

**THE POLITICS OF FASHION AS A SOFT POWER IN INTERNATIONAL  
RELATIONS: FASHION AND TRENDS FROM NIGERIA 1960-1999**

**BY**

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DIPLOMACY.**

**JUNE, 2024**

## **CERTIFICATION**

This is to certify that this research project was carried out by **Arinze Christopher OFODILE** in the Department of History and International Studies, University of Benin, under my supervision.

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**Date:**

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**Date:**

## **DEDICATION**

Dedicated to all Lovers of knowledge and to all Fashion Enthusiasts. That we tell our stories beautifully through Clothing.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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May we reach the end in goodness.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

#### Introduction

Beyond beautiful fabrics, the Nigerian fashion transcends more than just aesthetics. The story of Nigerian Fashion does not begin on modern runway. Its roots go deep into the history of powerful Kingdoms. From the intricately woven clothes of ancient empires to the contemporary designs, Nigerian Fashion has served as a powerful tool for shaping global perceptions of the nation. Taking a look at the vibrant colour characterising the Benin people's outfits, the fine velvet textiles adorning the people, intricate coral beadwork, and luxurious woven cloth, all these was unlike anything the Portuguese had ever seen upon first contact in the 15th century<sup>1</sup>

The Nigerian fashion scene has been a reflection of the nature of the Nigerian political scene, with themes of Colonization, Nationalism, decolonization, and continuous European adaptations as well as political tumults. The topic of fashion being a rich one encompassing a breath of techniques, a myriad of cultural meanings, and the embodiment of countless stories. Fashion doing more than cover of the body, but becoming a means of self-expression. Also, it is the way in which the unequal distribution of power in all societies is constructed, maintained, and expressed as legitimate. This society being either within a state or beyond boundaries of states, in the general international society of states. <sup>2</sup>

This power of fashion mentioned above is obviously not hard but soft. Nye in his book; *Soft Power: The Means Success to in World Politics, Public Affairs*,<sup>3</sup> defined soft power as power that occurs when one country gets another country to want what is wants, to like what it likes and to find her likeable and attractive. Soft power can mean anything from having a vibrant popular culture to symbolic appeals, more to persuade other states to take one's side. It is a great tool that can either compliment or substitute for material resources or hard power mechanisms like military power or economic material resources. It is quite important to note that soft power tries to overcome the limitations of material resources and also amplifies existing material resources.

The rise in the significance of soft power transcends academic circles, penetrating both the cultural and public spheres. Traditionally, realist perspectives dominated international relations, emphasizing factors like military power and economic influence. However, soft power studies offer an alternative lens, acknowledging the importance of cultural exchange, values, and narratives in shaping global perceptions.<sup>4</sup> Soft power studies encourage examining cultural exchange as a form of diplomacy. Giles Gunn, in his book *Culture Wars: The International Relations of Everyday Life*, argues that cultural products and practices can be powerful tools for influencing international relations.<sup>5</sup>

Nigerian fashion serves as a potent tool of soft power. Through the rich heritage embodied in garments like Aso-oke, Agbada and other indigenous fabrics and fashion pieces, Nigerian fashion fosters cultural exchange, bolsters the economy, and shapes a more positive

narrative about the nation on the global stage. Soft power, as theorized by Joseph Nye, refers to a nation's ability to attract and persuade others through its culture, values, and policies. Nigerian fashion serves as a vibrant expression of these elements.

In the talk of decolonisation, Nationalists and intellectuals as well as opinion leaders in new states all agree that the struggle for psychological freedom was, and is more exhausting than that of political freedom. This is so true and can be said true for all expressions of self that are not political, example, fashion. While political independence has been gained, the inferiority or superiority feeling attached to one's heritage cannot be separated from her fashion expression, adoption or abandon. Those that now choose to defy the status quo are then said to be political and radical as they send a strong message. <sup>6</sup>

Nigeria as a state in the international system has, with the use of fashion consciously and unconsciously delved into usage of soft power to hold sway some grounds in the system. This project seeks to explain this field and gain in depth understanding of this power play through clothing. So too, the complex nature made by the uneasy relationships between fashion, and cultures, surfacing from entangled history of Colonisation, decolonisation, Pan Africanism, Trade relations, as well as local political crises common in the political terrain of Nigeria.

## **Aim and Objectives**

The aim of this project research is to analyze how Nigerian fashion served as a tool of soft power in international relations during the period 1960-1999. While the objectives include:

- i. To examine the role of fashion in constructing a national identity for Nigeria after independence.
- ii. To analyze how fashion choices in Nigeria interacted with and potentially resisted lingering colonial influences and cultural exchange.
- iii. To investigate how fashion reflected and potentially challenged social hierarchies in Nigeria during the oil boom and subsequent economic crisis.
- iv. To explore how fashion was used as a tool for political expression and resistance during periods of political unrest in Nigeria.
- v. To analyze how Nigerian fashion adapted to the increasing influence of global trends while maintaining a sense of cultural identity in the era of globalization.

## **Scope of Study**

The project seeks to analyze fashion as a tool of soft power in international relations. It explores how fashion choices in Nigeria reflected and shaped national identity, cultural exchange, social class distinctions, and political expression on the global stage.

Exploring trade policies and political acts all involved in this diplomacy of clothing, the political statements made by politicians/statesmen, important figures, as well as popular culture, the research focuses on the impact of Nigerian fashion on international relations.

Overall, the scope is specific, focusing on Nigeria from 1960-1999, while analyzing the broader concept of soft power through the lens of fashion.

### **Research Methodology**

In a bid to carry out a detailed study, this research was carried out using the historical research methodology. The study is based on visual and data analysis, as well as inputs from previous paper work and sources on related topics.

In this regard, collation and analysis of both primary and secondary materials.

### **Primary Sources**

Primary sources utilized in the course of the research are oral interviews, archival and government materials, fashion magazines and newspapers published during the time under study.

### **Secondary Sources**

Secondary sources which were consulted include textbooks, articles and journals, paper presentations, as well as E-databases of the John Harris Library available for staff and students of the University of Benin. Also, information relevant to the study was gotten from the Internet.

## Literature Review

Certain literatures discuss the topic of the politics of fashion on a regional base involving the whole of Africa. However, drawing from the knowledge existing in them and from other sources defined to Nigeria, this study shall be carried out. Some literature as well exist on the definition of soft power like that of Nye. As well as other materials that analyse the effect of politics of trade policies guiding the various eras.

A cursory look at fashion magazines also gives a pictorial and practical examination on how fashion and fabric as well as its manipulation, have evolved.

Nye in his book *“The Soft power meaning to success in a world politics (2004)”* explore the meaning of soft power. <sup>7</sup> From this book we draw insight into the meaning and definitions of soft power. Also, the resources that bring about soft power. The rise of soft power as a rising element with the rise of the interconnectedness of the world, and the limitations of soft power. In this book, we get a valuable framework for understanding the evolving nature of power right from the 20th century to the 21st century. With the various debates currently on the relevance of the issue of soft power as relates to hard power, the book serves as an emphasis for persuasion, and lens for analyzing international relations, and the complex way fabric and fashion displays itself as a soft power and gains ground in this context.

Henne Peter J in his article *“What we mean when we talk about soft power”* argue on the term soft power, as overly broad and ambiguous leading to confusion in both scholarly and secular world. <sup>8</sup> He tries to make clear this ambiguity for clear analysis by treating the

vagueness of the term and the categorizing of diverse means of influence of soft power as wrong. He proposes a framework for categorizing all cultural symbolic instruments. Though this articles, Henne highlights the limitation of this current conceptualization; offers a more refined vocabulary for discussing non material source of power, encourages also a critical and nuanced approach to analyzing these instruments international relations. Henne's article is a valuable critique to the current state of the soft power discourse. This framework prioritizing an avenue for a more precise and clear understanding of non-material sources of power in the complex system of states. It Provides justification on the categorization of fashion and clothing as a soft power.

*Fashioning Africa: Power and the politic of dress* by Jean Allman is another valuable literature in this research Jean Allman in the book through a historical method presents a case to the political impact and expression on, and through clothing in different sections of Africa.<sup>9</sup> The traditional African textile as they circulate in western context, politics of identity both in African and in diaspora, how political and material ties bind people and are exposed through fashion. While this book explores Africa as a whole, we are concerned with the discusses involving Nigeria. Jean Allman's book give as great help in understanding how clothing has helped people express their political inclinations and social judgements.

The lecture given by Christine Checinske at Gresham College, London, "*The politics of fabric and fashion in Africa 1960 till date*" helped this study find a middle ground. <sup>10</sup> She states: " The unmistakable zest for life, the ground swelling creativity coupled with

economic, political will as well as cultural admiration with various phases over the years, provided the perfect interest for the building of a modern fashion industry in Africa." She is conscious that we should not always see African clothing as extreme and portray African fashion as always out to give a statement or as a message either in the fight of colonialism or pan Africanism or even political statement inwards. She refuses this that sometimes, African fashion just wants to beautify the body and nothing more than that. In her lecture though finding a middle ground, gives light on issues surrounding African fashion i.e., decolonization, Pan-Africanism, struggle for rebirth and upholding of African heritage. This she does with some historical references to African locally produced fabric and how they have made statements on the global fashion scene.

*Trade Liberalisation and Trade Flows in Nigeria. An Aggregated Analysis* by Anionwu Carol examines the impact of trade liberalization and trade flows on Nigeria economic growth from 1980. <sup>11</sup> Since this research involves analysis of trade politics and act throughout the specific time under study, this book helps shed light on the impact of trade liberalization and trade flows in Nigerian import tapping, import quotes, export texts are statistically significant in explaining the Nigerian economy. While this book is broad and encompassing all sections relating to trade analysis, from 1980-2017, we are only concerned with our period under study and as well as well specifics including do fabrics or fashion. Trade is a very rooted part of every nation's economy and by extension, foreign policy, so the analysis of trade given by Anionwu carol is very important.

*The Political Economy of Nigeria* edited by I. William Zartman treats topics including the income distribution and politics in Nigeria (an important help in discussing social class distribution in Nigeria), also the popular classes and the oil boom in Nigeria.<sup>12</sup> Lastly another topic that concern us in this book is Nigeria and foreign business as well as foreign policies. This book shed light to some sub topics which this research is concerned with. The foreign economic relations and Nigerian's economic condition inwards all affect in one way or another the politics and evolvement of Nigerian fashion and trends.

Added to the line of literatures consulted in this study is "*Fashion and Post-Colonial Critique*" by Elke Gaugele and Monica Tilton (Eds).<sup>14</sup> This book explores post-colonial African fashion, reorienting fashion beyond Europe, remodeling African fashion for the global and market and discourse on textiles. I analyze the various textiles and fashion of various cultures in Africa and how some Fashion bodies have picked a few innovations from the African fashion scene and implemented into western Fashion Scene. While this book deals with a broad analysis of the whole of African, we are concerned mainly with the areas that point to Nigeria, or relatively affect Nigerian fashion.

*"Africa in Europe and Europe in African reassessing the cultural legacy"* edited by Yolandi Aixela-cabre, studies the Afro-European and Euro African past and present from an interdisciplinary and comparative perspective.<sup>15</sup> It exemplifies the extent to which the histories of Europe and African are intertwined. How mutual experience and imagination have affected how cultural heritage and legacy are conceived and thought of, as well as

memories and sociopolitical experience. Basically, comparing Euro African and African-European realities.

In defining luxury, during one of the eras, we borrow the words of J.N. Kapfert in his book “*The Luxury Strategy*” to define this (sometimes) misused word. He defines luxury as “.... a complex and multifaceted concept”<sup>16</sup> rarity and exclusivity, high quality and craftsmanship, heritage and storytelling, emotional experience, culture and social meaning, His book helps us define luxury in this study as at some point here, the question of luxury arises.

*A cultural History of Dress and Fashion; In the Age of an Empire* published by Bloomsbury and edited by Denise Amy Baxter gives a detailed analysis of how dress in the West has evolved even down to the modern times and gives us an insight into the western perspective.

<sup>17</sup> How they define belief, body gender and sexuality, ethnicity and even status and class. This helps us give a detailed comparison with their fashion and how it has influenced the Nigerian fashion scene.

Newspaper report and fashion magazines also give great insight for the study of the research topic.

## **CHAPTERISATION**

### **Chapter One: BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY**

This chapter is the introductory part of the study. This section consists of the Introduction to this study, Aim and Objectives, Scope of Study, Research Methodology, Literature Review, as well as the chapterisation of this study.

### **Chapter Two: ASSERTING A NATIONAL IDENTITY AND CULTURAL DISTINCTIVENESS THROUGH FASHION**

This chapter discusses National Identity and Cultural resistance. It first Analyses how post-independence fashion embraced traditional textiles and silhouettes, reflecting cultural pride and a distinct Nigerian identity. It explores the role of fashion designers in shaping this national identity. And on cultural Resistance, it discusses how fashion choices in the 1960s served as a form of resistance against lingering colonial influences and specific garments becoming symbols of this resistance.

### **Chapter Three: FASHION AS AN EXPRESSION OF SOCIAL STATUS AND ITS ADAPTATION TO ECONOMIC CRISIS.**

This chapter discusses the social class distinction expressed through fashion in the 1970s and 80s,, and fashion adaptations to economic crisis of the 1980s. How the oil boom of 1970s led to increased class distinction and increased Western-influenced styles, how

local tailors and designers catered to different social classes and how trade policies of these periods impact availability or scarcity of fabrics both locally produced or imported.

#### **Chapter Four: FASHION AS A TOOL POLITICAL EXPRESSION AND GLOBAL EXCHANGE**

This chapter explores how fashion was used to express political views and resistance during periods of political unrest in Nigeria from 1960 - 1999. How specific garments or colors become symbols of protest and how fashion designers become voices for political movements. This might be a public act or singular act by statesmen or diplomats in the conduct of international relations.

Also, in the face of Globalisation and cultural exchange increasing in 1990s, how Nigerian fashion adapted to the increasing influence of global trends. Discussing how local designers incorporated global elements while maintaining a sense of cultural identity. Also, how trade agreements also affected the fashion industry's ability to access global markets and influence international perceptions.

#### **Chapter Five: CONCLUSION**

In this final chapter, the research is concluded providing a summary of all that has been discussed thus far, and discussing the fashion legacies of this period on the 21st century Nigerian fashion scene. Concluding with a strong note on how the Nigerian Fashion has

played a soft power role in the politics of Nigeria within, and in international relations, as well as giving recommendations to be noted for a stronger Nigerian fashion scene.

## Endnotes

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## CHAPTER TWO

### ASSERTING CULTURAL IDENTITY AND CULTURAL DISTINCTIVENESS THROUGH FASHION

#### Introduction

Identity means a state of having unique identifying characteristics held by no other person or thing. This means individual characteristics by which a person or thing is recognized<sup>1</sup>. The national identity of Nigeria, which has been influenced by various elements of Colonialism, Nationalism, Post-Colonialism, and the emergence of cultural icons and fashion designers, has had various shifts over the years. Various cultural and ethnic groups and regions within the country have unique dresses, attire, and textiles. Before 1960, these have been a form of separate cultural identity but with the emergence of the nation and her independence they have evolved to be forms of national identity.<sup>2</sup>

Upon Colonialism, Western/Elizabethan clothing styles were imposed on Nigerians. In nationalist struggles, nationalists abandoned European clothing and began wearing indigenous clothing (most were Yoruba clothings as most early nationalists were Yoruba) all to prove the nationalist identity.<sup>3</sup> A practical example is Mrs. Fumilayo Ransome Kuti a pioneer of the Abeokuta Women's Union. She understood that dress was a political tool and only wore the Yoruba dress – Gele (Head tie), Iro (Wrapper), and Buba (Blouse) and only spoke Yoruba to the white authorities while representing the Women.<sup>4</sup>

In the Post-Colonial era, there was a resurgence of interest in pressuring and promoting indigenous clothing. A practical example exists in the uniform worn by military men. Before independence, they put on khaki and there was some control as to what ceremonial robes they wore. Including the uniforms worn by colonial administrators and clerical officers.<sup>5</sup> However, after independence, the color was changed to green, and other changes like collar style were made. A shift from military to civilian rule has also been symbolized through clothing in the term, From Khaki to Agbada. This symbolism expresses the change in political power. In all these, there has been a beautiful blend of Western elements to Nigerian aesthetics.

Active effort was made by fashion designers and fashion icons like Fela Kuti, Christy Essien Igbokwe, Independence nationalist, as well as music and movies icon to shape the fashion identity of the nation. Fashion through the era has emerged as a powerful tool in asserting national pride and projecting Nigeria on the global stage. Showcasing Nigerian's uniqueness and aesthetics as well as cultural heritage through clothing, Nigeria has been able to shape positive international perception of the country.

### **Historical Discourse of Nigerian Fashion Scene**

Nigeria with diverse cultures, traditions and people all having unique fashion and styles have evolved over the years reflecting a complex history. Cultural integration as well as societal changes. In Pre-Colonial times, the clothing of the people reflected the identities, societal construct as well as climate. The climate of Nigeria, mostly warm has resulted in

light clothing. The earliest forms of clothing were bark clothes, furs, skins and hides, while the body was adorned with beautification marks and colour pigments.<sup>6</sup> Later these people evolved to start using woven textiles and dye fabrics for clothing. Portrayal of status, mark rituals and traditions and distinguish passage from one phase to another was mostly the goal of clothing, as well as distinguishing one tribe from another. In some traditions young women wore only skirts leaving their breast bare, and upon marriage wore full body wraps.<sup>7</sup> In portraying status the quality and colour depicted this. The fabrics used, whether linen, cotton or silk depicted status of the wearer too.<sup>8</sup>

Trade around the 15<sup>th</sup> century saw the arrival of beads, shells, buttons and specially woven fabrics and they were incorporated into local fabrics and localized.<sup>9</sup> Dying of indigo fabrics continued and the weaving techniques and colour mix of fabrics indicated a person's status and socio-economic standing. So, one thing is certain, a hot climate meant light clothing, seemingly bare bodies, but the clothing still depicted various messages intended by the wearer. Various cultures in Nigeria have fabrics which have cut out a unique identity for them. These fabrics came into use at some point either through early European trade and contact, or through the long network of the trans-saharan trade and in a few cases, through harnessing the local material and local technology.

Colonialism brought a different wave to Nigerian fashion. It saw the infusion of Western style and fabrics to the general Nigerian indigenous cultures. It also saw the upholding of

Western clothing as true and higher. Colonialism was not only in administration but in other spheres like clothing.

Firstly, there was an introduction of fabrics that were not traditionally used in Nigerian clothing. Late 19<sup>th</sup> century saw the introduction of Dutch wax trades to West Africa. Eventually they got incorporated into the making of Nigerian attires. The use of lace as well was initially brought in by Europeans during the colonial era. This lace has been used for various traditional attires. These influx of European fabrics on the Nigerian scene saw a birth of unique styles not certainly new but having a cultural blend. The above showcased the integration of Western and Nigerian but also saw some abandon and derogation of Nigerian clothing. Missionaries and schools tried to regulate the clothing and uphold the supremacy of European clothing styles. Not minding our hot weather, clothing that encouraged heat was used. Traditional dressing was not allowed in institutions and those in civil services were allowed to dress only in Elizabethan style. This was a form of Colonialism that extended to clothing.

Also, textile mills established by European Authorities in Nigeria produced textiles that were more focused on export rather than local consumption and this discouraged local production. All these made local producers unable to compete socially and economically. All these politics continued and upon independence the narrative changed, even though for a little while.

Post-Independence saw a different game. ‘The idea that fashion might be a self-defining art form became a reality once more’.<sup>10</sup> Cultural pride was resurged. Statesmen began (though first in independence struggles) and continued putting on indigenous Nigeria wears on daily basis and not only on special occasions. The likes of Nnamdi Azikiwe, Tafawa Balewa and in the 1970s to 1980s, icons like Fela Kuti continued to push the pride of indigenous wears.

Politicians in election times wore the traditional outfits of the region he was campaigning in. This was to gain acceptance and align with their identity in order to gain their trust. These began because Nigerian politics began on a regional and ethnic base and this is still applicable in present day.<sup>11</sup> There was also a positive change to the textile industry. With a focus on promoting locally made fabrics, there was encouragement of incorporating traditional fabrics by designers and this imparted in the economy. From the 1960s, there was a continuous fusion of local and Western style on both fronts. While Nigerians applied Western styles to locally produced fabrics, designers abroad consciously infused African elements in their designs.<sup>12</sup>

In the 60s, women wore long dresses and hats. Styles influenced by print and pattern in the 70s and movie influenced Oleku style brought about bright colours, American hip hop influenced capris pants, miniskirts and scousers(trouser and skirt sewn together), the bongo trouser, suits for females and males, cross no gutter(a local name for tight skirts), narrow ankle trousers, and miniskirts all came on board at different times from the 60s to the 90s. Nevertheless, amongst a few educated and designers, there was a push for a ‘Nigerianess’ to

whatever style in vogue. Most of the people belonging to the popular classes most times relied on local traditional fashion wears.<sup>13</sup>

Beyond independence and the cultural renaissance it brought, the oil boom of the 1970's brought changes to fashion. This newly found wealth saw Nigerians could afford high luxury goods and import of Western fashion items. The popular class divide was more visible in this era and those who were of high status could easily get luxury goods from fashion brands in the West.<sup>14</sup>

Military rule had some impact to fashion. Simplicity and monotonous became a thing during the military era of the 80's. The use of the Khaki became even more common during this era even amongst civilians. One can see that from independence to military and economics, every era had a niche on fashion on the Nigerian scene.

### **Traditional Nigerian Attires**

Nigeria, without doubt is a state with diverse and multiple ethnic groups each with its own unique traditional clothing styles. They include;

**Benin Attires:** Benin attires are quite symbolic and colours matter, all reaching back to antiquity. With one the richest dress cultures in Africa. With colonial influence it became a dressing of shy sense (in light note) amongst elite culture as colonial masters made their own dress style preferable. The Benin culture though prides itself as a very proud culture. With the renaissance of culture after independence and till contemporary times the dress has not

changed much from what it is known for even down to 600 years ago. It has fused and imbibed some Western elements but maintained its core essence.<sup>15</sup> The men typically wear a white top paired with a white or multi-colored stripe or plain red fabric and adorned with skull size hats.

Women tied wrappers made from fabrics as velvets and with Post-Colonial effect, lace and George. A beaded cape known as Ewu-Ivie as well, adorning their hair with beads and hair brass. The higher in social status, the more elaborate the costume is. Like the Oba of Benin's attire consisting of coral and ivory beads along with the significant items. The chiefs also wore elaborate clothing and the apparel worn depended on the festival or the motive for the gathering. In all, the Benin attire has been worn for many years even down to first contact with the West.<sup>16</sup> Although it has been influenced to imbibe new accessories, it has remained largely unchanged over time.

### **Agbada**

This flowing robe that is worn by men of various tribes in Nigeria. It consists of a wide sleeved tunic, an inner kaftan, trouser or a short and a hat. It is made with fabrics such as Aso-Oke/Asofi and other fabrics made of cotton including laces have been used over time. While it is known to be predominantly worn by the Yorubas, the Hausa (known to them as Babanriga), Fulani and other ethnic groups in Nigeria like the Etsako, Tiv, Nupe etc. have also included the Agbada style.

The spread to Hausas is owned to the spread of Islam by Jihads led by Usman Dan Fodo in the late 18<sup>th</sup> early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries.<sup>17</sup> Over time by the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, non-Muslim peoples too had started using the Agbada as a form of cultural dress and identity. Worn with intricate and elaborate woven thread work. The elaborateness of the design proved prestige and status of the wearer. The adoption of Agbada by other ethnic groups is also a product of social integration amongst ethnic groups in Nigeria before Colonialism. Trade networks between Nupe and Yoruba weavers also contributed greatly to the spread and adoption of Agbada across Nigeria.

### **Kaftan:**

This long robe-like garment is worn by men in Nigeria cultures and each culture has what they call this kaftan. The Igbos for example, before colonial influence wore other locally produced fabrics tied round around their waist and taken over the shoulder. But with Western influence, have evolved to have a kaftan made with a fabric known as the Isi-Agu.

Those who put on this Agbada also wear a kaftan under and made with whatever local fabrics that indicated one's social status worn over a wrapper tied over the waist. The Urhobos and other Niger Delta group have a unique Kaftan worn over a wrapper tied round the waist. The kaftan is quite popular amongst the different people of Nigeria though each has its own unique design and name, also with varying degree of fitting on the body.

### **Indigenous Fabrics**

Fabrics play a critical role in the traditional attires. They include Aso-Oke, Adire, Ankara, Akwete, A'nger amongst others.

**Aso-oke:** is used by the Yoruba and used for men's Agbada, Kaftan, women's Iro and Buba as well as Danshiki. It has come to be known as a special fabric and an identity amongst the Yorubas. With a technique of making involving preparing of yarn made from natural materials such as onion skin soft bark there after rolled into bobbins. With the unique style involving threads being woven into the fabrics by a pick and pick technique. The heaviness and colourful pattern depicted the type of ceremony (whether casual or formal) to be used for as well as status of the wearer.<sup>18</sup>

**Adire:** emerged from South-West Nigeria and has come to be a symbol of identity and tradition. Designs on Adire fabrics sometimes hold meaning, and sometimes simply exist as artistic fruits. It has been a powerful tool of cultural expression amongst the ethnic group. It has with its sustainable production process over the years, imparted in the economy of the people of Western Nigeria and Nigeria as a whole with its acceptances after independence on the global stage.<sup>19</sup> Made from various processes ranging from dipping the fabric in dye or tying the fabric with the dye poured on it, to resist method as seen fit by the maker.

### **Akwete**

Before the Isi-agu which is a result of early Western influences in Igbo land, the Akwete fabric is a traditional hand-woven textile produced in Igboland, and made in present day Abia State, Nigeria. Existing since at least the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. It is made from fibres such

as sisal, hemp, raffia, and cotton. With the many motifs, it gained prominence and a distinct identity as well as commodity for a market. The Akwete has also evolved as a result of weaving technique learnt from early European contact. The Akwete actively gives gender roles in that, while women weave, men construct the looms (a wooden device used to hold cloth for weaving). Used by women as wraps or loin clothes, men also use it on ceremonial purpose. While over a hundred motifs are known by the weavers, only three or four are simultaneously used on one piece of cloth. Motifs being inspired often by traditional beliefs, legends, common tools and household items, plants and general items found in the society. The Akwete is known as one of those fabrics that give a distinct cultural identity to the Igbo ethnic group in Nigeria.<sup>20</sup>



**Figure 1. Display of Akwete Fabrics on the wall and a woman weaving one.**

## **Okene**

A woven cloth known to the Ebira people. Ebira women have been weaving other cloth for centuries known locally by the name Itenochi. The variety of the threads used to weave the cloth gives rise to the variety of names given to it. Like the Aches Ohu derived from the Ohu thread. The Aches silk is derived from silk thread. A beautiful fabric known as a symbol of economic importance, and distinct cultural identity.<sup>21</sup>

## **The A'nger Fabric**

This white and black fabric has come to hold strong significance culturally and socially and a sense of unique identity to the Tiv people of North Central Nigeria. The fabric can be used to make Agbada, Danshiki, Kaftan, or a blouse and wrapper for women. The traditional hand-woven white and black yarn to mimic the zebra signifies the restful nature of the people and symbolizes honesty and sincerity. Amongst the various 12 types of Tiv textiles added to the A'nger, they each carry their own cultural significance and mark social hierarchy and occasions. Amongst all these, the A'nger is the most special fabrics and is used even to decorate honored non-Tiv individuals in the community. The A'nger no doubt has come to symbolize a strong identity amongst the Tiv people.<sup>22</sup>

## **A Deliberate Shift from European Fabrics to Local Fabrics**

The shift to local fabrics was a deliberate one and also multifaceted, driven by combination of economic, political and cultural factors to preserve cultural identity, support local

industries, and assert Nigeria's place in the global textile market. The 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries saw the influx of large quantities of clothing into West Africa British Colonies, Nigeria included, in a bid to meet varied taste of clientele within the region.<sup>23</sup> The various factors that influenced the change include;

Preservation of cultural identity: A drive to preserve the cultural identity of the nation through fashion can only be done by shifting towards local fabrics. Our fabrics Aso Oke, Adire, Akwete etc. are deeply rooted in our cultural heritage. By embracing these locally produced fabrics, Nigeria can truly showcase her cultural identity and preserve it too.

The economic implication is another significant factor during the preference of local fabrics. British colonial policies had significantly undermined local textile production in Nigeria. Favouring import of cheap European fabrics. There was a decline in traditional fabrics production techniques and even loss of skilled artisans in the field. With this it was a necessity for local industries to be supported and local textile production encouraged. This in the long run would help the economy of the country.

Policy Makers of Nigeria enacted various policies that ensured the shift to local fabrics. They include;

First, a key initiative which is the establishment of the Nigeria Textile Manufacturers Association (NTMA) in 1967. This establishment was aimed at coordinating efforts of local textiles producers to promote the use of indigenous fabrics. They worked as well to improve the quality and design of Nigerian textile, working to make them more appealing to

domestic and international consumers. The ban of textile imports after the 1967-1970 civil war prompted more investors to enter the textile industry. The body served of a regulatory body to ensure that textile made in Nigeria were of good quality and encourage patronage and acceptance locally and internationally.<sup>24</sup>

Also, there were restrictions on various import into the country. Although they were not directly linked with textile and fabrics, the effort was on the long run to boost all industries within the state. One of them was the Isi strategy import substitution industrialization (ISI) aimed at imposing higher tariffs on imported goods in a bid to promote the growth of infant industries. There was also the indigenization program of the 1970s aimed at encouraging Nigeria ownership and control of local industries. All these were aimed at supporting Nigerian industries and in the long run, had positive impact on the textiles industry.

Beyond legal and political acts done, the media has also sought to promote local attires and influenced an abandon of European textiles. Tsv shows like Zeb Ejiro's "The village Headmaster" which first aired in 1968, check mate first aired in 1997, and others have promoted locally produced fabrics and made them appealing to the populace. Nurturing the idea that television and culture are symbiotic bed fellows, these television channels try to be functional in promoting Nigeria culture.<sup>25</sup>

### **The Role of Fashion Designers and Icons in Shaping the Fashion Identity of the Nation**

In shaping the fashion identity of Nigeria after independence fashion designers and cultural icons had some role to play. "The choice of clothing can indeed be a part of diplomatic

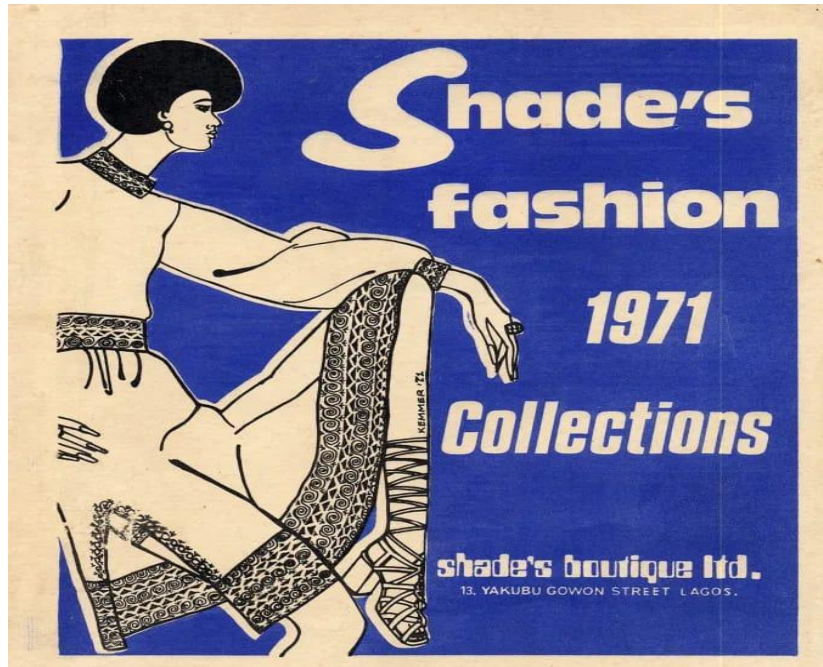
tactics”<sup>26</sup> and in the grand scheme shape perceptions both internally and externally. Diplomacy is carried out either through formal process by trained diplomats or informally consciously and unconsciously through icons in the society. These icons are cultural icons shape perceptions within the state. Some fashions designers and icons in Nigeria have also shaped the fashion identity of the state. These icons include Folashade Thomas, Fela, Kuti, and Nigerian politicians like Nnamdi Azikwe, Tafawa Balewa, Okotie Eboh amongst others.

### **Folashade Thomas**

She is an icon recognized both by Nigerian and by Europeans. She moved from Lagos to London in 1953 initially planning to be a nurse, but changed her mind upon getting to London and falling in love with the city’s fashion. After studying fashion in London, she returned and built her own cloth factory; Maison shade, later Shade Boutiques. In the 1960s her shop was known as a go-to place for contemporary fashion and she was known particularly for using traditional Nigeria textiles. She used textiles like the Aso-oke and Adire to make her designs and also made adjustments to the male Agbada to fit women more and invented the boubou for women. In her bid to uphold our Nigerian style and still learn from a new culture, she said; “.....I would look at the European skirt and then I would put it up against, in mind, the Yoruba Iro.....”. Both clothe a women’s lower half...Both styles had something to learn from the other”.<sup>27</sup>

Shade, so into the love and projection of Nigeria and identity said; “In the 50s and 60s there was a kind of confusion about our identity. Everything Western was praised and nobody

seemed to care about our own indigenously produced materials. I just never felt that way. So many things the world enjoyed came from Africa. I think it's time they stop pretending that they don't get so many ideas for us".<sup>28</sup> Her reevaluations of indigenous fabrics and silhouettes combined with the spirit of independence for many African nations and women, symbolizing an affirmation of African Identities. Her efforts through fashion gave credence to black pride and creativity. Shade stood out insisting on using iconic Nigerian fabrics. It is noted that shade's clientele included high status society women as well as Europeans. This showed her acceptance of both sides and in turn it being appreciated by the other side. Her 1971 collection showcase received recognition both in Nigeria, London and New York. Such designer and icon like her did help shape the fashion identity of Nigeria after independence. Being appreciated within and outside the country for upholding the dignity and values of our indigenous fabrics while still marrying elements of the West to our local fashion.



**Figure 2. Folashade's 1971 Collection's Advert**

### **Fela Kuti**

“Africa hot, I like am so. I know what to wear but my friends don't know. Him put him socks, him put him shoe, him put him pant, him put him singlet. Him put him trouser, him put him shirt. Him put him tie him put him coat. Him come cover all with him hat. Him be gentlemen. Him go sweat all over, him go faint like that, him go smell like shit him go piss for body, him no go know. Me I no be gentleman like that”.<sup>29</sup>

The above is the lyrics of a song titled; Gentle Man. For him there was no pride in conforming to Western standards of dressing even when it was not favourable to his climate

condition. The lyrics “I no be gentlemen” “I be African man original” painted the African man and his dress sense as legitimate and true and not subject to the gentlemen dress sense of the white man. Beyond his song lyrics were his actions and dress sense extended to those around him.

Fela Kuti Queens, the 27 women he married in a single ceremony in the 1970s beyond his personal taste, was a statement not to be over looked. The beaded braids, hair wraps, and elaborate body paints by all means defied Eurocentric standards of beauty.<sup>30</sup> Fela is an activist who fought the government and the West with his music, and realized above all that the politics of his body was important. He painted his body with Afrocentric designs, wore bright colours, and used Ankara to make his pants and jump suits - A Statement that meant a marriage of cultures. Fela is an icon that influenced the fashion identity of Nigeria and his legacy has extended to present day. With pants like the bell bottom, head gear and other intricate body paints made popular by him.

### **Okotie Eboh**

“Power is constituted, articulated, contested and represented through dress code. Making dress a compelling political language”.<sup>30</sup> One icon who understood this very well is Chief Okotie Eboh an Itsekiri-Urhobo Politician. He served as the federal Minister of Labour and Social Welfare (1955-1957) and first Nigerian Minister of finance (1957-1966). He was a local shoe manufacturer beyond politics and someone of his status encouraged Nigerians to pursue Nigerian made shoes, through his enterprise. He was seen as Nigeria’s most

flamboyant politician. Given the nickname “Omimi-Ijoh, Ejoh bilele, translated as the man with long feature and flowing wrappers”.<sup>31</sup> Chief Okotie Eboh was one of those politicians, who showed that the indigenous fashion of Nigeria cultures could be flamboyant and beautiful. He was most seen with wrapper, a loose-fitting Kaftan and matching hat. Sometimes this wrapper over flowered into a train and needed a bearer behind him to hold the edges. With an important figure like Okotie Eboh flanking the indigenous fashion, it contributed in asserting the fashion identity of Nigeria even to the shores of Europe.



**Figure 3. Chief Okotie Eboh in his long wrapper**

### **Nnamdi Azikiwe**

Nnamdi Azikiwe was a pan Africanist and a prominent African personality popularly called the Zik of Africa.<sup>32</sup> He was a foremost nationalist in Africa and in the independence and Pan African struggle preached about the African personality and the marriage of the old and new

world. He is mostly remembered for his contributions to Independence struggles without much consideration to his fashion. Nevertheless, he matched his words and struggle with his choice of dressing. Known for wearing the Agbada, and matching cap most of the times, his philosophical ideas and actions helped shape the fashion identity of Nigeria on a large scale.

### **Tafawa Balewa**

Tafawa Balewa is a significant icon in the political realm of Nigeria post-independence. His input in the independence struggles and emerging to be the first prime minister can only buttress how his choices would only send signals to Nigeria and the international community consciously or unconsciously. His choice of the Babanriga and the Alasho turban depicting dressing of many Northerners shaped in the international community a sense of fashion identity of Nigeria. His contribution to the formation of organization of African unity, negotiation between Moise Tshombe and the Congolese authorities during the Congo crisis of 1960-1963. Such great icon with influence beyond Nigeria surely would not be taken lightly in his political statements in this narrative of dress and fashion styles.<sup>33</sup>

### **Media and Publication that Helped Shaped the Fashion Identity of the Nation**

Media, print, electronic media is an important segment of society that helps mirror identity and shape this identity in turn. Mingyen Liu tell us “... the media has a lot of influence on what reality is, and can define our perception and influence our belief”.<sup>34</sup> We understand that our identity is shaped with the interaction with people and this media has founded platforms for people to give and receive signals, to communicate and interact. The Nigeria media has

been used to influence the popular art forms of Nigeria and transform our cultural impact of Nigerian cultures to the global village.

Various media actually sought to influence the narrative of Nigerian fashion and the likes of the pilot owned by Nnamdi Azikiwe though political still actually pushed for a Nigerian to every sphere. Amongst the various print media that sought to shape the fashion identity of Nigeria, Fashion magazines stands out and to be discussed here is one named DRUM.

## **DRUM**

In 1951, Drum was established in South Africa. It enjoyed a great success and is acclaimed as a driving force in pushing black culture in South African culture. It's expansion to Nigeria is the most successful and profitable venture of the magazine in late 1951. Its contents were greatly accepted by Nigerians and it gained popularity. Although this took a long journey in Nigeria it had correspondence in Kaduna, Calabar and Kano. It had articles about the night life of Lagos. Juju and African religion and other sociological topics. It featured articles from icons like Wole Soyinka, Chinua Achebe and even Fela Kuti. These icons were pro Nigerian in their ideologies and definitely infused this is their interview as well as articles. Drum's influence in the country is seen as remarkable. Selling about 14,500 copies in country that had a literacy level (at the early Presence in Nigeria) at an estimation of 49.1% in urban areas and as low as 6 -10% in rural areas at the time. This high reach of drums magazine enabled it to have some influences in shaping this identity of Nigerians.

Not minding the setback of the magazine, and the political games she sometimes played before her decline, the role of Drums in influencing the fashion identity of the country cannot be over emphasised.<sup>35</sup>

Surely, besides Drum, there were various other magazine that joined the chorus of Pan Africanism and independence shaping the fashion identity of Nigeria, through emancipation not just in politics, but in mind and its expression through fashion.



**Figure 4. Drum Nigeria Edition 1969**

## **Nigeria's Fashion as a Soft Power in Enhancing Her Identity.**

Soft power, Peter S. Henne helps us clarify that, “it is a tool that can either complement or substitute for material resources and is only one among several cultural-symbolic instruments of power that use ideology and culture to advance a state’s interest”.<sup>36</sup> This explains that soft power fills in the gaps or adds up to the true nature of power. Discussions about China or former President Trump being called upon to embrace soft power in his foreign policy of James Starvidis gallery for a soft power approach to ISIS in present day all prove that soft Power is truly a dimension of power that should not be neglected. Two things are sure with soft power. It complements and also its substitutes for material resources. In understanding soft power, one must know that firstly, soft power could arise from and simplify material resources, complementing and substituting for a lack. Secondly, in understanding of soft power, since power is measured in relation to other states it should be clear when a state draws on cultural elements. A state could draw on cultural elements, to integrate or fragment intentional action or diffuse relations. By integration, it means “efforts to maintain and expand joint action” while fragmentation involves efforts at disrupting or preventing joint actions. States may use cultural instruments of power for various causes. However, in the talk of soft power, it is a diffuse instrument of power. State employs soft power to integrate intentional action to make other states like and to what action it wants. This mounting of soft power is built up through culture, intentional aid efforts and public diplomacy.<sup>37</sup>

Nye simplified it as the ability of a state to make other states want what it wants, like what it likes, and ability to do this through attraction rather than force or coercion.<sup>38</sup>

Soft power can be drawn from culture and a major part of it is fashion. The Nigerian Fashion has been a potent tool for image construction and has been involved in navigating the state-to-state relations of Nigeria in ways that fosters attraction and trust. After independence there was a great call for industrialization and the promotion of locally made goods. This industrialization wave attracted foreign investors to the fabrics and clothing industry. Making textile and fashion contribute about 10% of Nigeria's GDP in the 1960s to 1970s, although this met a fall in the 1980s. It was the beautiful aesthetics of Nigeria fashion and the Nigerian indigenous fabrics that first attracted all such investors and with the economic opportunities quite enormous. This journey of textile industries gave signs of early fashion expertise. Folashade Thomas had a clientele in London and other countries. This meant Nigerian fashion attracted them and boosted the image of Nigeria products beyond the shores of Nigeria.

With both media, icons and general government policies supporting fashion of the nation, and even regulation of the Fashion Designers Association established in 1989, the image of the country has been put in positive light and aided economic growth and in some ways mental and body emancipation. The inputs of FADAN in ensuring a unified and healthy cultural identity too cannot be forgotten for they boost the soft power of the country. Now Nigeria's soft power resources, fashion included has raised Nigeria's regional power and

status. Nigeria's proper utilization of this soft power is still in question as there is a wonder if it is just mere illusion or has some potential<sup>39</sup>. Whatever the case may be involved in, in raising the image of the country, some conscious efforts could be employed by policy makers in constitution of foreign policies.

## **Conclusion**

Nigeria fashion has served as a distinctive identity. Evolving long before colonial times, various ethnic groups have created a niche for themselves, expressing status, climate, passage of status, wealth, and various other messages, not forgetting that sometimes they exist as just beautiful clothes and nothing more. With Colonialism came a shift where education and service meant abandon of the indigenous clothing styles. Even with this new trend some individuals defied this and dared flaunt their indigenous clothing. Such were mostly activist and nationalist. After Colonialism there was a conscious effort by the media and politicians as well as fashion and celebrity icons. Through their everyday actions they helped shape the fashion identity of this nation. While it is true that total emancipation and a true national identity expressed through fashion has not been achieved even in modern day, the efforts of nationalist, politicians and icons in shaping an identity through 1960 - 1999 cannot be dismissed. As through this, the image of the nation in these times gained assertiveness. Fashion being a product of culture and a source of soft power was at this time consciously and unconsciously utilized to attract and boost the identity of Nigeria. The fashion identity of Nigeria through 1960 -1999 awakened from the deep sleep Colonialism

put her. While more effort needs to be put in this age to gain more grounds, the assertive nature of the politics of fashion of this time played a good start to this game and crated for Nigeria an identity in which the modern Nigeria thrives on.

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## CHAPTER THREE

### FASHION AS AN EXPRESSION OF SOCIAL STATUS AND ITS ADAPTATION TO ECONOMIC CRISIS

#### Introduction

Nigerian indigenous fashion from earliest times has been social marker indicating wealth, rite of passage, gender, identity, and importantly in this discourse, social status. This power of fashion to indicate status is not peculiar to just Nigeria but must cultures of the world, as clothing allows people to be recognised as members of a specific group, position or rank and embodiment of wealth and taste.<sup>1</sup> During the period of 1960 – 1999 the fashion of Nigeria was impacted by the changing dynamic of Nigeria’s economic fluctuations. The oil boom first led the trend. With the oil boom came the influx of clothing and consumer goods of every type.<sup>2</sup> Nigeria began to benefit in terms of trade and capitalism greatly. This newly found prosperity bought the rise of a middle class who sought to express their new identity and class through fashion. Affiliations with luxury brands became the hit, as well as high-end attires to signal affluence and prestige.

In the 1980s and 1990s, economic crisis and recession as well as the Structural Adjustment Program disrupted this trend. Economic turbulence, some perceived to have some impact on fashion saw Nigerians adjust to locally produced alternatives and second-hand clothing. Others are of the opinion that this addiction to high taste fashion was not disturbed by economy as Nigerian adjusted. Designers sought ways to cater for the needs of Nigerians in

keeping with various trends. With this play of politics and fashion as well as economic ups and downs, this chapter seeks to discuss the nation's navigation of prosperity and hardships, as well as trends that arose from all these. Expressing therein, the boarder connection of all these sections of society.

### **Early Post-Colonial Fashion and Status Before the 1980s**

In early Post-Colonial years in Nigeria, a conscious fashion effort was not put in by the general populace. The popular classes (popular classes referring to Nigeria's rural and urban majority drawn from peasantry, unskilled and semi-skilled wage earners and the independent producers of the urban informal sector)<sup>3</sup> put on mostly informal traditional wears common in their locality. In general, Southern Nigeria, the rural areas had men tie wrapper on their waist leaving a bare chest and sometimes, they wore singlets and kaftans. For the women, their two wrappers and blouses were common. In the West, the Bubas, Agbadas and Dashikis were common. The North for a long time even till now has maintained highly their Kaftans and Trousers, Agbadas\Babanrigas, Blouses and Skirts as well as the head ties and hijabs without so much bother with Western clothing elements. Such was the fashion choices of the time.

In a bid to incorporate western elements, Second-hand Clothes - Okrika, bend down select, were the desired wears by the popular classes. School uniforms interestingly served beyond the purpose of just uniforms. On festive periods, children of those who did not have high social standing and belonged to the popular classes had two options. One option was putting

on the school uniform and parading round with it as their special wears. A second option was, the mother gave the child her wrapper to tie. This wrapper was held from behind and tied on the neck, and this served as the special outfit. Footwear for such children were quite a luxury and only a few could afford it<sup>4</sup> Those who lived in the urban areas and still belonged to the popular classes either had clothes tailored by local tailors or resorted to second hand clothes.

The rich elites and educated in these early times were known for their Agbadas and Suits. The making of Agbadas with intricately woven designs and not just plains were quite expensive, so only the high in the society could make such their regular outfits. The poor, in order to afford it saved heavily for it and might not even afford the expensive fabrics like Terrilyn in making their suits. Beyond suits and Agbadas though, an important social marker was the fabric used. Whether for indigenous traditional wear or English wears, the rich ensured the texture of fabrics used were of high quality.

In Civil and Public Service, the clothing style also indicated the level a person belonged to. Low serving staff like the Clerks and Teachers for example, put on shirts, ties and shorts, while high serving officers like Mangers, Directors and Head Masters amongst others upon promotion moved from shorts to long trousers. Little details as such indicated status even in Service<sup>5</sup>.

Truly, shortly after independence a conscious effort to make a statement with fashion was not so common amongst common Nigerians, and Indigenous textiles and clothing choices

was the norm. With the outbreak of the Civil War, economic and social life in the country faced some setbacks most especially on the south-eastern side, and fashion was one of the least concerns. From the 1970s after the war, economic and social life became balanced on all sides. A growing interest in fashion was rising and this was present amongst both the rich and poor. This was ushered in alongside the oil boom. The oil boom was an era of surplus and one way this was expressed was through fashion.

### **The Oil Boom Era and Fashion**

The first great oil price increase happened in 1973-1974. With the first oil price boom there was increase in the revenue of Nigeria. This ushered in an era known as the Udeoji or Udoji amongst Nigerians. This Udeoji meant literally, a reign of surplus. The term arose from the Udoji salary review commission of 1972. As a result of public sector salaries fallen behind inflation, increased revenue due to oil boom, it was expedient to set up a commission to review salaries of civil servants and all government workers. With this there was a doubling and tripling of salaries. In turn there was much money circulating in the economy. An economist in January 23 1982 said “The blessing of oil in Nigeria is that it brings a lot of money. The curse is that it concentrates that money in a few hands”.<sup>6</sup> This simply expresses the truth that although there was surplus money, the oil boom created and widened the gap between the rich and the poor. In-equality increased greatly in the country.

Those who fell into the rich class or had excess money expressed this new status through clothing. There was an increase in import in the country in lace and other commodities.<sup>7</sup>

Import and usage of fabrics like Terrilyn, Terreghai (this is the local name. It might be called otherwise in other societies), Cashmere and the Mikado silk as well as high quality laces increased. Usage as well was known amongst the rich and growing middle class. When specific styles were in vogue, the fabric used showed the class of the wearer. For example, when the James Brown style was in vogue, modelling James Brown a Hollywood star. Few days after his tour in Nigeria, the bell bottom trouser which was his style was seen everywhere. This style was similar to the Fela style; high waist, bell bottom and here, an added spark which was a big heel shoe popularly called Akpola. The shirt and trousers were tailored using either high cotton fabrics, African wax\ankara, or any other affordable fabric. A brand that was worn in styling the look was the Van Heusen. Those who could not afford a new Van Heusen shirt, bought it in the second hand or Okrika grade and still styled the trendy look. Fabrics such as the Chinox, Obrosoho Khakhi, and American Khakhi (note that these names refer to various names of fabric and were local names given in the Nigerian market) were also used to style the various trends and the quality used evidently showed what class a person belonged to.<sup>7</sup>

The tailor or designer patronized also showed the class they belonged to. The term kopurumu obara in Igbo or Hang and Buy in English referred to the low quality clothes sewn and hung for sales by tailors. This is a form of local ready to wear. Aba tailors especially, and local tailors in the country employed this pattern patronized by the popular classes. Uniforms were made, and formal and informal wears in vogue were made too. Such ready to wear were usually made of low-quality fabrics, poor tailoring skills and sometimes ill fitting.

Besides the hang and buy, tailors treated clients of different class differently. If the fabric bought is expensive, then the charges will be quite high compared to a client with lower grade fabrics. Also, tailors did not design new unique styles by sketching for clients of low class. With such clients, the regular styles or styles in vogue was sewn for them. But with high standing clients, a sketch of an entirely new design is done, for such client could pay more for such service.<sup>8</sup> Beyond this 'client sizing' pattern employed by local tailors and designers, there were also big tailors and designers during this time under study that were of high social standing in the country and one had to attain a particular social status, or save up so much to receive their services. Some of such designers were Nike Adenija, Folashade Thomas and Isang in Lagos, Zion Grace, Michael Ukoko and Mark Oris in Warri, Henry De Tailor in Sapele, and Arigbo De Tailor in Benin City amongst others.<sup>9</sup> Most of these designers were of great social standing because they learned the skill directly from English men in London, or were a second generation of those who learnt from white men.

All of such designers made clothes according to the style in vogue at the time ranging from James Bond to the Bongo/Labu to Maxi Skirts and Mini Skirts and dresses and indigenous styles as well incorporating these western elements with local fabrics, that could be blended. Examples are the Aso-oke and even the locally produced Ankara Dutch wax. Shoes too were not left out as the Sorpido(imported shoes) for women were more classy to be seen with them, the locally made shoes known as the Bata.



**Figure 5. A picture of the male style in vogue in the 70s and popularized in Nigeria by James Bond after his Tour in Nigeria.**

### **Economic Crisis and Fashion**

With Oil Boom came surplus money and with surplus money, Government spending rose. More money come into circulation but sadly, the increase in money was not matched by a rise in the production of goods. At this time, there was an increasing educated populace and decline of agricultural production. All of these led to inflation. As we depended heavily on Oil for Government spending, as well as imported goods evident in various sectors, there became a need to curb the situation. This was aimed at the devaluation of the currency and restructuring the economy. The Structural Adjustment Programme was introduced. With the

introduction of the Structural Adjustment Programme in 1981, there was a move for the liberalisation of Trade in Nigeria. The Liberalisation of Trade had adverse effect as there was the infiltration of the economy on unequal grounds with the West. With this, inflation and poverty were the ensuing effects amidst other economic issues. While this structural adjustment programme is not within our study, we are concerned with the effects it had on Nigerians; a devaluation of the currency and increased poverty<sup>10</sup>.

With increased poverty and devaluation of the currency, the cost of living in Nigeria increased greatly, and Nigerians wailed about the hardship. On fashion, Mr. Law Pele puts it this way; " We are already addicted to fashion so it did not stop us from dressing up and showing up "<sup>13</sup>. A conscious fashion effort only became ripe just less than two decades ago and with economic hardship, it did not deter this. A practical example is this; Mr. Law Pele told us that while other local and low-grade fabrics were sold from the range of 1 to 2 naira, foreign imported fabrics became sold for 6 naira in the 1980s and from then kept rising till present day where such fabrics are sold for up to 30,000 naira and more. Even with the increase, there was still patronage. When tailored and imported first hand ready to wear clothes seemed too expensive, second-hand clothes, or the Ankara were quite affordable and easily accessible to the popular classes.

## **Second-Hand Clothes**

Second-hand clothes also known as Okrika or bend down select, interestingly did not begin with the economic down turn of the 1980s as perceived. It started way back from colonial times and can be traced to the Abiriba people of Ohafia. Beginning from one man I. Onwuka who brought army surplus stock during and immediately after the second world war. From here this trade rose to being imported through ships berthed in the port of Port Harcourt. Some were sold to the people of Okrika and from this region it became popular to other people of the country. Nigerians, generally out of admiration for the colonial masters like to wear western clothes like suits, shirts and trousers as well as skirts and blouses. As economic downturns increased and tailored items increasingly became expensive, those who still preferred to wear them, resorted to buying them as second-hand clothing.<sup>11</sup>

Beyond this admiration of western clothes and resorting to the cheaper versions of it, the love of Okrika is due to the belief that they are more durable than already made or tailored local fabrics or clothes. Mr. Osita gives his reasons for such; " our local textile industries and production were not so equipped to produce very high quality to compete with the West in terms of quality. Also, that of textiles imported by the local manufacturers with affiliations with factories abroad (China) are not of highest quality as our brothers who go to these industries request for substandard. Their aim is to make sales and not good quality. On this note, we have substandard in comparison with what is available in the West. Now in the west, they have the highest quality of tailoring and fabrics and it is same quality that is sent

here as second-hand clothing and sold in our market". He also expresses that Okrika moves with the trend. Whatever is in vogue at the time is what is found in the bails sent to the market. This bears through that there is a borrowing of trend and fashion from the west. When styles like cross no gutter skirts, baggy trousers, pencil trousers and suits were in vogue, they could be found in the packages sent for sale.<sup>12</sup>

Although second-hand clothes have been accepted amongst the popular class, politically, the West have been accused of using this coordinated charity network of second-hand clothes as a way of using Africa as a dumping ground for the excess clothes waste. Second-hand clothes sellers can attest that rags and torn clothes can be found in the bails. It was in this context that Obafemi Awolowo said second hand clothes should be banned in Nigeria as we are not second-class citizens of the world. Acceptance of the second-hand clothes meant we accepted the status of second-class world citizens. His push for this ban as well as his involvement in the ills against Igbos during the Nigeria-Biafra civil war leading up to the ban of Second-hand clothes 1971, built up the hate of Obafemi Awolowo by the Igbos and this is speculated to contribute to him losing the 1979 election in the east. For the Igbos were greatly involved in the business of second-hand clothes. Not minding the ban in 1971 and the temporary lift by the Murtala Mohammed administration, second hand clothes continued to be smuggled into the country.<sup>13</sup>

Second-hand clothes too have different grades seeming like a form of class divide even amongst them. There is the First grade, Second grade and Third grade. The first grade is of

extremely good quality and can be washed and sold in boutiques for higher prices. For example, The Van Heusen Shirt could be found in grade 1,2 and 3 and anyone sold meant the wearer could still show up in style. Second-hand clothes permitted Nigerians to beat down the cost of living and at events, you cannot be a misfit. With one (1) shilling, one could afford a short but with this one (1) shilling, a new tailored short would not be made available.<sup>14</sup> So, while the economic downturn might not have caused a turn to second-hand clothes, it helped alleviate the effect of economic hardships on the popular classes.

## **Conclusion**

Clothing and it serving as a social indicator of status has always been evident in human existence and in the Nigerian society. With the increase in social divide between rich and poor, urban and rural brought about by the oil boom, these classes expressed their status through clothing. With the oil boom, import of laces and expensive fabrics as well as branded clothing increased, and with economic down turn became more expensive due to inflation. People of the popular classes turned to the hang and buy tailoring model for clothing choices, local tailors, and also to the second-hand clothes for affordable clothing. Tailors of high standing patronized expressed high class too, and local tailors treated various classes of people differently in rendering services. In summary, just as various trends existed through the years, as well as affiliation with western brands, the quality of fabrics used, the tailors patronized, and the choice of new ready to wear or second-hand clothing expressed the class an individual belonged to in social and civil life.



**Figure 6. Researcher with Mr. & Mrs. Osita Umeibeka. A retired teacher and his wife, both traders in Second-hand clothes**



**Figure 7. Researcher with Mr. Lawrence Pele. A Designer and business man**



**Figure 8. Researcher with Mrs. Rahab Bazunu. Fashion Enthusiast and Designer @ Keapettu International.**

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## CHAPTER FOUR

### FASHION AS A TOOL OF POLITICAL EXPRESSION AND GLOBAL EXCHANGE

#### Introduction

Fashion, beyond aesthetics has been rooted in deep political meaning and a tool of expression. From the general populace to specific individual, the tool of fashion has been used to express political views of acceptance and refusal. This has made fashion a dynamic element of global exchange. With the historical example of the Abeokuta women riot in 1946. Showing true that dress and undressing can be a string political statement,<sup>1</sup> so also between 1960 -1999 at various times was clothing employed as a political expression showcasing Nigeria's fashion and on the broader scale facilitating cross cultural interaction on the international stage.

The term from Agbada to Khaki, he who the cap fits all arose as political views expressed through the symbolism of fashion. Also, Nigeria indigenous fabrics like Aso-oke as well as the Agbada and Buba have influenced the design of some western fashion designers. This chapter seeks to explore how fashion in Nigeria has been a means of political expression and how it has influenced some global fashion statement and in turn been influenced, being a stable source of global exchange.

## **Fashion Expressing Political Ideas**

During decades of Colonial rule, African people and their creative expression was seen as sub-human, but with Independence, fashion being a creative self-expression defiant of the status-quo became once more a reality.<sup>2</sup> This is so true as the dress of individuals like Tafawa Balewa and other foremost nationalist like Nnamdi Azikiwe, Obafemi Awolowo etc. was a statement beyond identity but political. With the intentional choice of wearing only Nigeria indigenous wear of Agbada and Babanriga, it was a political statement opposing the western rulership and supremacy instilled through Colonialism. Obafemi Awolowo's opposition of second-hand clothing being sent into Nigeria and the subsequent ban of second-hand clothing in the country by the Government of Gowon and most subsequent Governments of the country up till now is a political act expressing defiance against the West view of the Nigeria and Africa as a whole as second-class citizens of the world. Obafemi Awolowo himself said we are not second-class citizens and so we should not accept second hand goods.<sup>3</sup> His understanding of the deep meaning rooted in clothing is clearly expressed. While this is only one side of the discussion, Nigerians turning greatly to indigenous fashion and fabric especially in international gathering, became a political statement stating equality with the West. One of such gatherings is the reception of president (Head of State) Babanriga and his wife at the Victorian train station on their visit to Britain

in 1989 and from there to the Buckingham Palace. At this grand reception, there were so many Nigerians present and all flamboyantly dressed in Nigerian attires.<sup>4</sup> This public show of the Nigerian dress is beyond pride and National identity but a political statement equating the Nigerian fashion on same place as the Western fashion and not to be hidden. While some might perceive this show of fashion as just a parade, others might take it as more than that considering how Nigerians look to her colonial master with high esteem, and how suit was highly fashionable at this time. Analyzing with such lens, one would realize that such public showcase of the Nigeria fashion is greatly a political expression. In this same gathering the dress of Ibrahim Babangida and his wife is also Nigerian indigenous dress. Babangida wearing an Agbada while his wife wearing a wrapper and blouse.

### **Maryam Babaginda**

She is regarded popularly as “Maryam Phenomenon”,<sup>5</sup> one of Nigeria’s finest First Ladies. Other First Ladies before her were mostly passive in office. However, she is the first First Lady who really became active in her office and some persons confuse her to be the first First Lady of the Nation. She is known much more and remembered for her Better Life Programme for Rural Women as well as the programmes championing the cause of women. Besides all these programmes she was politically accepted by locals and internationally for how she championed the Nigerian Fashion Dressings. She showcased the Akwa-ocha an Asaba indigenous fabric as well as the Buba, wrapper and blouse and the African print (Ankara) with her fashion choices she was greatly accepted, loved and hailed. This is

applauded for other women of affluence in her time would put on western dresses like suite, gowns etc. ordinarily, but since she chose to promote the Nigerian fashion both locally and internationally, this has made a statement politically in the discourse of fashion. In the Nigerian scene her actions seen as both legitimizing and making popular her husband's (Ibrahim Babaginda) regime amongst locals amidst his many controversies.<sup>6</sup>



**Figure 9. Maryam Babangida and Princess Diana during the visit to London.**

**The man who the Cap Fits – Ibrahim Babaginda**

**From khaki to Agbada**

The man who the cap fits is a political symbolism that is common with Nigerians in studying the political play between Nigerian Politicians and the transition to democracy in General Ibrahim Babaginda regime and after the 1999 elections. With much controversy in his era and other political upheavals, his refusal to let the MKO Abiola take power after winning the 1993 election made him quite unpopular amongst Nigerians. Added to his refusal to let go of power in his statement saying “It is he who this cap fits”. The statement is taken literally for he adds to the Khaki his military uniform and wears the Agbada and native cap in public gatherings. This statement through his choice of attire was perceived and taken in negative light by Nigerians on all platforms possible.<sup>7</sup> Before all this began upon becoming head of state in 1985, he chose the title of President instead of Head of State. This choice of name is to deflect from the norm which his predecessors have used and gain some form of acceptance amongst Nigerians. His choice of Agbada is perceived as intentional in finding a middle ground and keep both the high-ranking political officers and political elites at peace and gain acceptance on both sides. Unlike his predecessor, in meeting with the Queen Elizabeth in London in 1989, he put on Agbada and not his Khaki. His Conscious efforts to project presidency and the Agbada have caused the term “From Khaki to Agbada”.<sup>8</sup>

This term from Khaki to Agada has been employed beyond the talk of Babangida, to signify the transit from military rule to civilian rule. With military rule, heads of state have put on the traditional Khaki as symbols of authority. But after the 1999 elections, the attire changed, hence the term from Khaki to Agbada.<sup>9</sup>



**Figure 10. General Ibrahim Babangida with Queen Elizabeth II during his visit to London**

**Alhaji Tafawa Balewa** the prime minister of Nigeria upon his visit to president John Kennedy in Washington DC dresses in the Babanriga. Alhaji Tafawa and delegates from Nigeria all attended this in an entourage of Agbadas. Spreading the Nigeria identity through fashion and making this a political statement. Such display of our rich culture is quite intriguing. Even in his address to the U.S House of Assembly, he appears in a Babaringa and beyond his words at the assembly this dressing was imparted in the hearts of Americans.<sup>10</sup>

### **Political Campaigns and Clothing**

Fashion is quite an integral part of politics, with fashion being influenced by politics and politics in turn employing fashion as a tool. One way such play of politics through fashion is expressed by politicians is the putting on of indigenous dress of the locality they are campaigning in. This is how it has evolved in the time under study. Firstly, is a look at videos and pictures from the 1979 election campaigns. Here the practice of putting on the indigenous fashion of the locality where campaign is being held is not done. Regular Agbadas are put on and there is not so much bother as to representing the party through clothing, printing the candidate's face on Ankara fabrics and T-shirts.<sup>11</sup>

However, the story is different with the 1999 election campaigns. The conscious effort to represent the political party and candidate through clothing is put in place. Taking for example, the winner of the election and his party, Olusegun Obasanjo and the People's Democratic Party (PDP). There are Ankara prints, T-Shirts and caps having his name, party logo and colours printed on them. Here the message during the campaigns is expressed not just through word but clothing.<sup>12</sup> To give a sense of belonging and acceptance, so also do they wear the indigenous fashion of the locality where campaign. This art of political campaign through fashion begins here and over time will become perfected on the political realm<sup>13</sup>.



**Figure 11. Alhaji Shehu Shagari during his campaign in Abriba, Abia State for the 1979 elections. Dressed in Agbada and without any affinity to the Igbo culture of the Abriba.**



**Figure 12.**



**Figure 13.**

**Figures 12 and 13 are pictures of the 1999 election campaigns where hats, T-Shirts and Ankara fabrics are designed with party and candidates Info.**

### **Nigeria Fashion and Global Exchange**

Globalisation heightened in the 1980s – 1990s and so there was an increased cultural exchange. The Globalisation and the joining of states beyond borders heightened in the 20<sup>th</sup> century and this is visible in the Global exchange of cultural elements between Nigeria and other states of the world. In fashion, Nigeria has gained from this cultural exchange and Folashade Thomas the first recognized fashion designer in Nigeria is attributed with expressing the first fruits of this.

Designer Folashde Thomas is credited with introducing African ready to wear clothing to Nigeria. This is common in the west but not known in Nigeria and so she established this and a chain of other boutiques in Nigeria. She did all these after returning to Nigeria from

London where she received her training. Seeing fascinators and females hats in London, she used this idea in creating the Nigerian Version; A pre-tied gele (A head scarf Nigeria women tie as part of their outfits). With idea of the Midi gowns worn in the west also, she turned the Iro and Buba (Skirt and blouse) into a top and zip up skirt combination<sup>14</sup>. Folashade's innovations are a major result of global exchange. While this innovation is not the only one by designers, it it's the only major one known within the scope of our study. In turn also, the western scene has copied a few from us. Fashion brands in the Western society have copied some pieces into their fashion exhibition, like the Agbada, Gele and even the Adire. While firstly there have been no proper documentation of this, in the coming years beyond our scope of study, they are more properly documented and even more evident. Whatever it is they copy from us as a result of global exchange, it is as a result of maturity gained from the fashion effort of designers from Nigeria's Independence – 1999.



**Figure 14. Folashade Thomas designing a gown with the Aso-oke fabric.**

### **Conclusion**

The Nigerian fashion right from the struggles of Independence till after the Independence, has been a tool of political expression. Being worn alone, being a means of expression intentionally and unintentionally. Leaders too using it as a means of promoting acceptance amongst peoples and legitimising their government. The politicians too have seen it as an effective tool of promoting candidates during election campaigns. As all these go on in the face of globalization. Nigerians have let in freely, elements they find useful to the fashion of the nation. Fashion truly has the power to legitimise, to cloth and unite in idea and belief. In the spirit of innovation, borrow from other cultures, elements that are useful and giving out as well useful elements.



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## CHAPTER FIVE

### CONCLUSION

In this research study, it is evident that while fashion and clothing exist as a means to cover the body and showcase aesthetics, it is a visible language to express the identity of a people. Their belief and assertiveness to parade openly their heritage. A tool of social expression where the unequal is made known and the unequal distribution of power in all spheres of society is constructed, maintained and expressed as legitimate. The Nigerian scene is one with diverse peoples and cultures as well as diverse dressings. Colonialism fought this assertiveness and made Nigerians accept the Western culture as supreme. The promotion of Western Dresses was seen and the indigenous fashion was taken as second class. Independence caused a surge and renewal in the promotion of Nigerian indigenous fashion. Nigerian indigenous wears became political statements fighting against the colonial repression. The Government sought ways to promote the use of Nigerian indigenous fabrics, and increased investments in local textile mills. Textiles mills like the Asaba Textile Mill, Benin Textile Mill and products like Nichen products were seen. Sadly, this adrenaline rush and investments were short-lived and these Textile Mills were abandoned. Their abandon is not surprising as the true independence and emancipation of Nigerians is questioned. At the very break of wealth and economic surplus these was no turn inwards to invest in the local textile mills but huge reliance on foreign imports was seen. The import of Laces and other

Western highend fabrics was seen and with this, the local textile mills could not compete. Today they are mostly closed due to neglect.

This dependence on western laces and fabrics does not mean that all our indigenous fabrics have been totally neglected. The Akwete fabric of the Igbos has been forgotten by most Igbos although it is still in existence. The Igbos due to western influence made use of the Isi-Agu to create a unique identity for themselves. The Yorubas on the other hand have maintained the Adire and the Aso-oke. Other fabrics as well as A'nger have survived as well to this day. Generally, the quality of locally made textiles in comparison with western fabrics is quite low and revival of the local textile mills is needed.

Nigerian fashion has had a beautiful blend of western fabrics and laces and a conscious exchange has been visible. Designers like Folashade Thomas consciously have married the western European and Nigerian fashion through her designs. Other designers after her have always incorporated western elements alongside designing fashion pieces for Nigerians. As fashion designers attended to clientele, the type of service rendered and the designers patronized even showed class further in the Nigerian society. High end fabrics differentiated the rich from the poor. Another marker of social class was the Secondhand clothing. With these Secondhand clothing, the poor and popular classes could afford western dresses and not be a misfit in the society. Lastly, this era under study ushered into the Nigerian scene a conscious effort of employing fashion in politics and political games.

Fashion through this study has been reaffirmed to be an important tool in International Relations and Cultural Expression. Nigerian fashion serves as a testament to this. With its rich heritage and dynamic evolution from timidity to assertiveness, the political undertones resisting and projecting for acceptance, this powerful cultural identity set the tone for global exchange. Through the lens of Nigerian fashion, we see and understand deeply the inherent connection between clothing, politics, and class divide even between States. A clear example is the presence of Second-hand clothes in Nigeria and the resistance by the Nigerian Government. For it is unclear if this second-hand clothing network is truly for charity as the West looks on us as deserving of help and pity, or if it is a channel of dumping clothes and Africa exists as an open and receptive ground. With this, there is a struggle of which state exist as a second-class State and which is superior to the other.

With this understanding of the connectedness of the web of fashion and politics from 1960-1999, the current Nigerian state, and fashion designers can promote and invest in asserting a more Nigerian indigenous fashion identity. Investing in local textile industries, promoting our indigenous fabrics and cultural dressings while also setting innovative ways to improve our indigenous fashion. That just as in the West, our clothing is not meant for only special gatherings but have varying designs for formal and informal settings. Also, there should be an increased acceptance of our indigenous fabrics and style in formal settings like the white-collar jobs and schools that the ideal 'Gentle Man' is not just the man dressed in suit but the man dressed in wrapper or Agbada. All these are to promote acceptance by the growing generations and aid the fashion identity in the growing face of globalization. For the

supremacy of culture and power divide among peoples beyond actions, economic might, military and eloquent talks, is first visible through clothing.

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2.	Mrs. Ezewugo Umeibeka	Trader	67years	Igbudu Market, Warri South LGA, Delta State.	13 May 2024
3.	Mr. Lawrence Pele	Tailor and Businessman	74years	Deco Road, Warri South LGA, Delta State.	14 May 2024
4.	Mrs. Rahab Bazunu	Fashion Businesswoman	66years	Deco Road, Warri South LGA, Delta State.	14 May 2024
5.	Mrs. Ufuoma Okaruefe	Tailor	45years	Water Resources, Uvwie LGA, Delta State.	13 May 2024

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