Clothing as Semiotic Resistance: An Appraisal of the Yoruba "*Àmọ̀tẹ́kùn*" Uniform.

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Abstract
As a result of incessant kidnapping, insecurity and killings by herdsmen presently in Nigeria, the Yoruba people constituted a security group Àmọ̀tẹ́kùn; whose outfit signifies a visual and performative language of nonviolent resistance against the menace. This work investigates how clothing is used as resistive semiotics to redefine the insecurity challenges in the Southwest region. It examines how the Àmọ̀tẹ́kùn clothing has the performative and semiotic power to suggest the social positioning within society and the fundamental shift associated with the positioning. This study explores clothing as semiotic resistance within the Àmọ̀tẹ́kùn movement, using a multi-method approach. It aims to understand the cultural meanings, resistance narratives, and identity expressions embedded in the attire of the Àmọ̀tẹ́kùn security outfit. The paper provides a framework with which the communicative power of clothing and how it transcends the limitations of language in multilingual Nigeria may be explored and discussed. Finally, it concludes that the potentiality for the use of clothing as a non-violence performative weapon in engaging social problems contributes to the dynamics of social transformations in Yoruba security and beyond.

Keyword: *Àmọ̀tẹ́kùn, Semiotics, Resistance, Performance Activism, Clothing.*

Introduction

In recent years, a significant discussion on attire as a form of semiotic resistance has gained traction within socio-cultural and political analyses globally. A notable illustration of this narrative within the African context is the Yorùbá "*Àmọ̀tẹ́kùn*" uniform. This attire, worn by the security outfit serving the Yorùbá region in western Nigeria, reflects a deep-rooted symbolic resistance driven by socio-political and cultural factors. The *Àmọ̀tẹ́kùn* security outfit was established in response to increasing security challenges within the region. Their uniform, an integral aspect of their establishment, is enveloped in the culture and tradition of the Yorùbá people. The uniform is made of a camouflage pattern with an array of dark brown colouring - symbolizing the bravery, unity, and strength of the Yoruba people.

The Yorùbá people of the Southwest, Nigeria marks every aspect of their existence with cloths that depict the purpose of those events; starting from the birth of a child to the funeral celebrations as well as marriage ceremonies and war rituals. These tailored or untailored clothes function in various capacities but most importantly, they reinforce the relationship between the

naked body and the social world. It is on this note that the people built a clothing outfit that carries a sacred aura, which stands as an index to their identity. The *Àmọ̀tẹ́kùn* uniform stands as a resistive semiotics and a non-violence paradoxical weapon that will redefine the insecurity challenges in the region.

This study explores clothing as semiotic resistance in the Yoruba Àmọ̀tẹ́kùn context, using a multi-method approach. It aims to understand the cultural meanings, resistance narratives, and identity expressions in the attire of the Àmọ̀tẹ́kùn security outfit. The study examines how clothing is used as resistive semiotics to redefine the insecurity challenges in the Southwest region. It examines how the *Àmọ̀tẹ́kùn* clothing has the performative and semiotic power to suggest the social positioning within society and the fundamental shift associated with the positioning. Finally, the work is concluded that the possibility for using clothes as a nonviolent performative weapon in addressing social issues contributes to the dynamics of social transformations in Yorùbá security and beyond.

Clothing as Social and Cultural Phenomenon

Clothing is not just a basic need for humans, but an intricate social and cultural phenomenon that communicates various messages concerning our individual and collective identities around the globe. Every culture has its unique traditional attire, associated with specific rituals, ceremonies, occasions, or daily norms. Today, an individual's choice of clothing is a statement expressing his psychological, sociocultural, and economic attributes. Although apparel satisfies a fundamental human necessity for physical protection and warmth (Sproles, 1979), its significance goes beyond the physical. It is frequently a physical manifestation of societal, personal, and cultural beliefs (Barnard, 2002). This perspective confirms that clothing inherently becomes a broader social dialogue.

Clothing is a constant way for us to communicate our social differences to the outside world and an expression of who we are as a people (Breward, 2000). They are an element of our arsenal of social technology, a tool for grounding concepts of identity in human visual indices (Tseelon, 1995). Because they have personal meanings that are unique to the individual and a group as they serve as significant channels for forming national image, clothes are a significant source of self-expression, both of individuality and agency. Clothes operate at the link between the individual and the collective, and they fashion identities and represent the "current spirit" (Lehmann, 2000, p. xii). Because clothing "stands at the interface between the individual and the

social world ... the private and the public" (Enstwistle, 2000), it becomes an embodied symbol that confers identity to both individuals and collective. They serve as the boundary between oneself and others, a platform for the expression of one's identity, including one's social class, educational background, and religious convictions. As an identification and communication tool, clothing carries many significant signs that take on different meanings and symbolic frontiers in the society.

A significant aspect of man's daily life involves wearing cloth to conceal their bodies. These clothes and the human body are inextricably linked; through them, a person takes his/her first step towards non-verbal communication with the outside world. These clothing not only communicates appearance but also forms a person's inner world, which contains a great deal of significance and messages (Dorrance, 2011). These human coverings are either attached to or held by the natural body and sometimes altering it by different manipulations such as painting and decorative scarification of the skin, hair manipulation, fabric covering, clothing, jewelry, shoes and various accessories. The social context of clothing can be evaluated through multiple facets. Certain societal norms and expectations shape what people wear. This is especially pertinent in a professional setting, where individuals' choice of clothing can make an impact on their perceived credibility. The social division of classes is further evidenced through clothing, setting apart the wealthy elites from the less privileged.

Clothing serves as a bridge between the social world and the bare body in social interactions (Lurie, 2000; Saucier, 2011). Comparable in eloquence and power to the words of the most accomplished orator or the writings of the most persuasive propagandist, clothing serves as a persuasive political language. They serve as a physical exoskeleton that protects against the weather as well as a border (Lamont, 2002; Epstein, 1992) and a means of forming an identity. Within the context of clothing culture, they can be seen as symbols that represent a transmission of information between the carrier and recipient and as a "social skin" (Gilman, 2002), clothing symbols represent what a certain society values at a particular time especially as derived from person's dressing culture and how it impacts on the larger social and cultural background.

Because they connect distinct nation's material culture and core values across racial, national, and international barriers, clothes are one of the most potent and versatile cultural agents (Tortora & Eubank, 1989). In other words, clothing has always been a tool for means of expression, identification, personality and communication. They act as a bridge between the social world and the naked body, the individual and society, and they provide a way for the body to reflect social

expectations (Crawley, 2003). This vestimentary envelope that encloses and makes society and the self-visible is, thus, a valued interaction between the body and the social world.

Clothing can be thought of as a powerful symbol of change and resistance, which people use to spread their ideologies and symbols. These symbolic boundaries created through clothes help reveal their cultural and social identity, that is why Womack clearly states that human civilizations employ symbols to convey their unique ideologies, social systems, and defining traits of certain culture. As a result, the meanings of symbols vary depending on the cultural background of the individual using them and are not inherent to the symbol itself (2005). These symbols might be polysemic, multivalent, or multivocal so might offer numerous layers of meaning simultaneously while concisely and efficiently expressing complex thoughts with various levels of appeal, and multiple voices. Even though a symbol's use and meaning are culturally imposed, they nevertheless logically relate to the item they stand for, which in this case are clothes. These clothes can convey specific and array of meanings, which are 'quasi-code' (Davis, 1993, p. 5) displayed by the clothed body that may "not … be fashionable dress" (Eicher, 1995, p. 299) but are used as a site for performing culture. The meanings produced by the combinations and variations of the fabric, texture, colour, pattern, volume, silhouette, and occasion are continually altering and in progress, which draws on traditional visual and tactile symbols of culture (Boero, 2023; Neto & Ferreira, 2023).

Apart from expressing nationality or ethnic identity, clothing also becomes a mode of resistance and protest. Subcultures such as punks, goths, hippies, etc., use attire as an emblem of rebellion and a means to challenge mainstream culture (Hebdige, 2002). The consumption and display of branded items play a significant role in fashion. This phenotype, known as conspicuous consumption, is motivated by the pursuit of social status and approval (Oh, 2021; Dahm, 2018; Veblen, 1899/1953). Indeed, the social and cultural aspects of clothing are continuously evolving with societal changes and technological advancements. In essence, clothing is a potent tool of communication, which reflects and influences societal norms, cultures, identities, and status. As society continues to develop, so does the social and cultural significance of clothing, solidifying its role as an active participant in the socio-cultural dialogue.

The Yorùbás' and Wars

The Yorùbá people, native to Western Africa and predominantly residing in Nigeria, Benin, and Togo, are believed to share a common ancestral father, Odùduwà. Their identity has existed for a

long time, but it is tied to the historical Ilé-Ifè, which served as their place of origin and the city from which their political dynasties emigrated, and thus became the source from which other Yorùbá groups and cities derived their own origins (Falola, 2006). The people have an antiquity imbued with a rich history of warfare. War was often a decisive instrument for political consolidation, territorial expansion, and sociocultural evolution. This is because they are not confined to a single geographical region, they are not governed by a single leader. However, subsequent wars and slave trades disturbed this order, necessitating the restoration of a nation under a single great ruler (Johnson, 1960). This resulted in regional issues, which led to the formation of states.

The Yorùbá wars, most notably the Yorùbá Civil War, spanning from 1793 to 1893 and often dubbed the 100 Years War, embodied their strategic and military prowess. It saw the once-cosmopolitan empire gradually fragment into several autonomous city-states. These wars had profound socio-political ramifications not just for the Yorùbá people, but also for the future of Western Africa (Adediran, 1994). Triggered by a succession crisis in the Old Oyo Empire (Ọ̀yọ́ìlẹ̀) and exacerbated by Fulani invasions because of religious enforcement and slave merchandise, the war was a cataclysmic event that significantly reshaped Yorùbá political geography. Towns such as Ibadan, Abeokuta, and Owo emerged as dominant military powers, marking a shift from an imperial monarchical system to a more stratified, complex political landscape (Akinwumi, 2004).

At the height of its dominance in the 18th century, the Yoruba empire of Oyo provided security and regular government for her people, fending off would-be assailants. The delicate balance between political authorities and ceremonial dominance of important monarchs in the region, particularly that of the Alaafin and the Ooni, was disturbed by pressures from Islam's invasion through Jihad. The increase of the external slave trade along the Badagry-Lagos axis was another key factor that weakened these strongholds. All these factors aided the fall of the Oyo empire, resulting in the disintegration of the Yorubas, who immediately reorganized in other towns and launched a military campaign to reclaim some of their cities, particularly against Fulani Jihadists and Dahomeyan assault (Benin Republic).

The Yorùbá nation's balkanization intensified because of ethnic individuality and power struggles, as well as regaining already conquered zones and a desire to safeguard their territory despite their unity, which Akinjogbin refers to as the "ebi system". It's a kind of commonwealth where all families are linked because they have a common origin and a sense of belonging as blood

relatives (2002, p. 113). The rise of ethnonational conflicts, and the spread of global capitalism and democracy led to the fragmentation of the Yorùbá people into sub-groups living in five states in Nigeria's South-West: Ekiti, Lagos, Ogun, Ondo, Osun, and Oyo. However, this does not reflect the people's historical geography because they also live in Edo, Kogi, and Kwara states, as well as throughout Europe, America, and parts of Africa. As a result of constant battles and slave trafficking, they dispersed to other regions of the world as a major ethnic group. According to Falola, there are numerous Yoruba subgroups located along the length of the Niger River in the east and the Mono River in the west (2006). These constant invasions bred traditional military personnel ready to fight against any foreign attacks. The Yorùbá warlords are referred to as Aare Ona Kakanfo (Generalissimo); commander-in-chief that leads battles, fight wars, mobilize, train soldiers and conquer the enemies though presently it's a ceremonial title like the Bashorun (War General), Aare Latoosa (Powerful General), Jagungun (Warrior) and Akoda (Policeman). These warriors fought from the Kiriji war to the Egba, Oyo-Ijaye, Owu-Ife, Ekitiparapo, Eleduwe, Jalumi, Osogbo, Ogele, MugbaMugba, Lasinmi, Gbanamu, Pamo, and Offa wars as well as the defense of the territorial and ideological battles against the Dahomey's aggressive hostilities (Adefisan, 2021; Danmole & Falola, 1985; Law, 1970; Jones, 1965).

The Yorùbá wars also demonstrated their excellence in military tactics and weapon-making. Traditional fighting methods included intricate formation strategies, the use of war songs and drums for communication, and the institution of strict rules of engagement that preserved important cultural sites. According to historical sources, the Yorùbá people were skilled in the production of high-quality iron materials used for warfare, while their prominent warriors, recognized as 'Àgbà', held esteemed positions in society. The commanders and warriors are distinctively dressed and are set apart from other people and cultures. Dress, in Yoruba belief, has power. It takes on power either from the processes of production or when it is used. It does not only show power, but also resistance. It is considered as a weapon of the weak, especially in the face of continued injustice by/of the powerful and it signifies absolute lack of confidence in the state and the government.

Furthermore, these wars depicted the indomitable spirit of resilience and resistance against external invasion, especially during the scramble for Africa in the late 19th century. Despite voracious attempts by colonial powers to seize control, Yorùbá city-states maintained a tenacious stance, which delayed the onset of formal colonial rule. Though the warfare were destructive, but

it sketched the course of the political, social, and cultural mutations within Yorùbá land. The tenacity of the people during these war times illuminated their indomitable spirit and their commitment to autonomy and self-determination. This indomitable spirit led to the region's agreement to build a united force to battle a common enemy: the "herdsmen" who had transformed their region into a "theatre of violence and blood", despite their different political leanings and ideologies. Thus, they went back into history and brought back their hunting and warring skills but with a touch of modernization in their outfits and general operation.

Yorùbá Dress Culture and Its Importance.

Africa is known for its rich cultures that translate into vibrant expressions of art, music, language, and a myriad of other societal intricacies. Among the myriad cultures enshrined in Africa, the Yorùbá culture stands out prominently, particularly in relation to dress culture. The Yorùbá people hold their dress culture close to their hearts, owing to its symbolic importance, aesthetic value and a sine qua to living (Fakunle, 2023; Adeoye, 2005); for them, dress plays more roles than to merely cover or adorn the human body but creates, denotes and reinforces identity as well as vocalises their nationalist agitations. Before pre-colonial, pre-Christian and pre-Islamic eras, Yoruba dress serves two major purposes, which are to protect the human bodies from environmental challenges and to project the identity of individuals and groups.

Based on their functions, the Yorubas' classified dress into four groups; ceremonial, fashion, professional and casual clothes, which has nothing to do with style, design, mode, materials or season but basically for analytical reasons. This indigenous dress establishes and maintains the people's identity and, as a symbolic interactive tool, sometimes alters their identity. Though it still embodies both spiritual and secular power, whether real or putative because it is regarded as sacred, as it shares the status, power, and identity of its wearers. Whether or not the human body is dressed; Yorùbá dress constitutes a political tool that can have physical and spiritual impact and thus their belief that dress is essential to life. The Yorùbá society makes distinctions between identity and dress; hence their personality is fused with their dress because it creates, denotes and reinforces their identity. From the foregoing, it can be affirmed that dress, among Yorùbá people, plays more roles than to merely cover or adorn the human body (Oyeniyi, 2012).

Central to the Yorùbá dress culture is the use of locally made fabrics; from the popular Aso-oke fabric, a hand-woven cloth used in making traditional attire to the Adire, a tie-dye or wax-resistant patterned cloth. These fabrics serve not only to deliver aesthetic pleasure but are also

deeply entrenched in the history and tradition of the Yorùbá people. The people's dress is usually a reflection of certain cultural aspects, including societal rank, marital status, or even the nature of events being attended. So, the profound attachment of their dress culture is an embodiment of cultural preservation and identity formation. This sartorial tradition contributes to the sustenance of indigenous knowledge and skills, fosters unity and a sense of belonging among the people. Moreover, the uniqueness of the Yorùbá dress culture has led to its widespread recognition and appreciation across borders, thus promoting cultural exchange and enhancing the region's global visibility. Beyond its adornment value, it represents a nexus of tradition, creativity, societal order, and cultural identification.

Yorùbáness is impossible without the Yorùbá dress, they remain active and will always be so, the dressed and decorated human bodies are central components of the peoples' uniqueness despite the variety of changes that their dress patterns have undergone because of modernization. The dress patterns project them as an Omoluabi, a term for everything good, lofty and of good report. This is to fashion the dressers to be able to present themselves to both 'the self' and to public as worthy ambassadors (Fakunle, 2022; Rowland, 1990). The migration of people from different places before and after independence resulted in the mixing of different people and this meant mixing of different (dress) culture, which brought about the marginal increases in the number of indigenous dress users and an increase of hybrid dress users, especially among youths (Morgan, 1990).

The Yorùbás, like other African tribes, assign dress of different types to different professions or works. Both sexes have different respective dress patterns; both the hunters and farmers, dress up in the Gberi and Sokoto Digo, which were the norm and constitutes the most important form of aesthetic expression in Yorùbáland. The major differences between both professional dresses were that the formers' dress had pockets, especially in front, and the latter dress was deemed incomplete without a flywhisk, an Aparu (Byfield, 1997). Incidentally, this dress pattern is what the warrior puts on with few adjustments and protective accessory embellishments, which typically differentiates the dresses. Clothing serves as a marker of identity and a link between a person and society. Thus, despite their lack of access to western education, the Yorùbá chiefs in Southwest Nigeria had a social structure, which they displayed by donning a uniform. All of this is predicated on the notion of respectability, which explains why people dress alike that

sends different messages. This uniformed appearance performance illustrates how tradition is portrayed in modernity and conveys the prevailing opinion of a person or group.

Just like the Yorùbás, other Nigerian tribes, professional and religious organizations have also used dress in varying capacities, which are still reflected till date; and the Nigerian political scene is not left out, starting from the colonial era through the military and the democratic period. The political dress culture is referred to as the Khaki to civilian dress and Agbada/Babariga Era (Elisha, 2004), which affected every culture including the Yorùbás who eventually adopted the Khaki style of dress to suit their indigenous security outfit. , probably to portray the appearance of a security personnel as well as differentiate the ruled from the rulers, just as Khaki and other military insignia and epaulets denoting ranks and status, but also differentiate one officer from the other. The Àmọ̀tẹ́kùn dress is built into the Yorùbá identity not only to project the value of being an Omoluabi, but also to vocalise their nationalist agitations.

***Àmọ̀tẹ́kùn* Uniform: An Index of Identity and a Non-Violent Weapon**

Àmọ̀tẹ́kùn is the Western Nigeria Security Network launched on January 9th, 2020, by the states of Lagos, Oyo, Osun, Ekiti, Ondo and Ogun as a result of the rising security threats in Nigeria. It is codenamed Operation *Àmọ̀tẹ́kùn* translates as 'leopard' - a powerful, protective animal in African folklore in Yorùbá (Fig. 1).

Fig. 1. The Leopard. www.hep6.com

It is a "community security" outfit that "complements the efforts" of the Nigerian Police. This regional security initiative is only a "response to a problem" while the Nigerian police actualize a national "community policing strategy". This outfit has become "a confidence-boosting strategy" and an intervention "to defend our people" from the criminal activities of the herdsmen and bandits in the region as well as allay the fears of southwest residents. This creative initiative became necessary to save the lives and property of the people. Thus, their major obligation is to provide first-hand information that could help tackle and fight crime. Key to their operation is "information", which will be used as a preventive measure towards resolving the insecurity challenges of the region (Peller, 2020).

Àmọ̀tẹ́kùn, the Western Nigeria Security Network, uses a minimalist, graphic design featuring a leopard head against a black background, symbolizing strength, power, and agility. The logo draws on Yoruba cultural symbolism and transcends language barriers, making it a universal security symbol (Fig. 2).

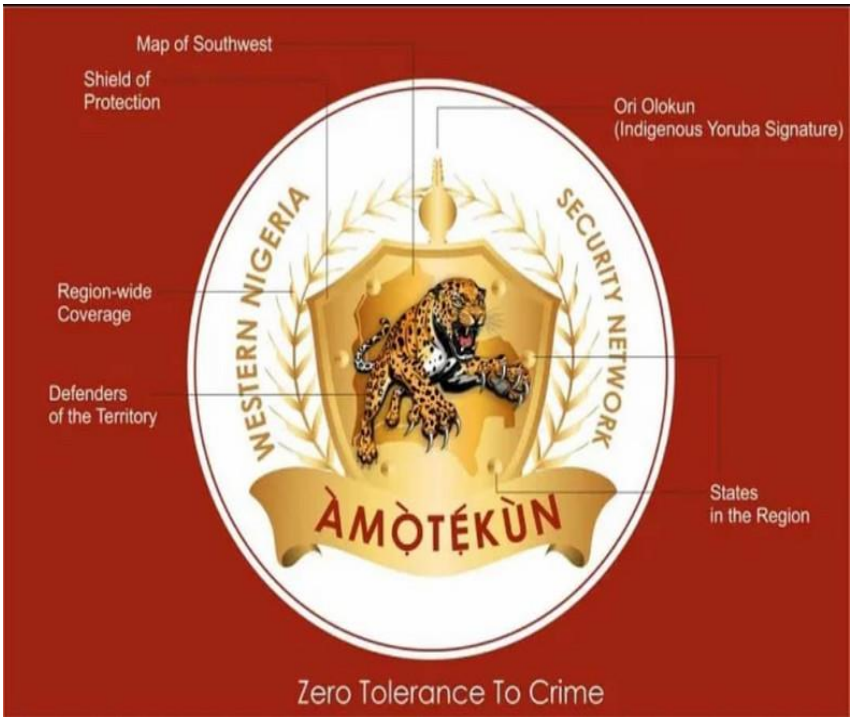

Fig. 2. Logo of Àmọ̀tẹ́kùn

The striking silhouette can be easily reproduced and adapted to uniforms and vehicles, conveying the gravitas of *Àmọ̀tẹ́kùn*'s mission and its mission. It points at the path to tread in ensuring that collaborative efforts among security agencies yield maximum protection for the citizenry. It points

at the ostensible potentials of a nation-state sincerely desirous of mobilizing the citizens for the production of goods and services. The *Àmọ̀tẹ́kùn* uniform not only signifies strength and resilience but also embeds within it a sense of cultural identity, pride, and heritage. Reflecting on these nuanced dimensions, the *Àmọ̀tẹ́kùn* uniform significantly contributes to contemporary discussions on clothing as an avenue for semiotic resistance. It not only garners conversation on cultural expression and political resistance but also offers a unique insight into the symbolic power clothing possesses within socio-political contexts.

Clothing has a distinctive personal role in a person's identity since it announces the wearer's social standing to both the wearer and onlookers in a specific interaction circumstance. Clothing confers identities on people, communicates roles within these structures, and reflects both cultural identity and habitat. It influences and shapes the appearance with significant impact on the construction of social identity (Boomsma, 2020; Akdemir, 2018). As expressions of identification and one of the traditional ways we communicate who and what we are to others, clothes are a component of our social technology toolkit and a way for concepts of identity to be grounded in the visual. However, this expressivity functions within a cultural context that gives social forms specific meanings. They are a means of constructing social identification at the level of group bodies' as well as a means through which cultural expectations are translated into precise needs in respect to appearance.

As an emblem of strength, sly and swift movement, the choice of the leopard is because it is a fast hunter, defender and successful warrior. The security operative of the Southwestern region adopted the skin type and materiality of the animal to serve a symbolic function by assuming the power and skill of the leopard, thus ensuring a successful hunt. The *Àmọ̀tẹ́kùn* uniform is a significant source of self-expression; both of individuality and agency as well as an identification and communication tool that signals the membership of the group. As a fascinating cultural and sociological phenomenon that has been accepted in the region, the uniform was conceived by the people's ethnicity, identity and region that are embedded with different systems of meaning (Barthes, 2006). The uniform "… is a significant material practice … use[d] to signal … cultural boundaries, social separations, continuities and, for the present purposes and political dissidences" (Maynard, 2006, p. 103). The *Àmọ̀tẹ́kùn* uniform is an "identity kit" (Nelson, 2002, p. 22), which reinforces the people's peculiarities, natures, roles, and responsibilities.

The emblematic *Àmọ̀tẹ́kùn* costume has continued to resonate as a symbol of identity, and more importantly, a non-violent weapon in present-day Nigeria. Enveloped in deep-rooted cultural significance and historic resonance, the *Àmọ̀tẹ́kùn* costume is fast gaining recognition as a highly visible representation of the security outfit's values, societal role, and tradition. *Àmọ̀tẹ́kùn*, meaning leopard in Yoruba, is a security network created in 2020 by the governors of the South-West Region of Nigeria in response to the increasing rate of criminal activities in the area. Predominantly donned by members of this security outfit, the *Àmọ̀tẹ́kùn* uniform serves as an emblematic identity and visual marker that distinguishes its wearer from other security agencies. The uniform is "a means of symbolic display, a way to give external form to the self-identity narratives," and "a means of self-display, which turns the conventions to basic aspects of identity" (Giddens, 2002).

The *Àmọ̀tẹ́kùn* security personnel use symbolism through their uniforms as a statement of both a social identity and power since the colours, styles, patterns and materials of their uniform have symbolic overtones that are crucial in confirming their status as the region's guards. The uniform stands as an index of identity, which has the potential to convey social positioning within Southwest, Nigeria and as a nonviolent performative weapon used in addressing social issues that contributes to the dynamics of social transformations in Yoruba security and beyond (Fig. 3). In other words, Operation *Àmọ̀tẹ́kùn* represents the counterforce to the forceful, destructive assailants.

Fig. 3. Operation Àmọ̀tẹ́kùn during inauguration by Late Arakunrin Rotimi Akerodolu

The *Àmọ̀tẹ́kùn* uniform is characterized by an iconic, vibrant amber-brown attire, reminiscent of a leopard's skin. This, combined with the imagery of a leopard – a revered and tenacious animal in Yoruba culture – shows the costuming's significance in symbolizing strength, resilience, and fearlessness. Moreover, the costume's color is not merely a reference to the leopard but symbolic of vibrancy, positivity, and the energy that the *Àmọ̀tẹ́kùn* strives to bring towards ensuring community safety and security. Beyond its role as an identity marker, the *Àmọ̀tẹ́kùn* uniform holds a more profound dynamic role: it serves as a non-violent weapon. It presents a visual cue of authority, respect, and caution, affecting a psychological deterrence to potential crime perpetrators. Typically, a person is less likely to commit a crime when a visible symbol of authority is nearby, thus underscoring the non-violent nature of this security measure (Sunshine & Tyler, 2003).

Furthermore, the *Àmọ̀tẹ́kùn* outfit inspires a sense of community trust and ownership. It connects directly with the cultural heritage and values of the Yoruba people, thus, instilling a sense of belonging and trust within individuals in these communities. This trust is crucial for effective community policing strategies, as it promotes stronger rapport and cooperation between the security agency and the community members it seeks to protect (Gill et al., 2013). The *Àmọ̀tẹ́kùn* costume – vibrant and symbolic, serves beyond its graphical appeal—it serves as an index of identity and a non-violent weapon. Representation and psychological deterrence, embedded in its non-violent nature, harmonize with community ownership, making it an immensely significant aspect of the *Àmọ̀tẹ́kùn* security outfit. Thus, the *Àmọ̀tẹ́kùn* uniform portrays a multifaceted role that transcends the conventional societal understanding of a costume to a symbol of identity and a catalyst for non-violent social control.

Àmọ̀tẹ́kùn Uniform: Semiotic Power of Social Repositioning

Symbols are occasionally utilised by different cultures, and each of these symbols may have a different meaning, making it challenging to discern between the various meanings. Therefore, it is vital to understand how symbols vary among cultures, especially given their complex structure and multiple layers of meaning, especially when it comes to clothes. Clothing has deeper social connotations beyond the visible that can build power dynamics, emphasise certain aspects of identity, and conceal others.

Most people have learnt how to show their agency through clothing, even though the resistance expressed through it may appear inconsequential and the experiences of empowerment

may also be momentary. They have visibly used their clothing for dramatic effect, either as part of their protest or to question certain traditional constructions to make fundamental meaning of their collective consciousness. Given that it is a part of daily life that is taken for granted, clothing in particular offers useful justifications for resistance. Clothing reflects personal expression styles and the relative nature of the ideals they represent (Barthes, 1983). Uniforms repress difference, highlight the role over the individual, or otherwise manage and control people in a much more overt manner, yet they can also be utilised as a form of resistance (Lurie, 2000).

The *Àmọ̀tẹ́kùn* uniform is a perfect embodiment of sociocultural representation and national pride in Nigeria, serving as an emblem of local security, strength, and vigilance. The *Àmọ̀tẹ́kùn* Security Network has been dressed using elements that creatively leverage cultural and traditional symbols, underscored by a deliberate effort to represent semiotic power. The semiotics of their costume contributes significantly to their social repositioning in society. The *Àmọ̀tẹ́kùn* costume is predominantly noticeable by its dark, earth-toned colour palette. However, it is not the colours alone that translate meaning. Notably, the costume incorporates leopard patterns, a symbolic iconography that resonates with Yorùbá mythology. In Yorùbá culture, leopards represent power, agility and fierceness (Braide, Olusola, 2005), thus the incorporation of it in the *Àmọ̀tẹ́kùn's* outfit reflects these attributes, fostering an image of courage, alertness and resilience, key attributes of a security outfit.

The fusion of military paraphernalia such as boots, bulletproof vests, and firearms adds another dimension to the interpretation of the outfit. This military-like look, a common association with safety and protection (Glas, 2004), augments the idea that the *Àmọ̀tẹ́kùn* are fully equipped and prepared to defend the community against unlawful elements. The outfit also borrows heavily from traditional hunter attire. It is this element that provides the most significant semiotic value, a social repositioning of the *Àmọ̀tẹ́kùn* as protective hunters, not just of game, but their community. Yoruba community members have historically regarded hunters with respect due to their skills in navigating forests and difficult terrains, thereby giving the *Àmọ̀tẹ́kùn* enhanced credibility as a competent and knowledgeable security outfit.

The headgear, a red beret in the military tradition, indicates valor, bravery, and a readiness for self-sacrifice. Symbolically, red is known to invoke feelings of passion, urgencies and alerts the most out of all colors (O'Connor, 2011). Therefore, it brings about an all-round feeling of security and trust in the community members. The costume consequently plays a highly significant

social-cultural role by creating a visual imprint, a diverse functional system of signs that communicate enhanced security and community protection. Each element of the costume conveys a distinct message, strategically calculable to point out what *Àmọ̀tẹ́kùn* stands for.

The *Àmọ̀tẹ́kùn* security group's physical presence, along with their uniform, sends powerful messages to the general public, drawing attention to their activism and resistance as well as challenging the current status; a strategy Austin has dubbed "the politics of presence" (2017) because it carries a deeper meaning, which the Security Operatives have used to send signals of their neighbours and perceived enemies**.** The *Àmọ̀tẹ́kùn* security group utilises the semiotics of dress to advance their resistance agenda in challenging the status quo. The focus, therefore, is on how the cloth and dress are marshalled for the performance of collective action, socio-political dissent, alternative and identity politics. The *Àmọ̀tẹ́kùn* uniform is a visual experience, a neutral and transparent type of communication open to everyone; though used to influence people and persuade them into the freedom struggle. The *Àmọ̀tẹ́kùn* uniform is an important expression against colonialism, insecurity, herdsmen and terrorist attacks; it became an emblem for the resistance, revolution and change. Thus, the uniform became a power changing mechanism that is not only a physical boundary between the security personnel's self and the immediate environment, but also a "symbolic boundary" (Murekain, 2021; Albrecht, 2012) aimed at creating distinction between what indigenes and the herders/terrorists/kidnappers (intruders). Their outfit, therefore, forms a relationship of solidarity through which the people envisaged as a way of belonging and thus, creating a transnational social movement.

The *Àmọ̀tẹ́kùn* uniform is always "involved in a social context, and it puts the position of the individual in the face of the group" (Fussell, , 1992, p. 73) and "the symbolism in the colours of the clothing continues to be one of the most powerful and the most symbolic sign" (p. 70) because it represents the color and design of the dreaded leopard; hence the uniform stands as a resistive semiotics and a non-violence paradoxical weapon that has redefined the insecurity challenges in the region. The clothing did more than protect, cover and adorn the body of the personnel, but a conscious "cultural and political tool" deployed to maintain a movement and build solidarity with the aim of "inversing the hegemonic norms" via "collective representations of sartorial embodiment" (Yangzom, 2016, p. 622).

As a symbolic issue, clothing should be considered as an addition to verbal and other communication expression systems. It should also be remembered that clothes, as one of a person's

most obvious physical characteristics, is crucial in the social construction of identity. According to Crane, "clothing styles are significant to the social groups in which they originate or whom they are targeted but are often incomprehensible to people outside these social contexts" (2000, p. 15). The uniform of *Àmọ̀tẹ́kùn*, on the other hand, provides proof of the importance and significance of symbols in the construction of regional security operatives of Nigerian identity in general and the Southwest region in particular. The *Àmọ̀tẹ́kùn* uniform allows the group to negotiate boundaries and its "embodiment … itself alters political space and civic discourse, [which is] imperative to understanding how resistance is performed in creating social change" (Yangzom, 2016, p. 623). This clothing has become both a "public and hidden transcript" of resistance to state power because it is "the open interaction between subordinates and those who dominate" and the "discourse that takes place 'offstage' where it is unobservable to those in power (Scott, 1990, p. 2-4). The *Àmọ̀tẹ́kùn* uniform, though, not a direct confrontational instrument; is a tool for symbolic resistance and empowerment as well as avoiding political repression especially, making them and their demands visible as "weapons of the weak" (Scott, 1985).

The *Àmọ̀tẹ́kùn* security costume demonstrates how different cultures can have an impact on clothes as a form of protest (Fig. 4).

Fig. 4. Operation Àmọ̀tẹ́kùn Security Personnel in their Costume on Parade

Since it has the performative ability to transmit social placement inside and around the region as well as the fundamental transformation that comes with it, the dress of these security operatives has developed into a typical method through which they disseminate their ideologies and symbols.

Conclusion

In this study, I have considered that the public transcript of the *Àmọ̀tẹ́kùn* security uniform is used to elucidate how authoritarian tendencies are passively resisted because of the generalised insecurity in Nigeria and the Southwest in particular. When used as a peaceful performative weapon to address social concerns and as a political symbol to deter dangerous offenders, the *Àmọ̀tẹ́kùn* uniform has contributed to the dynamics of social transformations in Yoruba security and beyond. This study proposed that the *Àmọ̀tẹ́kùn* security operatives have readily contributed to the eco and geo-political wellbeing of the Southwest region as a resistant form. Such a concerted effort would encourage other areas to follow suit and aid in lowering the level of insecurity in the nation. This is because the proposed community policing plan, which is thought to help reduce crime, social unrest, and insecurity as part of the commanding heights of the security in the country, would naturally match the *Àmọ̀tẹ́kùn* security operatives.

In conclusion, the *Àmọ̀tẹ́kùn* uniform operates on two distinct but interrelated levels. On a functional level, it provides operational requirements for action in the field. On the level of representation, it signifies their intent, character and place within society. By using visual signs, the uniform connects with citizens on an interpersonal level and feeds into the larger social narrative contributing to the social repositioning of the security outfit into a symbol of security, alertness and protection for communities in Southwestern Nigeria.

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