' Organisation C.M.O. of Roman Catholic Church Nsukka branch. © Olive Iweka. 2008.



Plate 7: Artist's expression of Saint Joseph the carpenter designed for Catholic Mens' Organisation C.M.O. of Roman Catholic Church Nsukka branch. © Olive Iweka. 2008.



Plate 8: Mothers' Union uniform for celebration of 150 years of Anglican Church in Nigeria (1842-1992) © Olive Iweka. 2008.

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