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# ANALYSE THE AESTHETIC CONCEPTS OF THE SOCIO-CULTURAL SIGNIFICANCE OF ADIRE IN SOUTHWESTERN NIGERIA

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**ABSTRACT**

For centuries, the ceremonial and everyday elements of Adire, a Yoruba tie-and-dye textile in shades of bold blue lustered with vibrant hues true to African cultural standards have embodied much more than just major symbolism. Taking a deep dive into the aesthetic notions and socio-cultural importance of Adire in Southwest Nigeria, this research is centered around its historical transformation since inception to present day. The study gathered data via: Semi-structured interviews with the artisans and quantitative surveys conducted within the community. The research shows that the aesthetic principles of Adire are embedded in Yoruba cosmology, social groups and art traditions. The indigo-dyed backgrounds and carefully stitched designs on Adire textiles are adorned with motifs and patterns that convey intricate storylines, cultural meaning systems, religious beliefs or historical undertones. A mean outcome of 4.25 from the survey confirms to a great extent that Adire has gained widespread cultural prevalence and serves as an instrument for social identification, unity and cohesion This paper therefore posits that Adire is a living, fluid cultural object constantly responding to the influences of its environment (contemporary or not), without undermining core aesthetic and socio-cultural values. To this end, it unconventionally calls for a continuation of Adire studies in the social sciences and encourages its incorporation into school curricula so that further educational avenues can be explored whereby we pass on an exemplary cultural heritage.

**KEYWORDS**: Aesthetic concepts, Socio-cultural significance, Textile Arts, Yoruba Adire culture

1. **INTRODUCTION**

*Adire* is a type of textile art that originated from the Yoruba people of southern western Nigeria. The name *Adire* comes from the Yoruba words ‘adi’, meaning ‘to tie,’ and‘re,’ meaning ‘to dye’. *Adire*is a resist dyeing technique that involves tie dyeandbatik. Yoruba *Adire* Textiles, known for their tie and dye techniques serve as a means to convey the Yoruba cultural heritage and ideas to other cultures. This has experienced a significant aesthetic change in Yoruba land. This transformation includes technological advancement, cultural shift, globalisation, socialisation and others. The origin technique of *Adire* was created traditionally by using indigo dyes, which involves the intricate hand dyeing technique. Consequently, synthetic dyes and modern methods were introduced, and it allows aesthetic designs at wide range of multicolours with an improvement that has made *Adire* more accessible, accepted and expand the diversity of creativity of the artisans.

Influence of modern design made *Adire* modern designers marry the traditional motifs and contemporary aesthetic together in resulting to a unique pattern that appeal to the younger generations across boarder to the extent at which those in diaspora have sense of belonging when they see or wear *Adire*.

The cultural significance and identity show that *Adire* is an integral part of Yoruba people which has always been used in ceremonies and it stands as a means of identity at home and diaspora. This is a cultural heritage of Yoruba people, which stands out and speaks a great volume in recent years. *Adire* artisans preserves their cultural identity through globalisation by reviving the traditional patterns and techniques. Market changes and consumer choice of *Adire* market, is spread widely with the increase in its demand for the traditional and contemporary design globally in the fashion realm which allows *Adire* exhibition surface through its aesthetic evolution.

Artistic teamwork by the traditional *Adire* artisans and contemporary artisans collaborates which led to the symbolic interpretation of the crafts. With their alliance, it results in the innovative pieces that go beyond the boundaries by merging the traditional techniques with the modern artistic expressions.

The aesthetic concepts and socio-cultural significance of *Adire* in South western Nigeria are of great importance in understanding the rich cultural heritage of the region. The significance of *Adire* extends beyond its artistic value, encompassing deep-rooted socio-cultural meanings and traditions within the Yoruba community(<https://artsandculture.google.com/story/adire-the-art-of-tie-and-dye-pan-atlantic-university/QVxsVPSAxQtlw?hl=en> )

The study of *Adire* in south western Nigeria holds potential for exploring the intricate connections between art, culture, and societal values. The aesthetic concept of *Adire* cultural symbols, particularly in the context of wedding gowns present opportunity to delve into the socio-cultural significance of *Adire* within ceremonial and celebratory contexts (<https://internationalpolicybrief.org/wPc:content/upload/3044/10/ARTICLE6-139pdf> )

**Aim and Objectives of the Study**

The aim of the study is to comprehensively explore and analyse the artistic and cultural elements embedded within the practice of *Adire* textile production, while the Objectives of the Study are:

i. to investigate the historical, social, and artistic dimensions of *Adire*, aiming to uncover the underlying aesthetic principles and the ways in which *Adire* textiles serve as a form of cultural expression and identity within the southern Nigeria.

ii. to provide a deeper understanding of the intricate relationship between aesthetics, culture, and socio-cultural significance of *Adire*, shedding light on its impact on the local community and its broader implications within the context of Nigeria and global cultural heritage.

**Scope of the Study**

The Scope of the study offered a comprehensive and nuanced exploration of the aesthetic concepts and socio-cultural significance of *Adire* in south western Nigeria, providing valuable insights into its artistic, historical, and anthropological dimensions.

**Significance of the Study**

The significance of the study extends to cultural preservation, artistic heritage, anthropological insights, cross-cultural understanding, economic implications, and academic value, thereby enriching our understanding of the artistic, historical, and cultural dimensions of *Adire* within a global context.

**Justification of the Study**

The justification is rooted in its profound relevance and potential impact across multiple dimensions by its role in cultural heritage preservation, artistic appreciation, anthropological insights, heritage conservation, academic enrichment, and global cultural heritage. It represents a meaningful exploration of a rich and vibrant cultural tradition with far-reaching implications for art, culture, and society.

Platei**:** Indigo Resist Fabric Processing in Yoruba

**2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

**2.1.** ADIRE AS MATERIAL CULTURE IN YORUBA LAND

Hypothetically, the origin of *Adire* might be traced to the archaeological findings in some Tellen burial caves of Mali (Bolland, 1992). Furthermore, the resist dye under the name of *Adire* has given the Yoruba of Nigeria International reputable at least since 1900 when an applicable quantity of indigo dyed cloth was exported to Europe. Oguntona (1986) however, purposes that the ancient industry of indigo dyeing cannot be said to be developing. Rather, it appears that it is losing ground to western mechanization of imported textiles. Areo & Kalilu (2013) opined that, the *Adire* art tradition is however preponderant in a few Yoruba towns to the extent that the names of these towns are traditionally inseparable with the *Adire* art tradition. Oguntona supports the fact that the practice of pattern dyeing is confined to certain ethnic groups in both north and the south of the country.

In the south, dyeing is practiced in most Yoruba towns and villages, women are involved in the dyeing; it is a cooperative venture in which every female member of the family participates. Adetoro (1972) supports that, the dying process is practiced in almost every Yoruba towns and villages. There is frequently, widely differing recipes for dyeing by Yoruba and that of other part of Nigeria. In Western part of Nigeria, women use earthen–ware pots partially buried into the ground, while in the North, the dye prepared in deep cemented pits of 46 centimeters to 320 centimeters in diameters, covers to by conical shared across lids. Van and Wolff (2014) also have the same opinion that *Adire* is the name given to indigo dyed cloth produced by the Yoruba women, using a variety of resist dye techniques. Beier, Ulli, ed (1997) avers that, *Adire* as a distinctive textile type, first emerged in the city of Abeokuta, in the early decades of the twentieth century however new techniques of resists dyeing were developed, most notably the practice of cloth with a cassava starch paste prior to dyeing, known as *Adire* *Eleko*.

The development of the craft of resist is a unique achievement for mankind in the history of clothing and fabric surface decoration**.** *Adire* is a material of daily used, has been there for ages now as an industry, it is one of the promising industries in Nigeria. The beginning of traditional industries with attendant technological skills in West Africa is general, and in Yoruba land particular is difficult to ascertain. It could however *Adire* design is known to be one of the oldest form of dye - resist method of textile design in Africa. *Adire* is exclusively Yoruba Nigeria, because it has important traditional uses, and the motifs are exoteric and esoteric in nature. *Adire* is, a Yoruba word which simply means tie and dye. A combination of two Yoruba words, ‘*Adi’* meaning to tie and‘re’, which means to dye.

Tomori (2011) argues that, *Adire* was a viable trade at its peak in the 1920s in West Africa that the Senegalese merchants were buying up to two thousand wrappers in a single day (Bayfield, 1993) as quoted by Onabolu (2005). Due to its uniqueness, *Adire* a classic indigo - dyed resist cloths of the Yoruba used to be a buoyant source of trade exchange in West Africa in the 1960s (Wolff, 2006) as quoted by Onabolu (2005), the art of *Adire* was a family profession usually performed by the women in the family which is a laborious technique and it is passed down from one generation to the next (from older women to young girls through long apprenticeships). As earlier stated, resist technique is an inherited trade that transfers from the elders in the family down to the generation that follow in an informal form of education. Akande (2002), after an extensive study, states that, Yoruba women of Southwestern Nigeria, where the craft is known as ‘*Adire’* generally produce magnificent cloths, dyed in indigo-bath.

1. **METHODOLOGY**

Materials and equipment used are; 100% cotton (Guinea brocade), caustic soda, hydrosulphite, dyes of different colours, bowl, hand gloves, spoon, tjanting, candle wax, stove, scissors, matches, table, pot for melting wax, *et cetera.*

Thisinvolvesa multi-faceted approach that integrates qualitative and, where applicable quantitative methods. The methodology aims to capture the artistic, historical and anthropological dimensions of *Adire* while incorporating community engagement and scholarly analysis.

This involves a holistic approach that integrates scholarly inquiry, community engagement, visual analysis, and interpretive synthesis. By adopting a multi-method approach, the study aims to provide a nuanced understanding of *Adire’s* artistic, historical, and anthropological dimensions within its cultural context.

1. **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The discussion and interpretation of the aesthetic concepts and socio-cultural significance of *Adire* in south western Nigeria provide a multifaceted understanding of its artistic, historical, and anthropological dimensions. The findings underscore the need to recognize, preserve, and promote the rich heritage of *Adire*, ensuring the enduring legacy within the cultural tapestry of the region. Below is an elegant display of the aesthetic concept and socio-cultural of *Adire* in this article:







Plate ii: Adire off shoulder croset gown:

Plate iii: Adire short gown with flare sleeves:

Plate iv: Adire short gown with yoke:

Orokun aro, aiyedegbe, omi, sekere, orogbo omi, sekere, orogbo, sekeseke, orokun aro waya ewe ege, orogbo, sekere, agbo ile, batik Bakare, 2022

**4.1.** The objective of this research is to analyse the aesthetic concept of the socio- cultural Significance of Adire Symbols in Southwestern Nigeria.

**Oral Interview**

This objective necessitated the description, analyses, and interpretation of some of the Adire symbols (designed) obtained in this research. A systematic analysis of all works obtained was done symbiotically (contextually) as opposed to formal analysis, which only seeks to describe an artwork visually. With the opinion of Tosin Elegunsi Adeleye, Opeyemi Sanyaolu, and Idowu Israel (oral interview, 2019), Adire is an inheritance and was practiced along lineage line among the Yoruba of southwestern Nigeria; they are transferred from generation to generation. The use of traditional motifs is so common among the Adire traditional dyers that it creates an impression of uniformity in works. From the information derived from fieldwork, the Yoruba people aesthetically organize their Adire symbols and patterns, based on the expertise of the designers. Adeogun Adesoye Olalekan, Alhaja Fausa Ganiyu (oral interview, 2019) believed that the beauty of Adire fabric depends on the designer aesthetic appeals of the wearers. This gesture makes the motif discernable with all the decorative attributes therein, clearly seen by the beholder. It was added that the motif varies significantly from one cloth to the other. Also, elaborate decoration separates humans from animals, marks one’s ethnic identity, and lastly provides self-esteem.

Opeyemi Gbolajobi, Abiodun Awolaja, Olaoluwa Adesina, and Akeem Adelekan (oral interview, 2019) say that the socio-cultural significance of Adire is aligned with an annual ceremony of odun egungun, Iya Itoku, Iya Mapo, and Osun Osogbo. It serves as a means of identification, beautification, and attraction in Yoruba land. Yoruba are in love with aesthetics in all its ramifications, and efforts are always undertaken to cater for such beautification of their cloth. Beauty is always shown cased in socio-cultural dressing and festivals, Baba Ede, Adeola Ajewole, Abiodun Ezekiel (oral interview-2019). These festivals periods are avenues for socialization between distant, families, subgroups, clans, and other friendly subgroups, with the Yoruba land.

Also, Adire became fashionable as the costume and attire of the new elites in Yoruba land, even later becoming part of a national style with the political elite in Nigeria’s second republic: a former President Chief Olusegun Obasanjo dressed in Adire at state conscious expression of national identity, same applicable to President Buhari and his Vice, Yemi Osinbanjo. Also, one of the few Nigerians who revere national attires is the Director-General of the Nigerian Tourism Development Corporation, Otunba Segun Runsewe (Ororho, 2007). Generally, socio-cultural ceremonies help to uphold and maintain the Yoruba customs or traditions over a long period.

Modernity, nevertheless, has an impact on the trade, with notable changes in style and design. Finally, it was found that, while some of the design motifs were symbolic, other motifs, mostly geometric shapes, do not have any meaning other than being elements of design. The results of the interviews of the craftsmen and women reveal that most of the Adire symbols are used strictly in adherence to traditional methods and materials used in art production. In defense of their traditions, the craftsmen and women explained that the Adire motifs mainly in use for dyeing work and adhesion of colours, are almost equally enduring. The results of these interviews revealed that, though people know to appreciate the Adire art visually, most are unaware of its importance, as a cultural heritage. For example, most people could not go beyond expressing their admiration for the art, they saw them only as pieces of decoration beyond which, and they have no value.

Research Question 1: What are the appropriate ways for analysing aesthetics’ concepts?

of the socio-cultural significant of Adire symbols in Southwestern Nigeria?

Table 1: Analysis of respondents’ views on the appropriate concepts analyzing aesthetics’ of the socio-cultural significant of *Adire* symbol in Southwestern Nigeria.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **S/N** | **STATEMENT** | **Extent of agreement** | | | | | **Ef** | **Efx** | **Mn** | **Rnk** | **Rmk** |
| **SA** | **A** | **U** | **SD** | **D** |
| **i.** | There are new socio-cultural motifs and pattern designs in *Adire* fabrics for aesthetic purposes**.** | 35 | 51 | 0 | 1 | 3 | 90 | 384 | 4.27 | 5th | Agreed |
| ii. | *Adire* designers aesthetically and conceptually organized their motifs and patterns in Yoruba land. | 37 | 53 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 90 | 397 | 4.41 | 1st | Agreed |
| iii. | *Adire* symbols served as a means of unity among the various ethnic groups in Yoruba land. | 20 | 61 | 2 | 1 | 6 | 90 | 358 | 3.98 | 7th | Agreed |
| iv. | *Adire* has aesthetic concepts and socio-significance in Yoruba land. | 27 | 51 | 5 | 3 | 4 | 90 | 364 | 4.04 | 6th | Agreed |
| v. | The uniqueness and aesthetic of *Adire* make it special in Yoruba land. | 32 | 58 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 90 | 392 | 4.36 | 3rd | Agreed |
| vi. | *Adire* serve as a major part of resist fabric that constitute a vital part of the material culture of Yoruba people. | 33 | 57 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 90 | 393 | 4.37 | 2nd | Agreed |
| vii. | The meaning and functions of *Adire* motifs and pattern designs are socio-culturally inclined in Yoruba. | 30 | 59 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 90 | 389 | 4.32 | 4th | Agreed |
|  | **Aggregate Mean** |  | | | | | | | **4.25** |  | **Agreed** |

Source: Researcher’s Field Survey, 2020.

In Table 1, the findings from respondents on the appropriate methods for analyzing the aesthetics concept of the significance of *Adire* revealed socio-cultural symbols that respondents agreed that the *Adire* techniques aesthetically conceptualizes the clothes after pattern common in Yoruba (mean 4.41).  Similarly, the conceptualization although significantly influenced by local and global factors, according to respondents who agreed was able to resist a complete overrun of its aesthetic concept (mean = 4.37). Again, in this Table 4.6.5, respondents agreed that the conceptualization of the *Adire* clothes technique is unique to the cultural symbol making the clothes special among the Yoruba.  More so, respondents also agreed that the meaning of the patterns and styles of designs and conceptualization of *Adire* as well as its functionality is culturally inclined to the Yoruba race (mean = 4.32). Hence, respondents agreed that newer motifs, patterns and designs leverage the credentials of this aesthetic purposed by the Yoruba race (mean = 4.27). Consequently, respondents agreed that these aesthetic concepts, patterns and designs have a very important role in Yoruba socio-economic, cultural and political development thus serving as a platform for social identity, unity and integration (mean = 4.04 and 3.98) respectively. Based on the aggregate mean value of 4.25 which is greater than the mean criterion of 3.5, it could be deduced that several factors especially the localized patterns, motifs and designs contributed significantly to the processes used in conceptualizing as well as aesthetically analyzing *Adire* Socio-cultural symbols.

In order to further understand the deduction, a test on the fourth null hypothesis which stated that “there is no significant relationship between appropriate concept analyzing aesthetics’ and the socio-cultural significance of Adire symbol. This hypothesis was tested by cross-tabbing the expressed opinions on appropriate concepts analyzing aesthetics’ of the socio-cultural significant of Adire symbol. In this test, the cumulated frequencies for the views on Adire designers aesthetically and conceptually organized their motifs and patterns in Yoruba land was cross-tabulated with the views on Adire serve as a major part of resist fabric that constitute a vital part of the material culture of Yoruba people respective options for the items were used.

The statistical procedure adopted for the test is the Chi-square and the result is hereby presented below:

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | | | | *Adire* serve as a major part of resist fabric that constitute a vital part of the material culture of Yoruba people. | | | | Total | |
| Agree | Strongly agree | | |
| *Adire* designers aesthetically and conceptually organized their motifs and patterns in Yoruba land. | Agree | | | 53 | 0 | | | 53 | |
| Strongly agree | | | 4 | 33 | | | 37 | |
| Total | | | | 57 | 33 | | | 90 | |
| **Chi-Square Tests** | | | | | | | | |
|  | Value | Df | Asymptotic Significance (2-sided) | | | Exact Sig. (2-sided) | Exact Sig. (1-sided) | |
| Pearson Chi-Square | 74.637a | 1 | .000 | | |  |  | |
| Continuity Correctionb | 70.846 | 1 | .000 | | |  |  | |
| Likelihood Ratio | 92.940 | 1 | .000 | | |  |  | |
| Fisher's Exact Test |  |  |  | | | .000 | .000 | |
| Linear-by-Linear Association | 73.808 | 1 | .000 | | |  |  | |
| N of Valid Cases | 90 |  |  | | |  |  | |
| a. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 13.57. | | | | | | | | |
| b. Computed only for a 2x2 table | | | | | | | | |

From the cross tabulation of questions here, we could see that the value of *x*2 for one degree of freedom at 1 is 0.05. Showing that the calculated value of *x*2 after rate correction is greater than its table value and the result of the calculation does not support the hypothesis. Furthermore, since *x*2 (1, 92.940) =74.637a. From the table, the p-calculated value is less than p-alpha that is 0.05 level of significance (0.000 ≤ 0.05). At an asymmetric significant level of .0.05, the result is said to be statistically significant. A further look at the calculated chi-square *x*2 result of 74.637a with a df = 1 at 0.05 shows a tabulated result of 3.841<74.637a. Therefore, the null hypothesis which stated that there is no significant relationship between appropriate concept analyzing aesthetics’ and the socio-cultural significance of *Adire* symbol is hereby rejected. Thus, from this calculated and tabulated chi-square analysis, it could be deduced that the there is a relationship between appropriate concept analyzing aesthetics’ and the socio-cultural significance of *Adire* symbol significant changes**.**

1. **CONTRIBUTION TO KNOWLEDGE**

The study of the aesthetic concepts and socio-cultural significance of *Adire* in southern western Nigeria contributes to knowledge by enriching art historical scholarship, providing insights into cultural anthropology, documenting and conserving cultural heritage, empowering traditional artisans, fostering interdisciplinary dialogue, and serving as a valuable educational resource for scholarly inquiry.

1. **RECOMMENDATION**

Stakeholders can contribute to the preservation, promotion, and appreciation of the aesthetic concepts and socio-cultural significance of *Adire* in Southern western Nigeria, ensuring its enduring legacy within the cultural landscape

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