

Simulating the Costume Elements of the Daughters' Lineage into Contemporary Textile Designs to Promote Anioma heritage of the Delta People of Nigeria

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Abstract

Culture has been generally regarded as the totality of a people's way of life and people are identified by their culture. Unfortunately, in Africa, people are fast losing their identity to the strong wave of globalization which continues to sweep across the African continent like a hurricane. This situation will get worse if something is not done to arrest it. The study employs an art historical methodology. The research also carried out some studio projects in textile using mainly weaving and knitting methods. Sources of information for the study include, primary and secondary sources. The research finding identifies the important values in the indigenous arts and culture of the Delta North Area of Delta State, Nigeria. The Study among other things highlighted the importance of indigenous textile to the preservation and propagation of indigenous cultures in Africa.

Key words: Costume, Textile Designs, Anioma Heritage Contemporary, *Akwa Ocha*

Introduction

In Africa body decoration and dress offer clues to a person's age, ethnic group, religion, social position, and even political opinions. Today such terms are used only in a few places or during certain ceremonies. People communicate information about themselves by the clothes they wear and the way they adorn their bodies. The significance of Akwa Ocha to the people of Delta North cannot be over emphasized, moreso, as a member of the *Otu Ikpoho-Ali*, (women forum) adore its costume elements. In view of these, the researcher propagates and adapts its costume element into motifs for contemporary textile designs.

Anioma Culture area is made up of towns and communities located in Delta State, South-South region of Nigeria. The Anioma people for administrative purposes are referred to as Delta North. The term Anioma is an acronym derived from the four original local government areas: (A) for Aniocha, (N) for Ndokwa, (I) for Ika, (O) for Oshimili, M and A are common denominators found in the four original local governments. The coinage was made by the founding father, Chief Dennis Osadebay in 1951 and has since remained the preferred indigenous name by which the people collectively refer to themselves. Language spoken by Anioma people is Enuani Igbo.

Ogbukagu (1997: 61), avers that women have many groups designed to present and protect their interests. *Ummunanadu* literally means the daughters of lineage. In parts of Anambra State, it's called *Umuokpu*. In Imo State, they are also called *Ndimgboto* and *Umuada* in some parts of Delta North in Delta State. The pilot survey carried out by the writer, revealed that from Ika, through Anambra to Imo State, the concept of Ndimgboto, Umuokpu and Umuada is the same thing as Umuada in Aniocha and Oshimili, Ikpoho Ali in Ika, or Ikpoho-Ani in Ndokwa which is commonly used in Delta North Area, in Delta State, Nigeria. Umuada is a compound word obtained from "Umu" a plural prefix depicting

many, and *ada* meaning daughter. Basically, every Enuani woman is *ada* (a daughter) of a particular community and is seen as that for all the days of her life.

This study area is Delta North Area of Delta State in Nigeria; which is made up of *Ndi-Enuani* (Ndokwa) or *Ndi-Eluani* in Ika language which means the “Highland people”. In reference to the geographical location of the study area, a more common name for the people was “indigenously referred to as Anioma”.

Daughters of Lineage

In Delta North, the daughters of lineage are a social religious group enriched with the traditional costumes of their patrilineal community. The costumes are used for body adornment by the women, which in turn elevate the levels of art in them. This remains undoubtedly the first identity of the people without equivocation.

Costume is a style of dress, it has to do with clothes in the styles of a period in the past according to the English dictionary. Costumes are used to inform fashion accessories. It also refers to the artistic arrangement of accessories, in a pictorial presentation. The Hornby Dictionary (1974:184) says “contemporary costumes are defined as the captivating time or period to which reference is being made. It is also the clothes worn by people from a particular place or during a particular period in the past”. The costume is therefore made to sustain and improve the major identity of the daughters of lineage of the Delta North Area of Delta State, Nigeria.

Akwa Ocha (White cloth) is one of the costumes popularly used as the distinguishing cloth of Anioma people (Delta North) and it reflects their cultural aesthetics and taste. It goes beyond a mere textile to reflect a people’s social identity. *Akwa Ocha* is an expensive cloth; hence, it is worn on festive occasions by both women and men. *Akwa Ocha* is best accessorized with coral beads of varying colors, sizes and designs. *Akwa Ocha* or *Ekwa-Oruru* (cotton fabric) in Ika, also known as *Oto –Ogwu in Ndokwa* and some section of Anioma, is a highly valued, hand spun and hand woven fabric.

Today, the designed motifs range from *Enyi* (elephant), *Ugo*, (Eagle), *Kpakpando* (Star), *Nsha* (Comb), *Eke na ogwulugwu* (rainbow), *Ejekom be loya* (heading to the lawyer’s house), *Ije agwo* (zig zag), *Aka* (hand), *Isi nwaonya* (head of a cat), *Azu* (fish), *Aka mkpuluite* (small pestle), *Ogwu azu* (Fish bone), *Ezuzu* (hand fan), *Ishaka* (Maracas), *Egogo* (gong), *Udu* (Musical pot), *Ikpewe or eshulu* (coral beads), *Oduefi* (horse tail), *Ogiso* (tortoise), *Nzu* (clay chalk) *aAkpa ego or nkpulu ego* (cowries), corporate/ association logos. The use of these designed costumes elements corresponds to specific events for which the cloths are commissioned.

Cultural History of Anioma

The origin of Anioma (which means “Good Land”), can be traced to their eastern neighbours and ancestors across the Niger River, the Igbo. According to Onwuejeogwu (2001:3), “the Anioma people in general are descendants of Igbo people from Isu, Nri, Awka, and Owerri areas, and this migration started many centuries ago”. The fundamental elements of Igbo culture are evident among the Anioma people and the entire region of Igbo land. For example, the Anioma people have the *Eze* institution, *Nze* title, *Ndichie*, *Umunna* and *Umuada* organizations, the *Ofo* staff, the *Ikenga*, *Oji* (Kolanut) communion, among others, similar to other areas of Igbo land. These Igbo cultural characteristics were not imported into the Anioma region, rather, the people have been practicing them all through their existence. Anecdotal evidence suggests that the famous slave Olaudah Equiano also known as Gustavus Vassa, was an Anioma man.

Anioma Social structure was dominated by the use of lineages. The lineages were based loosely on the concept of *Uno*, *Umunna*, and *Idumu*, which are major blood lineages; while *Ogbe* and *Obodo* were open and much more political in structure. *Uno (Uloh)* was a small family unit comprising husband, wife, and children. The next lineage was *Umunna*, which includes, the primary or nuclear family, the

daughter or son in law, and the grandparents and the grandchildren. The Ogbe is a larger structure which allowed non-blood relatives; it comprises the *Idumu* and some outsiders and it is best classified as a quarter in terms of demography. The maximal concept is one that looks like a small town; this is the Obodo. There are twenty five local government areas in Delta State and nine make up the Anioma area, which is the Delta North: Aniocha North, Aniocha South, Ika South, Ika North, Ndokwa East, Ndokwa West, Oshimili North, Oshimili South and Ukwuani.

Anioma ethnic identity derives from their common set of symbols and cognitions shared by the people. Aniocha, Ndokwa, Ika and Oshimili, share the same cultural space and delimited physical geography. They dress, dance and use similar musical instruments. They speak similar dialects of the same languages. Show the respect to their elders, extol character and integrity, while shunning exploitation, "Money they say is not everything, character is everything", in short, they share the same worldview. Anioma ethnic identity is cultural self-definition and philosophical affirmation of self-determination as a people who see themselves at the crossroads of the contemporary Nigerian state. Anioma provides the physical and cultural space that define the necessary locus of their highest fulfillment as a people.

Anioma does not seek to define its personality or identity simply as an antithesis of everything around it. However, one point must be made immutably clear to any questioner; No Anioma person wishes to be recast in a mould that is not Anioma. It must be emphasized unequivocally, that Anioma can provide the people with an essential part of historical consciousness, and also an index to the universal psychic character of their identity. Anioma can communicate a sense of history to the people. Granted that legend, folklore and history point to our diverse origin, over time their forbears were able to create a culture that is uniquely Anioma, hence no Aniocha person, Ndokwa person, or Oshimili person, sees one another as strangers. Amidst this cultural heritage Anioma people do not need to look elsewhere for inspiration and identity.

Anioma is not an extension of another group. This is why for several decades its people have attempted to rid themselves of their psychic frustrations of marginality and neglect by clamouring for the creation of Anioma State. There is a strong sense of community and commonality between and among the people. Anioma people are highly cultural, therefore guided by culture in every aspect of life. Some of the festivals celebrated by the people include: *Iwu*, *Eborakiko*, *Ine*, *Ulor*, *Utegbe*, *Ichu-Ekwensu*, *Iwa ji*, (New yam festival), *Igue*, *Ukwe*, *Olu and Ogwu*. In some Anioma communities such as *Ebu*, disputes are commonly settled in shrines with deities standing as arbiters. A festival such as *Iwu* is necessary to cleanse the community and make preparation for the coming year. While *Igue* festival celebrated by Agbor and a few other communities are analogous to that of Benin with similar objectives.

Rites and Practices of the Daughters of Lineage

African culture like many other Non-Western cultures of the world is mostly male dominated. However, the paternalistic propensity of African cultures does not indicate subjugation of women. On the contrary, according to Kuenyehia (2003), "women in Africa play dominant roles in the family. The family in turn affects the status of the women and dictates most of the norms that affect the women". If the family accords the proper respect and dignity to women, society will do the same and women will be empowered to contribute their utmost to the development of the society at various levels of cultural heritage. The prevalent family type in Africa, especially Nigeria (among the Delta North area of Delta State) is the "extended family. Which is characterized by extensive kinship network of reciprocal social and economic obligations" says Dow and Werner (1983).

According to Ogbukagu (1997:61), "the powers of *Umuada* are enormous and they are very much respected, especially in matters affecting death, burial rites, marriage and settling the conflicts existing among their men, they constitute essential instrument of an organized system of government

in Igbo land". The Umuada are empowered to execute and perpetuate the traditional practices and norms which are sometimes harmful, hindering rather than enhancing development at the grassroots level. The exercise of their power is often manifested in their roles or activities during funerals, widowhood rites, traditional marriage ceremonies, conflict resolution and other kindred activities.

Women in Delta North Area of Delta State Nigeria, wield enormous power by virtue of their position as daughters of lineage. Their exercise of power often promoted traditional harmful practices to the detriment of the grassroots development. According to Nett (1981) Ties of kinship are strongly sustained as the dominant concern of everyday life in the extended family structure and each member is his/her kin's keeper. Consequently, there emerges a system of vital mutual socially constituted, shared and transmitted cultural support system among members of the extended family group, known as the extended family system (EFS).

The EFS exercises some controlling authority over its members, commands their loyalty and demands strict adherence to the norms and practices of mutual aid. Every member of the EFS has a status, rights and obligation, and enjoys the sense of security, which comes from this extended family; says Dow and Werner (1983). Masha and Hunge (1988; 9) referred to the system as "Nigeria's own type of social insurance for old age and welfare of members of the extended family". In Southeast of Nigeria, there are patrilineal and matrilineal communities in the engineering and sustainability of the EFS in Nigeria. The two most dominant and potent of these forces are kindred men and the daughters of lineage; women whose genealogical relationship can be traced to a common ancestry. They are the strongest women group vested with the age-long power of perpetuating the EFS norms including various forms of traditional practices.

In the process of wielding their ageling powers these daughters of lineage often harass, intimidate, punish and sanction people, including imposition of levies and making of threatening demands on members of the kindred. Their activities border mostly on traditional EFS practices, some of which are harmful, hindering rather that promoting development at grassroots level. Notable among their activities are the agonizing widowhood rites by which widows are often subjected to various obnoxious treatments (Okoye 1995); (Nzei et al. 1990).

The question that necessarily arises is: what innovative strategies could be adopted to extend the frontiers of the age-long powers of *Umuada* beyond their traditional roles into economic, health and political spheres for grassroots development? Various studies on daughters of lineage have focused on their traditional roles, notably on the widowhood rites wherein they are the sole perpetuator (Okoye, 1995) and (Ahonis, 1997). No studies have however focused on the innovative ways of adapting the indigenous costumes and motifs used by the daughters of lineage.

Akwa Ocha is the distinguishing cloth of Anioma people, and it reflects their cultural aesthetics and taste. It goes beyond a mere textile to reflect people's social identity. The number and variety of designs a woman have in her collection is an indication of her wealth and status in the society. *Akwa Ocha* is best accessorized with coral beads of varying colors, sizes and designs.

Coral beads (*Ikpewe or Eshulu*) remained popular for centuries and are still considered a vital part of the costumes for the rulers in the Delta Areas and other places in Nigeria. Traditional coral beads have always been prominent in the costumes of the daughters of lineage, during marriage and burial ceremonies. Most of the motifs on the traditional cotton fabrics are drawn basically from nature and significant experiences that the Delta North people have passed through, thereby, presenting it in form of folklores on the woven fabric.

A number of African garments consist of a single piece of cloth. Women frequently wear wrappers-large rectangles of cloth they wrap around their bodies. Often a woman dresses at home in a single wrapper tucked and twisted under her arms, and she adds additional items when appearing in public. Jewelry and other accessories may express even more about their wearer than clothing does. Various styles of brass, stone, bone, or iron bracelets and armlets may declare an African's success,

gender, or religion. In some cases, much of a person's wealth is worn in the form of jewelry. Belts, caps, and jewelry may be decorated with beadwork in designs that represent a certain idea or message.

Weaving of Akwa Ocha

Weaving is a long-standing heritage of the Igbo-speaking Anioma people of Nigeria. Cotton yarn is the main weaving materials. Historically, the yarn was obtained from unprocessed cotton which was then processed locally.



Plate 1: A daughter of lineage adorned in Akwa Ocha



Plate 2: Weaving of Akwa-Ocha

Akwa Ocha is woven by women on a rectangular loom with upright posts. The cloth typically has three or four basic design colours against the white background: red and white; green and white; red, green and white; purple and white; white and silver threads; or white and red with gold metallic thread. The designs are produced with inlay technique in which the patterns are visible only on the right side of the cloth. Extra wefts are introduced from separate bobbins to produce those designs. A finished piece of cloth is about 71 inches by 30 inches and is called *Ofu Ibe* (one piece). Two of such pieces are joined together to form a wrapper. Four pieces are required for a complete dress wrapper known as *Ojije-na-ntukwasi* (the lower and upper wrapper).



Plate 3: Akwa Ocha production
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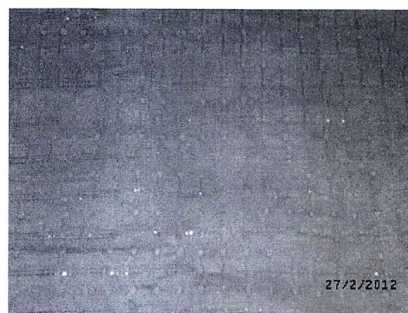


Plate 4: Finished work/2012 © the Author

Conclusion

The paper has revealed the cultural values of daughters of lineage in traditional rites and practices and has investigated the various indigenous motifs used by the daughters of lineage; by exploring creative textile techniques in various media and materials as viable means of visual illustrations and

documentations. This enabled the findings and recommendations of the study to be circulated to the public. Further efforts in this direction has evolved the mass production of the fabrics at the Textile Mills and to see that the designs created from the costume elements are for creativity of various styles used for various occasions and this will project and promote the heritage of the Anioma people in Delta State, Nigeria.

From findings, it has been revealed that not much in-depth study has been done on traditional costumes of the daughters of lineage in Delta North area of Delta State. Therefore, more efforts should be concentrated on the ways to explore the various methods of adapting these costume elements or indigenous motifs as a visual representation in textile designs, using tie and dye, batik, screen printing, knitting and weaving method.

Since daughters of lineage is a vital and powerful institution in partnering with the traditional norms and practices of the EFS, and could possibly extended their powers to the economic, health and political spheres, the institution should be empowered with such extension of power for development at grassroot level. This is crucial as to determine how the principles and elements of designs through various techniques can be adapted into textile designs. This will also show how the Anioma Cultural Heritage gets introduced in Nigeria and around the world through the use of costume elements and can also be propagated to organize, educate and activate Anioma Youth around the world, to be the best they can possibly be, using their entire God-given talent. This will help to impact peoples live, drive the economic, social and political well-being of the Anioma Community through awareness, change and determination.

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