

Ankara Kampala: Property Rights as Revamps for the Adire Indigenous Knowledge

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Abstract

Adire the textile art tradition of the Yoruba is a product of indigenous knowledge which has become a ubiquitous part of the socio- cultural landscape of Southwestern Nigeria. Though its origin is hazy, the cloth is dynamic, ever evolving, and as an art tradition it has evoked many scholastic discourse. It is a source of economic and artistic heritage. This dynamism, based on evolving techniques and technology, has resulted in many variations of which *Ankara Kampala* is one. The coinage *Ankara Kampala* is a marriage of the word *Kampala*, a name by which *Adire*, the patterned dyed cloth of the Yoruba was dubbed at a time in history, and *Ankara*, the name by which the factory printed fabric or African prints are known. The paper, based on field research, shows that *Ankara Kampala* is by no means novel, but rather a transcription of the motifs of the indigenous *Adire* by textile multinationals within and outside the indigenous enclave of this textile. It explains how lack of appropriate property rights has impacted negatively on this indigenous textile art, the economy and the artists.

Keywords: Ankara-Kampala, Property Rights, Revamp, Adire, Motifs

1. Introduction

The origin of *Adire*, the pattern-dyed cloth of the Yoruba of Southwestern Nigeria, though hazy, spans many centuries. The history of the art is traceable to indigo dyeing of old faded cloths, and yarns meant for weaving. The prototype *Adire* was done on *Kijipa*, the women hand-woven fabric of the people (Akpata, 1971)

“*Adire*” is derived from the two stages involved in the process of producing the cloth; “*adi*” to tie, and “*re*” to dye. (Wolff, 2011). From this simplistic technique of tie-dye, other techniques such as; *Adire oniko*, *Adire Alabere*, *Adire Eleko*, Batik, Direct Application, Discharge Dyeing and Factory-printed *Adire* known as *Ankara Kampala* have since evolved. “*Ankara Kampala*”, is a coinage of two names; *Ankara* and *Kampala*, and does not involve immersion into the dye bath like the first five techniques, though it is capable of producing all the designs obtainable from them.

Ankara, also known in the West as “African Prints” (because of its popularity among Africans, Americans and European blacks who identify with Africa as their roots), is the Yoruba generic name for all factory-printed textiles made majorly for West and Central African market. Its origin and development is traceable to Javanese batik, which at a time, African Prints production was aimed at imitating, in order to undercut Javanese market (Bickford, 1997). This accounts for the early imported Ankara being referred to as Java by the Yoruba.

Trade is a major avenue in the cross current and transmigration of textile. But apart from traders in textiles, returnee soldiers, missionaries, explorers, colonial officers, African and European Merchants were agents of cross-pollination of African Prints. This set of people with European designers researched and interpreted the taste of their African clients (Steiner, 1985). It is probable that the earliest African prints were brought from Ghana (one of the earliest British colonies), by Ogbomoso traders who were responsible for taking *Adire* to the Gold Coast (Ghana) (Surdarkasa, 1970), in order to satisfy the great demand for *Adire* within and beyond Yoruba land between 1900 and 1920. *Ankara* therefore could be the bastardized pronunciation of the country’s capital, Accra.

The “Kampala” in the coinage ‘*Ankara Kampala*’ is traceable to the *Adire* of the Yoruba which originally was dyed indigo. A multicoloured variants of the cloth became popular in the 1960s and its popularity at the time coincided with the Kampala Peace Conference which was held in Kampala, Uganda during the Nigerian civil war (Wolff, 2011). Hence it was dubbed *Kampala*, a term which has now become a generic name in the contemporary times for all pattern-dyed cloth, *Adire*.

The study is an art historical analysis of *Adire* art, its dynamism which has given birth to Ankara Kampala and the effect of the dynamism on the survival of the art tradition. Based on field research it has drawn from the few available literature materials on the subject and on visual art materials in private and public collection and in many fabric markets. The study specifically covers only those factory-printed fabrics employing the motifs of *Adire* in their designs, and not all factory printed fabrics.

Adire both in its production and as a product, falls within the purview and has the characteristics of what is regarded as traditional knowledge (TK) or indigenous knowledge (IK). *Adire* like such similar knowledge is a knowledge system embedded in the cultural traditions of the South Western region and it is an art tradition that distinguishes the occupants of this region, the Yoruba, from other people.

Through the *Adire* indigenous knowledge, the traditional technologies of indigo dye extraction, and multifarious techniques of cloth patterning has been developed by the people. Indigo which is by far the most popular and widely used in traditional Africa (Picton and Mack, 1979) is also the favourite dye in indigenous Africa (Polakoff, 1982). Boser who postulates that West Africa is “one of the most original” and greatest centres in the development of indigo worldwide, suggests that its development probably took place in Senegal, Sudan, and among the Yoruba in Southwestern Nigeria.(Boser-Sarivaxevanis, 1980) The Yoruba are however still considered the “most passionate lovers of indigo” in West Africa. All the materials for the technology of indigo dye extraction are sourced locally. The art tradition is therefore a cumulative and holistic body of knowledge, practices, know-how, developed by the people based on myths, proverbs, legends, folklore, interaction and observation of their environment through which a glimpse of their philosophical and religious worldview can be gleaned.

Economically, the indigenous knowledge of *Adire* is crucial for the subsistence and survival of its practitioners. For instance in 1926, 25% of the population of Abeokuta, a Yoruba town in southwestern Nigeria were involved in *Adire* production, with 80% of the cloth trade in the town by 1933 being *Adire*.(Records of Egba Council) It is also on record that at the climax of its commercial vibrancy in the 1920s, two thousand wrappers were being sold to Senegalese merchants in a day (Bayfield,1993), and by 1932 sales was estimated to be up to 500,000 wrappers.(Egba Administrative Bulletin, 1932).

Furthermore, *Adire* art tradition is traditionally a specialized art; an hereditary craft passed from mothers to daughters and thus has become a legacy of the Yoruba women. Finally, the motifs of *Adire* as a traditional knowledge are not an individual’s fresh creation or imagination, but rather designs that have become standardized through generations of use. They comprise of themes drawn from the world of nature around them, the flora and fauna, their philosophy, religion, significant events, and objects of day to day living. All the foregoing qualifies the art tradition as an indigenous knowledge to be guarded jealously and protected by property rights.

Adire art has in recent times been faced with a myriad of challenges which have further been heightened by the transliteration of *Adire* motifs into Ankara Kampala by textile mills. This textile art as an indigenous knowledge has been faced with lack of willing apprentices to learn the trade due to Western education and the tedious nature of its production, a problem which has been further aggravated by the ready availability of factory produced alternatives. Rather than take the trouble of learning the art, this group merely engages in the sale of *Ankara Kampala* to make ends meet.

The production of *Adire* is through division of labour. Retailer in recent times have experienced disappointment from the producers who either fail in punctual delivery of commissioned works, or who occasionally engage in industrial actions to press in their demand for better remuneration for their creative efforts.

With constant influx of foreign cultures, many in the society know next to nothing about the process of *Adire* production and its indigenous motifs. To these undiscerning ones, “Kampala ni Kampala n je”, that is, the factory-printed *Ankara Kampala* to them, is no different to the traditional handmade ones.

Also, *Ankara Kampala* is sold at almost half the price of the handmade *Adire*, and many are also of the opinion that *Ankara Kampala*, being factory produced will have a more durable colour fastness. As a result of all the foregoing, the producers and retailers of *Adire* have in recent times become reticent to researchers whom they believe only come to photograph their designs, only for them to see bales of factory produced version flooding the market few weeks afterwards. Unemployment for the few *Adire* artist, waning incentive for creativity are some of the fall out of the introduction of *Ankara Kampala*

The appropriation of new patterns and designs is not radically new as the factory-printed cloth tradition has been built upon the circulation of designs and motifs from within and outside Africa to the extent of being referred to as “a kind of design archaeology of motif and pattern” (Subler, 1997). In spite of this there is still a dearth of literature material on this genre of textile. Bickford (1997), Nielson (1994), and Spencer (2001) have all researched on different aspects of factory printed textiles, but none of them has worked on those with *Adire* motifs as their design elements and the effect the transcription of such motifs has on the society.

In addition to lack of scholarly work on transcription of indigenous motifs of *Adire*, there is also no strong tradition of ownership over the indigenous motifs of *Adire* as it obtains in property rights or copyright law of the Western world. This is due to the failure of citizens and successive government in recognizing and respecting the laws regulating their use.

A few approaches have been developed to protect traditional knowledge. One of these suggests protecting such a knowledge as cultural heritage. Another suggests seeing traditional knowledge as right to be protected collectively as human right. While the third by World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) and World Trade Organization (WTO) is looking into using existing and unique measures in protecting traditional knowledge.

Indigenous intellectual property is a general legal parlance used globally in national and international gatherings to identify an indigenous people’s special entitlement to certain rights to claim (from the people’s own laws) all the knowledge such a people ever have known, presently know and will even know in future (Rain Forest Aboriginal Network, 1993). It is a concept that has developed mainly from Western legal contraptions and which in recent times has become part of the United Nations general push, aimed at ensuring that the world’s indigenous knowledge is safeguarded and respected against possible misuse and abuse (Watson, 1992).

Unfortunately, such claims to rights do not exist within the context of Nigerian law and where a form of copyright law exist, they only cover contemporary digitalized or published works and often times the law is not strictly enforced. The indigenous knowledge of *Adire*, its motifs, techniques and technology are therefore left unprotected.

2. Typology of Ankara Kampala Design

The different types of *Adire* produced under the various techniques is capable of being copied, and has been copied by either local and foreign textile mills at one time or the other. The copied *Adire* designs are made to look as exactly as the original as possible. The colour combinations are copied to the minutest detail with no alteration whatsoever, and to further confuse the consumers, even some accidental designs formed during *Adire* production are included on the factory-printed fabric. For instance, in copying the sewing machine - stitched *Adire* patterns, the factory printed versions are produced with tiny marks in imitation of the perforation made by the machine needle during the machine stitching. Also those fabrics imitating batik patterns have the cracking veins of wax, the medium of its execution incorporated. Even some avoidable dark pencil or ball pen sketch marks found on some finished cloths, are still copied into the factory-printed transcribed *Adire* patterns.

3. Ankara Kampala and its Socio-Economic Effect

Entrepreneurship is an important element in the dynamics of modern economics, and small and medium businesses, such as *Adire*, are among the few surviving enterprises in Nigeria which have been major source of job creation especially in the rural areas, thereby stemming rural-urban migration. Mass production of transcribed *Adire* motifs into factory made, cheaper and affordable textiles is impacting negatively on the nation’s economy.

“Employment generation is a dynamic concept referring to the ability of a system or an establishment to offer more and more employment opportunities throughout its life time to people in search of work”.(Mensah, 1987). This was what *Adire* was achieving in the Nigerian economy until *Ankara Kampala* was introduced. The fallout of this is that new comers into *Adire* enterprise become discouraged to start the business, and the usual producers are getting out of job. The resultant effect of this is rural-urban drift of many *Adire* artists in search of menial jobs.

The country’s Gross National Income (GNI) is thereby greatly affected as the foreign exchange generated from tourists through *Adire* is dwindling. Effective Resources Utilization is being destroyed as the use of local resources such as ‘*Elu*’ indigo and cassava starch is drastically affected, thereby reducing the income to our

farmers.

The presence of Ankara *Kampala* in the market has resulted in distrust for researchers, thus causing the traditional *Adire* producers to suddenly become reticent to genuine researchers with their trade union imposing sanctions for granting interviews. Many genuine researchers no longer enjoy the co-operation of *Adire* artists, thereby making their findings subjective. *Ankara Kampala* has diminished the value hitherto placed on *Adire* as many youths seems to have been brain-washed that everything foreign is superior to their own, thus placing less value on *Adire*.

This also has negative effect on Co-operative Society and Small-Scale Industrial Credit Scheme (SSICs) as the Co-Operative thrift Society and Small-Scale Industrial Credit Schemes (SSICs) that use to thrive on revolving loan repayment from the *Adire* producers are greatly affected as some beneficiaries are unable to pay back loans collected. Also the healthy competition hitherto enjoyed by *Adire* producers through price differentiation, credit terms, service and product improvement is almost non-existent again.

4. Conclusion

This study has been able to reveal how *Ankara Kampala* has been nothing but a transcription and the usage of the various motifs of the many techniques of *Adire* by textile mills within and outside Nigeria. The adverse effects of the transcription of this age long motifs on the traditional learning process, the economy, the art and the artists in general has been highlighted.

The presence of *Ankara Kampala* in the markets of southwestern Nigeria only buttresses the fact that *Adire* as a product of an indigenous knowledge is constantly in demand. Multinationals are constantly studying the society in order to exploit whatever is in demand without any consideration to how their action affects the well-being of the originators or custodians of such indigenous knowledge and without any compensation or share in the benefits accruing from such usage. The Federal Government of Nigeria apart from enacting property rights to protect such indigenous knowledge must do all within its powers to ensure that such rights are enforced to protect the small and medium scale *Adire* industries. Also, person whose past and heritage is lost through such infringement on its rights and indigenous knowledge is invariably allowing the destruction of its indigenous cultural creativity which naturally should serve as the bedrock for solid economic future.

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Plate 1

Ankara Kampala imitating the Stamped Batik method.
Photograph by Gbemi Areo, 2007



Plate 2

Ankara Kampala imitating the pencil mark used in sketching the shape.
Photograph by Gbemi Areo, 2007