

Evolution and Development of Fashion Designing in Yorubaland, Nigeria

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Abstract

Dressing and grooming are tangible aspects of Yoruba culture and civilisation that spanned thousands of years. Despite this truism, in Yoruba studies the politics, economics and religious underpinnings of Yoruba civilisation have been more isolated and adequately interrogated by scholars; than Yoruba clothing history. Thus, there is a lacuna in the understanding of fashion designing in the context of the changing utility of clothing over time and space in Yorubaland. Consequently, this paper examines the evolution and development of fashion designing in Yorubaland to bridge this gap. It used the historical research methodology to achieve this objective. The paper historicises the development of fashion designing from the Garden of Eden to the twentieth century. Within the period of study, the paper finds that the rise of clothing nationalism and the weaponisation of dressing in the struggle for Nigeria's decolonisation were significant milestones in the clothing history of Yorubaland and Nigeria as a whole. Therefore, this paper concludes that fashion designing served a purpose that was beyond covering human nakedness in Yorubaland. It featured prominently in the politics, economics and sociology of the Yoruba people. This means that Yoruba traditional textile designing was both responsive to time and the environmental milieu. Therefore, Indigenous Yoruba textiles and clothing evolved as a Giffen or utility goods in Yorubaland and changes in price, preferences and modernity could not extinguish their demand.

Keywords: Fashion Designing, Clothing, Yorubaland, Utility, Changes

Introduction

Yorubaland is located in the Southwestern part of Nigeria. It is currently made up of six states namely Ekiti, Lagos, Ogun, Ondo, Osun and Oyo. The territoriality of Yorubaland stretches from the west from around the area of Badagry to around Warri, and it stretches inland around latitude 9° N towards Niger. This means that a large part of the region is made up of a low flat plateau with a range of hills, the Yoruba hills, running from east to west across the territorial gamut (Akinjogbin and Ayandele 121). Yorubaland is majorly owned and populated by the aboriginals of the region, the Yoruba descendants of Oduduwa. These people are one of the most dispersed people in Nigeria. They are also found in Brazil, Cuba, the Caribbeans and the United States of America because most of the slaves brought to the Americas from West Africa during the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade era were

descendants of the Yoruba people (Mullen 9). Globally, there are over 40 million Yoruba people living on earth (Mullen 9). In Yorubaland, the people have been living in advanced urban communities for more than 1500 years.

In the thousands of years of Yoruba history, the people have been making a living by engaging in farming, trading, art and textile production (Mullen 9). However, the focus of this paper is on the evolution and development of fashion designing in Yorubaland. This historiography is apt because Linda Welter and Abby Lillethun observed that the study of dress and textiles have for long been integrated into Home Economics. Thus, there is a pertinent need for new inter-disciplinary perspectives on this subject, particularly efforts to divorce its historical context from Home Economics. In response to this need, this study will examine the nature of fashion designing in Yorubaland, Nigeria from a historical perspective. It will interrogate cloth production and textile designing in pre-colonial Yorubaland; and the impact of British colonialism on these industrial activities. The paper will also chronicle the changes and continuities in dressmaking and designing as one the cardinal Indigenous industrial economic activity of Nigerian peoples. It climaxes by exploring the rise of dress nationalism and the utility of dressing in the struggle for the decolonisation of Nigeria.

Historical Context of Clothing and Fashion Designing

The historical evolution of clothing can be traced to the Biblical account of creation that took place in the Garden of Eden. According to the creation narrative, Adam and Eve rebelled against God's instruction not to eat from the tree of life. One of the consequences of eating from the Tree of Life was that, their 'eyes' would be opened and they would know that they were 'naked'. Biblical sources captured the historical context of clothing and fashion designing thus: "Then (after Adam and Eve ate from the forbidden tree) the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized that they were naked. So they sewed fig leaves together and made loin coverings for themselves" (Genesis 3:7 NWT).⁶

But the earliest standard of fashion designing and clothing (leaves covering only the private parts) the first human pair invented for themselves was not pleasing to the grand designer of the heavens and the earth. Hence, Jehovah introduced and set new standards of clothing material and fashion designing. He introduced a modest trend in fashion designing which is explained thus: "And Jehovah God made long garments from skins (animal hide) for Adam and his wife to cloth them" (Genesis 3:21 NWT). This fashion style entailed the designing of clothes to cover the whole body not just human private parts. It was against this backdrop that dressing and fashion designing progressively became fully entrenched in human societies across the globe. While it is true that clothes were worn by people of all cultures regardless of their level of development; what is historically certain is the fact that not all societies were early centres of cotton cultivation, cloth weaving, and fashion designing. However, it suffices to state that Yorubaland in Nigeria was one of the ancient centres of cotton cloth production across the globe. But Joan Allgrove-McDowell in her study identified ancient Egypt as the earliest centre of cloth production in Africa. Fashion designing developed as a staple industry in Egypt during the Neolithic period, c. 5000 B.C.E. (Allgrove-McDowell 30). In the ancient cradle of human civilisation, linen was produced to serve multiple purposes. It was used not only for clothing but also for the mummification of their dead Kings (Allgrove-McDowell 30). Linen (cloth) was also used in Egypt as a currency to make payment for labour, as trade goods, as gift items, and as a means of paying tribute to the palace or temple (Allgrove-McDowell 30).

Industrially speaking, it is safe to maintain that the textile and clothing is both the oldest sub-sector and the most socio-economically relevant industry to human and national development. Cloth production and designing as economic activities are diverse and heterogeneous. They range from the

processing of fibre yarns and fabrics, synthetic yarn, wool, home textiles, and clothing to clothing embedded with technology (Girneata 176-77). The diversities of the finished products of the cloth production and designing industry mean that there are different typologies and methodologies of production in the different centres of cloth production globally. It also means that there is a division of labour and specialisation in the fashion industry. This has given some textile production and designing some comparative cost advantage in the production of specific textile materials. Outside Africa, archaeological discovery of fine woven cloth fragments in Turkey showed that as far as 6300 B.C.E. Europe had been a centre of cloth production. And other societies cannot be left out in the historical timeline of cloth production and early fashion designing. The professions flourished in Pakistan, India and the Americas around 3000 B.C.E. And by 2700 B.C.E., the Chinese started cultivating silkworms and they developed special loom to weave silk cloth (“Textile History Timeline”). However, it can be said that the historical development of the fashion designing industry reached its peak in the nineteenth century during the Industrial Revolution. The change from labour-intensive to capital-intensive methods of production caused by the development of machines gave a fillip to the global fashion designing industry. The Industrial Revolution transformed the cloth-making business from being a manual household spinning enterprise to a full-fledged industrial activity carried out in factories or mills (“The Utah Education Network”). This was made possible by the Flatbed purl knitting machine invented by Spiers in 1910; the Hattersley loom invented in 1920; the sewing-knitting technique and Malimo machine invented by Heinrich Mauersberger in 1949; the Fiber reactive dye invented in 1954; and the open-end spinning developed in Czechoslovakia in 1963 (“Timeline of Clothing”).

Therefore, based on the historical trajectory of cloth production Abdullahi Bawa safely argued that the traditional textile industry was the take-off point for industrial development across the globe (Bawa 1-6). And this is understandably so because modern industrialised giants such as China, Korea, Taiwan, Singapore, and Hong Kong were propelled to greatness by the successes of their traditional textile industry (Bawa 1-6). Furthermore, their textile industry proved to be a good employer of unskilled labour and a good training ground for labour to master manufacturing and production in the long run (Bawa 1-6). Some of the aspects of the fashion designing industry that unskilled labour caught up with in time included how to develop fashion trends, branding, generation of distribution network through retail shops, and how to optimise logistics from production centres (factories) to the stores (Girneata). These know-how are germane for any other production outfit in the manufacturing sector. Globally, the textile industry fashion designing and textile industry is divided into traditional wear and modern wear. However, the focus of this chapter here is on the development of traditional cloth and clothing designing in pre-colonial Yorubaland, Nigeria.

According to Adaobi O. Iweka, the history of the Nigerian fashion industry as one of the global centres of cloth production is traceable to 900 A.D. or earlier (153). Cotton cultivation and cloth weaving which are the foundation of fashion designing flourished in Yorubaland and other pre-colonial Nigerian societies such as Igboland, Hausa land and Esanland among others. The production of traditional or indigenous textiles in these Nigerian societies with different varieties is a testimony to the deep historical context of fashion designing. Cloth weavers during this period basically produced clothing manually using vertical and horizontal looms (Iweka). However, even though cloth production in pre-colonial Nigeria was done manually, Nigerian societies excelled in it as an economic activity. This made the indigenous textile industry one of the oldest manufacturing sub-sectors in Nigeria’s economic development history. In Kano, the pre-colonial headquarters of fashion designing in Nigeria the industry thrived for many centuries despite the labour-intensive method of production.

The success and fame of Kano cloth led to the city's description as the "Manchester of West Africa" in the 19th century (Onyeiwu 234-49).

The centrality of cloth production in Kano, Nigeria did not in any way eclipse the success of fashion designing in Yorubaland and elsewhere in the country during the period. The industrial activity thrived in *pari-passu* in all established cloth production centres in pre-colonial Nigeria. F.O. Ibeto and S.R. Ogunduyile in their study confirmed that cloth production and textile designing flourished in other areas of Nigeria in the pre-colonial times (2-6). This explained why there were different varieties of clothing and dressing styles among the diverse peoples and cultures of the country. The differences in fashion designing led to the emergence of traditional textiles and clothing such as *Aso-Oke* and *Adire* in Yorubaland, *Akwete* cloth in Igboland, *Okene* cloth designed by the Ebira people in Kogi, *Khasa* cloth designed by the Fulani, among other surface design fabrics produced in northern Nigeria (Ibeto and Ogunduyile 2-6; Iweka). There was also the Esan cloth designed in Esanland as four main varieties namely *Ukpon adodo*, *Ukpon noghian*, *Ukpon asiso*, and *Ukpon agbo* (Okoduwa 27-28).

It is instructive to note that Yorubaland through the fashion designing of its well-known "*aso-oke*" and "*adire*" textiles was a major powerhouse of the dress and grooming industry in pre-colonial Nigeria. To this end, Olugbemisola M. Areo and Olatunde R. Kalilu averred that the Yoruba people were properly clothed (351). This was because the Yoruba culture from earliest times prioritised modest and decent dress and grooming among the people; and forbade nudity which was regarded as an abomination and an act equivalent to insanity (Areo and Kalilu). Therefore, Yoruba customs and traditions through its emphasis on the appropriateness of clothing to any given occasion helped to steer the wheels of the Yoruba fashion designing industry (Areo and Kalilu). In the region, fashion designing entailed the making of *adire* (tie and dye) and the sewing of the *aso-oke* according to the taste and style of the wearer. But the designing of *adire*, which is of two types and involves two different techniques, was the main hob of fashion designing as an economic activity. The first designing technique is the total dying of clothing to produce the *amure*, and the second is the patterning and dying of clothing to produce the very popular *adire* (Areo and Kalilu).

Fashion designing of the *aso-oke* according to the use of the extra weft brocading sewing technique creates clothing varieties such as the *etu*, *alaari* and *sanyan* (Areo and Kalilu). In Yoruba fashion designing, the etymology of the word "*Adire*" provides explanatory insight into the basic procedure involved. The Yoruba word is formed by two syllables "*Adi*" which means "to tie" and "*Re*" which means "to dye". This implies that tie and dye as a fashion designing technique was a deeply entrenched practice in Yorubaland. Saheed Zakaree observed that the making of *adire* textile starts with the sourcing of the fabric, tying of the fabric, immersing of the fabric into a dye (dying), drying of the fabric, beating of the dyed fabric with wood, and packaging of the fabric. These processes are followed by the sewing of the fabric into gorgeous designs by cloth makers (13). Areo and Kalilu explain that Osogbo, Ibadan, Ede, Ondo and Abeokuta in Yorubaland were critical centres of the region's tie and dye industry. However, although fashion designing in pre-colonial Nigeria was largely a small-scale household business; the widespread of textile industrial activity ensured that the clothing needs of the people were conveniently met and that there was a surplus for trade. Fashion designers during this period get the needed manpower to keep their business running by recruiting, training and incorporating members of the family into the business.

Understandably, Steve Onyeiwu wrote that fashion designers depended heavily on their family members to produce clothing (234). Providing further insight into why fashion designing was a small-scale industrial activity in pre-colonial Nigeria, Elisha P. Renne noted that while the land was abundant to set up the business; both capital and labour were scarce (Candotti 3). But the scarcity of capital and

labour did not in any way mean that the traditional textile industry was subsistent and stagnant. It is a historical fact that through intra and inter-group trade Yoruba clothing was exchanged within and beyond Yorubaland (Girneata 177). Thus, it is not a surprise that Adriana Girneata described the traditional textile industry as the oldest and largest export industry. Esan clothes, for example, through Benin agents were exported to Europe (Okoduwa 30). And the Yoruba indigenous fabrics were no exception. They were exported as far as Brazil through the Trans-Atlantic trade before the British colonisation of Yorubaland (Pulse).

Colonial Rule and Fashion Designing in Yorubaland, Nigeria

British deposition of Oba Dosumu of Lagos and the annexation of the region in 1861 created a pathway for the eventual colonisation of the whole of Yorubaland (Falola and Genova xx). Lagos was made a British colony from where the European power penetrated the whole of Yorubaland under the guise of ending the Yoruba civil war in the nineteenth century; and systematically expanded their sphere of influence. By the time the wars ended, the whole of Yorubaland had come under the effective occupation of the British. Subsequently, in 1906 the colonialists amalgamated its Lagos colony with the whole of Yorubaland, the Benin Province, the Niger Delta communities and the people of eastern Nigeria to create the Southern protectorate. Colonial rule in Yorubaland was geared towards satisfying just one purpose, the economic interest of the British. And this explained why colonialism did not serve the course of industrialisation and economic development in Yorubaland and elsewhere in Nigeria. It clipped the wings of the indigenous textile industry and redirected labour and capital towards the production of cash crops for the benefit of the British metropolis.

Hence, instead of clothing the European power encouraged the people to produce cotton. The colonial economic policies during the period were partly aimed at boosting British textile production capacity and securing Yorubaland as one of the secured markets for finished British clothes. Therefore, in 1910 the colonial power established the British Cotton Growing Association (BCGA) to encourage Yoruba people to go into cotton farming for export. The aim of the BCGA was to make cotton constantly available for the manufacturing of foreign ready-made cloths that were later used to flood the Nigerian textile market. This development had a direct impact on the local fashion designing industry in Yorubaland. For example, in Owe land both men and women started cultivating cotton for commercial purposes instead of the traditional cloth weaving that was predominant in the area (Oshewolo 112). In time, the over-exportation of cotton from Yorubaland to Europe created a scarcity of raw materials in the region which led to a decline in traditional textile production and designing.

Understandably, Makinde D. Olajide and Ajayi B. Joseph aver that the British colonial economic policy from 1886 knocked down the Indigenous textile industry and guaranteed the continued importation of British clothes to Yorubaland (60). Therefore, by importing finished foreign clothes into Yorubaland the British introduced new types of clothing that further undermined the indigenous fashion designing. The Yoruba people called these foreign clothes “*aso oyinbo*” (Olajide and Joseph). These foreign fabrics were consolidated through the use of political instruments and religion (Christianity) that entrenched foreign clothes into the fabrics of Yoruba society. These institutions were used to ginger changes in clothing taste and preference in Yorubaland as elsewhere in colonial Nigeria. The new dress sense and standard of fashion designing the British introduced flattened the demand curve for locally designed fabrics. In Igalaland, Peter Naankiel, Abah Danladi and Bwashi Rufai observe that colonialism disarticulated and dislocated cloth weavers and dyers. The colonial power achieved this through the instrumentality of Christianity and Western education (1). Christian converts in colonial Nigeria were required to adorn foreign clothes to attend church services. By

frequently adorning Western clothes to attend marriage ceremonies and participate in other Christian festivities, the Nigerian Christian population gradually became accustomed to wearing foreign clothes over indigenous textiles (Naankiel et al.). Thus, Samuel Johnson averred that Christianity played a huge part in the consolidation of foreign dressing in Yorubaland (112). More so, the colonial schools set up by the British helped to engender foreign dress and grooming in Nigeria. In Yorubaland and elsewhere, people intending to receive Western education were required to sew and wear school uniforms out of foreign textiles. This contributed to repositioning the dress style, preferences and orientation of the people (Naankiel et al. 1). But on the positive side, colonialism set in motion the process that accidentally led to the transformation of fashion designing in Yorubaland and elsewhere in Nigeria to the age of modernity. Steve Onyeiwu writes that the first modern textile mill was established by the colonial authorities in Kaduna on November 22, 1957.

This paved the way for modern textiles to grow in leaps and bounds across the country to reach 134 mills out of which 45 are medium and large-scale production-oriented (Onyeiwu 234-49). Furthermore, the colonial authorities established eight textile trading centres in the western, eastern and northern regions. In Yorubaland, the British established modern textile training centres in Ado-Ekiti in 1947, Oyo in 1947 and Ilorin in 1950 (Naankiel et al.). Consequently, Funmilayo Modupe Adu, Adeyinka Ajayi and Olaosebikan Aremu in their study “*Textile Industry in Yorubaland: Indigenous Knowledge and Modernity in the Era of Globalisation*” observe that, the objectives of the colonial textile training centres fashion were to introduce fashion designers in Yorubaland to new equipment and modern techniques in textile production; to train spinners, weavers and dyers to add value to the indigenous method of cloth production (288). The outcome of the colonial textile training in Yorubaland was the production of modern *aso-oke* that attracted demand from the United States of America and the United Kingdom (Adu et al. 288). The question, therefore, may be asked: was there anything wrong with the standard and quality of clothes produced in pre-colonial Yorubaland? Their obvious answer is no. Traditional textiles produced with the indigenous method of production were in no way substandard and inferior. But clothing colonisation, disguised as the modernisation of the indigenous textile industry, was the main problem. It was aimed at consolidating Western fashion sense and clothing preferences in Yorubaland regardless of the attendant personality identity crisis risk. Cloth colonialism sought to whip up taste and demand for modern clothing among the Yoruba people and secure a market for finished foreign clothes in Yorubaland.

Fashion Designing and the Utility of Clothes in Yorubaland

Clothing and adornment are integral parts of the culture of a people. This implies that for, people across the globe dressing and grooming are usually environmentally determined and influenced by inherited customs and traditions. Hence, the labelling of indigenous dress sense and fashion designing as traditional clothing is not out of place. The label fittingly describes clothing design and dressing that are in accord with the established norms and traditions of a people. Therefore, since people dress according to customary norms and traditions; it follows logically the utility of clothing is also customarily determined from one society to another. But the purpose of clothing changes with time as the people of a society come in contact with foreign customs and traditions. In Yorubaland, one of the Indigenous motives for dressing and grooming is to dignify men and women in the society as nudity is frowned upon. The traditional knowledge system of the people holds that “*aso ni edidi eniyan*” which means that it is clothing that makes a person complete (Fakunle 6). Clothing also serves some other aesthetic and socio-economic purposes in the region. This implies that it is an art form and an economic activity that people engage in to keep the social life of Yoruba people running. The basic traditional clothing in Yorubaland includes *aso-oke*, *iro* and *buba*, *kaftan*, *agbada*, *dansiki*, *gbariye*, *suliya* and

dandogo (Oladipo 122-26). Some of these clothes are worn as undergarments, while others are worn as upper garment. Clothing like *buba*, *dansiki* and small *ghariye* are usually worn as the undergarment of the *agbada* cloth. The *agbada*, which is a large wide-sleeved gown, is an upper garment usually worn as formal and ceremonial attire in Yorubaland (Oladipo). It is worn with trousers known as *soro* or *kamu* and with *fila* (cap). There are different varieties of Yoruba *fila* and the usage is determined by social events and social status. They include *adiro*, *ikiro*, *yoti* or *labankada*, and *onide*. Yoruba women on the other hand will usually complement their dressing with headgear such as *gele* and *iborun* (Oladipo). However, during the thousands of years of clothing and adornment in Yorubaland, the *aso-oke* developed as the most worn piece of fashion in the region. This was because the cloth can be worn as both casual and ceremonial wear (Olajide and Ajayi 59). It was the most preferred day-to-day clothing in Yorubaland, but it also had rich religious and ceremonial value. The *aso-oke* was commonly used as “*aso-ebi*” material, that is, as commemorative clothing used to mark special social events (Olajide and Ajayi). In Yoruba traditional religious worship, the *aso-oke* featured prominently in the *Egungun* ancestral worship. It was used to sew the costume of the *Egungun* masquerade representing the deity. The *aso-oke* was also used as a sacred cloth by members of the *Ogboni* society in Ijebuland. This clothing known as “*Itagbe*” is a very important religious insignia of the cult of the *Ogboni* (Olajide and Ajayi). But the ceremonial and commemorative use of *aso-oke* in Yorubaland began declining with the introduction and general acceptance of the “*Ankara*” fabric (Olajide and Ajayi 61).

Over time and space, the utility of clothing in Yorubaland has experienced significant changes and continuities because of cultural contact and civilisation which the Yoruba people call “*olaju*”. Beyond covering human nakedness, clothing evolved to become a means of demonstrating social status, a mode of communication and a symbol of prestige because of its aesthetic appeal (Fakunle 6). These changes are captured in the findings of Olowookere Oladipo, who observed that clothing hitherto served as underwear and waist wrappers designed for hunting, farming and manual labour (121). And in Rosemary Oshelowo’s observation traditional clothing such as *arigidi*, *kitipa*, *aki*, *arikuku* and *keke* in Owe land were originally designed as domestic, cultural and ceremonial clothes becoming commercial trade items (113-14). The extant utility of clothing in Yorubaland has changed in conformity with the prevailing political and socio-economic realities that modernity, Western civilisation, had imposed on the people. Michelle Willard captured this change thus, “clothing are at times worn to communicate some social messages to the public, as well as to commemorate numerous social events such as political party campaigns, birthdays, funerals and weddings” (117).

For funerals and mourning of the dead, Yoruba people attach importance to the colour of clothing. White garments or Black garments as the case may be are usually the preferred clothing to mourn the dead in Nigeria. Most times customised clothing is worn to funeral programmes with inscription messages at the back of the cloth that show the love of family and friends for the deceased; and also, their confidence in the hope of a resurrection of the dead in the future. In city capitals and business districts across Yorubaland, particularly Lagos, clothing had gained increased economic importance as a medium of advertisement. Companies intending to introduce a new product to members of the public usually use printed clothing to achieve their goals. These printed or customised clothes carry catchy and brief informative messages that can be understood at a glance. This advertisement-oriented clothing is worn around busy streets, allies, junctions and busy markets where there is heavy pedestrian traffic by marketers and sales agents of big businesses. They are accompanied by sound cars, that is, a vehicle with a DJ inside playing attractive music and dancers to draw the attention of the public (Personal Observation of the use printed-clothing as a medium of mobile advertising in Festac Town

Lagos. Observed July 29, 2015).¹ Sometimes road shows or street shows are organised in public spaces with people wearing unique customised advertorial clothes serving as moderators, ushers and crowd control personnel. The goal of these modern business development strategies is to bring to the knowledge of the public either a new company or a new product that is being promoted on the adorned clothing. Consequently, R. Cox observed that, “textiles are unique items of trade. They are art form and a form of economic commodity. Textiles stand out as having an inordinate number of designing, producing and marketing variables” (225). It is discernible from the foregoing that clothing in modern economics is one of the viable tools of mobile marketing. In the final analysis, Dani Lyndersay in his study *Nigerian Dress, the Body Honoured*, summarised the utility of clothing in Yorubaland and elsewhere in Nigeria this way: for protection against unknown spirits, weather, harmful insects and diseases. As a sign of belief in some gods or goddesses. As a symbol of ethnic identification. As a sign that one has completed puberty or an age-grade rites. As a symbol of status. Aesthetic desire to satisfy one’s ego. To make one attractive to the opposite sex. To demonstrate one’s sexual or gender identity. As a sign of profession, ownership or allegiance (16).

Clothing Nationalism and Decolonisation Struggle in Nigeria

From 1941, fashion designing and clothing in Yorubaland and elsewhere in Nigeria took on a new revolutionary meaning. The recognition of the right of colonised people to self-determination in the Atlantic Charter signed between Britain and the United States of America fired radical nationalism in Nigeria. It made the indigenous peoples of Nigeria bolder and daring in their pursuit of decolonisation and redemption of their personality and cultural identity. This caused significant changes in the post-World War II utility of dress and grooming in Nigeria. Fashion designing was incorporated into the struggle for Nigeria’s independence, and this gave rise to clothing nationalism, and perhaps cloth decolonisation. In Yorubaland, nationalists such as Obafemi Awolowo made a lot of de-colonial fashion statements that were packed with radical political undertones. Dressing was weaponised by the nationalists as a means of expressing their rejection of Western domination over Nigerian culture and tradition. There was an intentional recourse to the adornment of traditional textiles and locally designed clothing that was part of the general efforts to revive the Nigerian personality. Bukola Oyeniyi in his study “*Dress in the Making of African Identity: A Social and Cultural History of the Yoruba People*” observed that Yoruba nationalists under colonial rule strongly advocated for the return to Yoruba culture, particularly its language and dressing. The nationalists argued that foreign textile and clothing were unsuitable, unhealthy, and commodious to the tropical climate of Yorubaland (Olaide and Ajayi 58). Dress nationalism in Yorubaland led to a surge in the adornment of all kinds of traditional Yoruba clothing as a fashion declaration of independence of some sort (Oyeniyi).⁶⁵

¹ I personally observed this use of printed-cloth as a means of mobile advertising in Festac Town, Lagos (July 29, 2015).

Figure 1: Dress Nationalism and Clothing Politics in Colonial Nigeria



Source: <https://tinyurl.com/b3y727cz>

Figure 1 above shows Nigerian nationalists attending the London Constitutional Conference in 1957 and the Lagos Constitutional Conference of 1958 adorned traditional clothing as a means of asserting their socio-cultural independence from the British and promoting the Nigerian personality and culture on the global stage and domestically. It shows the extent of clothing nationalism and the weaponisation of dressing as an instrument in the struggle for Nigeria's independence. Clothing politics engendered a non-violent revolution against the British. But it was a very potent force that helped unclad the garment of colonialism; while encouraging the redemption of the Nigerian personality.



Chief Obafemi Awolowo



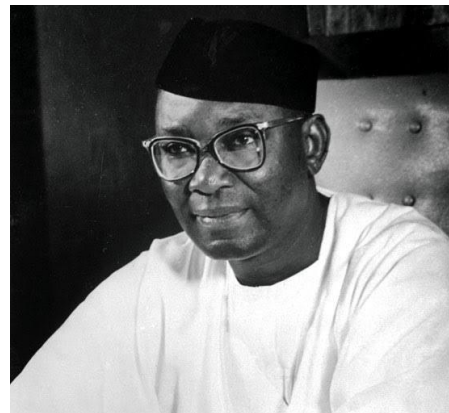
The Young Anthony Enahoro

Figure 2: Midwestern Nationalists and the Redemption of the Nigerian Personality

Source: <https://tinyurl.com/2vn8dacw>



Alhaji Abubakar Tafawa Balewa



Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe

Figure 3: Northern and Eastern Nationalists and the Redemption of Nigerian Personality

Source: <https://tinyurl.com/264uenww>

Figures 2 and 3 above show Chief Obafemi Awolowo, Chief Anthony Enahoro, Alhaji Tafawa Balewa, and Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe operationalising clothing politics during the colonial period. It is apparent that from the 1940's in Nigeria clothing and fashion designing were officially incorporated into the body politics of the nation. During this period, traditional textiles were increasingly worn by nationalist across Nigeria to symbolise their protest against colonialism, struggle for the redemption of the African/Nigerian personality, and the rejection of European cultural hegemony in Nigeria. This development from 1945 was instrumental to rejigging the declining traditional fashion designing industry; and the recapture and taking back of the local textile market from the control of the foreign cloth manufacturers. Therefore, clothing nationalism contributed to both the economic and political development of Nigeria. Politically, nationalists attending the London Constitutional Conference in 1957 to deliberate on Nigeria's independence clad themselves in traditional clothing. And in 1958, while attending the Lagos Constitutional Conference to further the case of Nigeria's decolonisation dressing was one of the soft powers Nigerian nationalists exploited. Fashion nationalism in Nigeria snowballed into a frenzy that engulfed all spectrum of society. And traditional political institutions were not left out. They switched from using foreign textiles to sew their royal regalia to using local textiles (Oyeniya). In Yorubaland, following the growth and consolidation of the anti-European stance on fashion and textiles, Oladejo observed that dressing became a method of expressing power and resistance (8). Therefore, Jean Allman averred that dress in colonial Africa was designed in such a way that social and political transformations were appropriated in the indigenous understanding of power and cultural nationalism (qtd in Oladejo 9).

Conclusion

The evolution, development and utility of fashion designing in Yorubaland over the thousand years of human history are progressive. Cloth making and designing in the region is a continuum of textile production in ancient centres such as Egypt. Findings in this paper show that cloth making and fashion designing (tie and dye) developed in tandem in Yorubaland. In pre-colonial times, this study finds that the *aso-oke* and *adire* were the hallmarks of Yoruba fashion designing. But British colonisation of Yorubaland brought about significant changes and continuities to its fashion industry that set it on the path of modernity. Although the colonial authority's prioritisation of cash crops (cotton) to feed its textile industry in the metropolis endangered and slowed down the development of the indigenous fashion designing industry; it experienced a rebound in the 1940s. Therefore, this study finds that after the Second World War, the utility of clothing took on a revolutionary dimension. The resultant rise of clothing nationalism and the weaponisation of dressing in the fight against colonialism in Yorubaland and elsewhere in Nigeria contributed significantly to the decolonisation struggle, redemption of the personality, and the restoration of the indigenous fashion designing industry before 1960. In all of these, Yoruba traditional clothing among others in Nigeria survived through time as *giffen* or utility goods that are demanded more as things change positively or negatively.

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