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Adire in Osogbo Nigeria: It's Uniqueness, Technology and Significance

Ojelade Lydia Omolola

Principal Research Officer, Department of Research, Planning and Publication,
National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Osogbo, Nigeria

Bashir Morufu Omotayo

Chief Research Officer, Department of Research, Planning and Publication,
National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Osogbo, Nigeria

Oyeniya Tolu Fatimo

Assistant Chief Education Officer, Department of Education,
National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Osogbo, Nigeria

Abstract:

Adire is simply the Yoruba meaning for "to tie" and "to dye" and it remains inseparable from the dressing and lifestyle of the people of Osogbo in Southwest Nigeria. This study, an ethnographic study based on field research analysed Adire in Osogbo land and it examined the technology of Adire Osogbo focusing on the materials and specific methods involved in the production process; this was with the aim of unfolding the uniqueness of Adire Osogbo in Nigeria. The findings from the study revealed that Adire in Osogbo are of various types and that a significant period of innovation was the introduction of "Adire Alabela" in the early 60s which took Adire Osogbo to another dimension. There exists a positive relationship between Indigo and Adire production in Osogbo as there is no Adire without dye. The study concludes that Adire Osogbo is indeed unique among other centers in Nigeria.

Keywords: Adire, osogbo, Indigo, dyers, motifs

1. Introduction

Nigeria clothing styles depict the culture and traditional believes of the people. Yoruba people of the Southwest Nigeria among other tribes attach a considerable importance to their mode of dressing such that both men and women are gorgeously dressed to show case their culture and beauty, depending on the occasion at hand. There are various clothing for different places and events in Nigeria, notable among these are Adire, Aso oke, and Ankara. Adire are of different types and designs and it is traditionally significant to the people of Osogbo than other fabrics. The word Adire is coined from two words; "Adi" (to tie) and "re" (to dye). Adire is simply the Yoruba meaning of tie and die. Adire is a creative and artistic form and creative patterned dyed cloth; and it is the creativity and the design in Adire that makes it significant both as process and objects of communication in the world of the Yoruba and perhaps beyond. The design and the decorative elements on the cloth are meaningful parts of the people's day to day lives (Areo, 2003). In addition, Adire are indigo resist dyed cotton cloths that were made mostly by women in various parts of Yoruba land. Indigo is an organic substance which comes from the indigo plant and it has been used as a dye in Africa for at least two thousand years (Gasali, 2018). Just as a talking drum speaks, Adire motifs give information about the origin, culture and value of the Osogbo people and they also show the indebted creative ability of the designer. Adire making has certainly been developed over a long period of time and it gets stronger and better as it passes from generation to generation (Saheed, 2013). Development has really influenced Adire Osogbo and thus amazing designs are produced from time to time. The exact origin of tie and dye is unknown (Gausa and Abubakar, 2015). Documented evidence however indicated that the art of dyeing has been practiced in China between 615 and 906 AD, in Japan between 555 to 794 AD and in some parts of Asia, Indonesia, India and Africa (Gausa, 2005). In central Africa, Cassava and rice paste has existed for centuries as well as in Yoruba tribe of Southern Nigeria and Senegal (Batik guild, 1999). Based on accidental discovery history of Adire as indicated by Buhler, Adire was discovered by accident centuries ago. However, this was not supported by Yoruba philosophy and traditional history. This is because Stories in Ejiogbe credited the origin of patterned dye to Orunmila the Yoruba deity of wisdom and divination and Ifa exponent. Patterned dyed cloth was made using the material technology of certain birds Agbe, Aluko, odidere, lekeleke and Agbufan (Areo and Kalilu, 2013). The Origin of Adire Osogbo can be traced to the inception of the town centuries ago. Majorly, there are three Adire centers in Yoruba land that is Abeokuta, Ibadan and Osogbo. The focus of this study is on Osogbo as the best Adire center in Nigeria.

Many studies were focused on other Adire centers in Nigeria while only a few studies that were on Adire Osogbo has not stressed the uniqueness and significance of Adire Osogbo. Areo (2005) looked at the problems and prospects of

Indigo dyed resist cloth of the Yoruba; Areo and Kalilu(2013) emphasized on geography of Adire centers in the south western Nigeria, Oparinde (2012), Areo and Kalilu (2013) examined the application, techniques, and technology of Adire work ; Gausa and Abubakar (2015) emphasized the need to improve on the finishing of Adire to make it more attractive and lustrous,Owoeye (2017) examined the relationship between textile production and dyeing act as a ritual performed by dyers in Osogbo.This paper analyses Adire in Osogbo and its uniqueness among other Adire in the country, it also examines the technology of Adire Osogbo and the major significance of Adire Osogbo.

2. Adire in Osogboland

The origin of Adire Osogbo can be traced to the inception of the town in the early eighteenth century, when the founder of Osogbo oba Gbadewolu Larooye and the great hunter Olutimehin settled with their people from Ipole Omu near a river which is now popularly known as Osun River. In the course of their settlement they were trying to cut the weeds and trees while one of the trees fell on a pot belonging to the goddess of Osun River. In reaction to this, the goddess spoke angrily with a loud voice from the river "Gbogbo ikoko aromin letifotan"?Meaning "You've all broken my dying pots? While the people's response to osun goddess was "oso igbopole o, Osoigbo rora o" meaning,"Sorry wizard of the forest". This statement clearly reveals the existence of dying tradition in the area before the settlement of Osogbo people. Osogbo is popularly known as "Ilu Aro" because indigo- dying is an indigenous profession of the people. It is a knowledge that has been with the people from inception and which is expressed in myth of the people and embedded in spirituality that tells the origin of the people (Areo, 2013). The beauty of Adire work is that the knowledge is been passed form mothers to their daughters to ensure its continuity and in this twenty first century, the male and female gender are now participating fully in the profession. Somemen are useful in sowing while some are majorly designers.

Adire Osogbo is very unique compared to those produced in other towns in southwest Nigeria. Scholars have identified Osogbo as a traditionally renowned home of Indigo and dyers. The Indigo plant used for dying in Osogbo is scientifically known as *Indigofera Tinctoria*. It remains the oldest natural dye colour on the record of world textile tradition (Gillow and sentence, 1999). It is one of the potential dyes that generates blue colour and It is one of the original sources of indigo dye which is also called the true indigo (Wikipedia, 2018). Fortunately, Indigo Known as "Elu" among Yoruba is readily available in Osogbo without been cultivated. This can be attributed to the fact that the soil of Osogbo is suitable for the plant and it encourages it to grow well in large scale. Once this plant grows in an area it naturally becomes a big tree. The implication of this is that enough quantity of Indigo is available for dyeing. This has helped in producing beautifully made Adire over the years in Osogbo and its environments with little or no stress. Historians claimed that in the time past, Adire producers in Abeokuta had to take their cloth to Osogbo for dyeing (Areo, 2013). In recent times, designers from all over the country and beyond purchase Indigo from Osogbo and it is well packaged for importation as the need arises. Moreover, Adire Osogbo is also unique because it is highly durable compared to others in the country. This can be as a result of the fact that expensive quality fabrics with one hundred percent cotton are used for various Adire designs rather than factory waste products used by some centers in the country. The level of creativity of the designers in Osogbo is also a contributory factor to the uniqueness of Adire Osogbo. The motifs made on the fabrics are of various kinds and it becomes very rare to see repeated designs. Hands and not machines are used in creating most of these designs and the designers take their time in the creative acts. Stamps are not used in any of the Adire centers visited in Osogbo unlike some centers in the country. There are various Adire centers in Osun State, these centers are well known with quality and durable Adire designs. Such centers include; Alaka's compound; Nike Art Gallery headed by Nike Okundaiye; Heritage Gallery headed by Jimoh Buraimoh; Artist village headed by Femi Johnson, Fatolu Center for Art and Culture headed by Tolu Oyeniyi and Ade Omo Ade Gallery and dying center headed by Ade.

3. Types of Adire Osogho

3.1. Raffia Resist-Adire Oniko

This is a tie-die resist type of Adire. The tying is done to resist the dye in specified parts of the fabrics. Traditionally, raffia (iko) string-like material is used as a tie resist with the primary aim of creating various unique patterns. Small objects such as seeds, stones, pebbles, palm kernels are strategically tied to attain beautifully dyed fabric. These objects can be tied in circles on the fabric this is called "Alagbole". When the seeds are strategically tied into the fabrics is called "Eleso". Larger circles are obtainable by lifting a point on the fabric and then binding the fabric beneath tightly, this is called "Olosupa". Initially, two colours of blue and white were achievable, but due to creativity and experimentation more colours have been obtained using the raffia resist method of dyeing.

3.2. Stitch Resist- Adire Alabere

This method came to being as a result of expansion in the work of Adire. Cloths are stitched with thread and needle using either hand or machine. This is done to resist dye and thereby producing fine-lined motifs and diverse patterns depending on choice. The raffia will then be removed after dyeing to bring out colorful end result. The stitch resist type of Adire brought in males into the profession, such that most men are involved in handling machine for the fabrics to be stitched while females are mostly dyers.

3.3. Starch Resist - Adire Eleko

This method uses cassava starch to resist dye. There are different types of Adire eleko such as freehand eleko, stenciling eleko, splash and lace eleko. Adire professionals in Osogbo are known for their artistic symbolic creative Adire Eleko patterns, which can hardly be seen elsewhere in the world. They traditionally apply cassava starch paste on fabrics

to form unique symbolic patterns; using stencil, chicken feather or straw from a broom stick. Desired patterns are also achievable using freehand painting technique. Some of these patterns are accompanied with special names and its representative motifs namely Oluokun, Onirecord, Egunaje, Ibadandun among others. These motifs are meaningful although may be abstract to a novice. The resist patterns are created by the decorators called "Aladire" while the dying is done by female dyers called "Alaro"

3.4. Wax Batik- Adire Alabela

Batik is a way of creating so many beautiful colours using wax to resist dye. It is a process of applying wax and dye to the fabric to achieve intricate and colourful patterns (Stan, 2011). Batik can be referred to as cloth block printed with wax or cloth decorated with hand-drawn design (Oparinde, 2012). The introduction of Batik in Osogbo in the early 60s was an unforgettable era in the history of Adire. It was indeed a significant period of innovation in handcrafted cloth production in Osogbo as Suzan Wenger, Ulli and Georgina Beier organized series of experimental workshops known as Osogbo School of Art and also popularly called MbariMbayo workshop. Among the participants of these workshops are Chief Jimoh Buraimoh, Bisi Fabunmi, Muraina Oyelami, Isaac Fajana and late Taiwo Olaniyi (twin seven-seven). Suzan Wenger popularly known as "Adunni Olorisa" in Osogbo substituted paraffin wax for cassava paste as a resist agent. In addition, synthetic dye also was introduced as substitute for indigo dye. Wax is used as a resist by crumpling, folding, spreading and randomly splashing of the wax before dying. Also, multiple colours are achievable in wax batik with the use of the synthetic dye. The uniqueness in motifs, styles, colours and fashion remain unequal by other centers in Nigeria. The Osogbo School of Art has produced renowned artist in Osogbo with different specialization and this has taken Adire Osogbo all over the world.

The beauty of Adire Osogbo in recent time is the ability to combine the various types of Adire on a single fabric. The chosen fabric can be tie and dyed using either raffia resist or stitch resist with two different dyes at least. Having obtained the desired result the same fabric can be designed with wax to resist dye after which another set of dye will be applied. This form of batik is unique and simply beautiful and it shows the level of intelligence and creativity of Osogbo dyers.

4. Technology of Adire Osogbo

There are methods, systems, and devices used in production of Adire in Osogbo. Each method is in tune with the various Adire designs. Major materials used in the production are also essential and must be readily available before the process starts.

4.1. General Materials for Adire

- Guinea Brocade (100% cotton)
- Silk, Chiffon, Rayon and Lynen (100% Cotton)
- Common salt (optional)
- Foam sponge/ Brush
- Spoon
- Sticks
- Scissors
- hand gloves
- Apron
- Dye stuff
- Kerosene stove
- Cooking pots
- Plastic buckets and bowls
- Nose cover
- Table and chair
- water

4.2. Specific Materials for Raffia Resist-Adire Oniko

- Raffia
- Needle
- Seeds or Stones or pebbles

4.3. Specific Materials for Stitch Resist- Adire Alabere

- Raffia
- Needle
- Thread
- Sewing Machine

4.4. *Specific Materials for Starch Resist – Adire Eleko*

- Cassava paste
- Solignum (Alum dudu)
- Feather, broom stick
- Indigofera (Elu) leave
- Indigo dye (Aro)

4.5. *Specific Materials for Wax Batik- Adire Alabela*

- Paraffin Wax
- Hydro-sulphite
- Caustic soda

5. **Methods of Making Adire Osogho**

5.1. *Method 1-Raffia Resist-Adire Oniko*

Tie with raffia the chosen seeds or stones into the cloth strategically; soak the cloth with cold water; prepare the selected dye plus other items as indicated for dyeing and dye the cloth.

5.2. *Method 2 - Stitch Resist- Adire Alabere*

Fold the fabrics as desired; use the thread, needle and machine to sew the folded pattern on the fabrics; soak the fabrics with cold water; select the desired dye; prepare and mix with other materials; dye the fabric.

5.3. *Method 3 - Starch Resist – Adire Eleko*

Prepare cassava paste with Solignum; design the cloth using feather; broom stick and Cassava paste; prepare dye with other materials and dye the cloth. Allow to dry and remove the cassava paste while the cloth is being soaked into cold water.

5.4. *Method 4 - Wax Batik- Adire Alabela*

Soak the fabric into cold water to remove the starch; dry the fabric; iron and fold into desired patterns or lines. Allow your wax to melt using stove and pot; use foam sponge or brush to create decorative designs of your choice; Prepare dye with other materials; dye the cloth and de-wax. Also, freehand designs can be done following the same process.

6. **Significance of Adire Osogbo**

6.1. *Promotion of Art and Culture*

Adire is traditional attire that is very significant to the people of Osogbo. Producing, selling and wearing Adire is with the primary aim of transmitting culture from one generation to another. Adire serves as a means of identification for Yoruba people generally living anywhere across the globe. During Osun Osogbo annual festival it is noticeable that the king "Ataoja of Osogbo" and his wives, the chiefs, Osun devotees, traditionalists, cultural troupes, indigenes among others are gorgeously dressed in Adire to show case the beauty of their culture. This has gone a long way in promoting the culture and the tradition of the people of Osogbo such that foreigners have started emulating Yoruba people by putting on Adire. Tourists are seen from time to time buying Adire with great enthusiasm for personal use and also as souvenirs thereby promoting the art and culture of Yoruba people all over the world.

6.2. *Creation of Employment Opportunities*

Adire is highly significant in creating employment opportunity for Nigerian citizens. It is one of the craftworks young graduates are learning in Nigeria after schooling. This has helped in reducing unemployment in the country as it serves as a good substitute for white collar jobs. More hands are usually needed in production of Adire to allow division of labour and thus specialization and high productivity. Some are specialized designers (Aladire), while some are dyers (Alaro). In addition, some are employed for ironing while some are to package the finished product. Sales girls or boys are also employed to be in charge of selling and distribution. These show the rate at which employment is being generated within the industry. It should be noted that training is going on in all of the Adire centers in Osogbo for interested apprentices with hope of producing more professionals in the industry.

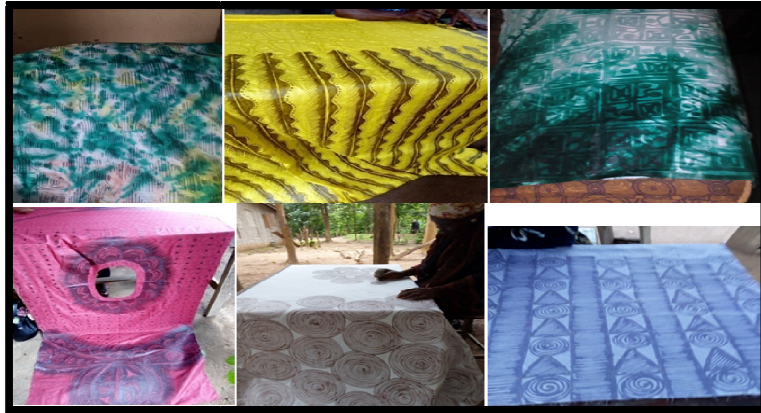
6.3. *Generation of Income*

Adire is inextricably connected to the economic and social fabrics of the Yoruba people (Gausa, 2015). Adire is therefore also extremely important in generating income. Professionals in Adire production are getting their daily income and this has positive implications on their lives and family. Adire is not only useful for clothing or fashion, it is also used for household materials such as bed spreads, pillow cases, table covers; door and window blinds, bags and purses, wall hangings and throw pillows. It is of higher demand both locally and internationally; therefore, individual and corporate organizations that involve in the business obtained revenue through sales. Adire material merchant are also making it in the business, for instance, no one can make Adire without indigo or synthetic dye and some are specialized in this area. Moreover, local, state and federal government generate revenue from the production of Adire through the direct and indirect taxes.

6.4. Health Benefits

Adire has some health benefits. It is useful as repellants, insecticides, and for healing of the body from certain ailments. It is the belief of the people that are into the traditional production of indigo that after the production, the leftover water can be used for fumigation to prevent reptiles, termites and some other little insects within the house. Findings show that this has been worked out on several occasions. In addition, anyone suffering from stomach problem can drink the used Indigo water and he will be totally free from the ailment. Furthermore, "waji" cloth from Indigo is usually used as a cure of chronic Pile over the years in Osogbo.

7. Pictorial Illustrations of Adire Osogbo



*Figure 1: Adire Alabela- Wax Batik in processing stage
Fatolu center for Art & Culture Osogbo, Photograph by Ojelade Omolola 2018
Artist Village Osun Grove Photograph by Bashir 2018*



*Figure 2: Adire Alabela- Wax Batik at the Finished Stage
Fatolu Center for Art and Culture Osogbo Photograph by Omolola Ojelade 2018*



*Figure 3: Adire Eleko- Starch Resist in Processing and Finishing Stages
Artist Village Osun Grove Osogbo, Photograph by Bashir Omotayo 2018}*



Figure 4: Raffia Resist-Adire Oniko in Processing form
Artist Village Osun Grove Osogbo, Photograph by Ojelade Omolola 2018

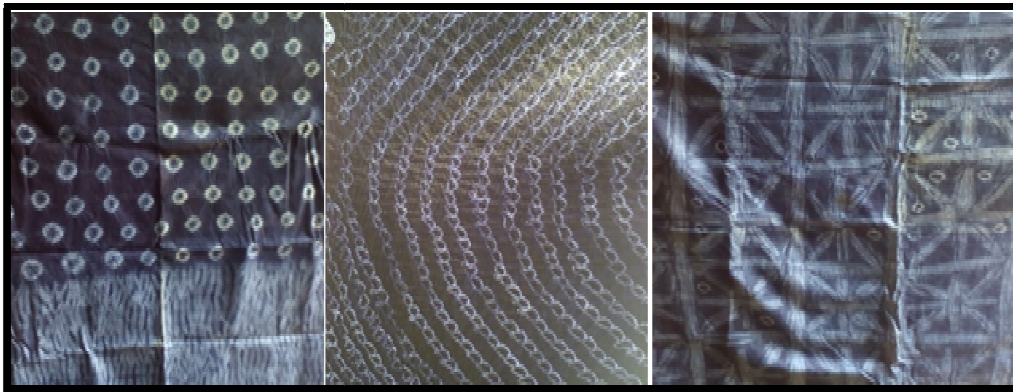


Figure 5: Raffia Resist-Adire Oniko Finishing Stage
Artist Village Osun Grove Osogbo, Photograph by Ojelade Omolola 2018



Figure 6: Display of Adire Osogbo by Some Staff of National Museum Osogbo at
Osun Osogbo Sacred Grove Photograph by Ojelade Omolola 2017 & 2018



*Figure 7: Display of Creativity by Some Osogbo Artists
Fatolu Center for Art and Culture Osogbo and Artist
Village Osun Grove Osogbo,
Photograph by Ojelade Omolola 2018*

8. Conclusion

Though there are various Adire centers in Yorubaland of the southwestern Nigeria, the centers in Osogbo are naturally endowed with renowned artists and dyers. This can be attributed to the fact that Osogbo oroki is traditionally known as "Ilu Aro" that is, the home of Indigo and dyers. Osogbo leads in the production of unique and qualitative Adire of various types and the efforts of the dyers, the quality of the fabrics in use and the distinctive motives prove Osogbo designers' level of creativity and commitments over the years. Just as a talking drum speaks the mind of the drummer among the Yorubas, Adire Osogbo motifs give information about the origin, culture and value of the people. Indigo is inseparable from Adire Osogbo this is because without dye there is no Adire, fortunately Indigo is readily available in large

quantity in Osogbo such that other centers in the country cannot do without Osogbo in term of indigo dyeing. The study reveals that Adire Osogbo is distinct, durable, and attractive and it stands out within and outside Nigeria.

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- xxiii. Princess Ademola Adekemi, Artist Village Osun Osogbo Grove, 8th August 2018.
- xxiv. Mrs Ifatojola Olatona, Artist Village Osun Grove Osogbo 8th August 2018
- xxv. Mr Isaac Fajana, Artist Village Osun Osogbo Grove, 10th November 2018.