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THE RELEVANCE OF EBIRA TAO WEAVING TECHNIQUE IN SOCIO-CULTURAL INTEGRATION AND SUSTAINABLE IDENTITY OF THE EBIRA PEOPLE IN NIGERIA

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Introduction
The clothing need of man has been satisfied over time through a variety of textiles (woven, knitted, felted and so on), from the very crude to the now sophisticated types. The most important of these all is of course, the woven textiles. As reported by Kureave and Audu (2005), woven textiles are not only the earliest types, but also the most important and most commonly used the world over. They are principally used for the purposes of covering nakedness, adornment of the body, identification and so on. Most importantly, woven textiles are found to shape the social, cultural and economic lives of many ethnic groups and societies of the world.

Like any other traditional African society, the Ebira people in Okene, Okehi, Adavi, and Ajaokuta have over time depended on Arts and Crafts of various shades for socio-cultural and economic subsistence. Crafts that have featured prominently in shaping the socio-cultural and economic lives of the Ebira People include: pottery, basketry, mat weaving, wood carving, cloth weaving, dyeing and so on. More than any of these crafts, the Ebira people in Kogi State of Nigeria have depended on cloth weaving (especially the "Ebira-Tao" woven fabric) for centuries.

The "Ebira-Tao" fabric has since been adapted by the Ebira as their cultural symbol. Ebira weaving has been observed as one of the major crafts in Nigerian society since ages to date. Nigeria has many ethnic groups that are blessed with one form of traditional occupation or the other. Such traditional occupations are few and they can be easily identified with a particular community. Ebira-Tao people of Okene have such occupation in Cloth Weaving. Okene traditional cloth weaving is so special that its products have been observed as outstanding among others wherever one comes across them (Salawu, 2014).

Cultural and Social Identity
Identity is a term that is widely used and, as a consequence, can mean many different things to different people. Identity is sometimes used to refer to a sense of integration of the self, in which different aspects come together in a unified whole. This intra-psychic emphasis is often associated with Erik Erikson, who introduced the term "identity crisis" as part of his stage model of psychological development. Another common use of the term, particularly in contemporary times, is identity politics, where the reference is typically to different political positions that are staked out by members of ethnic and nationality groups.

The term "social identity" refers specifically to those aspects of a person that are defined in terms of his or her group memberships. Although most people are members of many different groups, only some of those groups are meaningful in terms of how we define ourselves. Identity, according to Given (2008) is a social process involving perception and differentiation. It can be defined as the

ways in which individuals and groups regard themselves as similar to, or different from, each other. These perceptions can change over time, so identity is a fluid construct rather than a static one (Sherry, 2008).

Social Identification is the process by which we define ourselves in terms and categories that we share with other people. In contrast to characterizations of personal identity, which may be highly idiosyncratic, social identities assume some commonalities with others. For many people, ethnicity is a central element of self-definition and becomes an important social identity. In the past, social scientists categorized human beings in terms of basic racial categories, such as Asian, Caucasian, and Negroid. With increasing awareness of the arbitrary nature of the social construction of race, these categories are less frequently used. More common today is categorization on the basis of ethnicity, defined in terms of culture, language, and country of origin (Deux, 2009).

Cultural Social Integration
According to United Nation (2005), Social Integration can be seen as a dynamic and principled process where all members participate in dialogue to achieve and maintain peaceful social relations. Social integration does not mean coerced assimilation or forced integration. The need for social integration from the perspective of the United Nation was premised upon the need to move toward a safe, stable and just society by forming and mending conditions that could lead to social disintegration.

The Copenhagen Declaration on Social Development according to Jeannotte (2008:6) bears some resemblance to the conceptualizations described above in that it explained social integration as:

> the process of fostering societies that are stable, safe and just and that are based on the promotion and protection of all human rights, as well as on non-discrimination, tolerance, respect for diversity, equality of opportunity, solidarity, security and participation of all people, including disadvantaged and vulnerable groups and persons.

In other words, social integration should be seen as the process of promoting the values, relations and institutions that enable all people to participate in social, economic and political life on the basis of equality of rights, equity and dignity. This definition excludes process of social integration based on force or that attempt to impose unitary identities on reluctant populations. Promoting social integration requires attention to different, but inter-linked, processes that shape the extent to which people are able to live and work together on an equal basis: Recognition of diverse social groups, cultures and identity in order to promote respect, dignity and co-operation.

Social integration moves the community towards peaceful social relations of coexistence, collaboration and cohesion. Social integration is the process of building the values, relations and institutions necessary to achieve that society. Social integration is about making societies more equitable. It requires actions to renegotiate and redefine existing social contracts which define the rights and responsibilities of citizens, states and the private sector. In the broadest sense, the term integration is used to define developments that determine connections of related diverse elements into the social whole, system, community, or other unit. The concept of integration is a fundamental one in functionalist theories, and it defines a mode of relations of the units of a system by virtue of which, on one hand, they act to avoid disrupting the system, and, on the other hand, they cooperate to promote its functioning as a unit.

The conception of integrity is important in other theoretical perspectives that use other concepts as well, e.g. consensus, solidarity, correspondence, etc. When discussing ethnic processes, the concept of integration is not just closely related to the processes of socialisation, acculturation, and assimilation, but it is also an inseparable part of the course and result of these processes. Every phenomenon of social integration is conditional and insufficient because it is a continuous process, a certain level of which is necessary for the functioning of every social system.

Considering the concept of integration in the context of the theories of ethnicity, relations among ethnic groups, conceptions of integration, assimilation or pluralism can be discussed in a broad continuum, i.e. different aspects provide a great variety of possible interpretations. identities, attitudes, behaviour, and participation in the social sphere of ethnic groups are influenced not only by the matters that take place within the boundaries of ethnic groups or in relation to other groups, but by the processes that take place in the broader society.

What matters is how ethnicity will be treated in the future, how it will affect social mobility and participation in majority society. On the other hand, social integration is related to an individual's position in the social topography and an individual's capabilities and opportunities to apply those capabilities. Also, it is very important to consider the status or position in the social topography that an individual ascribes to her/himself, how s/he perceives her/himself in the social context. In addition, an important matter is what could be defined as an individual's "visibility" in the social topography, i.e. the symbolic significance of the position held.

Traditional clothes and Social Interaction, identity and Integration
Arnold (2001), Edensor (2001), Maurin (2001) Derrett, (2003), Jeong and Santos (2004) and Lade and Jackson, (2004) assert that Cultural Clothing is an avenue for cultural exploitation, manifestation and enculturation among the people of the community whose cultural values, norms and shared beliefs are a subsidiary. As a people whose ways of life is uniquely and deeply rooted in culture, festivals become a veritable platform through which they socialize and integrate. Festivals afford the audience a first-hand, interactive experience with culture, as the source of thematic choices in the performing arts is essentially cultural. Thus, the people's culture ensemble through the traditional weaved clothes becomes one of the drivers of cultural creativity and sensitivity that are appreciated by the people who are directly and indirectly connected to the depth and insights of the people's way of life (Coker and Coker, 2009). Social and cultural interaction between immigrants and established residents creates the cross-cultural understanding that helps all community members gain a level of comfort with one another and widens their appreciation for all cultures. It has the potency that can unite, rather than divide. Culture plays a significant role in defining our identity and worldview.

A sense of community cultural identity and integration is an almost invisible yet critical part of a community. Though hard to define, it includes a community's image, spirit, character, pride, relationships, and networking (Bush, 2000). A sense of community comes from a shared vision, where a clear sense of purpose, individual's ideas and contribution involve working together on community issues, celebrations, and problem solving. Developing a sense of community is challenging. It involves long-term work, building levels of connectedness, belonging, and support (Derrett, 2003).

The organizations and civic institutions managing the Ebira Tao cloth offer a spatial boundary in terms of place, which harnesses the community's vision of itself and provide participative opportunities to nurture and sustain what is important to the community. The use of the Ebira Tao

traditionally weaved cloth provides an opportunity for community cultural development (Enrique, and Herrero, (2004). It can reflect the dynamic value systems of individuals united by the same customs, images, collective memory, habits, and experiences. This tradition can be replicated and each generation can pass on something of its experience to the next. This is of particular interest to families that use the production process as a form of social communication and transfer of knowledge.

Bringing people back to generously share their special space and favourite places with visiting friends and relatives assists in healing, awareness raising, and through understanding issues of sustainability associated with some delicate environments. Values and beliefs held by individuals in a community are inextricably linked and shape people's attitudes and the way they act in specific situations. Under scrutiny in these regional communities is how the values, interests, and aspirations of individuals are influenced by their bio-physical environment (space and place) which leads to a sense of community that influences how the community celebrates that which affects the community's well-being that in turn informs the environment in which individuals and groups define their values and beliefs.

Ebira Tao
Okene Weaving Techniques
Spinning is one of the processes often undertaken in many traditional hand woven fabric productions. Okene handcrafted cloth weavers carry out local spinning to obtain the necessary yarns that enable them produce their variety of woven fabrics. As observed by Mukaila (2011), this is the actual process in which the Okene weavers spun manually. Adediran (2015) states that the early weavers were not limited to the natural colour of the spun cotton when they moved, as there were plants available to make vegetable dyes to colour the thread either yellow, brown, black and blue.

There were Professional women who specialized in dyeing of the thread only, while others went into the field of weaving and spinning. Women from Magongo Ogari District did the dyeing mostly. The women of Magongo-Ogari, are not historically Ebira, they do not engage in weaving, but they are very good in the dyeing of cotton thread. One type of dyeing that is historically and presently popular in traditional society is the indigo dyeing. This type of dye produces shades of colours. The Magongo see the shades of indigo colours as blue, black and green colour etc.

Hand-spun threads are usually dyed in indigo blue colour and are still being used. Since the indigo coloured threads have specific important use in certain ceremonial cloths in Ebira culture, they are highly respected in the society. Women in Okene were weaving with hand-spun dyed threads until the second decades of the twentieth century. Around the year 1920, the British agents began exporting yarns of multi-coloured cottons and wools to Nigeria and Okene in particular. Alhaji Ibrahim Atta II the former Ohinoyi (Chief) of Okene had the foresight to realize the value of these yarns and how they could be improved toward the quality and quantity of weaving in Ebira Land. He regarded the cloth weaving as a valuable Ebira talent and used his many wives to demonstrate expert and proficient weaving talents (Ododo, 2001:30).

The Use and Relevance of Ebira-Tao Weaving
Ebira Tao cloth weaving was in existence before 13th century. The first known material used by An'ebira to weave cloth by the 13th century was raw cotton spun yarn which was used as fibre for cloth weaving as reported by Weise, (2013). There were two types of cotton both of which were locally grown. The cotton comprised of the pure white cotton and a brown variation. Other colours

are blue, black, and red, which were obtained by dyeing the white cotton through dipping it into a mixture of already prepared dyes. Today, traditional cloth weaving is one of the major occupations engaged in by Ebira women (Okene). Cloth weaving serves as one of the major sources of revenue generation to about 80% of the women folk in Ebira Tao land.

Ebira-Tao people in particular are predominantly farmers and one of their major cash crops is cotton. Cotton serves as raw material for weaving. This enables a number of women to engage in weaving production. Another vital factor is that, there is a cultural importance attached to Okene weaving by the people. For instance, the cloth is used for burial and for festivals, which are acknowledged by the people. Most elderly persons use the cloth for body covering, and others use them to make easy chairs for relaxation after a day's work. Most importantly, the woven cloth is used as a prayer mat (Yaro and Ebuga, 2013). In recent time, a lot of designs towards modernization of the techniques have been introduced into the art of weaving in Ebira land. The Okene women in particular can now weave different sizes and designs and can inscribe into the woven fabric various forms of writing and symbols.

Several factors have been adduced to have contributed to the development of the cloth weaving culture of the people in recent time. Firstly, hand woven textiles have always been a rich source of one's tradition. The women folk both elderly and the young have been practicing weaving in Okene Town from time immemorial. Secondly, the traditional hand woven textiles of Ebira Tao are said to have rapidly changed in terms of designs, motifs, yarns and processes. Thirdly, local patronage and the traditional disposition of the people towards the use of the woven cloth are seen as contributing factors to the development and growth of Ebira Tao cloth weaving culture. Adeniran (2010:23), Cyril-Egware, and Peters (2016:146) corroborate this point. The need to empower women and the youth economically as a way of generating income to meet immediate basic needs as well as invest on material and equipment were factors that greatly influenced the Ebira Tao cloth weaving culture in recent time.

The Sustainability of the Ebira Tao Textile Technology.
Modernization as well as the accessibility to advanced weaving materials and technologies have greatly enhanced the growth of the textile industry. The ability to aptly bring about new designs that were beautifully made and produced by weavers through the fusion of the old and new processes of designs and productions could be said to have significantly contributed to the sustenance of the cloth weaving industry so far. Changes in taste in textiles, adornment and hairstyle have however, affected and almost substantially altered the traditional dress code of many ethnic groups in Nigeria as peoples' preferences for lighter, brightly coloured machine woven fabrics become more obvious.

Significantly, textiles have relevance in the culture of a people. The major way of improving and sustaining the traditional woven structures and maintaining their degree of observable traits is by its application into contemporary fashion as fashion extensions and accessories rather than completely as fashion wears or attires. The richness and variety of such fashion extensions and accessories would be exciting not only to fashion designers but to everyone who comes in contact with the innovative work. After many years of neglect, a nurtured and well-structured traditional weaving entrepreneurship with the younger generation will contribute to providing an opportunity to achieve the goal of grass-root related development. This will resuscitate, revive and set the traditional textiles on the part to economic recovery as well as bring back the lost glory.

Conclusion

Cloth and dress have been described as a mirror of the culture of the people in any society (Perani and Wolff, 1999: 25). They symbolize the practices of the society, bounded by the same geographical location, sharing the same cultural values. In the cultural context cloth serves basic needs as clothing and shelter (Payne, 1965). The function of cloth and dress has however, been encapsulated within boundless limits by Perani and Wolff (1999) thus:

"Beyond basic role in shelter and protection, cloth and dress have overlapping mediating functions including:

(1) Measurement of self and personal worth;

(2) Indicator of occupation;

(3) Measurement of social value;

(4) Standard of economic value;

(5) Definition and negotiation of political power;

(6) Religious signifier and repository of supernatural powers;

(7) Indicator of culture and change."

There is therefore, the need to produce cloth that would not only be appreciated by the people but replicated to sustaining and satisfying the local consumption and drive towards economic self-reliance and sustainability in the face of the implosion of the textile industry in Nigeria due largely to influx of foreign apparel in a globalized economy or market place.

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