

# Simulating Yoruba Indigenous Fabrics: A Road to Culture Disintegration

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## Abstract

The production of indigenous fabrics (dyed, woven, and patterned) has been an age-long tradition among the Yoruba people of southwestern Nigeria. This tradition of fabric production survived for a very long time until the introduction of Western and Eastern fabrics after Nigeria's independence in 1960. Recently, the Chinese introduced imitations of both woven and patterned dyed textiles which have almost displaced the traditional ones. Many scholarly works have been done to alert the public of the danger that might be associated with this trend. This paper therefore looks at the emergence of Chinese imitation fabrics and its effect on the locally produced fabrics. To achieve this; the paper engages multiple research techniques which include, structured and unstructured interviews, participant observation, history, use of

photographs, and note-taking. Interviews were conducted among professionals, merchants, consumers, fashion experts, and entrepreneurs. This study was carried out in Abeokuta, Ogun state, Iseyin in Oyo and Osogbo, Osun state being the traditional homes for textile production in Yoruba land. Data for the study were generated using information gathered through interviews and participant observation. Findings revealed that many of our youths are not aware of the implications of patronizing simulated textiles on home industries. In addition, many are not aware that Yoruba culture is gradually being eroded. The paper recommends an attitudinal change towards patronage of indigenous textiles as a way of revamping the ailing industry and the rich cultural heritage of our country.

**Keywords:** Culture, Disintegration, Fabrics, Indigenous, Simulating, Yoruba

## Introduction

The textile arts or industry is an extension of the way of life among different ethnic groups in Africa, and most of the time it serves as an iconic representation of the rich and dynamic culture of the people, which has grown over time among different tribes in Nigeria. Saheed (2013) established that assets such as skills, products, and meaningful contributions to social and economic well-being are generated by the people's culture and way of life. Torntore (2001) observed that *Adire* and woven fabrics are iconic representations of the culture, beliefs, language, and artistic heritage of ethnos, especially in Nigeria. The tradition of fabric production has grown predominantly among the Yoruba people due to their quest to maximize the variety of materials available within the perimeter of their location. According to Areo and Kalilu (2013), It was asserted that the rich cultural environment of the Yoruba people has been a catalyst for the rich visual expressions emanating from the people, which has greatly impacted the artistic traditions of fabric decoration in "*Adire*," weaving, leather works, and basketry, among other arts. According to Areo (2013), *Adire* was coined from two Yoruba words, "*Adi*," meaning to tie, and "*Re*, meaning to dye; in other words, it is pronounced as tie-dye. The word has an ambiguous meaning that refers to the production process and the product.

Maiwada, Dutsenwai, and Waziri (2012) claimed that hand-woven fabrics are called "*ofi*," which refers to the loom used in their production. This craft has been an age-long tradition among the people of southwestern Nigeria. Asiwaju, in Akinwumi (2015), noted that the Yoruba people have developed a modern variant of "*Adire*" from the existing one called "*Adire eleko*," which became popular and generally accepted over time because of the variation of unique design that appeals to viewers sense of beauty both locally and internationally.

The Yoruba-speaking tribe is in the southwestern axis of Nigeria, namely, Oyo, Ogun, Osun, Lagos, Ondo, Ekiti, Kwara, and, in some parts of Kogi and Edo. The Yoruba-speaking tribe spread beyond the shores of Nigeria to other countries like the Benin Republic, Togo, Sierra Leone, Cuba, and Brazil. The aforementioned tribe has invested tremendously in the Nigerian textile industry, especially in the dyeing and weaving tradition, which has turned out to be the most dynamic and decorative craft that symbolizes the unique heritage of the people, with

Abeokuta, Osogbo, Ibadan, and Iseyin as cutting-edge in the production of such fabrics. This has opened opportunities for cross-border trading in Africa and other parts of the globe. Yoruba indigenous fabrics have been one of the key boosters of the local economies in the western region of Nigeria, which rose to prominence due to their uniqueness and acceptance. This, among other factors, is responsible for the jack-up in demand and supply curves on the transSaharan trade market before the oil boom in the 1960s.

Akinwumi (2015) established that the demand for indigenous cloths integrates Yoruba cloths on the drive of local economies, which is a result of high trading environs across the west African coast to trade on the Atlantic coast, which placed Africans in an enviable position in the international trade market. The art of fabric decoration among the Yoruba gained recognition to the point that it became an iconographic representation of the culture, so much so that anytime or anywhere the craft or word *Adire* or *Aso-Oke* is mentioned, what quickly comes to mind next is the Yoruba people. The Chinese introduced imitations of both woven and patterned dyed textiles (Fig.1-4) which have almost displaced the traditional ones (Fig.58). The word "simulation" refers to the direct or indirect imitation of patterns or materials from the existing ones. Andreja, Slavica, Beti, Andrej, Zoran, and Simona (2017) observed that simulation is the exact duplication of the real physical appearances of original textile forms, which could be in terms of design or materials.

### **Statement of the Research Problem**

In Nigerian textile industries especially in the area of traditional dyed fabric, a lot of changes have taken place in the production technique of dyed fabric be it plain or resist dyeing. There has been a lot of improvements in forms, motifs generation and expressions, styles and techniques *etcetera*. All these changes have widened the technique and methods of dyed fabric production among the textile artists in Nigeria. However, there are inadequate scholarly studies on the trends of dyed fabric in the Nigerian clothing market. However, there are inadequate scholarly studies on the trends of dyed fabric in the Nigerian clothing market.

The proliferation of the market with printed look-alike dyed fabric has greatly affected the Nigerian local dyers in the production and marketing of their products as a result of the low cost of factory-printed dyed fabric. Western education made the youths and young school leavers not willing to learn the art as they preferred white-collar jobs and other lucrative vocations to dye fabric, which invariably reduced the number of local textile artists.

The technological advancement that encourages mass production and the influx of factory printed dyed materials that look exactly like indigenous dyed fabric has greatly affected and suppressed the indigenous locally produced dyed fabric. Some of the motifs used by the indigenous textile artist are transcribed into factory-printed dyed fabric which automatically has a very negative effect on the locally produced dyed fabrics in terms of patronage. It is therefore necessary and expedient to examine how the simulation of Yoruba-dyed fabric could cause cultural disintegration in the country. In other to proffer likely solutions so as not to allow indigenous dyed fabric to go into extinction especially the Batik aspect of it.

## **Aim**

The study aims to look at the emergence of Chinese imitation fabrics and their effect on Yoruba indigenous fabrics.

## **Scope of the Study**

This study examined the adverse effects of simulation on indigenous fabrics. The study was carried out in Abeokuta, Ogun State, Iseyin, Oyo and Osogbo, in Osun State which are the traditional homes for textile production in Yoruba land.

## **Methodology**

Data for this study was generated using information gathered through interviews and participatory observation. The paper engages multiple research techniques, which include structured and unstructured interviews, participant observation, historical analysis, the use of photographs, and note-taking. Interviews were conducted with about five (5) randomly selected stakeholders which included professionals, merchants, consumers, fashion experts, and entrepreneurs.

## **Review of literature.**

A review of existing relevant literature for this study has been considered and reviewed in the following sub-headings:

### **A brief history of traditional fabric.**

Akpata (1970), Areo (2013), Areo and Kalilu (2013), discussed the historical background of *Adire*, they also traced the origin of dyeing tradition among the Yoruba to Osogbo, presentday Osun State Capital, with a claim that Osogbo people were weavers and dyers, the best one could find at that time, to the point that a saying was ascribed to prove this that “*Aro mbe ni Osogbo, omo enia ni mbe nile Ibadan*,” “meaning there is a dye in Osogbo and human being is in Ibadan”. Osogbo is referred to as the home of excellent dyeing practice, but Ibadan, on the other hand, is the city of gentlemen. In the late 1930s and early 1940s, *Adire* gained prominence in Abeokuta and Ibadan, with each of the locations distinct by their unique design (Fig. 9-47, *Adire* motifs and their meaning). Prominent among them is Abeokuta. Makinde, Ajiboye, and Ajayi (2009) examined the historic evolution of woven fabrics among the Yoruba of southwestern Nigeria, with a special interest in the factors responsible for the rapid decline in patronage and the necessary ways of revamping the dyeing tradition of woven fabric.

Akinwumi (2015) states that the introduction of non-conventional materials into the dyeing industry grew remarkably from 1960 and became more popular with the blend of other materials, most importantly the introduction of synthetic dyestuffs and fibers to the Nigerian market. A new pattern was also created, apart from the traditional design, for different occasions and in commemoration of landmark events. This gave rise to patterns like the *Ade* (Crown, Fig. 47) and stencils among others.

Lloyd (2012) emphasized the influence West African contact with the Western economy has on creating a shift in the technology of the people today and how it permeates local ways of preserving the artistic heritage of certain lineages. Makinde et al. (2009) linked the decline in the production and appreciation of indigenous fabrics to the systemic destabilization of homebased industries. The idea was backed up by a policy that was implemented by Sir Fredrick Lord Lugard (Saheed, 2013) to guarantee continuous importation of British-made goods at the detriment of home-made goods. These policies became a propelling force for the decline in the production, acceptance, and patronage of indigenous textile industries. This is in addition to the introduction of foreign yarns and synthetic dyestuffs as alternatives to local materials and technology. This harms the social and economic significance of the local industries.

### **The effects of globalization on the textile industry**

Muhammad (2011) examined the impact of globalization on the Nigerian textile industry, with a focus on job losses and national security. It emphasizes the adverse effect of globalization on employment in the Nigerian textile industry vis-à-vis Nigerian security, despite the effects it has on industrial growth. He further established that globalization and liberalization of trade place an embargo on sustainable development. Muhammad, Mukhtar, and Lola (2017) examined the effects of globalization and the challenge posed by China to the Nigerian textile industry in the twenty-first century. The study concluded with a postulation that the rising dominance of imported cheap Chinese textiles in the Nigerian market is displacing the local fabrics, which has subsequently and gradually destroyed the economy of the local textile industry. Olatunji in Akinrinade (2008) revealed that 80 percent of textile consumption in Nigeria comes from smuggled textile materials from China and other Asian countries. Only 20 percent of consumption comes from local industries. He further claimed that the importation of Chinese textiles has done more harm than good to the Nigerian textile industry by drastically reducing local production capacity.

However, the reviewed literature above revealed that the most recent simulation of indigenous fabrics (dyed, woven, and patterned) has put the continuum of locally made fabrics to flight, due to the disguise of globalization and the liberalization of trade. The reality is that the trade exchange between Nigeria and China, despite the benefits associated with it, has been more detrimental to the continuous survival of indigenous textile materials and the economy at large. The in-flight simulation of indigenous fabrics by the Chinese is rapidly taking over the market and gaining wide acceptance.

### **The Role of the Textile Industry.**

The textile industry has played a major role from the pre-colonial era until the early decades of the twentieth century, and it has been one of the major inspirational drives of the culture and identity of the people. Maiwada et al. (2012) submitted that textiles are one of the cultural industries that combine creativity and cultural information to produce products that resonate with the lifestyles of people. Marjory (1980) concludes that "textile products are an integral part of every person's daily life." This is true for Yoruba textiles (woven or dyed fabrics), which

are used to commemorate or celebrate prominent events among the people. Worth noting is the exhibition of relationships and the spirit of oneness that exist among the Yoruba, which is the culture of uniformism during parties. Aremu (2006) revealed that *Aso-Ebi* is a means of publicly displaying affection for one another. As one of the reflections of culture, the fabrics are used as a hallmark of major events in Yoruba land. Worth mentioning are "*Ekimogun*" in Ondo State, "*Ojude Oba*" in Ogun State, and "*Egungun*" Fiesta in Oyo State. Makinde et al. (2009) report Chief Odetola's facts about *Aso-Oke* as fabrics used for spiritual purposes that, when combined with leather and spiritual invocation through incantations, serve as protection.

The local textile industry has continuously contributed to sustainable growth and development in Nigeria. The unique creativity and aesthetics of Yoruba fabrics make them an eye-catching desire of everyone who meets them. This made room for diffusion across West Africa. Byfield (2002) and Eades (1993) asserted that the Nigerian *Adire* fabrics product sold across its shore to other African countries like Ghana, Senegal, the Congo, and the Benin Republic, among others. This broadens cross-border trade and boosts the economy of the region due to the high demand for these fabrics. Byfield, in Norman (2005), revealed that merchants from other African countries came to Abeokuta to buy *Adire* fabrics. This, among other factors, is responsible for the boom in the textile industry. In the twenty-first century, the new colorful *Adire* continues to meet fashion challenges and to be an alternative to machine prints. Ayodeji (2023) points out the structural dichotomy in the textile industry in Yoruba land before now. stating that local fabrics used to be the strength of the economy in Yoruba land, ranking them among cash crops like cocoa, rubber, and cola-nut produced in the region. He further explained that dyeing and weaving, being a transgenerational craft that has been passed from one generation to the next, is also an industry whose value chain has created enormous jobs in the past, but unfortunately, it is now history. Although the dyeing and weaving industry is still struggling to maintain its status, I am afraid that the recent trend might erode it.

### **Decline in the production of local fabrics**

The post-colonial period has been marked by its challenges for the Nigerian textile industry and the risk of a rising trend that is associated with a desire for imported print fabrics. This became prominent shortly after the independence celebration in 1960. But before then, there was a structure that gave room for the exploitation of resources in Nigeria. Rodney, in Makinde et al. (2009), stated that British policy in Nigeria from 1886 was designed to knock down the home industries to guarantee continuing importation of British-made goods to her colonies, which Sir Lord Lugard implemented. Akinwumi (2015) notes that British policies only sought markets to promote their goods at the expense of indigenous products. Nigeria has witnessed a sudden shift with the introduction of synthetic dye and fiber, which were adopted in 1960. Areo (2013) explains the innovation that came with the adaptation of synthetic materials, with a blend of new techniques introduced by Suzzan Wenger.

Most recently, the growing influence and decline in the demand and patronage of local fabrics crashed with the rise in demand for imitation fabrics. Banke, a merchant in "Itoku" market in Abeokuta, Ogun State. She has lamented her painful experience, stating that for about 3 decades in the business of *adire* merchandise, this period was different. Owing to the influx of cheap

adulterated Chinese *Adire*, so many prefer to go for these cheaper imitation fabrics than the locally made ones. The reason is that the economic situation is biting hard, so much so that people prefer to go for pocket-friendly materials if they serve the purpose of covering their nakedness. This has taken a toll on the merchant and reduced the sale and patronage of indigenous goods.

### **Results of Findings**

One of the artisans in local *Adire* production in Abeokuta Jimoh Sofiat, and Alhaji Mufutau, one of the weavers in Iseyin, both relate their experience to the effect of the imitation fabrics, stating that production in the industries operates on the scale of demand, which is linked with patronage by the merchants of these fabrics. *Safi* categorically said that high patronage from consumers determined, to a great extent, the number of demands from the local producer of *Adire*. Both conclude that demand for these fabrics has decreased in recent times. Both *Safi* and Mufutau cried out that the government should come to their rescue because if this trend continues, it will threaten to throw them out of jobs.

In response to the imitation fabrics, one of them gave an honest view about why she chose the fabric.

*"I love Adire Fabrics because of the uniqueness and satisfaction that comes with the fabrics, but at the same time, the economy has not been friendly for me to be able to comfortably afford the local Adire because of the high cost of buying good Adire fabrics, and as long as this imported fabric is budget-friendly, I don't mind." Ajibike Adekunle.*

The responses from many individualized interviews revealed that most people cannot differentiate between local fabrics and imitation fabrics because they see them as *Adire*. It was also detected from their response that most went to the market intending to buy local *Adire*, but it was unknown to them that it was not the indigenous *Adire* that they ended up with. Some, on the other hand, were lured by the cheap price and shining effect of the fabrics.

### **Discussion of Findings Effect of the Simulations**

The decline of the textile industry through the importation of Chinese imitation fabrics has adverse effects on various aspects of our lives as individuals and as a nation at large. The importation of simulation fabrics is detrimental to the survival and continuity of locally made fabrics (woven and dyed), which have social and cultural relevance to the projection of identity. It is a known fact that the words *Adire* and *Aso-Oke* are symbolic to the Yoruba as much as "Riri" is symbolic to the Hausa. The uniqueness of these fabrics is linked to the technicality of their processes and products, which is an iconographic representation of originality. (Personal communication, Ayodeji 2023) he established that most of the pattern in *Adire*, especially "*Adire Eleko*" iconic record of events, is proverbial, beyond fashion aesthetics. The acceptance of simulation is having a downplaying effect on the cultural identity of our local textile industry, and if care is not taken, a generation will come that will feel like we are not capable of producing these fabrics because the simulation would have eroded this local industry, just as it is difficult for the youngsters to believe local Nigerian fabrics are highly demanded around the world.

Dahunsi (2023) emphasized that importation is detrimental to the sustainability and economic development of a nation, not minding whether it is a simulation of locally made or foreign products. Importation will generally make Nigeria demand foreign currency, which in turn will lead to the devaluation of the local currency. He asserted that the double jeopardy associated with a country importing a simulation of products that are locally produced in the country is one of the fastest ways to kill the local industries, which is tantamount to starving the industry of its benefits in terms of employment, processing of raw materials, increased exportation, and attraction of investors, among others. Ajayi (2023), opined that, continuous patronage of Chinese imitation fabrics could lead to the dearth of the local textile industry and, in turn, throw many youths out of their jobs.

Dahunsi (2023) says that *“it's a Neo-colonial mentality that imported products are of higher quality than our local products, which is why some prefer to go for imported products even when at times these products are inferior to the indigenous products.”* This practically affects the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and Per Capital Income (PCI), which also affect the growth of the economy. Murtala in Bello, Inyinbo, Dada, and Oluyori (2013): *“The predicament that bedeviled the Nigerian textile economy that earlier had a considerable advantage in textile production, which manifested itself in the last three decades as a result of globalization, resulted in a steady deepening economic crisis that has had adverse and far-reaching consequences. This considerably affected the textile industry, wiped out labor, and left behind an unsecured nation.”*

Taiwo (2023) enumerates the implications of this Chinese fabric on our health as humans, stating that a large populace is not knowledgeable about what to wear and what not to wear in different climatic conditions. He further established that different climatic conditions appreciate fibers, which are sensitive to proper regulation of atmospheric temperature. The Chinese simulation fabrics are made of thermoplastic fiber, which harms the wearers. *“I am sure of this because I have seen many wear clothing that is meant for cold atmospheric conditions on a sunny day; this will certainly have a side effect on our skin.”* Singh and Bhalla (2017) revealed that many fabrics today, especially synthetic ones, are manufactured with tons of chemicals that are highly toxic and pose a serious threat to our health. Some of the threats to our health are but not limited to, allergic reactions, overheating and sweating, respiratory problems, environmental impacts, and microplastic contamination.

### **Recommendations**

The challenges that beset us now with the rising trend of devaluation of the local industry have placed Nigeria on the bema of importation, which today leads to the importing of products that can be locally produced in the country. Research experiments have proven that the industrialization of local industries is a major propelling force for development and a sustainable economy. Dahunsi (2023) affirms that rather than importing these products, local industries should be encouraged through initiatives that promote the exportation of our indigenous products. Create a market network for the producers of local products that will drive the sale of this product locally and internationally.



Finally, an embargo should be placed on the importation of simulation fabrics (woven and dyed) into the country, and policies that will boost the local industries and products should be enacted by the government. The people should be properly informed about the difference between the local fabrics and the imitation Chinese fabrics. Ajayi (2023) recorded the action of Governor Dapo Abiodun to immediately respond to the cry of the local dyers in the state by declaring that *Adire* Fabrics should be used across the state on Fridays and in Osun state the governor, Senator Jackson Nurudeen Adeleke also declared Wednesday of every week to be for wearing *Adire* Osun. Worth noting is the demonstration by the Abeokuta group of the *Adire* Association for the peaceful march to the state and the Alake palace in solidarity against the spread of Chinese simulation fabrics. It is believed that these recommendations when carried out, will encourage the use of indigenous textiles.

### **Conclusion**

Colonialization has left a negative imprint on the indigenous fabric among the Yoruba of southwestern Nigeria. It is gradually replacing the traditional materials, processes, and technology of producing our local fabrics among the Yoruba. Most of the prominent local woven and dyed fabrics are gradually becoming a shadow of what they used to be. Though we can rule out innovation associated with exposure to foreign materials, Makinde et al. (2009) observed that the arrival of Christianity and Islamic religion encourages new dress cultures, which further endanger the survival of our local fabrics.

The mentality that anything that is imported is more durable and quality than the local products is neo-colonial slavery. This ideology makes the youth, especially those who associate our local attire or fabrics with being primitive or fetish, now prefer imported fabrics and simulation fabrics. Nigeria as a nation will record a remarkable improvement in the economy if we can change our attitude towards our local industry and products as opposed to the acceptance and importation of foreign textiles.

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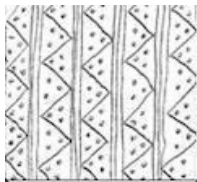
1-4 Imitated *Adire* from Sabo market stall, Osogbo, Osun State  
 Photograph and Collections by the Authors

Figure

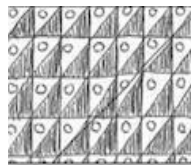


Figure 5-:8 Traditional Adire from FunkyTex , Estate, Osogbo  
 Photograph and Collection by the Authors

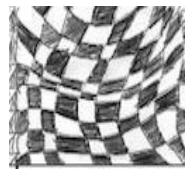
Motifs and their Meanings



**Plate 9**  
 Cross road.  
 want to fly to



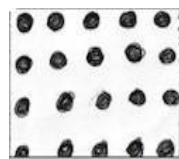
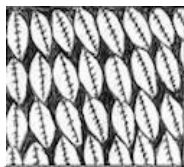
**Plate 10**  
 Feather, anywhere you  
 (*Ominira*).



**Plate 11**  
 Liberty

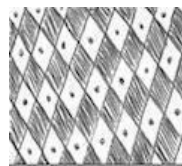


**Plate 12**  
 Wave of life,  
 wave away my problem. you will get there first.

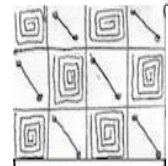


**Plate 13**  
 (Money will soon  
 your way).

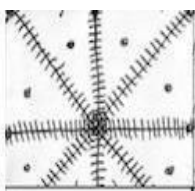
Hope.



**Plate 14**  
 Matches Long life.



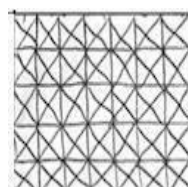
**Plate 15**  
 Cowry shell, money come



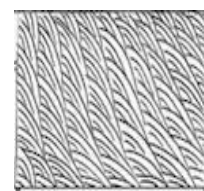
**Plate 17**  
 Guinea corn.



**Plate 18**  
 Sango. (Protects

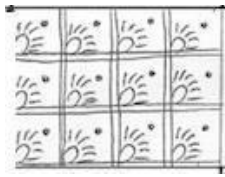


**Plate 19**  
 Defence,



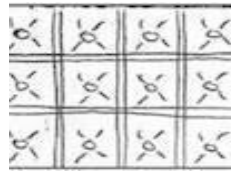
**Plate 20**  
 Water.

(The hand that feed  
you never lack).



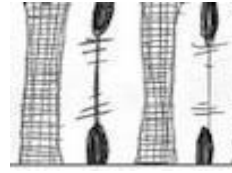
**Plate 21**  
When your star is  
shining bright,  
nobody can block it.

from thunder).



**Plate 22**  
Earing,  
only hear good news.

your inner spirit  
will always defend you

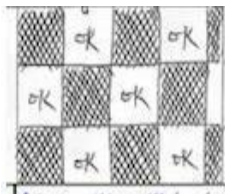


**Plate 23**  
Pillars of strength,  
spoon of honey.

(Water has no enemy).



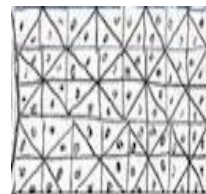
**Plate 24**  
Wall gecko,  
peaceful home.



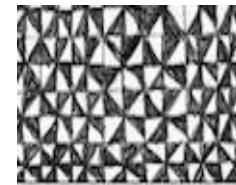
**Plate 25**  
be ok. Crossroad,



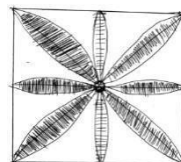
**Plate 26**  
Sekere Drum.  
your journey may  
be difficult  
but you will get there



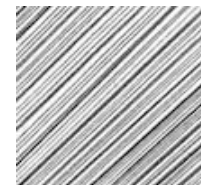
**Plate 27**  
Talking drum,



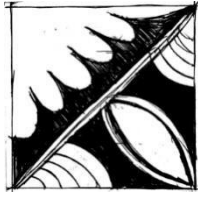
**Plate 28**  
Everything will  
sending messages  
through the drum.



**Plate 29**  
Ewe Ege Cassava leaf.

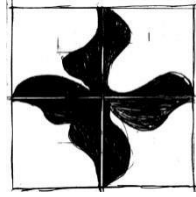


**Plate 30**  
Mirror (Dingi)  
Someone that's a reflection in your life

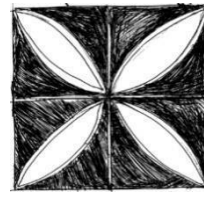


**Plate 31**  
Leave motif.

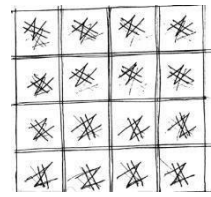
protects  
(Bigger Dove Eye)



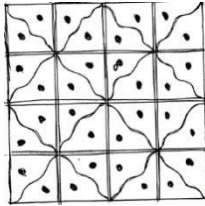
**Plate 32**  
Oloju Eyele Nla



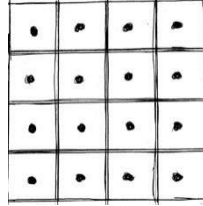
**Plate 33**  
Naira Motif.



**Plate 34** Shango  
from thunder.

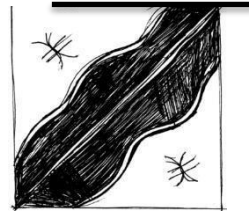


**Plate 35**  
motif  
(Groundnut)

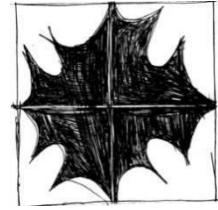


**Plate 36**  
Dot design.

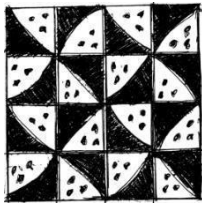
(Okro Leave)



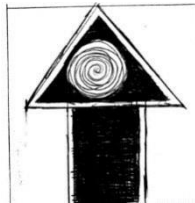
**Plate 37**  
Epa Motif



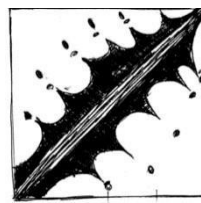
**Plate 38** Onigunmeta  
Ewe Ila motif (Triangle)



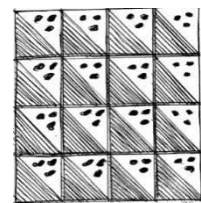
**Plate 39**  
(Triangle)  
Onigunmeta



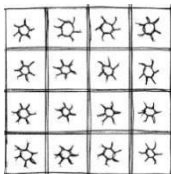
**Plate 40**  
Umbrella motif  
(Aburada)



**Plate 41**  
Contemporary motif.



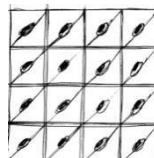
**Plate 42**  
Toro Fankale Motif  
(Three Peace Design).



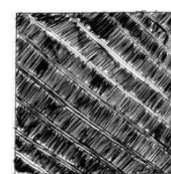
**Plate 43**  
Irawo (Star) motif.



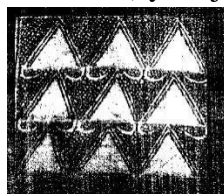
**Plate 44**  
Contemporary motif. Eye ball Motif.  
(eyin oju).



**Plate 45**



**Plate 46**  
Onikika Legbe  
(Pleating) motif



*Figure 47: Crown (Ade)*