

8. EVER REVOLVING MODERN NIGERIAN FASHION

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Abstract: *Fashion revolves in circle, reflecting historical, cultural, political, economical and social life of a nation as noted by Ogunduyile. It hence, satisfies the apparel accessory wants and needs of the people at a given period of time, thereby reflecting man's environment, and stands as a means of non-verbal communication in revealing the culture and history of a people. Thus, it is innovative and reflects popular values of the society and changes when such values change. However, Nigeria as a country is not an exception to this norm. Although, desirable and inevitable the Nigeria modern fashion may be, the pace and degree of changes in contemporary Nigeria fashion necessitated by the influx of foreign cultures has continued to put traditional Nigerian hand-woven fabrics such as Akwa-Ocha, Aso-Oke, and Akwete among others in an adverse situation since designers use less of these fabrics for modern dress styles. The paper discusses Modern Nigerian Fashion as it has kept revolving and changing since the 1960s till date.*

Key word: *production, visual communication, history, fashion, modernism*

1. Introduction

Fashion being a popular style of clothes, shoes, building, automobile or any items mostly acceptable by a given people at a given period of time, makes it an acceptable art by man that allows self-expression and creativity. Over the years, fashion all over the World has continuously undergone changes and Nigeria as a country is not an exception as fashion keeps evolving globally. Nigerian Fashion has come a long way, from the ancient days to modern times.

The Modern Nigerian Fashion began during the colonial era when the Europeans first came into the shores of West Africa with their own dress styles and fashion sense. However, Modern Nigerian Fashion can be traced back to the early 1960s when the elite in the country began to wear the European dress styles as a mark of civilization and as a sign of association as well as an identification with the Whiteman and his ideas.

2. History of Fashion in Nigeria in the 20th century

Nigeria is a country with mixed fashion sensibilities which kept undergoing changes, but few scholars have advanced some accounts on fashion and clothing styles which also applies to the broader landscape of modern Nigerian fashion, because, indeed, fashion no doubt is a broad area. Paula and Mueller (1980) notes that fashion is a business whose goal is to satisfy apparel, accessory wants and needs of the people. They further opine that it is innovative and reflects popular values of the society and changes when such values change. Umukoro (2002) is of the view that fashion is an exclusively human phenomenon.

Ogunduyile (2003) states that, fashion revolves in circle, reflecting historical, cultural, political, economical and social life of a nation. He further notes that it

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comprises the totality of the human outlook: accessories, bags, shoes necklaces and rings. Chukueggu and Cyril-Egware (2009) point to the fact that fashion reflects man's environment, and stands as a means of non-verbal communication in revealing the culture and history of a people. Akinrujomu (2002) is of the view that fashion is a way of doing the thing which is considered most to be admired during a period. Eicher (1976) opines that fashion is a factor in clothing in Nigeria as well as the rest of the World. On his part, Okeke (1996) looks at fashion as any method of enhancing the beauty and dignity of the human body.

He further mentions such methods as subtractive, additive and extension. Subtractive is the use of body mutilations such as facial and body scarification, cicatrization and tattooing. He explains additive approach to include the use of textiles styled in various ways to adorn and dignify the body by covering some desired parts or most of it lustfully or graciously for various aesthetic and functional effects. Also, the use of footwear's, headgears, coiffure, bangles, anklets, earrings, necklace, and beads fall within the additive category.

Then the uses of handbags, walking sticks as optional items are fashion extensions. In a similar vein, Roach-Higgins and Eicher (1992) reveal that fashion includes not only clothing, jewellery, and things carried or wielded (e.g., walking stick, sceptre, hand, or parasol), but also hairstyle, cosmetics, more permanent alterations like tattoo, scarification, piercing, branding, and surgery, as well as more subtle and transient transformations of the posture, gesture, stance, and gait.

Okeke (1990) looks at fashion as a style of clothing worn by most people of a country. Okeke mentions fashion to also include popular styles of automobiles, furniture, homes and many other products. To MacCracken (2014), Fashion is the art, designers are the gods and models play the part of angels in the dark. In view of the above, fashion, in general, could, therefore, be summed up as popular style or practice in dressing, body decoration, use of accessories combining both indigenous and modern design concepts.

In light of the above, modern Nigerian fashion especially in clothing and accessories, therefore, can be said to be diverse and dynamic as the country itself. But despite the diverse and dynamic nature of modern Nigerian fashion, it presents the complex nature of the fashion system in Nigeria and combines both the rich facets of indigenous creativity and the modern experiences of which it mostly conveys. This aforementioned quality ties it with the rapid rhythm and pace which usually characterise modern life in Nigeria.

Modern Nigerian fashion in its diverse presentations has certain aspects which reveal the shaping of Nigeria's modern identities and people's belief and approaches to modernity. Nevertheless, fashion in Nigeria has in no time rejected the past while focusing on that which is perpetually new because people still sought cultural identity in their dressing.

This statement holds true as Babalola (1998) informs that the fashion of the Nigerians is evident in their numerous outfits tailored from hand woven fabrics such as *Aso-Oke*, *Okene cloth*, *Akwete*, *Adire-Eleko*, floor loom weaving of Northern cities, *Akara*, *Popo* cloth and *Ishan* cloth. He further says that these were worn in form of wrappers tied around the burst with intricately design beads which adorn the exposed shoulders and wrists.

The foregoing again shows that indigenous Nigerian costume has continued to trail fashion trends in Nigeria even during British colonialism. However, the result of colonialism somewhat added some influences in Nigerian fashion trend. It is not surprising that Okeke (1996) asserts that under colonial rule, Nigeria was subjected to overwhelming external cultural influences by her colonial masters.

This therefore mean that since Nigeria was once colonized by the British their fashion style of which marks their reign in Nigeria formed a major part of the people modern life notwithstanding the ever changing tastes of Nigerian fashion. The changing tastes in styles in modern Nigerian fashion often provide insights into history and attitudes of Nigerians towards the ways they dress. This development exemplifies Rovin (2010) who opines that fashion preserves the past.

There is no doubt that the fashion styles that reflect in modern Nigeria has been similar to what is obtained in Europe and America. The difference one might notice is in the use of fabrics and the re-interpretation of western dress styles to suit local realities. In fact, from 1960s, and 1970s it has been observed that Nigerian consumers had no choice but to respond to global social dynamics of fashion (Okeke, 1996: 46). Ogunduyile (2003) informs that the arrival of Missionaries and Western education hastened the process of change.

Abubarka, Olugbemi and Amasa (2009) say that Christian missionaries expected converts to wear modest European style clothing. On his part Shittu (2009) explains that Nigerian fashion scene followed the acknowledge ones in Europe and depends largely on the vogue in Italy, Paris, London and New York without any reference to the Nigerian cultural heritage. Similarly, Oguntona (1992) informs that the use of T-shirt, shorts, trousers, gowns, face caps, hats, French suits, safari, and others became more important than the traditional dresses.

More so, the emergence of fashion style magazines which though were not so popular includes photographs that usually have more influences on the designers. These magazines were greatly sought after as they also have profound effect on Nigerian public taste. Again, more people became educated due to contact with the Europeans as they travelled abroad and began coping fashion of Western vogue.

Ogunduyile (2003) explains that Nigerians have free access of movement and as such are exposed to foreign fashion inspirations which often result into more ideas and materials which enhance creativity. Akinrolabu (1986) informs that many committed and ambitious fashion designers sought for formal training abroad in the various fashion institutions in Europe and America. However, the result of this development for example is the mini and micro-mini dresses that prevailed in Europe which became prevalent in Nigeria (Plate 1 and 2).



Plate 1: Mini Gown above the knee
Date: 1963

Source: Josephine Nwabuoku's Collections



Plate 2: Micro-mini
Date: 1966

Source: Lois Nnadi's Collections

In addition to the above mentioned dress styles, there were suit styles and other western wears such as several styles of Jeans, trousers and tops, both short and long or maxi gowns of diverse styles have at one time or the other have been the vogue of fashion (Plate 3, 4 and 5).



Plate 3: Suit on Jeans
Date: 1969

Source: E. I. Ononeme's Collection



Plate 4: Short Gown
Date: 1972

Source: Patricia Onochie's Collection



Plate 5: Maxi Gown
Date: 1972

Source: Patricia Onochie's Collection

It has been noted that the long gowns in particular which usually cover the thigh and knees also have its shoulder and back exposed. In keeping with this trend, Okeke (1996) explains that the traditional wrapper was worn to stop above the knees, by young women, in the mini style as the older women generally maintained the use of two-piece (up and down) wrapper fabric in their formal dressing. Okeke further notes that expensive imported and local factory-made lace materials competed with traditional wrapper textiles. Other women's fashion of this period includes trouser, trouser suits, shorts and unisex shirts.

On the men's side both short suit jackets and long suit jackets were in vogue but long suit jackets were mostly favoured which were only adorned for formal occasions (Plate 6). The men also wore trousers popularly known as *bongo* which were usually tight from the waist down to the knees and flared at the bottom with slim fit shirts (Plate 7 and 8).



Plate 6: Long Jacket Suit on Bong
Date: 1978

Source: E.I. Ononeme's Collection



Plate 7: Various tops on Bongo
Date: 1974

Source: Patricia Onochie's Collection



Plate 8: Fitted shirt on Bongo
Date: 1974

Source: Patricia Onochie's Collection

There were other fashion styles that manifested in the later part of 1960s and 1970s this period for both men and women. Okeke (1996) identified some of them to include French suit also known as Safari, shirts and jumper for men in south eastern part as jumper and trousers of uniform *adire* materials as casuals wears were in vogue for men in the west. Okeke further informs that for the women the *adire* (tie and dye) material was also popular for the style of dress christened festac after FESTAC fiesta.

This dress style according to Dike (1978) was fairly tight or loosely fitted to the body with two side slits, embroidered neckline, sleeves and lower fringe. The foregoing shows that contemporary Nigerian fashion always reveal the cultural vitality and longstanding sophistication of distinctive and rich Nigerian fashion system which is a blend of cultural heritage and fashionable innovation.

Fashion in the 80s and 90s also witnessed the usual common western influence such as several styles of jeans, tops and skirts both short and long, mini and maxi gowns, blouses, tops, trousers and trouser suits and unisex shirts. This period also witnessed the ban on imported textiles which favoured a number of textile industries and fashion designers. In fact, Ogunduyile (ibid: 149) is of the view that the ban encouraged individuals to delve into fashion design and indigenous textile got a boost.

Ogunduyile further notes that textile and fashion designers attempted to create a mix of Western and African styles. Some of the fashion designers particularly those trained abroad who are highly skilled and creative although copied in a different way the predominant western dress styles but concentrated more on African styles to suit Nigerian local conditions with maximum use of local textiles in order to satisfy fashion conscious Nigerians. There are popular fashion styles that were in vogue during this period. One of such fashion styles was known as *agbada* of which have both male and female versions (Plate 9 A and B) and 10 A and B).



Plate 9: A and B various types of male *Agbada*

Date: 1996

Source: Lovina Onwuakpa's Collection

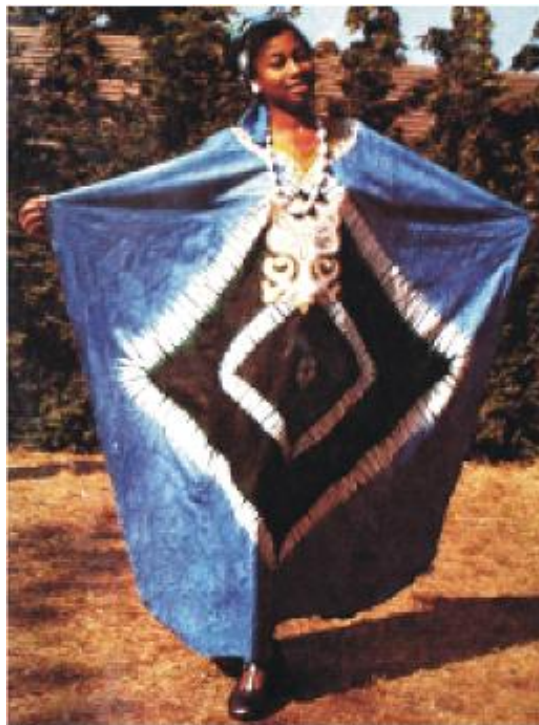


Plate 10: A and B various types of female *Agbada*

Date: 1977

Source: Lamine Diakhatee's Collection

Women usually compliment this elegant dress style with a flamboyant headgear popular known as madam Koffo. This style of headgear was introduced and popularized by a Nigerian female actress called madam Koffo in a television programme known as "The second chance." Brocade, fancy prints and white satin materials were also used to make different dress styles that became the vogue of the moment. These include *boubou* for women (Plate 11).



Plate 11: Boubou

Date: 1994

Source: Lois Nnadi' Collections

Others are shirts, jumper and trousers for men of which were usually richly embroidered. In addition to these were the use of fabrics of other West African countries such as Ghana *kente* which was used to fashion jackets and waistcoats. These fashion styles were popularised for office use, public and ceremonial functions. Another fashion that was in vogue particularly for women is that tying of wrapper in the traditional form was transformed with the use of local textiles to make both skirts and gowns. This dress style is either below or above the knees depending on the choice of the wearer. Similar to aforementioned women's fashion style is another long skirt that gets to the ankle which usually has long slits at one or two sides.

However, despite the government's ban on imported clothing, people continually travel and import into Nigeria all sorts of ready-made dresses especially for women of which brought to vogue the use of fashion styles such as stretch jeans trousers and shorts worn with spaghetti half tops (Plate 12), baggy knickers and pedal pushers and long stretch skirts (Plate 13).



Plate 12: Spaghetti top with stretch Jeans

Date: 1996

Source: Lovina Onwuakpa's Collection



Plate 13: Long Stretch skirt

Date: 1998

Source: Lovina Onwuakpa's Collection

3. History of Fashion in Nigeria in the 21th century

The period of 2000 upwards in modern Nigerian fashion notices a continual demand and increasingly changes in clothing styles of both men and women although there were crossovers in the sense that former styles keep reappearing. This buttress the fact, that changes in fashion are constant and somewhat a part of daily life. In fact, Nduma (2007) asserts that fashion in its varieties cannot be separated from our daily lives, even those who refuse to follow fashion is argued to do so in order not to partake in trends. In addition, Olaghere (1993) observes that fashion industries are moving at tremendous speed that one is left breathless with anticipation.

There are many entrants in men and women fashion within the period of 2000 till date as they have continued to exhibit eagerness and appetite for new trends, but fashion designers have continued to keep up to the demands. The rich and the celebrities can be said to somewhat led fashion within this period. Style of dress of public figures, social events and fashion houses are somewhat the main indices for fashion changes or new creations within this period under review.

All these have complimented some of the business strategies that have continued to enrich the fashion sector. Little use of Nigerian traditional hand-woven textiles, more of factory printed fabrics such as *ankara* and fancy prints that come in bright coloured patterns were used to make different dress styles and also applied as appliqué on other fabrics. These bright coloured fabrics were used by men to tailor shirts, shorts, trousers, caftan, Senegalese, Indian incorporated dress styles and slim fitted jumpers (Plate 14).



Plate 14: Slim fitted Jumper
Date: 2015

Source: Nwabuoku Ken-Dikens's Collection



Plate 15: Long Flared Gown
Date: 2015

Source: Ursula Nnadi's Collection

Women on the other hand use these fabrics to fashion European, American and other foreign dress styles such as long and short gowns, long and short skirts all made in flared and gather forms. See (Plate 15). Some of these women dress styles particularly the mini types were usually tight fitted in order to emphasise the female curves while some of the women dressed styles were combined with skin coloured

vail nets to create the illusion of exposed skin especially at the bust, belly and hand regions. Also, lace fabrics were combined with Ankara for fashionable statement and dress styles made up of corset (Plate 16 and 17).



Plate 16: Corset Gown with Lace
Date: 2023

Source: Andrea Kpolugbo's Collection

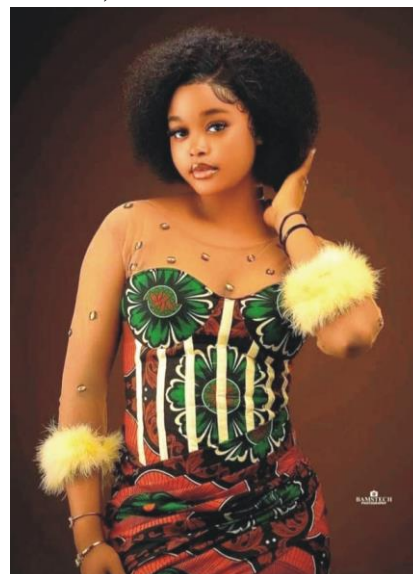


Plate 17: Corset Gown with Ankara
Date: 2022

Source: Hamstech Photography's Collection

Prevalent within this period is a popular fashion style in the use of the aforementioned fabrics as group identity. One of such group identities with the use of these fabrics is the popular *Aso-Ebi* concept introduced by the Yoruba people to signify oneness and unity amongst a particular family, friends and organisations at an event, (Plate 18).



Plate 18: *Aso-Ebi* with various styles at a wedding ceremony
Date: 2007

Source: Lovina Onwuakpa's Collections

Wande (cited in Edegba, 2013) states that *Aso-Ebi* culture is familiar to most Nigerians and was described as a type of fashion culture that has come to stay. Different dress styles were usually identified with *Aso-Ebi*, group or organisation uniforms. They include single or double wrapper, long and short skirts with suitable blouse and headgear. However, it's worthy of note that in 2000's, the headgears were tied in various styles, especially in layers. (Plate 19 and 20) as well as gowns and *Buba* for women. Jumper, shirts and caftan were popular for men. The use of factory prints and Nigerian traditional textiles seems to be the idea controlling modern fashion in Nigeria today.



Plate 19: Layer Head Gear
Date: 2022

Source: Yemiz Fashion's Collection

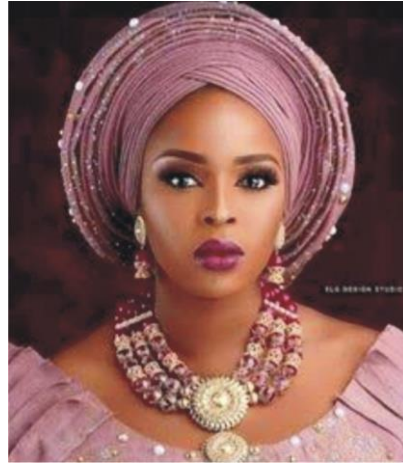


Plate 20: Layer Head Gear II
Date: 2023

Source: Yemiz Fashion's Collection

The influx or continued importation of ready-made garments into the country due to foreign trade by some Nigerians despite its ban still constitutes a major aspect of fashion in this era. In fact, Jibrin (2009) states that in spite of the declared policy of the federal government to combat the menace, our traditional markets have been flooded with smuggled cheaper but inferior fabrics, often passed off as our products. From the foregoing, there is no doubt that presently one cannot pinpoint a particular fashion style as being in vogue, but one discovers that there is a growing mood of formality, which is mirrored in fashions that emphasised youthfulness. More often than not the kind of jobs individuals does usually dictate their fashion including the accessories they use.

There is no doubt therefore that several of the foregoing fashion styles of different periods have always been complimented by accessories as they have been an integral part of contemporary Nigeria fashion. Fashion accessories come in different forms and a basic fashion accessory is anything including makeup that contributes in a secondary manner, to one's outfit or draws attention to that part of the body which it adorns. The most common accessory in modern Nigerian fashion is jewelry which comes in various forms, styles, shapes and sizes as each can be used to enrich one's entire outfit.

Women adorn jewelry more than men in contemporary Nigeria fashion vogue. The next common accessory that has helped in giving contemporary fashion a boost is handbags which come in different styles. A handbag and a scarf are an accessory very much associated with women, although some men do have them but not very often. Women tie a scarf in various forms and handbags which usually have straps are mostly worn over the shoulders to compliment the wearer's outfit.

Shoes and belts are other fashion accessories that play important roles in contemporary Nigeria fashion. Both men and women shoes and belts come in rich varieties in terms of design and colour. They are produced from a huge variety of materials. But women have loads of shoes compared to men. Belts originally do not play a vital role in contemporary Nigeria fashion, but presently belts have a significant place in Nigerian fashion. Belts are basically worn to keep the trousers from falling down and somewhat spices up one's look. Apart from using belts on trousers, many women wear belts with gowns, short and long skirts.

4. Conclusions

In conclusion, fashion revolves in circle, reflecting historical, cultural, political, economical and social life of a nation; thereby satisfying the apparel accessory wants and needs of the people at a given period of time as it reflects man's environment, and stands as a means of non-verbal communication in revealing the culture and history of a people. Thus, it is innovative and reflects popular values of the society and changes when such values change. Although, whatever the approach to contemporary Nigerian fashion, designers have continued to create new styles to suit changing identities and tastes. But, as desirable and inevitable the Nigeria modern fashion may be, the pace and degree of changes in contemporary Nigeria fashion necessitated by the influx of foreign cultures has continued to put traditional Nigerian hand-woven fabrics in an adverse situation since designers use less of these fabrics for modern dress styles.

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