

Colour in Yoruba Dress Culture

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Abstract

People all over the world have cultures; and these cultures determine how they perceive the world; how they think about themselves and their relationship with others; how they set and achieve goals. Culture defines and sets before a people what is real and not real; what is true and untrue; what is right and not right; what is beautiful, and what is good. The Yoruba in the South-Western Nigeria, have their worldview concerning various aspects of life. It is well meant that this study investigates the Yoruba perception on colour; which may seem otherwise to others though, but binds them to one another; giving them a sense of commonality. The study employed historical and document observation research methods; and semiotics as the theoretical framework. Findings revealed that the keynote of life of the Yoruba is in their traditional religions; and it is this traditional religion that influences their art, crafts and colour preference. Traditionally, the Yoruba have names for the three main or principal colours - funfun (for white and silver), dudu (for black and other cool colours) and pupa (for red and other warm colours); and these colours and their significance are mainly associated with the Deities

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1.0. Introduction

Culture, according to Trenholm and Jensen is that set of values and beliefs, norms and customs, rules and codes that socially define groups of people, binding them to one another and giving them a sense of commonality (Trenholm & Jensen 1992). The Yoruba of the South-Western Nigeria, are people of culture; and this culture determines their worldview in the issues of life. The keynote of life of the Yoruba is in their traditional religions (Fadipe 1970; Oluwole et al. 2013). It is this traditional religion that influences their art and crafts; colour preference, and, to some extent, their dress habits - all in the services of the ancestors and deities. The same religion forms the theme of their various traditional textile motifs, mythical beliefs, proverbs and idioms. They have belief in the Supreme Being whom they refer to as *Olórun* Olódùmarè [the owner of heaven and earth]. *Olódùmarè* is the pathfinder of all things on earth including the shaping of human destiny [*ayanmo*]. Among the Yoruba deities are the principal ones, *Obatala* and *Orunmila*; others are *Sango*, *Esu*, *Sanponna*, *Oya*, *Ogun*, and *Osun* to mention a few. This study investigates the Yoruba concept of colour with the aim of unravelling the myths behind these beliefs.

2.0. Research Methodology

This study employed historical and document observation research methods; and semiotics as the theoretical framework. Information regarding the culture of the African people is largely coded or preserved in oral forms. It is transmitted across generations (Oyebade 2004). This explains why the research employed more of oral tradition and oral history. Oral tradition relates to those reminiscences of the past that are commonly or universally known in a given culture. Oral tradition is historically relevant oral information passed across generations; whereas oral history is the study of the recent past by means of life histories or personal recollections, where informants speak about their own experiences. The informant could have witnessed or participated in what he was narrating; or could have been told by someone who was a participant in the episode or someone informed of the event (Henige 1982). Even though Wesler questioned the pertinence of oral history in writing about the past of a people (Wesler 2002), the usage was justified by archaeologists and anthropologists (Dakubu 2006; Scheffler 2000); claiming that oral tradition has a significant role to play in developing a history – it is a “historical tool/evidence” (Dakubu 2006). Therefore, the major instruments of data collection for this study were formal and informal oral interviews. It should be noted, however, that oral history requires an unstructured interview method (Albert in Layiwola 1999). Since historical data cannot be collected from just anyone but from some selected number of people in the society, in some selected places and at some special moments; this explains our missions to the traditional rulers at specific occasions for specific data - visits to hamlets and other places that are historically important. Our key informants were aged Yorubas and people holding political and religious offices in the society (Kings and Chief Priests/Priestesses of deities). These categories of people were chosen as informants because they are usually versed in oral traditions. In all the interviews, open-ended informal interview schedules were adopted. This availed the respondents the freedom, courage and opportunities to express themselves. Archival and museum documents were also exploited.

3.0. Yoruba Concept of Colour

Every Yoruba man believes that the nature of man consists of both the physical body and the human spirit/soul [èmí]. The physical body [ara], is favoured with the use of the various coloured textile materials and other dressing accessories which, when used, meet both the aesthetics and religious demands (Aremu 1991).

Traditionally, the Yoruba have names for the three main or principal colours - *funfun* [for white and silver], *dudu* [for black and other cool colours] and *pupa* [for red and other warm colours]. To a minor effect, there are the *ayinrin* [multi-colour] and *ofeefee* [mixtures of the Yoruba primary colours - red, black and white]. *Ayinrin* and *ofeefee* could be referred to as the Yoruba secondary colours. Since Yoruba lack local names for other warm colours aside from yellow [ofeefee] and red [pupa], they often use the word *pupa* as a generic term for all warm colours of which yellow is sometimes included. For instance, when the Yoruba say *o wewu ododo* [He/she wears a dress of flower-red colour]. The word *ododo* in this statement is metaphorically referring to the red, purple and yellow colours - colours associated with heat or warmth.

According to Ojetunde Akinleye Asoleke¹, the primary colours are the only religious colours known to the Yoruba. This was confirmed by Olusola Aremu². Aremu added that the same is true of most cultures in the black world. To them he believes, “other colours originated from the three basic colours, *dudu*, *pupa* and *funfun*.”

3.1. Yoruba Concept of Origin of Colours

According to Awodele Awotayo³, it was *Olódùmarè* who sent *Orunmila*, the arch divinity who is also known as *Ifá*, together with other divinities to the world at the very beginning to carry out some of his works of creation. *Orunmila* baba *Agboniregun* [*Orunmila*, father of *Agboniregun*] is the deputy of the creator himself in matters of wisdom, knowledge, order and continuity. Awodele stresses that the Yoruba have the belief that colours, among all other phenomenon of the sacred order; are the handiwork of *Olódùmarè* with the assistance of *Obatala*, *Orunmila*, and *Esu*. Mythical handouts of the Yoruba, pointed to the fact that there are certain facts governing the origin of the traditional colours and that their symbolism were revealed to man.

Awodele supported his claim by a Yoruba oral tradition, which, according to him, was handed down to him by his forefathers. The tradition has it that *Erin-lojo-aso* [a hundred and sixty-four cloths] has been described as a creature in the likeness of human being when it got to the world. He offered sacrifice as instructed by *Agboniregun*. He offered *Osun* [camwood], and rubbed the same on his body. This made him look redish. *Ifa* also instructed him to use only red dresses. Later when *Iku* [death] came to *Isalu aye* [the world], he began to kill creatures who did not put on red clothes; but could not kill *Erin-lojoaso*. This was because of the red dress he put on; hence the sayings:

<i>Iku pa san-anyan</i>	Death killed handwoven fabric
<i>Iku pa ala</i>	Death killed white
<i>Iku pa epinrin</i>	Death killed <i>epinrin</i>
<i>Iku pa aran</i>	Death killed velvet
<i>Iku o ma le pa kele</i>	Death could not kill red
<i>Kele nikan ni somo ikeyin aso</i>	Red is the last born of all cloths
<i>Ijo ti kele ba tan Iku je tan</i>	Whenever red finishes deceiving death
<i>a pada seyin</i>	it leaves it alone

(*Pa Awodele Awotayo, Personal communication, August 2019*).

This apart, *Ifa* reveals to man the mythical story about a man called *Ojunigbe* was created before *Olódùmarè* [God] completed his work of creation. *Ojunigbe* was very poor. He later consulted *Ifa* oracle who asked him to offer a sacrifice if he wanted good fortune in life. He performed all the necessary rituals and sacrifice to appease *Eledaa* [Creator of man's destiny]. *Eledaa* was satisfied with his offering and made it possible for him to come across *Abon*, the mythical daughter of *Olokunsiade*. *Abon* was to come to the world to look for a husband. *Olódùmarè* opened up her body and filled it with beauties and riches of the world. These things include precious things in red, black and white. These precious things were later sealed up in her body and resulted into sixteen painful boils which spread all over her body. Oral tradition went on to stress that *Abon* was sold into slavery to *Ojunigbe* after she has been rejected by various kings in the land. Since *Ojunigbe* was too poor to be able to marry a wife, *Abon* became his wife. One night, *Abon* asked her husband *Ojunigbe* to help open up her body by cutting the painful boils. *Ojunigbe* did as requested and their household was filled with costly coloured cloths, beads and riches in different colours; mostly of red, black and white. Hence, *Abon*, the daughter of *Olokunsiade*, brought the three major colours - red, black and white to the world; contrary to the

¹the Chief custodian of egungun [masquerade] for Ibadan land.

² Professor, Department of African Arts, Obafemi Awolowo University Ile-ife

³ An *Ifa* Chief Priest, Igboho

assertion (Campel 2009) that “color” has its root in Latin. The above may look ridiculous to foreigners but it is a belief handed over by traditions. Africans, according to Oyebade had other ways of knowledge-dissemination; which among others, include folk songs, legends, oral history, rituals, folk tales, oral tradition, myths and ceremonies (Oyebade 2004). However, these traditions were not formally written but learned, especially in West Africa before the eighteenth century (Agai 2015).

It should be stressed here that the Yoruba believe that colours in the sky have messages or revelation from the creator to man (God communicating to man through nature). *Olódùmarè* may manipulate all colours to suit the purpose for which He intends to use them. Hence *Olódùmarè* is thus praised:

<i>Eyi to WOlódùmarè ni se</i>	<i>Olódùmarè does what He likes</i>
<i>Boba WOlódùmarè</i>	<i>If it pleases Olódùmarè</i>
<i>A taso dudu</i>	<i>He displays a black cloth</i>
<i>Boba WOlódùmarè</i>	<i>If it pleases Olódùmarè</i>
<i>A taso pupa</i>	<i>He displays a red cloth</i>
<i>A tanyinrin</i>	<i>He displays a multi coloured cloth</i>
<i>A ta 'akala baba awo</i>	<i>He displays white, the father of colours</i>

(Awo Fatoogun, Department of African Languages and Literature, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife Personal Communication).

The praise words above clearly identify the important position and the supreme ability of the *Olódùmarè* to do what He likes. He can change the colour of things in line with the immediate nature of time and needs. Whenever he wants daytime activities to begin, he covers a section of the world with *aso funfun* [white cloth] to indicate that *ile ti mo* [it is daytime]. When He wants to put an end to daytime activities, He takes away the white cloth and replaces it with a large black cloth and it would be *ile ti su* or *dudu* [night or black]. These activities made the Yoruba believe that *Olódùmarè* has a key to all problems of life (Olusola Adepoju¹, *Oke Aafin Igboho, Personal Communication, January 2021*). Olusola’s assertion was confirmed by Fatogun. According to him, it was as a result of these attributes that *Olódùmarè* is thus praised above.

4.0. Importance of Colour in Yoruba Culture

As stated above, the Yoruba have a number of magical beliefs and practices, including divination and magico-therapeutic actions. Such beliefs and practices are of vital importance for the understanding of their colour schemes which are closely knitted to their deities, mentioned above. Each *òrìsà* [deity] has a department which he/she controls, and they equally have their colour preferences (Adeleke 2009).

These deities have survived many generations and they have been in control of the Yoruba Primary Colours. The functions of these colours are unchanged and have been used to reinforce their importance and to highlight the spiritual power of the *òrìsà*. In traditional Yoruba society, ritual bowls for the use of *òrìsà* are usually carved with elaborate designs and decorations. They are also painted with any chosen primary colour that goes with the deities in question.

4.1. Funfun (White)

Funfun [white] is considered as the father and king of all colours. It is holy and peaceful. It originates directly from *Olódùmarè* and is mainly associated with the deity, *Obatala*; who is regarded as *òrìsà-alaso-funfun* [the deity that uses white dresses]. Nevertheless, there are a few other *òrìsà* who are equally associated with white. Among these are *Obalufon*, *Osun*, *Ogiyan*, and *Yemoja*. *Obatala*, the sole controller of white colour is praised this:

YORUBA	ENGLISH
<i>Banta banta ninu ala</i>	<i>Immense in white robes</i>
<i>O sun ninu ala</i>	<i>He sleeps in white clothes</i>
<i>O ji ninu ala</i>	<i>He wakes up in white clothes</i>
<i>O tinu ala dide</i>	<i>He rises up in white clothes</i>

(Orisabunmi Bisi², *Personal Communication, April 2019*).

The deity, *Obatala*, is believed to be with *Olódùmarè* during the creation of the world, [*isalu-aye*]. As a result, he was given the control of the king of all colours - white. The secrets behind the individual colour were revealed to him by the creator [*Eleda* or *Asèdà*] before he (*Obatala*) left his usual white cloth and emblems

¹ An *Ifa* Priest/Trado-physician in Igboho town, South-Western Nigeria

² An *Obatala* Priest in Igboho

signifying his divine presence (Adejumo 2002). His priests and priestesses usually clad in white attires. *Obatala* is pure, righteous, ritually and ethically holy. The usage of *funfun* stands as a magnetic force that draws nature to *Olódùmarè*

Due to the important position *funfun* occupies among other colours, it has been chosen by *Olódùmarè* as the most appropriate colour for burying the dead [òku]. Since the dead is definitely going to join the ancestors in *ajule orun* [the world beyond], he needs to clad in sacred colour to purify him before entering the gate of heaven. *Funfun* is believed to have very strong spiritual powers that can eclipse the functions of other colours. White is used for protection from malevolent forces and for promoting peace. The above assertions agree with Sieber and Walker's (1987) opinion that white is a powerful colour that symbolises light and clarity; the two essential weapons in the fight against witchcraft (Siroto 1978).

White as a colour is medicinal. Among the Fang people of Gabon, kaolin with its protective and curative properties is used to fight evil spells and poisoning. According to Aremu Olusola, Kaolin, because of its spiritual powers, is used to paint masks used by the Egúngún (Masquerades) to wade off evil spirits (Aremu Olusola, Personal interview). The curative nature of kaolin can be linked with its use in fighting against *ila-olode* [epidemic smallpox]. The protective nature goes as far as to guide against 'other mysterious threats to the well-being of individuals or the community. The usage of *owo eyo* [cowries] which are naturally white, also bears testimony to the importance of white. *Owo-eyo* is a requisite emblem that symbolises the presence of *Obatala* (*Orisabunmi Bisi, Igboho, Personal Communication*).

Among the Yoruba, *funfun* [white] is also called *ero* [peace]. *Funfun* has *iyi* [respect] and *owo* [high esteem]. *Obatala* is known as *amewa* [expert in beauty]. This agrees with Abiodun (1983) who describes *Obatala* as a sculptor divinity who accommodates all forms of *ewa* [beauty]. *Obatala* is said to be the source of the aesthetic consciousness in Yoruba myth. His favourite colour, white, is used by the *babalàwo* [*Ifa* priest] for curative and preventive purposes. White coverlet is usually recommended for people who often have bad dreams. This white coverlet is used to scare away evil spirits from the users. Since it is a popular cloth of *Obatala*, the arch-divinity, it is used to establish the authority to safeguard and rubber-stamp that Yoruba religion is dynamic, strong and affective (Adejumo 2002). White coverlet is also used to prevent and cure any mishap; and to solicit favours from those deities that control man. Notably among these deities are *Obatala, Oya, Obaluaye*, among others. These deities and divinities combine together to fight against any evil spirit and forces that frequently influence human affairs negatively. It should be stressed here that whenever white emblems are seen as part of egúngún masquerades costumes, it shows that the owner is indirectly putting the ancestor under the guidance of *Obatala*. The usage stands as a means of activating the spiritual powers of all deities in favour of white. (Olusola Aremu, Personal Communication).

Traditionally, white colour is made from kaolin; and it derives its magical powers and forces from the fact that it is directly from *Eleda* [the Creator. As earlier stressed, white, when used on masks, is meant to scare away evil and malevolent spirits if the adherents follow ritual procedures. Such sacrifices are obligatory for the survival of adherents; and equally, for the spiritual joy of the deity in charge. According to Pa Yesufu¹ of *Isale-ora* area in Ogbomosho, Oyo State, Nigeria, "white has the greatest beauty and evocative power than other colours such as red and black" (Personal Communication, 2021). Pa Yesufu's assertion corroborated Drewal and Pemberton's (1989) who noted that white has inner spiritual power that is invisible and that It is 'a colour of deep symbolic and ritual significance for *Obatala*.

¹ A 92-years old an Islamic Cleric in Ogbomosho



Plate 1: Madam Omileye Ibilola, Iya Osun Osogbo (top) in her normal outing outfit and Osun devotees (down) during child dedication celebrations.

{Photo: Lagos State Council for Arts and Culture 2003 and A.A.Adebiyi, Osogbo, 2019}

In Lagos, white cloth is used in the construction of Eyo *masquerade* dress and paraphernalia. According to them, white symbolises purity and holiness. It represents the cleansing power of water, which is the lifeline of Lagos. The attire of Eyo is made up of white poplin or sheeting. The Eyo wears an *Iboju* [face-mask] made of white transparent fabric. Only the *òrisà-Eyo* [head-masquerade] uses *aso-oke eleya* (hand-woven-narrow-strip cloth with holes); this distinguishes him from others. The drooping white robes wrapped around the legs of the Eyo masquerades become dirty after trekking around the areas where the festival is taking place. This is significant because according to tradition, “the clean white robe is believed to have wiped away any contamination and cleansed the land of any impurity associated with the ancestor, as well as all the pollution and afflictions that might befall the community and members of the household from where the Eyo came” (Oba Rilwan Akiolu, the Oba of Lagos, Personal Communication). Hence, “the Eyo *òrisà* outfit is used only once, after which is discarded (Adewale Dosumu¹, Personal Communication). This agrees with Lawal (2001), who observed that getting rid of the costume is part of the ritual.

4.2. Dudu (Black)

As it has been seen of *funfun* [white], *dùdù* [black] is also associated with two important divinities, *Esu* and *Ogun*. *Esu* is regarded as the inspector of the worship and the affairs of man and other divinities (Adeleke 2009). He is also in charge of worship and promotion of malice among people (Awolalu and Dopamu 1979). Yoruba

¹ 82-year old and head, Dosumu Ruling House, Lagos Island

myth is supposed to become wholly part of man. This is why important symbols for most divinities on earth are 'symbolically elevated'. According to Aduke Adesola¹, Esu is a powerful and very influential divinity. He once occupied a position that can meet the challenges of life. According to Drewal and Pemberton (1989), *Esu* is also the guardian of the ritual way. He bestows riches upon those who follow sacrifice as a way of life; and steals from those who do not acknowledge his authority.



Plate 2: The Esu deity's altar in Iya Osun Osogbo's house
{Photo: A.A.Adebiyi, Osogbo, 2019}

The importance of *dú dú* (black) may be extended to the use of *ose-dú dú* [black medicinal soap] often found as part of *egú ngún* [masquerade] costumes. This medicinal soap is used as an instrument to safeguard the maskers during outings. When this and other black items such as black carvings and statues, metal gong old with age, symbols and emblems are used as part of *egú ngún* costumes, they are to satisfy *Esu*, the deity in control. Items such as *ere* [black statutes], *aso-ofi-dudu* [indigo-dyed-traditional-fabrics], *eye dudu* [black feathers] and several other things are also effectively used to display spiritual powers. They stand to reinforce the powerful image of the ancestor (Biodun Ojelabi², personal communication). On the same costume could be found 'mystical emblems' in black comprising terrifying faces of carved images of birds, feathers and bells; all representing spiritual forces. These items are religiously used in reality to carry out the demands of the *òrì sà* during rituals and festivals. According to Drewal and Pemberton (1989), twin figures are scrubbed with a coarse, black, medicinal soap with soft, white chaff of sugarcane; while cloth soaked in indigo-dye is used to rub the head.

The importance of black as a colour may also be seen on ritual objects used in *Ifa* divination. This colour has a ritualistic symbolism. An example of such is the *ikin* [sixteen black sacred palm kernel]. According to the Yoruba legendary belief, the sacred *ikin* were given to *Ifa*'s children by *Eleda* [the Creator]. These, he told them, are to serve as the 'eyes' and dictionary to the future of man. They are to be used as instruments for the transmission of the wisdom and knowledge of *Òrunmì la* to man (Awolèye Ojo³). Awolèye 's claim agrees with Lawal (1974). According to Lawal, they project the esoteric nature of *Ifa* and represent the physical symbols of *Òrunmì la* when he departed from *ajule-orun* [heaven]. There is even an assertion that the blackness of *Ikin* probably symbolises *Awo* [the very deep and esoteric nature of *Ifa*]. *Eje* [Blood] and *epo pupa* [palm-oil], which are reddish in colour, often turn black with time; when *Esu* takes over control of the sacrifice. Since he is the controller of rituals and sacrifices, he turns the entire sacrifice into his personal property before taking it to *Èlédàà* (*Are mu Olusola, personal communication*)

Black connotes sadness among the Yoruba, but in East Africa, it connotes happiness. Black among the Yoruba connotes evil. Black dress is used among the Yoruba during mourning; especially, of the loved one who died at an unripe age. Black is put on at such instances to symbolise sadness; humbling oneself before the gods, especially *Esu*, to temper justice with mercy; since Yoruba believed that it was *Esu* that actually killed the person. Hence anything bad is symbolically represented with black in Yoruba belief and is related to *Esu*, the deity in control of black. Apart from this, any traditional religion worshipper putting on black during worship reverences *Esu*, thus asking *Esu* to keep evil away from devotees. In fact, worshippers, of other deities, during rituals pay homage to *Esu*, soliciting his favour and keeping the devotees from mishaps and also allow their rituals and celebrations go peacefully, acceptably, without strife, and violence. *Taa ba n bo Sango boya b'Obatala, ta b'Ogun, a n lati yo tesu sile* [when worshipping *Sango, Oya, Obatala, Ogun* or other deities, one needs to

¹ A 90-year old woman in Osogbo town

² Chief custodian of *egú ngún* for Edunabon town

³ an *Ifa* Priest at Abebi area, Ibadan

consider *Esu* also] - (Aremu, Personal Communication). This agrees with Adesanya (2018), who asserted that among the Yoruba, *Esu* is believed to be a potential mischief-maker and a promoter of malice and confusion.

4.3. Pupa (Red)

As it has been seen of *funfun* (white) and *dú dú* (black), *pupa* (red) also has its supporting divinities. Among the popular ones are *Sango* (god of thunder and lightning); *Oya* (the mythical wife of *Sango*); and *Sanponna* or *Obaluaye* (the divinity in control of smallpox). According to Sangodeyi Sangosanmi¹, *Sango* also supports the use of *dú dú*. This is why when offering a sacrifice to him, faces are often painted with black colour from *aro* (indigo colouring matter) as a sign of sobriety, submission and supplication.

Red colour symbolises blood, wrath, danger, anger and tyranny or violence (Adejumo 2002; Adeleke 2009). However, to some adherents of traditional religion, *pupa* stands for beauty and prosperity. It also provides a cooling presence for the admirers during rituals. As stated in *Ifa* corpus, *Sango oko Oya* [*Sango*, the husband of *Oya* - a water goddess] was a very popular King of Oyo. Surrounding *Sango*'s choice of *pupa* as his favourite colour is a myth in the *Òtuta-Oniko* verse of *Odu-Ifa* [the wise saying and the revelation of *Òrunmila*]. It expatiates on how he came about this colour. It states that *Sango*, the king of Oyo, was popular among his people but he was not a wealthy man. Due to his adversity, he was not a happy ruler. Although he possessed power because he was a fearless fighter and a warrior; he did not consider himself as having fullness of life. To crown his good attributes, he was instructed to make use of *wabi* [red skirts]; if he wanted the good things of life to come his way. He obeyed the instruction of the oracle and sewed his *wabi-ijo* [dancing skirts] with assorted beautiful red cloths. This attracted everybody and he became very prominent and important. During annual *Sango* festivals, he puts on his red *wabi* to dance round the town; and since he was a great dancer, he made plenty of money. Eventually, he became rich (Aremu, Personal Communication). The testimony to this usage of red by *Sango* is sanctioned by a popular song below:

<i>Oje lo ye Olorisa</i>	White befits the <i>òrìsà</i> worshippers
<i>Aso pupa lo ye oniSango</i>	Red befits the <i>Sango</i> worshippers
<i>Arisa ko maa je o</i>	Let that which is not commanded
<i>Arisa</i>	Be realized by us

The devotees always dress in *Sango*'s popular red colour clothes during worship and annual celebration in order to honour and appease him; with the hope of answered prayers. They equally have the belief that the brightness and beauty of red will bring an equal prosperity as it did for *Sango*.

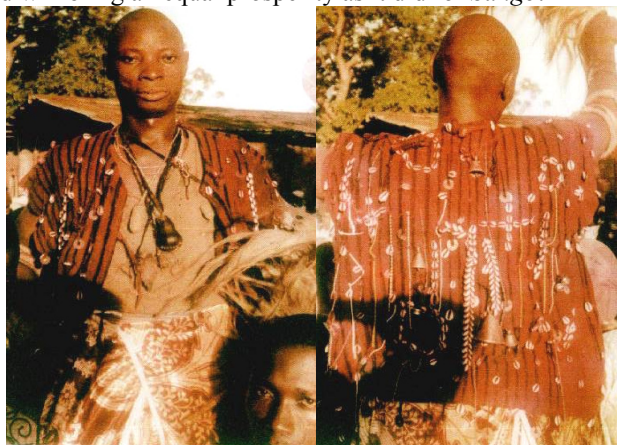


Plate 3: Biodun Ayegbajeje a Sango priest,
 in ceremonial dress during an Annual Sango festival, Igboho
 [photo: Olaoye, J.A. Igboho, July 2002]

Among the *Sango* devotees, red is acknowledged as *èrò* [peace]. This is because of the positions *epo-pupa* [palm-oil] and *èjè* [blood] occupy in the realm of worship. Both are used as water of divination, which are essential materials in traditional Yoruba religion. Apart from the above, among the traditional diviners, *ikoode* [the red tails of parrots] are used either religiously or medicinally. Medicinally, it is an important aspect of *ase* [the force that make things possible].

5.0. Colour Psychology in Yoruba Culture

Yoruba think and see colour in two ways - as sight and as touch. Everybody with colour vision sees colour in the

¹ A *Sango* Priest/Trado-Physician in Oyo

same way; but perceive colours differently since an individual's perception of colour depends on interest, temperament, cultural background and experience (Jerstrop and Kotilmark 1992). Thus in the Yoruba culture, colour defines and reveals the nature, character [*ìwà*] of persons and even divinities. For instance, *awo tútù* [cold colour] signifies coolness, serenity or composure.

Generally, in the Yoruba culture, warm colours denote aggression, excitement and danger. Red in particular, suggests physical strength to attack and conquer and is traditionally associated in Yorubaland with a strong temperament; which could be interpreted to mean the human passions of infatuation, bravery, hatred, retribution and revenge (*Olusola Adepoju, Personal Communication*). Olusola's assertion is in line with the findings of some studies - (Aremu 1997; Prust 1989; Renne 1995). White is attributed to holiness, purity and when white dress is used, with pureness of mind, it is in absolute submission to the will of *Olódùmarè* - holiness. The worship of *Obalufon* calls for the use of white garments by women. Contrary to Oluwole et al (2013) submission that attributed "the colour yellow and gold" to "the goddess *Osun*"; *Osun* worshippers including the *Ataoja of Osogbo*, are clad in white during the annual *Osun Osogbo* celebration; especially, *Lojo ti arugba Osun lo sodo* [the day the priestess enters the *Osun* River] (Oba Jimoh Olanipekun Oyetunji, the *Ataoja*¹ of *Osogbo*). White colour represents purity in belief, and though it always appears as plain and meaningless to unbelievers, to the keen adherents it is their symbol of all that is clean and holy. The users are not, however, considered holy and pure until they have been initiated and purification sacrifice has been offered to the proper deity. It is only then that they are regarded as clean, and their future, bright as white cotton cloth (*Omileye Ibilola*², *Personal Communication*).

Black connotes sorrow. However, the Yoruba do combine colours; and when they do, it is not with levity. There is more to it than what the modern colour psychologist may discern, since such colour combination also has religious connotations. According to Chief Ojetunde Asoleke, when white and black threads or cloth are joined together in the making of *egúngún* costume, it is to bring together the deities in control of these colours to pave way for peace during the *egúngún* annual celebration. Likewise, in dressing, the traditional Yoruba believed that by combining black and white which are associated with specific deities - black for *Esu*, white for *Obatala*, *Obalufon*, *Osun*, *Ogiyan* and *Yemoja* - their spiritual powers are thus harnessed either positively or negatively. For instance, that *Esu* should not put them into trouble; and other deities to shower on them blessings, peace and tranquillity.

In addition, the combination of blue and black colours signifies *ero* or *etutu* [peace]. In Yorubaland, it is traditionally believed that a woman who gives birth to a female child first, bears what is known as *èrò - èrò ni ó kókó bí* [She gave birth to peace first]. Blue-black colour is peaceful and mostly used by females and is known as a female colour. The reflection of this can be seen in *Àdirẹ-Elẹkọ* [traditional cornstarch resist method of fabric embellishment]; the dominant colour is blue-black aro, [indigo blue] (Olabisi Aremu, *Personal Communication*).

In addition, the Yoruba combine all manner of colour to create visual and psychological balance. For instance, the heat of *pupa* [ocher] balanced by coolness of *dúdú* [green] - the Yoruba often refer to cool colours like deep green, deep blue, dark blue and black as *dúdú*; expresses the 'restrain and tranquility' ... the dark, enigmatic and mysterious nature of *Orunmila*³ and the deep-thinking, reflective nature of the diviners (Drawal and Mason, 1998). Thus, the *ilẹkẹ pupa* [hot/red beads] and *ilẹkẹ funfun* [cool/white beads] commonly referred to as *kele* in Yoruba, proclaim both the retributive and healing power of *Sango* (*Alhaji Fowobi*⁴, *Personal Communication*). Therefore, in combining colours in dressing, the Yoruba are not only invoking the blessings of the gods in control of those colours but also express their willingness or desires to share the characters or nature/personality [*iwa*] of these deities (Aremu, *Personal Communication*).

Colour in Dressing has a psychological aspect and may influence the personality of the wearer. As an evocative symbol and visual metaphor of power, colour in religious dress conveys power and authority on the wearer. Priests wear evocative coloured dress to facilitate their spiritual roles. For instance, the proximity of the *Sango* priest's body with the red dress covered with cowries' designs conveys the effusive spiritual essence of *Sango*, the Yoruba god of thunder, and invokes his power, thus making the priest, at that instance, both the priest and the god, *Sango* (Olusola Aremu). This agrees with Joan Westcott and Morton William's (1962) opinion that *Sango* priests take on the attribute of *Sango*. Within such contexts, the use of colour in dress contributes to "a process of scarilisation".

5.0. Conclusion

The keynote of life of the Yoruba is in their traditional religions; and it is this traditional religion that influences their art and crafts; colour preference; and, to some extent, their dress habits - all in the services of the ancestors and deities. As it has been seen in this study, the Yoruba believe that the nature of man consists of both the

¹ The King of *Osogbo* town

² Chief Priestess of the *Osun Osogbo* Deity

³ Founder of *Ifa* divination

⁴ Former Head, Textiles Department, The Polytechnic Ibadan

physical body and the human spirit the soul [è mí]. The physical body [ara] is favoured with the use of the various coloured textile materials and other dressing accessories which, when used, meet both the aesthetics and religious demands. Traditionally, the Yoruba have names for the three main or principal colours - funfun [for white and silver], dudu [for black and other cool colours] and pupa [for red and other warm colours]. Funfun [white] is considered holy and peaceful and is the father and king of all colours; and is believed to have originated directly from Olódùmarè. As seen in this study, it is mainly associated with the deity, Obatala. Dú dú [black] is believed to have a ritualistic symbolism and is associated with the deities, Ogun and Esu; while pupa [red] symbolises blood, wrath, danger, anger and tyranny or violence; is associated with Sango, god of thunder and lightning; Oya, the mythical wife of Sango and Sanponna or Obaluaye, the divinity in control of smallpox. It is also highlighted in this study that these colours have and magico-therapeutic functions and these functions are unchanged and have been used to reinforce their importance and to highlight the spiritual power of the òrìsà. When combining colours in dressing, the Yoruba are not only invoking the blessings of the gods in control of those colours but also express their willingness or desires to share the characters or nature of the deities. This is the worldview of a people - the Yoruba.

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Appendix

List of the People Interviewed

A sample of men and women were selected and the criteria for selection were based on political authority, religious authority, age, sex and professional experience.

Group A: Traditional Rulers

1. Oba Rilwan Akiolu, the King of Lagos
2. Oba Jimoh Olanipekun Oyetunji, the King of Osogbo

Group B: Traditional Priests/Priestesses

1. Chief Ojetunde Akinleye Asoleke, Chief Custodian of the *egúngún* masquerade and mouthpiece of *egúngún* worshippers for Ibadanland
2. Awodele Awotayo, an 89-year old *Ifa* Priest, Agbo-Ile Agoro, Igbobo, Oyo State, Nigeria.
3. Olusola Adepoju, a 91-year old *Ifa* Priest/Trado-physician Oke aafin Igbobo, Nigeria.
4. Orisabunmi Bisi, an Obatala Priest, Popoola's Compound, Iseyin, Nigeria.
5. Awolaye Ojo, 90-year old *Ifa* Priest, Abebi area, Ibadan
6. Biodun Ojelabi, Chief custodian of *egúngún*, Edunabon.
7. Madam Omileye Ibilola, Chief Priestess of the Osun deity (*Iya Osun*), Osogbo
8. Sangodeyi Sangosanmi, an 83-year old Sango Priest, Oyo, Nigeria.

Group C: The Aged

1. Yesufu Raufu, (92 years old), an Islamic Cleric, *Isale-ora* area, Ogbomoso, Nigeria.
2. Adewale Dosumu, 82-year old, Dosumu Ruling House, Lagos Island, Lagos.
3. Aduke Adesola, (90 years old woman), Ile-Alaro, Osogbo.

Group D: The Academics

1. Aremu Olusola, Professor and former Head of Department, African Arts, Obafemi Awolowo University Ile-ife
2. Awo Fatoogun, Professor, Department of African Languages and Literature, Obafemi Awolowo University Ile-ife
3. Alhaji Fowobi, Former Head, Textiles Department, The Polytechnic, Ibadan

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