

## ADAPTING THE JUKUN TRADITIONAL SYMBOLS FOR TEXTILE DESIGN AND PRODUCTION.

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### **Abstract**

*The uniqueness of Africa is not because of its geographical location, but because of its diverse rich cultural heritage, symbolic operation and adages that surround the entire spectrum of human learning, reasoning, and communication. This research work on adaptation of the Jukun cultural symbols for textile design gives a brief introduction of the Jukun people, which are called the “karorofawas” with their rich cultural symbols. Its importance to the Jukun societies and how through symbolization, the Jukun people have communicated their ideas, fears, anxieties, moods, sensations, feelings and intuitions. All of these experiences, of course, are subjective or emotional, yet are capable of being graphically represented in line, shape, color, texture, and form. It asserts that, since people easily and readily relate with what they are familiar with, the need for adapting the Jukun cultural symbols and its intrinsic values to the Jukun communities and the world at large cannot be over emphasis. The artistic process of the cultural symbols adaptation for textile design shall also be handled.*

### **Introduction**

Historically, the Jukun according to their traditions, which are confirmed by such sources as the Kano Chronicle, are the descendants of the people known as the Kororofawa. They came from the Arabian Peninsula to Western Sudan and later settled near Lake Chad around Kanem-Borno. That was where they founded the city of Kukawa which later became capital of the Kanuri. This migration continued to Ngazargamu through Mandara hills, Mubi, Kilba, River Hawal (in Gongola), Shane, Pindiga (in present Gombe state) Gwana in present Bauchi state and finally settled in Wukari in present Taraba State. The word Wukari is jukun dialect, meaning: a better place, probably better than all the places they had ever been; hence they decided to make it their permanent abode. During the Fourteenth century, the Kororofawa (also called Jukun) were the objects of campaigns by the rulers of Kano, a city which they attacked in the sixteenth

century and again in the seventeenth century when they nearly captured it. At one time, the kororofawa (Jukun) controlled the largest part of Nigeria, extending from the borders of Hausa Land to Cross River State.

According to Zakaria (2007) The Jukun (“PaJukun”) are popularly known as the “Wapan” whose early history is very abstruse. Wapan (or Jukun) is the name by which people of the Jukun ethnic group call themselves, and are understood by many people. There are two oral traditions with regards to the word “Jukuns”. According to one tradition, the word Jukun is derived from the word “Pajukun” which means, it has been shortened and corrupted by the Hausas to Jukun, due to the difficulty in pronunciation. Whereas the other tradition, holds that the word ‘Jukun’ came into being as a result of a response to a white man when he was curiously looking at a very tall Jukun man. The Jukun man asked “mchim Pajukun ba?” Which means “am I not a human being?” Hence from this response we understood that the word “Jukun” means “Human being”

The statement above suggests that the word Jukun is not actually the name of the people but it was a nickname. Hence, it is obvious that anybody can be called with such a name “Jukun”. The Jukun people live in Wukari Local Government Area in present Taraba state. The town is located between latitude 7°51’N, 9°47’E and longitude 7.85°N, 9.783°E. (Google maps retrieved March 20 2014). The headquarters of Wukari local Government is about 202 km South West of Jalingo, Taraba State capital. The famous home of the Aku-uka, the traditional ruler is called Wukari. Wukari is one of the Local Government Areas that was created in 1976 and is divided into 15 traditional administrative districts namely: Wukari, Avyi, Matar-Fada, Gidan-Idi, Tsokundi, Nwokyo, Rafin-Kada, Chonku, Kente, Chinka, Jibu, Assa, Bantaje, Arufu and Akwana. It has a population of about 216,428 according to the 2006 census figure.

The dominant ethnic group in Wukari is the Jukun. The others are settlers, among whom are the Hausa, Igbo, Tiv, Bachama, Idoma, Yoruba, Tarok and Angwei, among others. The Jukun people of Wukari Local Government Area of Taraba State are predominantly farmers. Work force for farming activities is raised through traditional system known as “gaya”. It (Gaya) is a communal effort which involves friends, neighbours and relatives. It is meant to ease heavy work load among various groups in Nigeria. Those involved in such communal activities respectively eat and drink local food and beverages. This method of cooperation is applied to farm work right from planting to harvest. Crops produced include yam, maize, rice, groundnut, guinea corn, cassava, vegetables and fruits such as mango and orange among others. In the area of livestock, forestry and water resources, the Jukun also rear large numbers of cattle, sheep, goats, pigs and poultry. They also engage in fishing, and also hew timber and firewood.

### **The Jukun Traditional Attire**

African textiles represent the rich cultural heritage of the African continent. The artistic creations in the African textile segment through structural relationships of form, designs, patterns and colors express feelings and emotions which cannot be voiced in any other way (Wikipedia accessed 29.03.2014). The Jukun people are known for high quality weaving and cloth dyeing tradition. According to Gausa (2005) traditional attire as practiced by the Jukun is part of their culture which serves as a means of brotherhood identification. The Jukun people have different types of cultural attires made from different colours, patterns and weaves. Among types of adire are; kadzwe, Ayin - po, Adire and Baku. kyadzwe are used by the Jukun rulers for royalty. Jukun strip weavers used locally spun cotton. Only yarn dyed blue or black was available. These blue threads were woven with a dull white cotton yarn to produce some block simple geometric

patterns for local people (My Life: 216). Weavers among the Jukun produce their materials ranging from narrow strips cloth from narrow loom to a large piece of yard for garment making which is used during their cultural festivals. However, these cloths seem to lack any form of innovation or modification. And as a result of that, it has now been overtaken by Western trend in fashion.

Lamb and Holmes (1980) lamented the rate at which the craft is going into extinction and the decline in its patronage as a result of new reference points. New trends, as result of civilization, came to being. More so, the Jukun traditional attire does not bear any cultural symbols, except the ones that are meant for the ruling class such as the Aku. The Jukun cultural symbols have for long been relegated to the background and as such, it is not recognized and appreciated by many people. Most of the traditional cloths that were once produced by the Jukun weavers and dyers have already disappeared, and the technique of the craft is no longer in practice. This could be due to technical problems associated with weaving, the poor aesthetics quality and unmodified nature of the cloths. Consequently, the level of patronage of the cloth has gone down. Gausa (2005) also observes that the major function of traditional cloth for cultural symbols in form of dressing code for tribal identification in a particular region. Taste, beauty and correct judgments of product finishing is increasing every now and then. Therefore, the thought for change would always be remembered as we look forward to producing cultural material (adire) for our cultural identity within our cultural dynamism.

### **Traditional symbols of the Jukun**

The Jukun are known for their symbolic lifestyle. These are seen through the way they revere their king (Aku). Symbols are stored or contained in culture, whereas culture is the way of people's life. It is an integral part of the organizational life of most Jukun communities. They are not simply by-products of organization, but rather elements that structure members' active construction of sense, knowledge and behavior. The Jukun symbols can be perceived by sight and touch. They are therefore experienced as real image or sign and their impact has significant social consequences. Symbols form the intellectual and imaginative part of the Jukun man through which he transforms his knowledge and experience of the environment as well as his inner and subjective world into special codes, patterns, and visual configurations that represent reality in abstract terms. Some of the graphic symbols seen among the Jukuns are signs or images that express meaning indirectly. They are surrogate images; serve as "stand-ins" for other factual data. Jukun communities are known to possess a rich cultural heritage, sound proverbs, adages and symbols. And since people easily and readily relate with what they are familiar with, the adaptation of these symbols is inevitable.

Jukuns' are unique in their likes and interest as these are influenced by the communal pattern of life they live. Symbolic and artistic expression among the Jukun is based on the functional relationship between religion, agriculture, sorcery and power. The Jukun people of Taraba state of Nigeria have rich diversity of visual artistic symbols significant to their cultural life and religious orientation. They effectively exploit these symbols to make impactful statements. The various symbols they have bear the same meaning among all the other Jukun communities in the Upper Benue region as well as other communities that share similar cultural background (Meek, 1930). Firth (1973) notes that, "Symbols are signs that are commonly

agreed and interpreted by a group of people". Gausa (2013) assert that, among the symbols of the Jukun are the Red colors (Abukhan) which connote the warring nature of the Jukun nation, Black color (Abu pe) which depicts the king as a rain maker; white color (Abu fyen) which portrays the Jukun nation as a peace loving people. According to Chu (2003), symbols and signs are phenomena which are universally accepted by groups, including the Jukuns.

Symbols are the instrument of societal development and growth, but the Jukun cultural symbols and, of course, that of most Jukun societies are yet to be documented in any form. Although the people are surrounded by a lot of important cultural symbols that have cross-cultural affiliation with their neighbouring communities and even countries like Ghana and Cameroun, most of the Jukun cultural symbols have not been adapted for any other use or documented in literary form.

From the available literatures, it is clear that very scanty information exist regarding the forms and functions of cultural symbols of the Jukun people of Taraba state. Similarly, little information about some of their festivals, dance and cloth weaving cultures has been articulated in writing. For example, Lambs and Holmes (1980) studied Jukun patterned fabrics and identified some colours which are culturally relevant and symbolic. These colours are black and white and sometimes could be seen in blue and white. They also identified some reptiles and insects which are revered in the Jukun world-view such as crocodiles.

According to Jukun folklore, the crocodile helped them to cross a river when their enemies were pursuing them. The symbol of scorpion speaks of the king as a man of peace, except someone provokes him to a fight. Among other reptiles, the lizard symbolizes hospitality as it is the only creature that lives in houses of both the great and small. And the chameleon symbolizes change. It also signifies the attitude of the Jukun to change. Some cosmic bodies like the star and moon symbolize the Aku as a center of attraction among the Jukun people. The compass signifies the extent to which the Aku's leadership spreads to the North, South, East, and West. The spear and sword speak of their ability as great warriors. The bird in a flight symbolizes progress and prosperity. The tripod stone signifies the God, the Aku, and the Religious Teacher as the only beings the Jukun community holds in high esteem.

As it is obvious from the above and as with many African societies, the Jukun symbols are also derived from the animal and vegetable world as well as the cosmic. Some of these symbols are extracted from natural sources. This observation is in agreement with Smith (2010) who notes that "Uli patterns are simplified or abstracted forms taken from nature or functional items". Most of the Jukun symbols and motifs are abstracted by the designers. This practice is common among various Jukun ethnic groups and communities. Symbols and motifs are important means of communication. Chu (2003) elaborates this thus: "Symbols assist people in understanding the past, present and future, because symbols are generated within the perspectives and aspiration of culture in different periods of history".

Some of these symbols have been used by cloth designers to pattern their fabrics, for example the fabrics that is worn by the Aku the king. The researcher did observe that some of the Jukun symbols have relationship with those used to decorate the robe of the Ashanti king of Ghana, particularly, the Adinkra fabric, and the manner in which it is worn. Lamb and Holmes (1980:148) shade more light on this thus:

The Jukun, in a way, mark major boundary point in the distribution of Jukun dress between, on one hand the gown of the Hausa and those they have influenced and, on the other hand, the Togo-like cloths so common throughout the coastal and forest region of

west Africa...but the major Jukun weaving center is Akwana, some twenty-five mile to the west of Wukari.

A critical look at most of Jukun cloth shows a remarkable similarity between the two cultures. Particularly, the adinkra fabric from Ashanti kingdom in Ghana and the kyadzwe fabric of the Jukuns,' this might be the result of cross cultural influence. Consequently these societies will find it much easier to embrace it because of the symbolic attachment, thereby promoting patronage amidst the two cultures.

### Some of the Jukun symbols



Figure.1. A spiral line  
Size: 2'' x 2''

The spiral line (Fig 1) symbolizes the chameleon and connotes societal change. Since the colour of the chameleon changes gradually over a time, the Jukun man believes that change in the society ought also to be a gradual process.



Figure.2. Kahwa (sword)  
Size: 2'' x 2''

Figure 2 is a triangular form. Among the Igbo, according to Okunna (2014) this is called akwukwa: meaning tripod, and symbolizes merry-making. But to the Jukun, this is called the sword of justice. But it symbolizes 'a Call to arms' (readiness and preparedness for action or battle). Among the Jukun it also means Vigilance.



Figure.3. ATSOSHI (spear)  
Size: 2'' x 2''

Figure 3 which represents The Aku's mysterious spear which is believed to cause noise and earthquake once it is thrust to the ground. This spear signifies the Aku's symbol of authority.



Figure.4. Atswi (star)  
Size: 2" x 2"

Figure 4 represents the star. The star is the reflection of God's personality in the person of Aku. This is a belief among the Jukun. It also means guardianship or faith in God as it is associated with Christian religion.

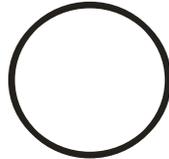


Figure.5. A Circle  
Size: 2" x 2"

Figure 5 represents the circle. Among the Jukun the circle symbolizes continuity. The Jukun believe that there should be continuity of cultural values among the younger generation.



Figure.6. Tisem (tripod circle)  
Size: 3" x 3"

The tripod circle ((Fig. 6)) stands for the respect that the Jukuns give to God, the Aku, and the Religious Teachers of their time. They believed that just as the stone is used for balancing of pot while cooking so also the power of God depends solidly, on God's sovereignty, Aku and the Religious Teacher in the Jukun community.

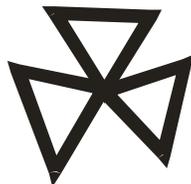


Figure.7. Nanabi (birds)  
Size: 2" x 2"

Figure 7 symbolizes the sea bird, which has a different method of feeding that distinguishes it from other birds. This sea bird scratches the sand forward in search for food. This stands for the kings' attitude toward the progress of his people.

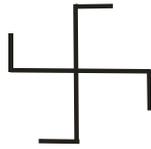


Figure.8. Compass  
Size: 2'' x 2''

The compass (fig. 8) represents the four cardinal points of Aku's kingdom. His dominion extends to North, South, East, and West.



Figure.9. the crocodile  
Size: 2'' x 2''

The crocodile (Fig 9) symbolizes savior, friendship or prudence. It is sometimes represented in triangle form in most Jukun communities.

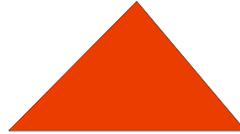


Figure.10. Abu khan  
Size: 2'' x 2''

Red colour (Fig 10) stands for the dangerous nature of the Jukun king (Aku)



Figure.11. Ason (moon and star)  
Size: 2'' x 2''

Moon and star (Fig 11) stand for Love, Faithfulness and Fondness. They also represent the way the Jukuns see their king. The Jukun see Aku as God. This understanding is similar to Jesus of Nazereth as "the bright and morning star" (Revelation 22:16).



Figure.12. Abu pe (black coloured triangle)  
Size: 2'' x 2''

The black colour (Fig 12) stands for the Aku as a rain maker.

### **Studio adaptation process of the Jukun traditional symbols**

The adaptation of the Jukun symbols in the 21<sup>st</sup> century has become necessary. This is because the symbols are not artistically organized and adapted for global presentation. But if the trend of activities in the global world is checked, it could be seen that Africa has become the biggest market for all the industrialized countries. The reason is simple: availability of enormous potentials. Consequently, the adaptation of these symbols for textile design will help unlock those latent potentials. Mamza (2007) observed that any nation that seeks relevance and competitiveness in this age of globalization must make every effort to give its citizens the best education possible. The Jukun symbols if properly adapted is an instrument par excellence that will project the identity of the people. It will open up a door of economic breaker through, identity recovery, job creation and make our teaming unemployed youth employers of labour rather than employees. Mean while, the human eye wants to see new things, and since society's culture is neither static nor unchanging, but rather is in a constant state of flux, influencing and being influenced by other world-views, expressive forms becomes very imperative. Then, Jukun symbolic adaptation is inevitable in our today's society. Consequently this paper comes up with this research.

### **Design motifs adapted from Jukun symbols**

Below are some motifs adapted from the Jukun community in Taraba state. The motifs are extracted from various Jukun symbols in figure 1-12 and were adapted in designs for interior decoration, wall hangings, and fashion.



Figure.13a.



Figure.13b.



Figure.13c.

Figure 13a, b, c, is a mix media drawings of some extracted Jukun symbols drawn on cardboard paper using charcoal, pencil, poster colours and ink. © Gausa 2013. Figure 13a is titled Acinku( head of Aku's masquerade), while figure 13b is Asankweshi-(constructed calabash for music) and figure 13c is titled conqueror. All these titles have historical significance among the Jukun people this was highlighted in the introduction.



Figure.14. Title; the hunter.  
Dimension 20.5”x12.5”

The piece titled “the hunter” (figure 14) is an attempt to bring to mind the importance of hunting as man’s first occupation during the stone age. The symbols adapted for this textile design is meant to give the younger generation the picture of the past in this present time. The work (The hunter) is drawn on a cardboard paper using red and black colour pen. The inspiration was from the horn of an animal (Antelope) that are mostly found around that region.



Figure.16a.  
Figure.16.d

Figure.16b.

Figure.16c.

Figure.16a, b, c. Title; Sinsiya madaurinki daya

Medium: fabric, ink, pencil and charcoal on cardboard.  
Dimension: 20.5”x12.5”  
© Gausa 2013

The piece ‘Sinsiya madaurinki daya’ is produced using a mix media approach (pencil, charcoal, pen, and cut out piece of fabric design) organized on a cardboard paper. The researcher believes that beauty is the product of creativity. Hence, introduces a motif from an already printed fabric which was cut out. This design carried the following symbols such as, a circle, a moon, a horn, and a bird. The cut out fabric motifs was trimmed properly and fixed on the background sketch (The crocodile fig 16a) by the means of adhesive gum. An over lapping method was also employed to cover some of the forms, thereby producing a beaux-arts. The moon is a symbol which connotes the Aku as center of attraction, the horn are from the animal around that region while the sea bird stand for the leadership character of the king as being progress minded. The bird in the design is not any bird other than sea bird because of it unique mode of feeding. The sea bird scratches the ground forward in search for food, unlike others birds that scratched theirs backward. The sea bird stands for a belief that; a leader ought to always look forward for the progress of his people instead of looking back at their offences or the fault committed.



Figure.17a.



Figure.17b.

The first stage involved in the design process was the drilling of a hole in the center of the baskets, a twelve nuts and bolt was used to screw the two baskets together to form a flower vast (figure 17a). A jute fiber was used as a means of incorporating the cultural symbols on the flower vase. The process involved unraveled of jute bag; the jute fiber was dyed in different colours such as yellow, orange, green, red, and navy blue for the flower vase as shown in figure 17b. A permanent ink marker was used in drawing out the motif on the constructed flower vast. After which the dyed jute fibers was applied on the basket (flower vase) by the means of adhesive material to bring out the form of the motif. Cut out pieces of a ready made fabric was also used to create variety of forms and shapes.



Figure.19a.



Figure.19b.

Titled: Royalty for interior decoration

This is the finished flower vase (figure 19a and b) produced from cultural symbols and materials; a local storage basket with some adapted Jukun symbols via mix media approach. © Gausa 2013



Figure.22a.



Figure.22b.



Figure.22c.

Furnishing designs titled Title; tapirika bu cindu (life circle), Ajo wa jender (a friend in need, is a friend indeed).

These furnishing designs concepts are adapted from the Jukun cultural symbols known as crocodile and tripod stone. © Gausa 2013



Figure.24a. Asankweshi - (constructed calabash for music) Back view      Figure.24b front view

Figure 24 is a finish work from figure 13b Asankweshi - (constructed calabash for music)



Figure.25a. Title; GAYI (provider)  
Screen printing  
Dimension 9"x7

Figure.25b Title; Apa wa hoco wasansan  
Screen printing  
Size: 7" x 5"



Figure.26.Sinsiya madaurinki daya (finished work of fig 16)

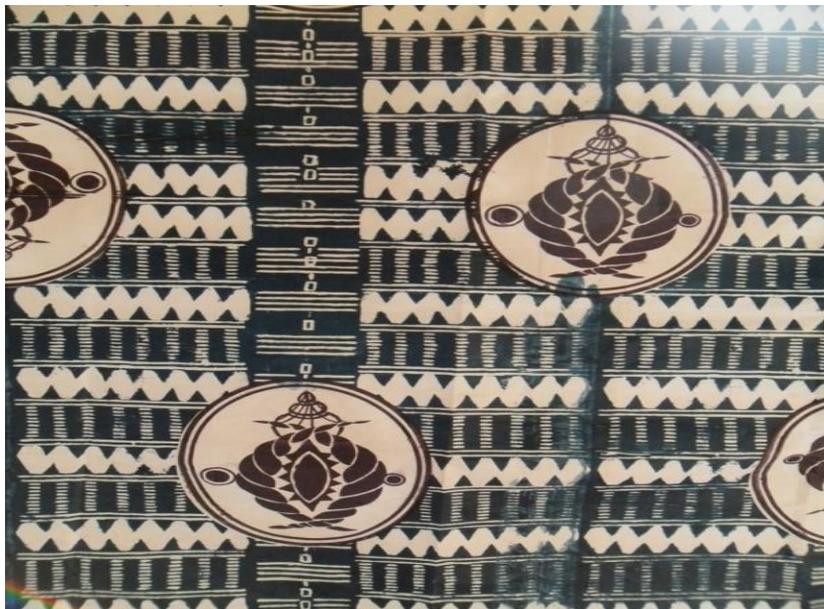


Figure.27.Title; Acinku (the head of Aku masquerade)

Printed design on fabric

Medium: screen printing on fabric

Length: 180"x45"

© Gausa 2013

The 'Acinku' is the symbol of the Aku masquerade (fig 13a). This masquerade is used to entertain the Aku, king of Jukun, during coronation and important festivals in the Jukun communities. The design is inserted in a 'kadze' fabric for adaptation. The motifs composed are combination of the Jukun mask called Acinku and a horn. The researcher's idea of this work of

art is about a masquerade festival that is commonly practiced among the Jukun. Whenever a hunter kills, an animal such as; Buffalo, Tiger, Boar, lion or elephant, a feast is organized for the people. Once this happens, the masquerade will have to come out to perform with a unique sound. This sound has several meanings which could either be an alert, indicating that something dangerous has happened or a sign to inform the cult members that a hero is found among the hunters and he needed to be honored. Thus, the cult members will come together for the festival. This practice is not only observed among the Jukun people, but it is held in most African societies, including the Zulu people of South Africa. The technique used in the execution of this work is purely screen printing method.



Figure.28.Title; Psalm 23  
Printed design on fabric  
Medium: screen printing  
Length: 180”x45”  
© Gausa 2013.

The design on this wrapper is from figure 28, it is titled The Psalmist. This portrays the Aku as a shepherd over his people. The motif used was developed from a study of the Jukun symbols. The silo incorporated at the topmost part of the design stands for provision. The primary function of silo is to serve as storage for food. The Psalmist, David says “the lord is my shepherd I shall not want...thy rod and thy staff they comfort me” (Psalms 23:4.) Biblically the staff symbolizes leaderships while the rod stands for discipline. Though the Aku provides food for his people, he also punishes offenders irrespective of their status in the society. That is why the scorpion tail was incorporated beneath. The blue colour represents the supremacy of God over all. The technique employed was basically screen-printing. The design is suitable for use as dress or furnishing material.



Figure.29.title; Andeba bu aken.-(a call for war)  
Printed design on fabric  
Medium: screen printing  
Length 180"x45  
© Gausa 2013.

Figure 29 is one of the Jukun major traditional attire called kyadze, which was modified by incorporating some of the Jukun cultural symbols. The work is titled "Adenba bu Aken" which means "call for war". Although we need peace in our world today, the work is born from the artist passion to document their historical past as warriors on their local fabric. Contrary to one that lacks design, this modified cloth has a motif that records the history of the Jukun people.

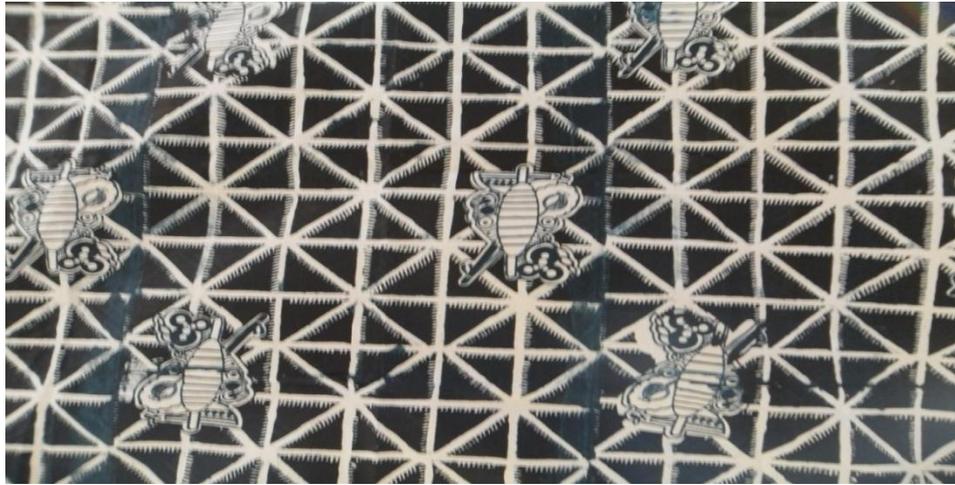


Figure.30. Title; Adire asankweshi-(constructed calabash for music from fi 13b)

Printed design on fabric

Medium: screen printing on fabric

Length 180"x45

Prototype using screen printing © Gausa 2013.

Adire is a popular tie and dye fabric produced among all the major ethnic groups that we have in Nigeria, but the Jukun Adire is different and unique among all others. The Jukun Adire cloth bears a fish bonelike effect as it can be seen in their craft. However, their Adire cloth lacks motifs. Consequently, this studio experiment considered it appropriate to incorporate motifs derived from musical instrument on the fabric. The Jukun people use this attire often during their "Gogge" dancing festival and during any other cultural entertainment. The finished work was produced using screen printing technique and could be used as skirt and blouse or 'buba' dress wear.



Figure.31. Title: celebration

Wall hanging using cultural symbols and local material such as plan seed, jute bag, shell of melon seed. © Gausa 2013.

The designed area was resist using a large polythene bag and masking tape, the tape was used to tape the edges so as to resist the penetration of dye into the designed area. The work was stretched on a table and a dark green dye solution was used with a spraying mechanism to spray the remaining surface so that the design can stand out from a far. The sprayed work was allowed to dry under the sun to prevent it from smearing on the design.

### Conclusion

The Jukun traditional symbols just like the ones from other society need to be given a global presentation through adaptation. This artistic approach in addressing Jukun symbols is not only for aesthetic purpose, but also to serve as a means of communication, social interaction and cultural identification among the concern group, the Jukun society and the world at large. The work also speaks of the relationship between humans and their natural, social and cultural relics. It also speaks of basic issues of social power as they pertain to the organization, authorization, legitimation and regulation of a social life held in common among the Jukun of the extinct Kwararafa kingdom. And will serve as a means of conservation of Jukun symbols for posterity sake, without endangering our culture in an attempt to improve the statues of our Jukun societies. Seeing that cultural symbols are the evidence of people's way of life, guide and light that lit the

path for the younger generation to trace their history, further adaptation and recommendation of the traditional symbols should be explored. Since Government programmes are in recent times targeted at empowering the poor masses in the society, this research could be used by the National Poverty Eradication Programme as a training forum to equip the unemployed youths to fight poverty by empowering them and therefore, making them self reliant. The designs developed with these symbols in this study could serve as a cultural or traditional means of conservation in the Ministry of Arts and Culture. If these design prototypes are massively produced, it will serve as a means of revenue generation for the Jukun communities, Taraba state and the nation at large.

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