



INNOVATION TOWARDS THE RENAISSANCE OF AKWA-OCHA WEAVING AMONG THE ENUANI IGBO OF DELTA STATE OF NIGERIA.

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ABSTRACT

The identity of any society is believed to be the reflection of its art and cultural heritage. The art of traditional weaving in any society is dependent on the need of that society. The Igbo people of Delta state of Nigeria is rich in textile weaving tradition. The woven cloth called Akwa-ocha contains surface decorative motifs and symbols and is used for various festive occasions among the people. the motifs and their meaning revealed the peoples history, religions and social behaviours. The woven fabric is highly reputed for excellence that the name Akwa-ocha was given to all the textile produced in the area. This weaving tradition is moribund as a result of technical limitation. This study is motivated to re-awake interest in production, preservation and promotion of Igbo weaving tradition through qualitative research analysis and participant observation method, this paper engages the vital issues affecting Akwa-Ocha through Schon's theory of reflective practice. Findings among others shows that while akwa-ocha woven fabric has unreserved capacity for cultural preservation, the technique of production is still primitive. The study conclude that if innovation through drafting is incorporated in the production process, the weaving tradition will be revitalized and promoted.

Keyword: *Akwa-ocha, Textile, Cultural heritage, Innovation, Weaving*

INTRODUCTION

The production of *Akwa-ocha* among the Anioma Delta Igbo of Nigeria has been an ancient traditional weaving culture passed on from one generation to another. Traditional *Akwa-ocha* textiles have a central function concerning usability and the mentality of Anioma people. The motifs and patterns on the textile reflect traditions, beliefs and livelihood of the people since ancient times. The creativity in motifs and pattern design creates a valuable cultural heritage to Anioma people that seriously needs to be preserved and promoted. However, there is uneasy that this ancient weaving tradition has almost become moribund thereby making the *Akwa-ocha* weavers to seemingly lose patronage, identity and experiencing troubled economy and giving way to the western fabrics, production and design.

Akwa-ocha weavers are skillful at weaving and natural dyeing. This strong ability makes weaving tradition still maintained by Anioma women up to now. Unfortunately, weaving processes of Anioma weavers are a very old tradition, which contains many technical limitations.. The riskiest of this weaving tradition is high percentage to lose weave-drafts.

The study therefore, is focused to save this cultural heritage of the Igbo from going into extinction. This study found drafting a sine-quanon for improving the efficacy and usefulness of *Akwa-ocha* fabric production. The Igbo, Anioma and Nigeria will find their *Akwa-ocha* weaving culture as part of the world weaving tradition

Statement of Problem

The popularity of *Akwa-ocha* hand crafted fabric has been on the decline. The production and patronage of traditional textile fabrics are blighted by the presence and increased influence of imported fabrics. These imported fabrics have negative impact on the psyche and patronage of the people all to the detriment of the indigenous fabrics such as *Akwa-ocha* and *Akwete* to mention but a few

Because traditional *Akwa-ocha* textiles contain a variety of predominant motifs, there are few researches and books presenting studies about them in cultural context; they particularly focus on religious motifs. These small numbers of publications are a little help to preserve this culture when compared to numbers of negative effects that are increasing year by year. Another impact to this

heritage is a simulation of traditional *Akwa-ocha* textiles by imported industrial textiles from European countries. The technical limitations of local weavers with currently few supports in cultural preservation are still principle problems for *Akwa-ocha* weavers.

Akwa-ocha needs to be rescued from the margin to which it seems to be presently consigned and brought to the center for more innovative ideas, to assume a platform through which other issues may arise.

Concept of Innovation

For innovation to occur, something more than the generation of a creative idea or insight is required: the insight must be put into action to make a genuine difference, resulting for example in new or altered business processes within the organization, or changes in the products and services provided. For innovation to occur in *Akwa-ocha* traditional fabric, something more than weaving beautiful white cloth for apparel and costume is required. There must be some alteration in the way it was done before. It should be put into new uses without altering its fundamental quality which is 'predominantly white'. This time, it is still *Akwa-ocha* but in liturgical vestments, wall hangings, bed cover, taxidermy rams head, hotel blinds and jackets. Fri, Pehrsson, & Soilen, (2013) further elucidate that: 'Innovation can also be described as a method and technology for new markets, new production methods and identification of new customer groups. This is in tandem with innovative ideas of incorporating *Akwa-ocha* into textile designs. This will bring in a wider horizon of application, thereby bringing a solution to the challenges of poor financial returns which the weavers are facing.

Technological innovation is defined as a new market and/or a new service opportunity for a technological based invention that could lead to development, or production success (Garcia & Calantone, 2002). It is on the foregoing regards that Baregheh, Rowley & Sambrook (2009) brought a suggestion of a complete and multi-stage process definitions of innovation as: "Innovation is the multi-stage process whereby organizations transform ideas into new/improved products, service or processes, in order to advance, compete and differentiate themselves successfully in their marketplace".

Innovation is the key element in providing aggressive top-line growth, and for increasing bottom-line result" Innovation in *Akwa-ocha* is all that is needed to achieve growth objective and save it from extinction.

Concept of Tradition

Tradition is a name used to describe a belief and behavior that has a special significance or symbolic meaning and is passed down within a society/group from generation to generation. Shils in James (2016) asserts that traditions enable us to inherit things from our ancestors, bestow them on our successors. Traditions are, above all, bearers of values and standards of excellence.

Through investigating tradition, it was understood that weaving tradition like *Akwa-ocha* could change or disappear due to globalization. For instance, we have seen that customs like *ide-uli*, *igbu-ishi* and *iwa-akwa* have changed in Igboland as a result of various factors, such as the education of girls, the breaking down of the caste system and exposure to the media, *Akwa-ocha* traditional fabric has preserved the cultural heritage of the Igbo people which is evident in the design motifs. This is in tandem with Arendt (2006) who proposes that:

Tradition preserved the past by handing down from one generation to the next the testimony of the ancestors, who first had witnessed and created the sacred founding and then augmented it by their authority throughout the centuries. As long as this tradition was uninterrupted, authority was inviolate; and to act without authority and tradition, without accepted, time-honored standards and models, without the help of the wisdom of the founding fathers, was inconceivable.

As Pilate famously said, “What I have written I have written”, another form of Latin author’s saying “scripta manent” meaning written things remain. It can also be likened to the immortality that recorded sound grants to the voice and thought of the dead. An example is the “I have a dream speech of Martin Luther King Junior” on record. An *Akwa-ocha* in itself is a material, not just an expression but it is just like writing. It speaks for itself and as long as the material lasts, it gives immortality to the culture. *Akwa-ocha* is a living tradition

Drafting

A draft is a generally approved system of explaining how to set up a loom to weave a particular cloth. Held (1978) describes a draft as a system of notation used to represent graphically the appearance and mechanics of a weave. It is in the foregoing regard that Akash (2021) says:

Drafting in weaving means the number of heald shafts used to produce a given design and the order in which warp ends are threaded through the heald eyes of the heald shaft. The principle of drafting is that ends which work in different order require separate heald shafts.

Corroborating this notion, Okpu and Loromeke (2020) observe that pattern drafting is a set of marks or characters used to designate the order in which the threads are drawn into the heddle to form the weave. She also observed that there are a lot of variations in the recording of these patterns drafting In agreement with these facts, Badoe and Asare (2014) state the following on draft:

Draft refers to a graphical representation of the warp ends on the various shafts of the loom. A draft is derived from a design by following the principle of "place all ends that lift alike in a design on the same shaft and all ends that lift differently on different shafts". Heddling order that is generated from a draft is the numerical information in the draft that guides a weaver to pass the ends through the eyes of the healds.

A complete draft illustrates the intersection of warp and weft for a particular weave, as well as the threading sequence necessary for the weave. Held (1978) identified the following benefits/attributes of drafting:

1. Drafting is an abbreviated notation. A concise complete draft will show at a glance what might otherwise take pages of detailed explanation.
2. Drafting can produce an accurate of all woven projects, giving the weaver an opportunity to build on successful ones and to correct failures.
3. Many variations can be readily visualized on paper. For example, if you have an interesting pattern, based on a particular threading order, you may want to see how it may work with a different threading order. By plotting it on paper, you can get a reasonable idea of how the weave will look and also identify problems that may arise. Another possible variation would be a change in colour or value in the warp and/or weft. The location and order of different-colour yarns will greatly affect the appearance of the fabric. It is much easier to alter the colour position on paper than to wind a series of alternative colour sequences and then weave each one of them.
4. Drafting enables you to duplicate another weaver's work for future experimentation. Few serious weavers rely on copying someone else's drafts exactly but is often helpful to be able to analyze other weavers in

other to find ideas for one's own. In a mutually creative situation, weavers (and, of course, other artists) actively ply back and forth against each other, developing and building on each other's ideas.

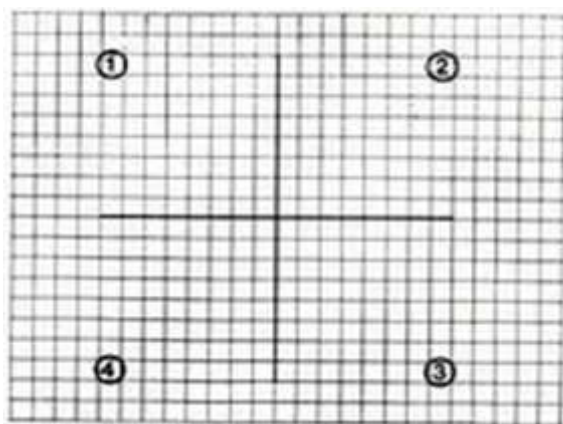
5. With drafting, it is possible to derive the mechanics of a weave from the appearance of a fabric.

Principle of Drafting

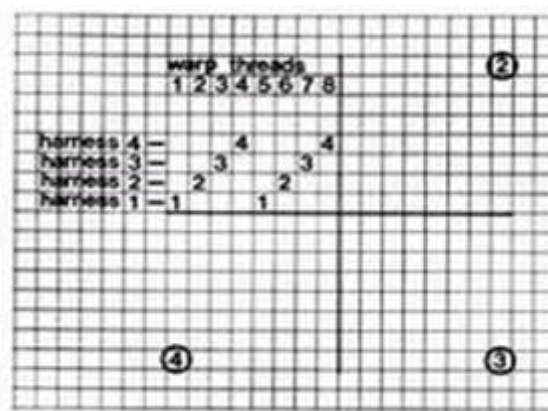
The principle of drafting is that all the ends working in different orders require separate heald shafts. This means that as a heald shaft is an entity, therefore all the ends passing through a given heald shaft will work alike. The converse of this rule may not always be true as occasionally for convenience and better performance the ends that are working alike are passed through different heads. Commenting further on this, Okpu and Loromeke (2020) liken thus: "Building plan of any house depends on the type of building which may be for a commercial, residential, recreational parks and markets. All these differ in their architectural planning. This also applies to the building planning of woven fabrics for dress wears, furniture and office wear. This also depends on the type of loom used for the formulation.

Okpu and Loromeke observed that the components of patterns drafting can be created, generated and developed with the aid of a software program for drafting patterns in a computer. It is not easily available hence the use of computational tools for the drafting of point paper.

The four quadrants of the draft are created by drawing two intersecting lines, as illustrated in diagram 1.



A. Four quadrants to a draft in the threading quadrant



B. A twill threading diagrammed

In diagram 1 draft, quadrant A shows the threading chosen for the loom. Quadrant 2 illustrates the tie-up or the combinations of harnesses activated together. Quadrant 3 shows the treadling sequence or the order in which the tie-ups are activated. And quadrant 4 diagrams the design created by the previous three quadrants. Each quadrant will be discussed concerning its relationship to the loom and how it affects the final design.

Conclusion

The review of literature originates the fact that innovation is inevitable in sustaining a tradition. Tradition preserved the past by handing down from one generation to the next the testimony of the ancestors, who first had witnessed and created the sacred founding and then augmented it by their authority throughout the centuries (Arendt, 2006).

Innovation implies the application of creative imagination in a design context. For innovation to occur in *Akwa-ocha* traditional fabric, something more than weaving beautiful white cloth for apparel and costume is required. This calls for drafting for the production. Drafting according to Kurts is a process often used by researchers who are interested in historic textiles or those concerned with replicating textiles of the past for restoration (Kurts, 1981)

The theoretical frameworks used for the work help to situate the fact that the decline of the popularity of *Akwa-ocha* is to a great extent as a result of the global intensification and expansion of social interaction. *Akwa-ocha* needs to be updated to meet the present global challenges. The study seeks other innovative way of production and functional application other than apparel use for cultural activities. This means that innovative ideas could be borrowed from other cultures to revive it while its original identity is still maintained. Innovation in *Akwa-ocha* means bringing it out of its hidden and undocumented position by drafting for production and applying it to other functional ends other than for apparel.

With draft, *Akwa-ocha* can attain longevity and global visibility since drafting will lead to computerization thereby filling a serious gap in knowledge.

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