



Indigenous Textile as a Veritable Instrument for Assuaging the Effects of National Economic Meltdown in Nigeria: Aso-Oke in Focus

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Abstract

As the waves of the financial crisis began to pound the centers of world finance, there have been some belated recognition of the danger posed by short term capital flows. Countries afflicted by the financial crisis have been forced to take their own measures to protect their economy. This paper proposes the use of Indigenous Textile (*Aso-oke*) as one of the instruments by which the problem of national economic meltdown in Nigeria can be solved by providing self-reliance and job opportunities to other numerous people. The paper examines the history of Indigenous textile (*Aso-oke*), and reveals the raw materials for producing it. The paper also examines the prospect of traditional cloth production with its accompanying benefit of assuaging the delectating consequences of national economic meltdown. The paper makes recommendations on how such prospects can be utilized for national development.

Keywords

Economic meltdown; Assuaging; *Aso-oke*; Weaving, Loom.

Introduction

Everyone educated or not, has known by now, that something is terribly wrong with the economy of nations. The term “economic meltdown” has assumed the center in the news media. In the simplest term, economic meltdown could be called economic “go-slow”. Just like traffic jams which grind vehicular movements to a halt with attendant man-hour losses, physical and emotional stress, economic meltdown literarily brings an economy to a stop.

At the Beginning of mid-2013, all three major stock indices in the United States the Dow Jones Industrial Average, (NASDAQ) National Association of Securities Dealers Automated Quotation, and the S&P 500 (Standard & Poors) entered a bear market. Overall, the Dow Jones plunged 504 points (4.4%) while the S&P 500 fell 59 points (47%). Asian and European markets experienced identical drops.

The crisis began to bite the financial sector in February 2014, when HSBC-Hong Kong and Shangai Banking Corporation, the world's largest bank, wrote down its holdings of subprime-related assets by \$10.5 billion. During that same year, at least 100 mortgage companies either shut down, suspended operations or were sold.

It has been a tale of woes for investors in Nigeria, as the stock market capitalization has fallen down by trillions of naira; Aworinde confirms that Thousands of jobs have been lost across the globe as could be felt from the corporate failures. These are just a few examples of the causes of the financial meltdown. The precarious financial situation was made more difficult in Nigeria by a sharp increase in oil and food prices in 2017.

Nigeria with more than 90% of her revenue coming from oil is in a very precarious situation now. The naira has suffered dramatic loss in value against major currencies of the world like the US dollars, the Euro and the British pound.

Clothing is one of the essential human needs. Engaging in the manufacturing and artistic design of it as a complementary of its production should be an assuaging tool of generating fund for individuals, and collectively for the nation. However, the nation appears to have shut the door on looking inward for fund. The focus nowadays is on oil explorations, which is not helping issues as at this year 2020 with the invasion of corona virus on the global world.

This paper exposes the use of indigenous cloth as a means by which national economy can be improved. In doing this as origin vis-a-vis it's traditional and recent dimensions are reviewed as well as tools and materials that are used. The prospect of using it as a veritable means of assuaging nation economic meltdown has been also proposed. The significance of this paper lies in its diversification function on the mono-cultural nature of the national economy of the lower level of the society.

Theoretical framework

This paper is hinged on the adaptation innovation theory. One of the proponents of this theory is Michael J. Kirton 2009 who posited that the adaptation-innovation theory is concerned with the differences in the thinking style of individuals that affect their creativity. He went further to state that individuals who have enough skills supported by appropriate style can undertake a job and be successful. Therefore, in sustaining the craft of weaving, innovation should be encouraged to meet people's aspiration and demand which can no longer be satisfied by the old and traditional techniques [1].

This is found presently in the production of *Aso-oke* in modern and contemporary samples in this paper. Tools and materials are diversified especially in yarns selections. Blended, silk, cotton and synthetic yarns are used for the creation of the different designs found in *Aso-oke* fabrics.

History of Indigenous Textile (*Aso-oke*)

In the olden days, the weaving profession was hereditary in Yoruba land, it was a closed door profession whereby children learnt it from their parents. Weaving is the technique of producing fabric through the use of a loom in which two sets of threads known as warp and weft respectively interlace at right angle to each other. Nkeonye's view also tallies with this, that weaving is the interlacing of warp and weft thread on the loom to form a fabric. Atanda, states that woven fabric consists of warp and weft threads that have been interlaced [2].

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Longman considers weaving as a process of producing woven fabric by the interlacement of warp and weft threads to create fabric.

No one can specifically say when and where traditional woven textile was introduced to Yoruba land in particular, and Nigeria and the whole of Africa in general. "Aso-oke" is a short form of "Aso Ilu Oke" also known as "Aso-ofi meaning clothes from the country's highland area. The literal meaning of Aso-oke is "Top Cloth". Aso-oke is an important item of clothing worn by the Yoruba of southwestern Nigeria.

Indigenous Aso-oke textile is one of the most vibrant and successful textiles on the African continent. By the end of the 20th century, Aso-oke was worn by the Yoruba only at major life-circle events such as birth of a new baby, weddings, festivals, burial ceremonies and so on. At present, the fabric is more popular among the Yoruba and other ethnic groups in Nigeria. The Yoruba people in southwestern Nigeria especially in major towns such as Qyo, Iseyin, Saki, Okeho, Ibadan, Lagos, Osogbo, Ijebu Ode, Abeokuta, Owo and Ado Ekiti are known for their Aso-oke weaving. However, the market for indigenous textiles has decreased with the introduction of European printed cloth ever since the early 20th Century.

Even though Indigenous hand-woven clothes are sometimes, not easily bought because of the cheaper clothings, Aworemi states that, it is still considered an important and valuable form of both clothing and art. It is possible that because there are cheaper and more convenient clothes available in the market, these textiles are considered even more valuable and special to the culture, Eicher in Makinde, et al clothing among the Yoruba is important in several different ways such as marriages, chieftaincy title, festivals and naming ceremony. Clothing is used to signify wealth and status, particularly those of high quality [3].

The Yoruba people often times will cover themselves in beautiful, colourful garments that drape and fold over the body, giving the impression of a person of high stature. Both the quality of the cloth and the amount of cloth used in creating the garment determines its worth. Hand-woven garments are very valuable in the Yoruba culture. The production of Aso-oke textiles is a costly and time-consuming procedure, yet this process is part of what makes them important to this culture.

Production of Aso-oke textile

The primary raw materials for the production of Aso-oke textile clothes are cotton, dyes, local silk and bark which are used in making the threads for weaving. They are either locally sourced or imported from Tunisia, Italy, France, Japan and other Asian countries. The cotton is kept in the barn for spinning which is the process of separating the cotton seed from the pure cotton. Locally spun and dyed indigo cotton thread is expensive and often replaced by shining metallic Lurex and brightly coloured rayon threads. This process is also known as sorting (Ajala). Patterning is another stage which helps in putting the patterns and designs on the Aso-oke. Aso-oke strips are usually about 14-15cm and stitched together to make the desired clothes [4].

The operators make use of two types of looms for the production of Aso-oke. These are the upright single heddle loom also known as the broad loom used by women (Figure 1) and the horizontal double heddle loom (Figure 2) mostly used by men. The broad loom is a fixed vertical frame upon which the warp of the thread is held under tension to weave cloth of predetermined length of about 30-90cm



Figure 1: Single Heddle Loom (Vertical).



Figure 2: Horizontal Loom: - 138 cm/79 cm/154 cm.

width to allow two or three pieces to be stitched together to make a wrap known as "Iro" for women. The fabric produced on the broad loom is known as "Kijipa".

Kijipa Ikale

Kijipa cloths are woven either with indigo-dyed yarns, pure white or creamy white yarns. Sometimes they are conveniently combined to form designs with symmetrical, asymmetrical and striped pattern. There are two major types of Kijipa. The first one is of blue-black colour commonly used by women. The second type is of pure white or creamy white colour preferred by men. Kijipa is mainly used for manual work because it is very thick and does not tear easily. An average Yoruba man that wants to go to the farm or do any vigorous work would prefer to wear Kijipa to do the work, because the cloth is strong and durable [5].

The double heddle loom used by men is a horizontal loom with unwoven warp yarns stretched out several metres in front of the

weaver with heavy stone or heavy metal to maintain tension. The loom produces strips of woven fabrics, which is about 14cm-15cm wide. The fabrics are cut and the selvages stitched together to make a larger piece of cloth which could be used for clothing or coverings.

Types of Aso-oke clothes

There are different types of clothes made from *Aso-oke*. These include prestigious and ceremonial clothes such as *Etu*, *Alaari* and *Sanyan* as well as other ones created nowadays for contemporary uses.

Etu cloth: *Etu* (fowl) cloth is blue sometimes with white strips. The strips are woven using local wild silk fibres. Thus, *Etu* (Figure 3) is dyed repeatedly in traditional indigo blue dye, which is brought out at intervals for drying and stretching. In ancient times, *Etu* is used as important social dress by chiefs, elders and traditional royal kings among the Yoruba. The second type of *Etu* is **PETUJE**: it is just like *Etu* cloth but the colour is lighter when compared with the deep blue colour of “*Etu*” cloth. *Etu* was first woven before the introduction of *Petuje*, a lighter colour of *Etu* as may be requested by some people [6].

Alaari cloth: *Alaari* cloth (Figure 4) is crimson in colour. It is traditionally woven with, locally spun silk yarns dyed in red camwood solution to achieve permanence in colour fastness. The use of *Alaari* is not limited to a particular ceremony but traditionally used for all events among the Yoruba people.

Sanyan cloth: *Sanyan* (Figure 5) is regarded as an expensive Yoruba hand-woven fabric, creamy in colour with a white stripe running through the middle of the cloth. It is traditionally produced from fibres made from the cocoons of the *Anaphe* silk fibres. They are hand-spun into threads, washed and soaked in corn-starch to strengthen the yarn for fabric production. This was however in ancient times, Today *Sanyan* is woven like every other fabric without the stress of spinning manually and soaking in corn-starch. Presently already



Figure 4: Alaari Hand Woven Cloth, spun cotton, 79 cm/62 cm, 1954.



Figure 5: Sanyan Hand Woven Cloth, spun cotton, 79 cm/62 cm, 1950.



Figure 3: Etu Hand Woven Cloth, spun cotton, 79 cm/62 cm, 1952.

–made blended yarns and synthetic yarns already wound in cones are used to weave. They are more prestigious and have perforations. *Sanyan* is regarded as the most expensive of all the Yoruba woven fabrics. Thus, the Yoruba refers to it as “*Baba Aso*” that is the father of fabrics [6].

Required Tools and Materials

The major tool needed is the Narrow/Horizontal loom for “Aso-oke”. Ofi means loom; while cloth woven on it is called “Aso-ofi”. The major weaving materials are the warp and the weft yarns/threads of assorted colours, silk threads, starch, creel, shuttle, bobbins and winding instrument. Colouring materials for yarn can be derived from diverse leaves which can give us different types of colours.

Cotton is gotten from a plant commonly called cotton tree in the area where it is cultivated as crop in Nigeria. It is a shrub tree commonly found in the savannah and arid region of the world. Hence, cotton which is the major material in production of Aso-oke can be sourced locally.

Starch is a watery, sticky extraction derivable from cassava tuber. It is a crop commonly planted in the southern part of Nigeria. The end product is called “gari” while starch is its bye-product. Creel, shuttle and bobbins are furniture materials made of local planks. They are constructed by local carpenters [7].

Method of Production

Yarn preparation for weaving

Warp yarn preparation for weaving consists of four major operations:

- Sizing,
- Winding,
- Warping and
- Drawing-in.
- **Sizing:** Prior to fabric production on the loom, it is necessary to prepare the yarn for weaving. The most rigorous but important aspect is preparation of warp thread. It consists of preparing it to undergo a process of passing yarn ends through a solution of starch and lubricant. The primary objective of sizing is to produce workable warp yarns. Other objectives include the provision of stiffness, strong and smooth warp yarns, so that it would be able to withstand the friction and stress that occurs during the weaving process; while the weft yarn preparation for weaving only involves checking the physical and mechanical properties of the yarn.
- **Winding:** This is the process whereby dried sized yarns are separated with hand and set on the winding instrument. The weaver then winds the yarns into bobbins suitable for weaving.
- **Warping:** Bobbins with yarns are arranged according to the design the weaver wanted to weave. Iron rods are nailed on the ground in the open space to run the warp yarns and arrange them as desired.
- **Drawing-in:** This is the process whereby the yarns are drawn or set on the loom to get ready for weaving (Figure 6). After setting it, upper and lower layers must be formed to give two separate sheds. It is inside these two separate sheds that the weft yarns would pass through in an alternate manner to create the fabric (Figure 7).



Figure 6: Draw in Warp Yarns on the Horizontal Loom.



Figure 7: Passing the Warp Yarns through the Heddle and the Reed on the Horizontal Loom in an alternate manner.

Processes and Techniques of Weaving Aso-oke

The weaving process consists of three principal operations which form a continuous circle.

- **Shedding:** Formation of shed by separating the warp sheets (thread) into upper and lower layers to form a tunnel or shed through which the weft thread inside the shuttle passes or is deposited. Therefore shedding is the opening of the warp threads into two separate sheds to create a tunnel for the weft yarns to pass through. Heddle wires are suitable devices to effect (carryout) the lifting or lowering of the heddle frames.
- **Picking or weft insertion:** This involves the laying in or depositing of the weft yarn through the formed shed by a means of butterfly style or formation.
- **Weft beat up:** This is the beating of the weft yarns into the fell of the cloth with the aid of a reed. However, apart from those principal operations; secondary operations are inevitable for the continuity of the control of the weaving process.
- **Warp Control (Let-Off):** This is the motion that controls the release of the warp yarns from the warp beam, at a constant rate and speed with that of the fabric control without breakages

- **Fabric Control (Take-Up):** This motion withdraws the fabric from the weaving area at the constant rate that will give required pick-spacing and winds it onto the cloth roller.

According to Akinbileje , “all woven cloth either Kijipa cloth or Aso-Ofi cloth is made according to the same basic principles of interlacing two sets of threads or yarns, the warp or the stationery threads/yarns and crossing them at the right angles of the weft, or active weaving elements.”

The weaving is carried out on a very primitive arrangement. The warp is laid a few metres away from the weaver and kept under a heavy object to maintain constant tension of the yarn as the warp is used up for the fabric formation. The weight is pulled nearer to the weaver by means of LEASE RODS. The weaver passes the shuttle through the opened tunnel and causes the weft thread to interlace with the warp and beaten-up into the fell of the cloth by a comb or reed. Thereafter, another opening is formed by changing the position of thread (those down move up and those up move down with the aid of the toes to control the heddles) and the whole process is repeated. The fabric so formed is rolled up onto the cloth roller at the weaver’s side which is later rolled out for cutting after been measured. Thereafter, they are joined together by a tailor for the purpose of wearing [8].

National Economic Meltdown and indigenous Woven Cloth (Aso-oke)

Indication from the various sources of materials used in the production of indigenous woven cloth (Aso-oke) would suggest combined contribution of the services of artisans such as farmers-Cotton growers, cassava/gari producers as well as paint producers. Layi opines that, the concept of economy is that it embraces all aspect of human endeavour where resources optimization is involved. National economy can be placed within this concept as maximization of all aspect of national resources is in relation to human input on material resources. While the involvement in vocational and technical skill of

weaving traditional cloth (Aso-oke) not only represents an economic develop for the nation but has also maximize the use of cotton, leaves and planks as all products of human capacities. Oyekanmi, asserts that there are links between individual surviving options that will increase human capital development on one hand, and also create essential goods that will necessarily promote their well-being, harmony and growth of the society and nation on the other hand [9].

Recommendations

prospects of aso-oke

If improvement can be made on these fabrics technologically, it is strongly believed that Aso-oke will be well embraced much more than the imported materials because of its full cotton content which is more tolerated and suitable to our climatic conditions. However, with the technological improvement on Aso-oke it will be liable for exportation to other countries. As time goes on ‘Aso-oke’ can be used in the home for curtains, cushions, bed-covers and table mats. The strips of cloth are a convenient width for spectacle-cases and pencil-cases. The narrowness of its strips of contrasting colours and textures can be combined to create a unique garment or item of home furnishing to express the taste of the owner (Figure 8).

To make hand woven cloths to compete more favourably with electronically driven woven machine, broad woven loom (Figure 9) is now adopted which can weave up to 26 inches wide fabric. Fewer strips of it are needed to make a complete outfit/attire, as against several strips made on the horizontal narrow loom.

The government on the other hand can still assist local weavers through the importation of some Western based looms to replace the locally sourced looms in order to meet the contemporary needs of the society [10]. If the government can assist these people with the above, there is the belief that it will save time, reduce the cost of production drastically, and increase productivity. Also, the thickness of the fabric

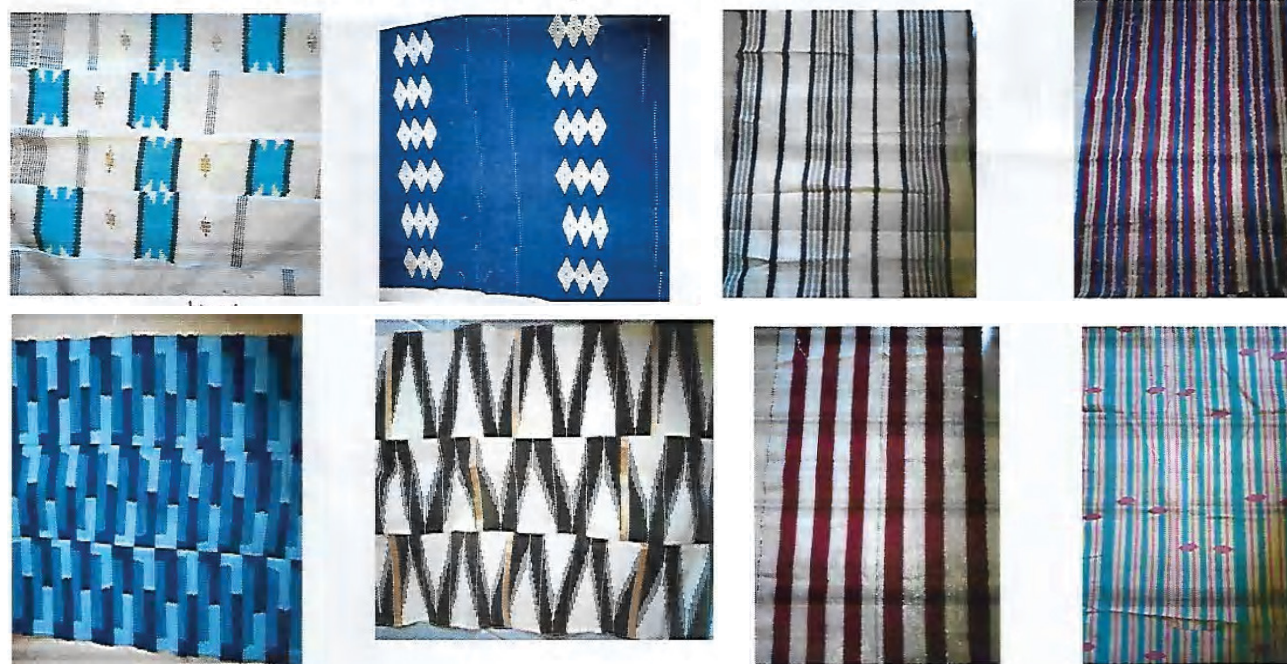


Figure 8: Some Samples of Contemporary Aso-oke on Display.



Figure 9: Broad Loom.

will be reduced drastically and the marketability of the material will be acceptable in the Western countries [11].

The economic benefits of *aso-oke* production

The crux of the matter is the economic benefits of *Aso-oke* which will go a long way in assuaging the effects of economic meltdown in Nigeria. It is therefore very necessary for Nigeria government, the State and Local Government to invest into the production of this indigenous woven fabrics to improve Nigeria economy in the following ways.

- When large quantity of woven fabrics is produced and exported, it fetches foreign exchange for the country, state and the individual weaver in particular.
- With the expansion of the *Aso-oke* weaving organization and business, it will provide both youths and adult employment as more attention is focused on it. Unemployment is becoming a great nuisance to Nigeria as a country and state in particular.
- The circulation of *Aso-oke* will no longer be sectionalized to mainly South-West of Nigeria, other states will be happy to have these essential woven traditional materials to buy and sell.
- More *Aso-oke* markets would be located in almost all the states in Nigeria, which will make its more viable.
- It can reduce import of foreign fabrics and save foreign exchange.
- The availability of *Aso-oke* in all states in Nigeria for marketability will ginger Nigerians to patronize other indigenous hand-made goods, to generate economic benefits to their states as they will also pay their business taxes to their states.
- The Government should make the *Aso-oke* more attractive and sustainable; it will make the economic benefit or gain very buoyant and robust.

Conclusion

The development of indigenous fabric has also enhanced the artistic and cultural growth of the various groups. Yoruba men dress with as much flair and brilliance as their wives. A man walks with

dignity in the long flowing gown called “agbada,” and it swifts about him when his feet move in the small intricate steps of Yoruba hence, Embroidery is used to decorate men’s clothes in Yoruba land.

It has become a known fact among the makers and users that *Sanyan* woven fabric ranks first among other hand-woven cloths. It is highly attractive and the high echelon of people in the society referred to it as the king of cloth. Highly placed people in the society would not do without having it for occasional wear and it is worn on big occasions, it is the cloths usually worn in the past by the Oba’s and Chiefs though its usage is limited now as it is diluted with the introduction of imported silk. It is usually the preserve of the wealthy class. Weavers are employed to specifically produce the *Sanyan* for the royal cult. It is made up of cotton and silk fibres. The silk fibres are got from the cocoons of the two main varieties of wild silk in Nigeria.

Petuje, Etu, and Alaari are also demanded by high caliber of people in the society, depending on what they wanted to use it for. Yoruba people cannot do without having any of these cloths inside their wardrobe for occasions. These cloths are very expensive but still they always cherished them and embrace the idea of wearing them to depict how wealthy they are. Woven cloths are prestigious in the Yoruba society and have remained so far.

“*Aso-oke*” has maintained its prestige and popularity in the face of competition from imported luxury fabrics. It is regarded as an important part of Yoruba tradition, yet has been modified to keep up with the times through the expansions of the colour range and the inclusion of silk and lurex. Sometimes the “*Aso-oke*” strips are enriched with machine embroidery before being sewn into garments.

The writers believed that great care, patience and hard work are actually needed to achieve great height; traditional woven cloth should be accepted as part of our cultural heritage that requires adequate promotion for gainful exploitation towards assuaging our national economic meltdown.

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