

MIGRATION AND ITS INNOVATIONS ON IGBO WOMEN DRESS FASHION:
A CLOTHING AND TEXTILE ENCOUNTER.

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Abstract

This paper is predicated on the fact that migration of the Igbo to other countries has brought about positive and negative changes in clothing and fashion. The Igbo's excessive penchant for migration has occasioned innovative and creative ideas in fashion designs thereby creating new mercantile networks for the clothing industry. In this industry, individuals are trained as fashion entrepreneurs and a cycle of entrepreneurial system sustained. This is a qualitative research. It uses observations, interviews and photography as research instruments to collect some data with a view to highlighting the kinds of innovation that migration has brought about in Igbo women's dress culture and its resultant effects. I argue that migration of the Igbo to different parts of the world has served as a catalyst to the fashion industry in Igbo land and contributes to a global intensification of Igbo dress ideas. I contend that migration has its virtues, shortcomings and imperfections on the migrants and the society at large. I conclude that although the foreign fashion the Igbo adopted as theirs during the process of migration hold significant prospects, they should not be allowed to undermine the modernity of Igbo 'traditional' dress.

Keywords: Migration, Dress, African wax prints, Akwete woven fabrics, laces.

Introduction

Migration is the movement of people from one place to another with various intentions such as settling temporarily or permanently. This movement could be voluntarily or forced and frequently done in long distances, such as from one country to another and also from a region within their country to another region in order to live there. Across a period of time, the Igbo have witnessed series of migrations. This phenomenon is not a neoteric find but has been present in the history of the Igbo till date. It has influenced their language, culture, dress culture, lifestyle, political stance and worldview. So many factors have been found to be responsible for this movement, they augmented the immigrants' appetite for migration, attracted and encouraged them to leave their places of origin. They are as follows; they felt there would be better living conditions abroad, enough job opportunities, better medical facilities and care, religious, political and press freedom, qualitative education, attractive climate, better chances of intermarriage etc. According to inventive Africa, in Africa, International Migration Fund (IMF) states that the number of migrants doubled since 1990 to reach about 20 million in 2013. And the two root causes discovered were conflict and pursuit for economic opportunities. Furthermore they mentioned that various migration studies showed over the years that there were fewer conflict migrants and greater economic migrants from Africa. It also states that the UNHCR (2011)

MIGRATION AND ITS INNOVATIONS ON IGBO WOMEN DRESS FASHION:
A CLOTHING AND TEXTILE ENCOUNTER.

Chika Chinyeogwa Chudi-Duru

official data of international migrants from Africa put conflict migrants at 86 per cent. But due to her huge population, youth unemployment rate (25.20 per cent), migration to various European cities, Mediterranean Sea crossing statistics, African migration statistics to America and Nigeria's periodic report on xenophobia attacks in South Africa (Olubukola 2018), one can ascertain that there are more economic migrants from Nigeria than other African countries. In Nigeria, the root causes of migration are internal conflict leading to 2,152,000 internally displaced persons (with 85 per cent caused by Boko Haram) and pursuit of economic opportunities. And the Igbo are not left behind. In all these migrations, the Igbo are heavily represented in that they are found to have migrated to different parts of the globe. Since clothing is one of the basic necessities of live, they find themselves adapting to the clothing styles of the people and the culture they find themselves in and as a result of this, they adopt and wear them every day.

Dress is a form of non-verbal communication which gives mental signs to a person's social identity. People get their first impression of someone from the clothes and body adornment he/she is putting on (Uto-Ezeajugh 2011). In other words a person's personality could be based on his/her dressing. Uto-Ezeajugh stresses that in different parts of Africa, different dress cultures are connected with the people of different areas, and these cultures are the distinguishing hallmark of each ethnic group. Dress provides the signs and symbols that serve as informants for observers to be able to form an opinion of others. Dress is not only used as an external cover for the bare skin of the human body, but to convey the historical and cultural significance of a place, worldviews, beliefs, ethics and political thoughts. These messages conveyed through the dress are usually carried out through the designs patterns, styles and colours on them.

Herald (2010) in Chudi- Duru (2017) supports this, and points out that design patterns are non-verbal means of communication used to differentiate, disguise, warm and allure. She further mentions that they are universal phenomena that are characterized by elements and principles of design. Designs on textiles are found in many cultures including the Igbo. According to Kriger (2006), textiles and fashion (dress) are one of human kind's most important commodities and have a lot to express on the peoples history and societies worldwide. Dress includes clothing, jewelry, hairstyles, cosmetics, body decorations and other dress accessories such as shoes, wrist watches, parasol, caps, hats, belts, hand bags, walking sticks, horse whip, scepter etc. the Igbo make use of all these mentioned above in terms of dressing, they are their cultural identity as regards to dressing in Igbo culture. They are easily identified in their dressing during social, religious and political gatherings.

The Igbo woman's traditional dress is made up of jewelries (anklets and armllets (could be ivory or metal), waist beads (mgbaji, jigida), earrings, hair decorations, Igbo traditional hand woven fabrics (akwete), uli/uri traditional hand painted body decorations, various styles of hairdo while in the contemporary times they have also adopted Indian madras known as George; this is also used by the Igbo women, laces of different makes using cotton, organza, taffeta, satin and other blends of different fibres, African wax printed fabrics otherwise known as Dutch wax Hollandaise, imitation fancy prints from China, other wax prints from Ghana, Cote d'ivoire, Cotonou, English wax, Java wax, Nigerian wax, other wax prints and printed fabrics from other parts of the world they can afford or lay their hands on as part of their dressing.

MIGRATION AND ITS INNOVATIONS ON IGBO WOMEN DRESS FASHION:
A CLOTHING AND TEXTILE ENCOUNTER.

Chika Chinyeogwa Chudi-Duru

Some Igbo have also found to incorporate some traditional hand woven fabrics from other parts of Nigeria in their dressing almost entirely abandoning their own dress culture. This would not have been possible without migration. It is in this wise that this paper has set out to examine the innovations of migration on Igbo woman's dress fashion with concentration on fabrics used by them and fashion.

Background to the study

The typical Igbo dress like any other African type possesses fundamentally the power to represent and distinguish the Igbo from the other ethnic groups in Nigeria and beyond. The typical traditional Igbo hand woven fabrics known as Akwete are decorated with symbolic motifs. According to Davis (1974), a history of the Igbo could be written using the advancement of symbolic motifs applied to their cloth motifs. Many of their motifs, showcase traditional legends, practices, tools, household items and beliefs while others are diacritical, confirming either new labels, familiar objects or the ability to translate newly introduced, everyday objects into stylized designs in weaving. Thus the traditional hand woven fabrics of the Igbo are emblematic. However, due to cultural diffusion emanating from migration and driven by improved and new technological advances, the Igbo dress has encountered diverse changes. These have been reflected in changes in the fabrics used by them, make-up, jewelries, fashion and also in their manner of dressing. Fabrics of different origins, adapted and utilized by the Igbo to construct their cloth wears are now referred to as Igbo traditional wears among the Igbo. The Igbo are now being identified with George wrappers instead of their own traditional hand woven fabrics. Maiwada (2008) in Ben-Iheanacho (2011) is of the view that all materials utilized by the Igbo are imported from outside Nigerian shores. But this study disagrees with him on that and stresses that not all fabrics utilized by the Igbo are imported from outside the shores of Nigeria because some Igbo still utilize their traditionally hand woven fabrics which are indigenous to them and the weavers are still producing till date (Chudi-Duru,2017). The George fabrics used by the Igbo as theirs and all its varieties are made in Madras, India. To support this point, Ben-Iheanacho (2011) narrates a personal encounter in Malaysia in 2003, where she attended a cultural exchange programme and all the participants were encouraged to attend in their traditional garb on the syndicate opening day. She dressed up in her double george wrappers, a lace blouse, the Igbo woman's big, stiff scarf, as befitting of a typical Igbo woman and the centre of admiration of all eyes only for her to be embarrassed by a female participant of Indian extraction from Sri Lanka, who exposed that that her wrapper was "hers" and further asked whether is how she uses it in her own country. The question is this how and when have Indian madras become the actual or authentic Igbo traditional wear? Is it not through migration that the Igbo are able to come in contact with Indian Georges? When one talks about the African wax printed fabrics, the Dutch claims that, laces- Swiss and China will claim those ones, ordinary printed fabrics- the English and other countries that produce them will claim them as theirs and so on and so forth. The study posits that if she had adorned herself in akwete hand woven fabrics that is hers, perhaps she would have looked atypical, unique, distinct and uncommon. People might ask some questions concerning her origin and how they could find such and possess some pairs.

MIGRATION AND ITS INNOVATIONS ON IGBO WOMEN DRESS FASHION:
A CLOTHING AND TEXTILE ENCOUNTER.

Chika Chinyeogwa Chudi-Duru

Statement of the Problem

This problem of this paper is that migration has given rise to the adaptation of what is not the Igbo women's mode of dressing to become theirs. And this has brought about a lot of modernization and changes in their dressing which bear positive or negative attributes on the Igbo women's dress fashion and textiles. Notwithstanding, the humble opinion of this paper is that the Igbo have neglected what they are known for globally in terms of textiles and have clung unto what is not theirs and which they cannot lay claims to.

In as much as these Igbo textiles are found in various foreign museums in the world, for instance the British museum (Chudi-Duru, 2017), the question is this, for how long will these Igbo hand woven fabrics be admired only in these foreign museums not on Igbo women bodies like some years back? This study asserts that in as much as migration has brought a lot of reformations and keeps on updating the Igbo women's dress fashion as in styles and materials, it should be clearly noted that satisfaction and pleasure should be derived by the Igbo women in using what is typically theirs. Akwete hand woven fabrics should not be forgotten but rather the Igbo women should revel in their usage because that is their own true Igbo cultural identity as regards to textiles and fashion which no one can never lay claims to their ownership except the Igbo.

The origin of cloth wears utilized by the Igbo women.

The Igbo women of the south eastern Nigeria adorn themselves in various fabrics. Some of them are brought to them by the reason of migration whereas a particular one is traditionally hand woven by the weavers although some of the woven design ideas were copied from the Indian George fabrics. These clothing and textiles utilized by the Igbo women will be discussed one by one below.

Akwete hand woven fabrics.

These are specifically woven in Ndoki town of *Akwete* in Ukwu East Local Government Area of Abia state (Chudi-Duru 2017). From the mid to late nineteenth century, weaving grew from a part-time activity that occupied some women, to full-time occupation in which all *Akwete* women participated (Ekwueme 2009, Ogu and Ndebilie 2011). At this period, *Akwete* weavers responded to the patronage of neighbouring Ijo peoples of the Niger-Delta, devising innovative techniques to create desired patterns in new textile materials. Oyelola (2004), finds out that *Akwete* women have been involved in major roles of inventing hand weaved textiles which have for over a very long time enriched the beauty and dignity of those who wear them using the vertical loom to produce cloth for everyday wear and also more sophisticated designs for special occasions. She opines that the *Akwete* weavers are well known for their woven cloths which are elaborately decorated with rayon silk warp threads. Nwachukwu et al (2012) believes that *Akwete* cloth is as old as the Igbo nation but because of the skillfulness of the weavers who demonstrated great mastery of technique and beauty of design, the art of *Akwete* cloth weaving was erroneously believed to have been introduced from Okene in Kogi State where a similar but highly developed style had earlier existed. On the contrary, Ekwueme (2009) narrates that the *Akwete* clans' ancestors came from Bonny in Rivers state; maybe that could explain why Umuagbai-Ndoki, Ijo and Ogoni in Rivers state also weave a cloth called Akuraku. Ikegwu and Uzuegbu (2015) further mention that this weaving vocation was projected into limelight globally by the colonial masters. But Ekwueme (2009) pronounces that *Akwete*

MIGRATION AND ITS INNOVATIONS ON IGBO WOMEN DRESS FASHION:
A CLOTHING AND TEXTILE ENCOUNTER.

Chika Chinyeogwa Chudi-Duru

woven fabrics gained popularity during the oil boom era and that this trade was what brought the beauty and creative nature of the woven cloths and the weavers into limelight at that time. She is also of the view that the origin of this unique traditional industry is still shrouded in mystery and affirms that these intricate designs created by these weavers have arguably been adjudged as one of the most famous of the women vertical loom clothes in Nigeria.

But Afigbo (1981), Goodlife (2010) and Sinha (2012) also disagree with this view of Ekwueme (2009) and Nwachukwu et al (2012) on the ownership of Akwete weaving said that the legendary weaver, *Dada Nwawkwata* who was acclaimed to be the founder of *Akwete* weaving began weaving with designs of her invention. She is said to be the founder of weaving in *Akwete* and has remained a role model for *Akwete* weavers who like her claimed they can weave any cloth design set before them. She usually loosens the threads from an open woven cotton cloth locally known as *acham* brought to the area through trade with the Portuguese between the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries when the latter operated in the Bight of Biafra. After studying the weave structures of the heavily ornamented cloth, she copied them and secretly began to weave a new style of *Akwete* designs. A deaf and dumb friend of hers revealed this after her death. Oyelola (2004), also agrees with Afigbo (1981), Goodlife (2010) and Sinha (2012) mention that the first *Akwete* weaver is believed to be Dada Nwawkwata and she is of Igbo origin. Sinha (2012) strongly believes that *Akwete* is the traditional hand woven cloth of the Igbo, made by highly talented women in the town of the same name which is transferred from mother to daughter since ancient times.

Sinha (2012) observes that it is used for ceremonial dresses but now; it has been overtaken by cheap imported materials. And with the introduction of the lighter polyester silk threads and beautiful new patterns, in her own view which the researcher disagrees with, *Akwete* competes remarkably well with the best materials in the world. The artistry and craftsmanship that goes into the making of this material stand it head and shoulders above most woven fabrics in West Africa. However, history reveals that the production of the cloth is the traditional profession of the Igbo women folk who started weaving from the time their hands were strong enough to handle a vertical loom.

Sinha (2012) postulates that although there are some uniquely traditional *Akwete* woven fabric patterns passed down over centuries, each weaver still tries out new designs in keeping with modern trends in fashion thus creating an interactive and vibrant industry. They are distinguished from other textiles produced on the vertical loom by their sizes and worn by women as wrappers (Eicher 1976). According to Davis (1974), a history of *Akwete* could be written using the advancement of symbolic motifs applied to their cloth motifs. Some of the woven designs have always been personal expressions of the weavers. According to Ikegwuonu (1979) in Chukwueggu and Ogu (2013), *Akwete* fabric design motifs are derived from legend stylized human, animal forms, creatures, everyday life, conceptual symbols and inspirations. They are still woven and scantily used till date to convey specific messages through the woven fabrics. Although the woven symbols are not reserved for a particular group of people, that is; is not only the Igbo that utilize the woven fabrics, they still have significant meanings for the people that use and own them. Basing the origin of these fabrics on facts, this research is of the view that the owners, are the Igbo.

MIGRATION AND ITS INNOVATIONS ON IGBO WOMEN DRESS FASHION:
A CLOTHING AND TEXTILE ENCOUNTER.

Chika Chinyeogwa Chudi-Duru



Plate 1: akwete hand woven fabric.
Source: Chudi-Duru, C (2017)

African Wax Printed fabrics

These are seen as traditional cloths in Igbo land and Africa as a whole. They are used as uniforms (aso-ebi) in some ceremonies till date. According to Eccentric Yoruba (2011), an internet blog, the development of the African printed fabric is as a result of a long historical process of imitation and simulation and how exactly Dutch wax prints became popular in West Africa is still being argued. It said that Dutch wax prints started out as cheap mass-produced imitations of Indonesian batik locally produced in Java. The Dutch and the English, were the key players in industrializing the batik production techniques and popularizing the resulting textiles in foreign markets.

It also said, that Javanese batik is a product of hand-drawing motifs on a cotton cloth and involved the use of wax and resist-dye and was introduced to Holland, after being colonized by the Dutch, and subsequently to other parts of Europe, but did not gain popularity. In the 19th century, Dutch merchants found out that fabrics were mass produced in Europe using engraved roller print machines and dye-resistant resin to design motifs and produce a batik effect on cloth. It was an effort to develop foreign textiles markets for machine-produced batik imitations. The mass production of batik dyed textiles were brought to Europe by the van Vlissingen's who were a textile merchant family and established their company in 1846 and set up Vlisco brand of cloth.

Eccentric Yoruba (2011) narrates the various views as regarding to how Dutch wax prints entered the West African market. One view is that in the late 1800s, Dutch transporters that were on their way to Indonesia from Europe had with them, their simulated batik textiles. They often stopped at various African ports, to sell their goods and consequently they got a lot of African customers.

It further narrated another view, which is that these fabrics could not be marketed in the Indonesian market due to, it did not retain the well-defined qualities as the original batik and

MIGRATION AND ITS INNOVATIONS ON IGBO WOMEN DRESS FASHION:
A CLOTHING AND TEXTILE ENCOUNTER.

Chika Chinyeogwa Chudi-Duru

economic restrictions imposed on the sale of foreign textiles at the beginning of the 20th century to protect locally made batik textiles. Therefore, in order to avoid a deficit in their business, the target market was diverted to West Africa.

Some names that have been given to these wax prints are star, opener, ruler, horse, alphabets, broken plates, bow-tie, bible and snail, bible and star, pink lady, eyes, happy family, ten o'clock mass, rope, hand, record, fan, shell and others. Famous manufacturers are Vlisco in the Netherlands, Akosombo textiles limited in Ghana and Hitarget in China. There is also ABC wax from Manchester, United Kingdom but today it is part of Akosombo Textiles Limited and printed in Ghana. There are also many textile industries in Africa and China which use the wax print design for similar looks and much cheaper fancy textiles which still find their way to Igbo land. In Nigeria there are some few textile industries in Kano and Lagos that are still producing some African printed fabrics while others have gone moribund. There are no textile industries found in Igbo land, and this portrays that all African wax printed fabrics utilized by the Igbo women as dress in fashion get to them through migration; be it internal or external migration.



Plate 2: African wax fabrics.
Source:the New Times.
www.newtimes.co.rw/business

George fabrics

George fabrics originated in India, where they are utilized as sarees. The African George fabrics are predominantly used in most parts of Africa. They are exported to Africa in large quantities because they are so popular there. They became popular among African royal and noble families at first. In Nigeria, they stand out as one of the most flamboyant textiles utilized by the Igbo women. Though the Ijo are also known for their george wrappers. This luxurious coloured material has delicate embroidery and golden textures. It is historically linked to the wealthiest in the Igbo society as a preferred choice for big social events but in recent times, people from different levels in the society and beyond are wearing george fabrics. This is usually made from viscose- a semi synthetic fibre created by dissolving wood pulp and refining it into a filament. It looks similar to cotton but softer to touch. Viscose was first developed in France by the industrialist Hilaire de Chardonnet. Most of the world's George fabric is sourced from India though most of those fabrics are exported to Africa.

This fabric is very popular amongst the Igbo women and are used for various occasions such as weddings, thanksgiving services, traditional marriages and some traditional ceremonies. An internet blog- empire textiles, observes that this beautifully- embroidered George

**MIGRATION AND ITS INNOVATIONS ON IGBO WOMEN DRESS FASHION:
A CLOTHING AND TEXTILE ENCOUNTER.**

Chika Chinyeogwa Chudi-Duru

fabric is comfortable to wear and has noble and festive appearances. Again George wrappers are not produced by the Igbo but found their way through the migration of some foreigners from the west to Nigeria.



Plate 3: some Igbo women wearing George wrappers.
Source Chudi-Duru C.(2018)

Laces

African laces are embroideries specifically produced for the West African market and the Africans in diaspora. In Nigeria, laces are prestigious and status symbols. According to Silke (2012), in the 1960s, they became the symbol of the new independent Nigeria. During that time, they were of great value and passed down from one generation to the other. Most of these African laces are produced in Austria. A town called Lustenau in Austria is specially known for producing African laces since the end of 1950s. This town with its serene environment and twenty-one thousand inhabitants owes up to a third of its wealth to the African lace business.

She further mentions that single family homes with long garages own embroidery machines in Lustenau; a special African lace taxi service by Mama Bosch and other services like hotels, shipping agencies and others in order to help the African lace customers when they are on business in Lustenau. She continues by mentioning that the West African market was overtaken accidentally. Since around 1880, in Lustenau and its environs, machines were used to produce laces and embroidery not by hand any longer. Consequently, more companies began to produce works of embroidery for humankind but mainly for United Kingdom, United States of America and Russia. The production was decrepit after the Second World War and this led to the closure of most of these companies. In 1940s and at the beginning of 1950s, some pioneers of lace makers travelled to Asia- Japan to be precise and Arabia. The business relationship with Arabia was faring well and was expanded to Africa – Sudan to be precise. However, when one of the lace sellers was travelling to Khartoum, he had to make a stopover in Lagos. Reason being that there was no direct flight from Zurich to Khartoum. He used the 8 hours waiting to visit the local markets in Lagos with his suitcase filled with samples of lace. Both lace seller and the lace ladies were quite excited in that, the ladies on seeing these samples were ordering as much as they could while the seller went back to Austria and proudly declared that he has captured a new distribution market for the Austrian lace companies. Since that time, she says that the African lace market is the most important distribution market for the Austrian embroidery industry. In

MIGRATION AND ITS INNOVATIONS ON IGBO WOMEN DRESS FASHION:
A CLOTHING AND TEXTILE ENCOUNTER.

Chika Chinyeogwa Chudi-Duru

2011, roughly 60% of the laces produced were sold to African customers with its main markets in Nigeria, Senegal, Ghana, and Benin and the African in diaspora- UK, US and Canada.

These African laces are nowadays worn by the Igbo women at traditional occasions such as during baptism, weddings, birthdays, burials or as uniforms known as *asoebi* (a borrowed Yoruba word which means family cloth). Men, women and close friends of the family concerned wear the same African lace in the same colour but tailored differently. From the above it could also be ascertained that laces are not made by the Igbo though brought into Nigeria by the seller through migration but are utilized in their dress fashion till date.



Plate 4: some Igbo women wearing Lace fabrics. Source Chudi-Duru C.(2019)

Western clothing

Before the advent of the Europeans in Nigeria, all ethnic groups had their own traditional attire which were mostly hand woven. The Igbo women had theirs which has been mentioned earlier. The west introduced long and short gowns, blouses, shirts, trousers, knickers made with different fabrics of different origin. These clothing were brought by the missionaries on their journey to Igbo land. According to Mohammed, Oluyemi, Abdulateef, Atolagbe, Adejoke and Williams (2018), the use of imported second hand clothes by Nigerians has been around for decades and this dates back to the early post-colonial period when ships of used clothes were brought into Nigerian shores through Okirika, a sea port in Rivers state, Nigeria. They further mention that Okirika means used clothes. And prior to this time, Nigerians wore their traditional attires which highlight their various cultural identities nevertheless, the arrival of European explorers brought about the European way of dressing which was assimilated into some societies and cultures in Nigeria. This acculturation did not leave the Igbo women behind thus their dress fashion has been greatly affected both negatively and positively by the European manner of dressing.

MIGRATION AND ITS INNOVATIONS ON IGBO WOMEN DRESS FASHION:
A CLOTHING AND TEXTILE ENCOUNTER.

Chika Chinyeogwa Chudi-Duru



Plate 5: some Igbo ladies adorned in different fabrics for an occasion. Source Chudi-Duru C.(2019)

Migration and its innovations on Igbo women dress fashion

From the different garbs mentioned above that was introduced to Igbo land by migration, it could be deduced that the Igbo women adorn themselves in different attires which are not theirs. The colonial masters according to an internet blog Administrator (2015), which were majorly the Europeans that invaded Nigeria in the early 19th century. They introduced and established their own culture to displace the culture and traditions of Nigeria, which the Igbo are part of. The influx of this foreign culture subjugated almost all areas of Igbo culture including their women dress fashion. There were some changes, development and modernization of all sorts through the adornment of those clothing. Some are accepted while some remain unapproved.

Centuries ago, the Igbo women wore clothing for modesty, it was not used for fashion statements or to display affluence or status. But over a time, their dress style changed due to acculturation. This study reveals that once they got in contact with the western culture, most of their dress styles changed as a result of preference for the foreign dress fashion, language, way of life, mode of behavior etc. They are of the view that the foreigners' culture is better and more appreciated than theirs. This lead to a kind of inferiority complex on the part of colonized and if not they would have taken pride in what is theirs. Consequently, the typical dress fashion of the women which consists of traditional woven pieces of cloth used to cover up the sensitive parts of the body, neck and waist beads, the uli/uri traditional body decoration used to beautify the female body started to go into extinction till date. These have been suppressed and overtaken contemporary by the Indian madras, Dutch wax hollandaise wrappers, laces and other western wears. These contemporary wears as gathered by this paper is much appreciated by the Igbo women seeing that most of them acquire some for occasional and day-to-day use. Despite the fact that some of the styles that are being constructed by some designers using these fabrics mentioned above are quite indecent when compared to the distinctive Igbo dress wears. These new styles of indecency are seen by some women as modernization of the 20th and 21st century, up to date and fashionable. Before it was a taboo for any woman to wear torn or distressed clothes in Igbo land, showing of cleavages in blouses, shirts and gowns, micro mini shorts and skirts, slits that shows the tights etc., nevertheless, all these are worn by some females as

MIGRATION AND ITS INNOVATIONS ON IGBO WOMEN DRESS FASHION:
A CLOTHING AND TEXTILE ENCOUNTER.

Chika Chinyeogwa Chudi-Duru

fashionable clothing. All these are abnormal dress culture from foreign designers which some have adopted as theirs. The Igbo women wears are not torn into pieces before wearing like some wears that are imported into the country. Torn clothing in Igbo land depict poverty. It is believed that anybody that wears torn clothing is poor.

This paper is of the view that most Igbo women especially in the urban areas have almost forgotten their traditional attires, they wear mostly western styled clothing to work and to their offices from Mondays to Fridays except on Sundays when some adorn themselves in traditional wears made up of African wax prints, George materials with lace blouses. Some also wear African wax fabrics to work on a work day.

However, in rural areas, they often still wear traditional clothing. The traditional clothing for women are two piece wrappers and a blouse to match, these are usually complemented with a head gear made of 100% polyester. Some of the wrappers are simple enough for day to day activities for instance some cheap African prints while others are for formal occasions. The wrappers used for formal occasion are made of more expensive fabrics like Indian georges and laces which are often imported, the akwete hand woven fabrics of the Igbo are sparingly utilized in most occasion in Igbo land (Chudi- Duru 2017).

Consequently, a lot of ideas have been introduced to Igbo women's dress fashion ranging from the production of the fabrics, constructing them into all sorts of wears and the various ways in which they are adorned. From the interview conducted, a lot have been revealed by the interviewees; there are some positive impacts of migration, in that it helps to improve people's social life since they learn new culture, customs and language which helps to improve friendship among people. When a new culture is learnt, a lot of things come into play. Such as a change in their manner of dressing and cloth wears.

Okome (2011) observes that the events taking place in traditional African societies with special reference to Nigeria can be explained as a phenomenon of a "cultural reversal." In that the youths who are the future of the country do not diffuse the culture, as an alternative they import the western culture displayed in the few urban cities especially the dress culture to facilitate the gradual disappearance of the traditional culture. He further mentions that in no time, the behavior pattern becomes firmly rooted in the culture and in no distant time it can be seen giving way to foreign influence. This is a clear attempt to express the individuality by the youth which comes in different forms in which dress fashion is one. Most of the youths share common behavior and tend to act alike. A times, it is very difficult to talk them out of it because of the impression of the transformation that go along with a particular dress behaviour is sometimes overpowering. He also says that in almost all cases, the trend in dress habits is a rebellion against the old. The Igbo are part of the African societies and their youths are included in this so called "transformation."

The migrants usually send to their loved ones what they can lay their hands on in those countries they have migrated to. What they find in the shopping malls as clothes, that is what they will buy and put on and also send as gift items. When they are sending gifts such as cloth wears to their loved ones, those are what they will buy and send. It has been noted by this paper that the Igbo migrants often send home some money and boxes of clothes and other items that benefit those left behind so as to increase their consumption and improve their living standards. Among those clothes sent, are the clothes meant for the natives of the areas the migrants find themselves.

Some Igbo women that migrated to international countries to acquire some knowledge in dress making and fashion designs have been able to transfer manpower, skills, needed knowledge and

MIGRATION AND ITS INNOVATIONS ON IGBO WOMEN DRESS FASHION:
A CLOTHING AND TEXTILE ENCOUNTER.

Chika Chinyeogwa Chudi-Duru

innovation for the growth of dress fashion in Igbo land to those who are willing to learn. Most of those fashion designers have been able to establish fashion houses and fashion design schools in different states in Nigeria. Some are also into production, sales and fashion shows. They have mentored many young designers and graduated many fashion designers. A lot of fashion shows have been organized in which they participated. But the question still remains, in as much as these designers are famous in Nigeria and outside its shores and with all the knowledge acquired, how many of these Igbo fashion designers have been able to resurrect and restore akwete hand woven fabrics to their normal position? By designing with the fabrics and aiding their sustainability. It has been revealed that most Igbo designers design with foreign fabrics. A lot has been added to the Igbo dress styles such as skirts (ranging from mini, midi and maxi) and blouses (of various styles and lengths), gowns of various styles and lengths, jumpsuits, skirt suits, trouser suits, shorts of various lengths, spaghetti styles, jackets of various styles and lengths, western wedding gowns, gown suits, female shirts, under wears and many others. All are made of various fibres, both natural and synthetic and most are imported from overseas such as cotton, linen, wool, polyester, satin ,acrylic, nylon, lycra, acetate, spandex, silk, jacquard, satin, laces, Dutch wax Vlisco prints, African prints, velvet, jeans, corduroy and others. Hand dyed fabrics (batik, tie-dye, starch resist etc.) are produced in Nigeria, Abeokuta to be precise.

Through this so called dress transformation, the typical Igbo hand woven fabrics have been relegated to the background and only remembered by very few times during festive periods. During these festive periods, only the imported fabrics adopted by the Igbo as theirs are worn. These fabrics have almost succeeded in taking the place and functions of Akwete hand woven fabrics in Igbo land. To the extent that some adults and younger ones (youths) do not even know what and how the woven fabrics look like (Chudi-Duru, 2017). She mentions that when a research was carried out in Abia State in 2017, some youths could not recognize Akwete woven fabrics when some samples were shown to them except those that are from Akwete. If these foreign fabrics did not get to the Igbo through some migrants perhaps their popularity would have been certain. While grabbing these foreign fabrics (George, laces, Dutch wax hollandaise, Chinese fancy prints etc.) and relegating what is actually theirs to the background, the Igbo woman should bear in mind what Mark Twain in Umukoro (2011) says:

What would any man be without his clothes?

Without his clothes a man would be nothing at all

The clothes do not merely make the man...clothes are the man.

Without them he is a cipher, a vacancy, a nobody, a nothing!

The way an Igbo woman dresses that is her clothes, goes a long way to inform people of her personality. Her dressing sends messages to recognized and unrecognized audience. A word might not be uttered by her inform of an introduction, but her dress communicates on her nativity. Just like a police officer is recognized by his uniform an Igbo woman is recognized by her traditional garb.

Conclusion

The Igbo women often wear clothes and engage in fashion to cover the nakedness of their bodies and avoid embarrassment, display affluence, beautification, protection from heat, cold, insect bites, and proper identification, showcases one's cultural heritage, beliefs and appeals. They also view dressing as a means of non- verbal communication that expresses ones'

MIGRATION AND ITS INNOVATIONS ON IGBO WOMEN DRESS FASHION:
A CLOTHING AND TEXTILE ENCOUNTER.

Chika Chinyeogwa Chudi-Duru

identity. However, almost all but one type of clothing they wear all came into Igbo land through migration of foreigners to Nigeria. While some were introduced by some Igbo those that migrated to other foreign lands for one thing or the other. Although through the migration of some of these foreigners to Nigeria in the 19th century, the Igbo have been able to admire the foreign apparels they brought along with them, adopt most of their cloth wears as theirs, trade in them, utilize them and construct them into wears as an avenue to generate some income and wear them quite often in many occasions, this paper stresses that those fabrics are not the indigenous fabrics of the Igbo. In as much as the Igbo women utilize these fabrics in almost every occasion, they should bear in mind that their own *Akwete* hand woven fabrics needs to be brought into limelight just like its counterpart –*Asoke* of the Yoruba in Nigeria. It also recommends that they should not be carried away by what they see in foreign fashion that is not theirs and forget their own. Their own fabrics and mode of dressing should be utilized more than the foreign fabrics and clothing styles, in that way no one will embarrass any Igbo woman proudly decked in her own indigenous *Akwete* hand woven fabrics.

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MIGRATION AND ITS INNOVATIONS ON IGBO WOMEN DRESS FASHION:
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Chika Chinyeogwa Chudi-Duru

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