

PROVERBIAL ILLUSTRATION OF YORÙBÁ TRADITIONAL CLOTHINGS: A SOCIO-CULTURAL ANALYSIS

by

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Abstract

The Yorùbá of South Western Nigeria have from the traditional time appreciated the value of human development in national advancement. They have the understanding that the development of a nation is akin to the development of man, therefore the personality of a man has to be well enhanced so as to fulfill his responsibilities. Clothing among the Yorùbá is a crucial factor upon which the development of the human personality is anchored. This philosophy is vividly illustrated in proverbs. The thrust of this paper therefore, is to make some analysis of the socio-cultural factors underlining the use of clothes in Yorùbá land. Proverbs were used to project the significance of traditional fabrics among the Yorùbá. A succinct analysis of the proverbs assist in decoding the thought patterns, feelings, opinions and the ideas they communicate. This in essence will help us in appreciating the importance that Yorùbá attach to clothing in human development. The decision to use proverbs in this study is predicated on the fact that Yorùbá proverbs are time tested and proven as a powerful African indigenous medium of expression (Amali 1985).

Keywords: Proverb; Yorùbá; Tradition; Clothing; Personality; Indigenous.

Introduction

Clothing is a significant factor in human development. This development came as a result of the efforts of man to cover his nakedness and protect him from shame and the harsh elements of life (Payne 1965: 1). The idea of covering the body started from the Garden of Eden (Genesis chapter three), when the first man (Adam) discovered that he was naked. He decided to cover his nakedness with leaves which were the first immediate materials available to him. Man later graduated to the use of animal skin (hide and skin) which progressed into tanning. Tanning according to Mangut and Mangut (1999: 150) involves a series of processes whereby raw skins and hides are converted into more durable commodities. These processes are aimed at rendering the skin or hide durable by making it not putrefactive and at the same time yielding a product with technical characteristics suitable for a wide variety of purposes.

This process of fabric production in course of time developed into the use of yarns which are still collected from various sources (animal wool, silk from insect, cotton, etc), according to the technology available to or advanced by each culture. The Yorùbá of South western Nigeria developed the use of fibres essentially from cotton, silk and wool which were spun into yarns used for traditional woven fabrics.

There are two major purposes for clothing as earlier mentioned. These are to conceal

the sensitive parts of the body (modesty of appearance) and to protect the body from harsh elements (harsh weather and unpleasant insect bites). However, there is a worldwide change in the way people view modesty, because 'it is changing from complete covering of the body to 'Bikini' bathing suit' (Payne, 1965: 1). Though the purposes and ways of clothing are changing from culture to culture, it nevertheless, transforms the appearance of man as it adds value to his outlook, when it is properly put together through the ingenious hands of the artist. The sum total of this human development is the foundation for nation building.

Traditional African fabrics date back to centuries prior to the advent of the Europeans. This is accentuated by the Yorùbá maxim which says that, *kí òyìnbó to g'òké, kì í se ewé ògèdè ni Èdá fi í se aso*, (before the white men arrived, the people were not dressed in plantain leaves). This suggests that locally made clothing has been in existence among the Yorùbá for many centuries before the arrival of Europeans.

The usage of African traditional fabrics is gaining acclaimed popularity in Europe and among Africans in Diaspora. These products were initially limited in varieties (designs and styles); they were also restricted to the kings and chiefs, (Johnson, 1973: 3). However, the tide has changed because the cloths are found popular among the old, the young, and the affluent Nigerians. The reason is that the fabrics are gaining historical as well as national importance.

As a result of the socio-cultural factors, textile art is taught as a course in tertiary institutions. It is being practiced as a profession in textile centers in cities, towns and villages. More people are presently engaged in textile production much more than before. This is because traditional fabrics are now used to satisfy the dynamic socio-cultural and economic yearnings of the people.

Yorùbá traditional attires are no longer merely used as attires to adorn the body occasionally, but have also become the status symbol of wealth, socio-cultural and religious identity of individuals. Diogu (2000), buttresses the prominent use of traditional hand-woven fabrics which are also copiously found among the Tiv of Benue and Ebira of Kogi States of Nigeria. The Yorùbá, especially from Ondo, are known for their love for the acquisition and generous use of indigenous (handmade) fabrics, *aso-òkè or aso-òfì* (Ademuleya 2002). To celebrate the importance of clothing among men, different proverbs are used to accentuate clothing as a token of good personality and as a material of class distinction. The significance of traditional woven fabrics is reflected probably more in Yorùbá proverbs.

Yorùbá Traditional Clothing

The Yorùbá traditional clothing is an all encompassing fashion fabric in the cultural context. Though there are foreign influences in the use of these traditional wears like *aso-òkè*, the Yorùbá nevertheless, has succeeded in adapting the traditions of other cultures to meet their needs, while still upholding their cultural identity (Smith & Eicher: 1982). This is most vividly expressed in the use of Yoruba traditional clothing. The fabrics are made from either natural or man-made fibres, cellulose or non-cellulosic fibres. Most of these traditional fabrics are very expensive; as such they were restricted in use. In the traditional past, they were mainly used by the Kings, Chiefs, Princes, Princesses and *Oloris* (King's wives), and other prominent persons that could afford them. In contemporary time, these materials are not limited to the aforementioned people in the society but as many as could afford them. *Aso òkè* is widespread and it is gaining ground among the young and old. The Yoruba people for

example have a creative wisdom of the use of these traditional fabrics in the contemporary times. They combine *aso òkè*, with other machine woven or factory printed fabrics for important functions. For example they combine *aso- oke* with damask (Fig: 1) or lace etc. These are worn during traditional festivals and other special outings. *Aso òkè* is often used as big trousers, *kembè*, flowing *agbádá*, *yèpè*, amongst men (Fig: 2). They also wear them as caps such as *abetí ajá*, *filà oníde*, *ikòrí*, *adiro* etc. Women on the other hand use these fabrics as *iró* and *bùbá*, wrapper and blouse. They also use *aso òkè* for bags, shoes and purses, as headgear and shawl, *gèlè* and *ìborùn*. Women also use *gèlè* and *ìborùn or ípèlé* as complement to their expensive contemporary fabrics, such as lace materials, jacquard, damask etc (Figure 3).

There are lots of these traditional *aso òkè* among the Yorùbá. They are *sánányán*, *egungun èlú*, *Ègbòrò*, *fòpelò*, *dàmétù*, *lálùbósà*, *lómolangi*, *etù*, *petùje*, *láyínyán*, *lápòólà*, *àlààrì*, *lúboméjì*, *kitiké* and *kíjipá*. These come in different colours. *Sánányán* is a creamy coloured fabric, which is a product of the ‘cocoon anaphe’. It was around 1940 that other fibres were dyed into different colours (Fadayomi, 1989), out of which *àlààrì* is red, and *etù*, blue- black from indigo material. These materials are sewn into different forms. They could be *dànansíkí*, *dàndoógó*, *gbàrìyè*, *agbádá*, *bùbá* and *iró*.

Different occasions demand different outfits among the Yorùbá. The *sánányán*, *lítà*, *lómolangi* and *òúnjawú* are commonly used as casual wears, while *etù*, *petùje*, *orúkópé* and *láyínyán* are often used for traditional festivals like Sango and Ogun festivals, especially in Ondo town of South Western Nigeria. *Egungun èlú*, *láyínyán* and *etù* are commonly used for rituals *etutu*. These traditional outfits are also highly favoured in ceremonies like wedding, naming and cultural dances. Their presence creates awe and veneration in the minds of the people. For example, one finds young ladies and women tying the wrapper from the chest downward and with heavy beads covering the neck to the shoulder (Fig: 4), when attending specific socio-cultural ceremonies, such as traditional marriage, ceremonial festivals and ritual outings. Oloris, king’s wives often dress in this form, tying *aso- oke* over the breasts with beads flamboyantly worn on the neck, at the wrists, ankles and even on the buttocks. Men may put on *Kembè*, (‘knicker burger’ as its modern derivative) and *bùbá*, the radiance it gives the wearer informs the social relevance of the wearer either as crowned prince or princess, *Olorí* or Chief. The value placed on these materials does not allow them to be discarded easily. These traditional fabrics are worn till they are impossible to be worn again, especially with the Yorùbá people of Ondo (Ademuleya, 2002). It is very important to add that the types, styles, colours, and decorative patterns observed on dress, in most cases, add prestige to the totality of the traditional cloth in its appearance and in its contextual usage. Such as the embroidery works which are added to the design of the cloth which is known as *onà*, (design), make it very attractive to the wearer. Threads, of different colours and textures are intricately embroidered on the cloth to give beautiful designs.

Yoruba Proverbs and Clothing

Yorùbá proverbs among many others illustrate the importance and value which the Yorùbá, like any other ethnic group in Nigeria, attach to issue in different contexts. However in this study, Yoruba Proverbs was discussed as related to traditional clothing. It is worthy of note that there are many proverbs related to clothing and human development, some of them were discussed. The decision to use clothing related proverbs is based on the fact that the Yorùbá perceive proverbs as walking stick of the language, *bí òrò bá sonù owè la fi n wá a*. Proverbs play crucial roles in imparting meaning and understanding to a given situation. It is a

formidable factor in discussions in order to build up an argument or to support a cause. James (2002: 1) in his study defines proverbs as “a rich source of imagery and succinct expression, encapsulating abstract ideas and allusive wording, usually in metaphorical form”. Sheba (2000: 76), define proverbs as words of wisdom meant for only the wise to unfold, thus revealing the lost ideas.

Mieder (1988: 85) observes that “proverbs are traditional wisdom literature”, he explains further that “No matter what problem might be touched upon in a particular song - be it a broken heart, a declaration of love, an explanation of a feeling, the expression of a wish or whatever - a proverb will come to mind as a ready cliché which can summarize the complex nature of our thoughts and feelings”. The Yoruba of Nigeria have the belief that Proverb is the horse which can carry one swiftly to the discovery of ideas, and this is no more restricted to the traditional views but becoming increasingly used to carry modern messages (AFRIPROV.ORG). In these ways proverbs are like advertising drive that sends their message to the listener through vivid pictures.

As in many parts of the world, the Yorùbá holds proverbs in high esteem because they are regarded as the wisdom lore of the society (Asiyanbola A.A 2007 and James B. O. (2002). Proverbs are considered to be the most veritable tool in expressing ideas and feelings among the Yorùbá. It is a cultural antiquity that is relevant to day-to-day life even in contemporary time rather than a ‘material for the museum’. It is also considered that the traditional elders by reason of age and experience are the repository of proverbs and the custodian of knowledge which are derived from proverbial expressions (*Enu àgbà l’obì ti ngbó*). Proverbs are time tested observations of natural and human phenomena (Olatunji 1984: 170). Adepegba (1983: 13) observes that “the day-to-day conversations of the Yorùbá people, their expressions and use of words, especially if carefully examined within their cultures, seem capable of explaining their concept of every aspect of life and the world around them”. Different sets of proverbs illustrate various human activities, events, things and ideas (Daramola 2004, Salami 2004 and Asinyanbola 2006), which clothing also shares significant illustrative material through the use of proverbs.

Numerous proverbs are illustrative of the high value placed on cloth and clothing among the Yorùbá. The renowned American historian of Yorùbá art, Drewal (1979: 180), drawing from the proverb, *omo laso èdá* (children are the clothes of men), a metaphoric expression, equates cloth with children as man’s most valued possession. While the use of proverbs has frequently been applied in recent years, the actual use and function has changed considerably. However, proverbs in relation to traditional clothing, is still very relevant and significant in use and function. Yorùbá Proverbs have often featured in publications. Samples have been collected and translated into English and classified alphabetically or in terms of how they are used. However, hardly has any attempt been made so far to study the form of these proverbs as they relate to clothing.

The socio- cultural significance of clothing to the Yorùbá cut across all aspects of life, it is therefore, often expressed in different principles of human endeavour. Proverbs as related to clothing are therefore discussed along the line of these principles.

Principle of Dignity of Outlook

The thought pattern and worldview of the Yorùbá about personality development can be easily deciphered from the critical analysis of the proverbs stated below:

- (i) *Ìrínísí ni ìseni lójò*
A good dress-sense commands respect
- (ii) *Bí a bá rìn rìn ìyà, tí a woso isé wò 'lú, igbákígbá ni wón fì í bomi fún ni mu*
If we walk disorderly and dress raggedly into the town, an unwholesome calabash will be used to serve one drinking water.

The above proverbs connote that the measure of respect that is accorded an individual more often than not, is determined by the quality and value of his or her outlook. Personality here means the total outlook or appearance of a person; it includes clothing and its accessories. The underlying philosophy of these proverbs is admiration and honour. Among the Yorùbá, greeting is accorded a very important value; a man or woman is greeted respectfully according to his age, status or dressing outlook.

In the first proverb *Ìrínísí*, that is, appearance in a good-dress sense is about what a person wears which in turn determines the way of greeting and type of honour to be accorded. *Ojò* means honour that is often attached to the totality of dressing outlook that is attributed to a person. Perception determines the recognition and admiration, *ojò*, which a person's attire may attract. A similar Yorùbá adage that perfectly expresses this same notion is *bí a se rìn làá koni*. (A person's appearance shows the value of respect that may be accorded such a person at the given time). For example, someone who dresses in a simple short and trouser may be greeted casually, while someone who dresses in voluminous well embroidered traditional attire like *etù* (Fig 5), *sánányán* or *àlàárì* (Fig 6), would be considered as a High Chief or seen as a wealthy person who deserves more dignifying greeting that befits his or her outlook much more than the first person, who though may be of the same status. A cursory look at a person will determine the type of greeting and respect to accord him or her. It is a common saying that first impression lasts long. This impression among others is about someone's dress- sense.

Moreover, Aremu (1991:7) supports the claim that the clothes you wear are symbolic of the person's status. He further buttresses this by illustrating with the costumes worn by the masquerades. According to him, *aso èkú*, is what makes the masquerades, because they (masquerades) are the visible emblems of the ancestors on earth and the cloths, *èkú* are the only things we see when they appear, respect and honour are therefore accorded them when they appear replenished in their colourful dresses during the annual festivals. *Aso èkú* is the emblem seen rather than the personality underneath the masks; this is one of the reasons why these masquerades are in different categories, according to their dress- sense. Some of them are major while some are minor.

The philosophy of life in Yorùbá culture is not static or stagnant. This is evident in their dress habit. In a ceremony of about five hour duration, the celebrant could change his or her dress two or more times in an attempt to show his or her affluence, joy or happiness. This phenomenon is also seen in fashion trends as what was in vogue a year earlier may become obsolete and then turn to a new trend even before the former dress gets worn out.

- (iii) *Eni tó kan àkànpò èwù ti kúrò ní ilé san tàbí kò sà*
The nobility of someone who is dressed in gorgeous garments is without qualm.

This proverb implies that the way you appear leaves no doubt about the comfort of your home and indeed your economic status. *Àkànpò* means wearing of valuable and gorgeous

attire on top of another; which is considered to be a sign of affluence among the Yorùbá. It also signifies happiness, joy and peace of mind and satisfaction. It is the comfort of a person that enables him to wear a combination of appropriate clothing to make complete attire. This also shows that the person is in his right frame of mind to be able to select the right materials that are suitably combined. This ability is embedded in man through the knowledge of art.

However, it is important to differentiate between different *àkànpò*. Somebody may put on complete attire to appear gorgeous for an occasion (Fig: 7), to keep one warm when the weather is cold while another person may put on different attires for comedy. An example of this is *Baba Sùwé*, Yoruba comedian, who puts on Yoruba traditional *agbada* on sweater with Khaki trouser and wears slippers with socks on the feet (Fig: 8). This could also signify madness if the attires are not appropriately used (Fig: 9).

Another proverb that equally identifies the importance of clothing among the Yorùbá is:

- (iv) *B'ílé bá san ni, àwò là á wò*
A person's well being can be confirmed from the
outlook of his or her skin.

In this instance, an inference is made concerning the socio-economic status of the person. *Ilé* (house) here connotes the state of affairs of man or his well being. The appearance of a person signifies his status (Fig: 3,5,6 & 7). *Ilé* (house) is used here metaphorically to describe the person's financial status. In like manner *àwò* (skin) is used to describe the general well-being which a person enjoys in the family. Clothing such as *etù*, *àlààrì*, *sánányán*, *kíjìpá* and others could be taken as valid instruments to determine the economic well-being and status of the individual. This is because these materials are expensive and elegant so beyond the reach of the common man.

Principle of Planning

Yorùbá people have an understanding of time and seasons, hence, adequate arrangements are made to take care of clothing that is suitable for different seasons. There is the time of winter when thick cloth is needed while in the time of summer; only light cloth is suitable. These materials are prepared well ahead of the seasons. The family that is economically disadvantaged, being conscious of their economic limitation would also prepare well ahead of eventuality by weaving cloth that would be needed for all occasions. These proverbs that are associated with planning among others include, *a kì í wo èwù òjò nínú èrùn*, *oyé ní í kílò fún onítòbí kan soso*.

- (i) *A kì í wo èwù òjò nínú èrùn*
You don't put on a summer cloth during the winter
- (ii) *Oyé ní í kílò fún onítòbí kan soso*
It is the harmattan wind that will discipline someone who has
only one skirt

The winter period is often a very cold season. Clothing as one of its characteristics, which shields a man from inclement weather. The Yorùbá believes in planning ahead, as situations and circumstances of life do not remain constant. The clothes worn during raining season is not the same as harmattan. Therefore, advance preparations have to be made for the seasons. It also connotes that we should always be prepared to

adjust, adapt and to respond to the changing circumstances of life. Greetings are often associated with the seasons which emphasize the importance of cloths. Time and seasons do not come suddenly but they come regularly, it is therefore expected that one should prepare well ahead for the challenges that may come with any of the seasons. A pair of knicker is not sufficient to combat cold, when one is washed, the other must be available for use.

- (iii) Aso ò bo Omóye,
Omóye ti rin ihòhò w'ojà
The situation is beyond redemption

Nakedness in the public among the Yorùbá is synonymous with madness; it is believed that if madness is still within the confines of the home, it can still be cured; however, if the madness has gotten to the market place (public domain), it is no longer curable. This state may be as a result of careless handling or insensitivity to the plight of the mad man or non cooperation on the part of the mad man. It is therefore, considered too late to restore such a one to sanity. Cloth here is seen as a therapy which could have been used to save Omóye from doom.

Principle of Hard work

It is still culturally valued among the Yorùbá that a man should work hard, so that he could function optimally at the level of his mates in meeting his basic needs. There are proverbs that illustrate this.

- (i) *Ajogún èwù kò moyì agbádá nlá*
He who inherits a blouse does not appreciate the value of a garment

Among the Yorùbá, much value is placed on traditional cloth; it is cherished and preserved for generations. Traditional clothing is part of the wealth bequeathed to children. Therefore children are taught to work hard to sustain what they inherit from their parents. Proverbs are used to emphasize the importance of clothing, wealth creation and maintenance. A lazy man who inherits a little thing will not appreciate the efforts invested in great fortunes. It is therefore expected that everyone should work hard.

- (ii) *Owó laso oge*
Fashion ability is sustained by money.

It is definitely an expensive pastime to present oneself to the admiration of others especially among the Yorùbá people. Among other accessories, the cloth worn must be aesthetically and culturally appealing to be appreciated by others. The materials in vogue are usually seasonal; hence, one has to work hard to sustain fashion ability.

- (iii) *Àgùntàn kò paso èsí dà*
A sheep does not change the clothing it has put on since last year.

The importance attached to changing one's dress and style seasonally, as a mark of affluence and hard work, cannot be underscored. This is why in every festival, a Yorùbá man or woman would wear a new dress. They do this to show that they have more than enough. In most ceremonies, a Yorùbá man or woman will change his or her dress more than once. If he's

unable to do this, it could imply that it is not well materially with the person as he or she could not meet-up with the demands of the season. It is a metaphoric statement which implies that a lazy man cannot afford a change of raiment.

(iv) *Dàndóógó kojá àbínúdá*

Dàndóógó, an expensive traditional regalia, is not easily procured.

This means that one has to be financially buoyant to be able to purchase *dàndóógó*, a traditional Yorùbá dress . This is so because of the long process of production. It is a hand woven cloth of expensive materials. Before the advent of imported materials for weaving, the yarn used for weaving was gotten from cotton and local silk. This was then locally prepared by picking, ginning, scouring and spinning. The processes were done by hand thereby minimizing the quantity that can be produced at any given time and thus make it very expensive to procure. The designing itself takes a very long time to make. This was why in most cases only the rich people could then afford the *dàndóógó* cloth. Wealth then was usually associated with hard work. Therefore, only the rich can afford the payment.

(v) *Oyé ní í kílò fún onítòbí kan soso*

It is the harmattan wind that will discipline someone who has only one skirt.

The wealth of a man among Yorùbá is usually considered to be synonymous with how hard working he is. Therefore, if you must appear dignifying, you must work hard to earn it, unlike these days, when people get rich through questionable circumstances. However, development and growth are progressive actions which are built up daily upon sound moral values. The Yorùbá man or woman in traditional time believes very much in this and it is portrayed in their proverbs and clothing. Ordinarily, a man with only one skirt would have no other one for a change when that one is washed; therefore, he will wear it wet in spite of the cold since there is no alternative. To avoid cold is to be well prepared through hard work.

(vi) *Kijìpá l'aso òle, òfi l'aso àgbà; àgbà tí kò ní òfi kó rójú ra kijìpá*

The strong woven cloth is for the lazy man, the superior cloth is for the elderly, the elderly one who does not have the superior cloth should endeavour to buy the strong woven cloth.

This proverb is an admonishment that one should work hard. If a man cannot do so much, it is expected of him to do something rather than stay idle. It is sacrilegious for a man to wake-up early in the day and could not lay his hands on something profitable. There is a song in Yorùbá which says that, if a man fails to work, he will be a servant to his mates. It amounts to lack of cultural ethos for one to remain idle.

Principle of Security and Protection

(i) *Aríyàá dàbora bí aso*

One who clad himself with maternal care.

Maternal care is taken as a very important issue among the Yorùbá. One who has no motherly care is regarded as an orphan, who would suffer cold, hunger and deprivation of all sorts. This is because the mother show care, feeds, protects and defends her child in any given situation. A motherless child may not enjoy such protection. So, in the same vein the importance of clothing is metaphorically referred to as mother care. The value of mother

cannot be over emphasized as this can be linked to mother- hens that protect the chicks under the cover of its feather against harsh weather, hawks and other predators.

- (ii) *Bí ò sí aso*
bí ò sí èjìgbà ilèkè
onírúurú ìdí là bá ma a rí
bí i kókó
bí oówo
bí i iku
bí àgbáàrín
omo enìkan ìbá bósoólè won jòbo
omo enìkan ìbá bósoólè won a jomòdò
Enìkan ìbá bosoólè won a jorá kúnúgbà
Oníwàànù bosoólè o kun bí ìrù esin
Iwà nnù mojá alékan

.....
Igi méta là bá se lóre
E jé a segi òwú lóre
Èyàn tó bá règbònsè
Kó má fewé òwú nùdí
Ojó a bá kú
Aso ní í sin ni

.....
(If there were no cloth
If there were no beads
We would have seen different kinds of buttocks
Like lumps
Like boils
Like swollen hips
Like grape-sized swelling
If naked, some people would look like monkeys
If naked, some people would look like wart-hogs (*Phacocoerus africanus afer*)
If naked, some people would look like Western Hartebeestes (*Bubalis major*)
Oniwaanu puts off his cloths he still remains full like the horse tail
“Good character” (inner beauty) the offspring of Alekan

.....
Three types of tree should be shown kindness
Let us show kindness to the cotton tree
Anyone who goes (to the bush) to relieve him/herself
Should not use the leaves of the cotton tree to clean up
On the day we die
Cloth will be used to wrap us for burial (Oyetade B.A. 2004)

- (iii) *Aso lèdidí àwò*
Cloth is the covering for the human body

Human body could have been ridiculously exposed if not for the good effect of clothing. Skin rashes, infections, bumps and other irritants could have been exposed, to the embarrassment of man if his shame has not been covered by cloth. Man could also have been infested by various irritants but for clothing.

- (iv) *Ó na pápá bora bíi aso*
He escaped (He covers himself with wild grass like cloth)

The grassland where a man could escape to is likened to cloth which concealed the nakedness of man. A man who escapes to grassland could have done so to evade arrest or to escape from rough handlers. Cloth in this wise is seen as providing security from shame or disgrace.

- (v) *Ó wo aso pupa bí i osùn*
He wears red cloth like *osun* (camwood)
- (vi) *Ògún onílé wo èwù èjè, ó fi imò bora bí aso*
Ogun onile covers himself with palm leaves like cloth
He is well protected in his camouflage

As a soldier in his camouflage is shielded from the enemies in the war front, so is a man who conceals his real personality under his cloths. Cloth here serves as protector from adversaries.

- (vii) *Eni ja'le léèkan, tó bá d' àrán borí, aso olè ló dà bora.*
He, who stole once, whatever his wealth, is considered a product of theft.

Principle of Modesty and Sincerity

- (i) *Eni tí a n tàn mọ̀, a díá fún eléwù etù tó n kan sáará sí onítéru*
The deceived is self-conscious even when a deceiver who is dressed in expensive flowing garment is applauding him that dresses in a less impressive garment.

The proverb is trying to showcase the class distinction through the quality of dressing. *Etù* is one of the most costly traditional cloths, so it cannot be compared with *téru* which is an inferior cloth among the Yorùbá. When one is seen dressed in *etù*, it often portray the person as going to a very important or well celebrated outing which demands that one should dress very gorgeously. However, the one who is dressed in lowly *téru* should not pretend to be expensively dressed. It therefore implies that we should be humble enough to accept and be satisfied with who we are, even when there is pretence of acclamation to the contrary. In other words, we should not have an exaggerated feeling of self importance.

Principle of Strength

- (i) *Àbàtábútú kījìpá ní í paná otútù*
It is the thickness of cloth that can bring cold under control

This is a reflection on the link between clothing and the concepts of human health, weather and societal value system. On the relationship between clothing and health, it has been shown that clothing right from creation has served the basic need of man, which is for the purpose of covering the body from severe weather (Blanche 1965). *Kījìpá* a thick Yorùbá traditional cloth for example, shields one from cold weather because of its thickness and size, thus keeping the body warm. Yorùbá dresses are mostly thick and voluminous or airy materials; they are often sewn as *gbàriye*, *agbádá*, *sòkòtò kèmbè*, *dàndóógó, búbá* and *iró*. These are worn as they relate to events and seasons.

Principle of Justice

- (i) *Ègbón síwájú ó so aso kó,
àbúrò kẹhìn ó wo èwù,
bí a kò mo olè, olè mo ara rẹ*
The elder brother who was the first to come had cloth hanged on his shoulder, the younger one who came later had his cloth on, if we cannot identify the lazy one, the lazy one knows himself. Certain situations are self evident and needs no explanation. The evidence on ground is sufficient enough to dispense justice, if the judge believes in fair play.
- (ii) *Bí ajá wo agbádá iná,
tí àmòtẹkùn wo èwù èjẹ,
tí ológìnní sán àkísà mó ìdí,
egbé aperanje ní íse.*
If the dog wears a dress of fire, the leopard, a dress of blood, and the cat a rag tied around its waist, they are all carnivorous animals.
- (iii) *Aso nlá kó lèèyan nlá*
A big cloth does not necessarily portray the importance of a person.

Appearances sometime are deceptive; therefore, one should not judge things by their appearances, but by what they are in reality. Likewise man should not be deprived of his rights because of his appearance.

- (iv) *Irú aso kò tán nínú aso*
The likeness of any particular clothe can always be found among the others.

The Yoruba man believes in the equality of man and that there is no basis for complexes. No matter how unique a clothing material is, there is always a likeness of it in vogue; this implies that no matter how important a man may be there is always someone as important. No one has a monopoly of certain qualities.

Principle of Contentment

- (i) *Ení jalè lèèkan, bó daso àrán borí,
aso olè ló dàbora*
He who stole once, if he wears *àrán* (velvet), it's a stolen material

When a man steals once, he already has a tainted character, no matter his material possession; the materials are seen as stolen goods. It is not easy to have ones image redeemed once it's tainted, so we must guard ourselves by living a life of contentment.

- (ii) *A wín ni wò kò yeni,
àgbà wò sòkòtò,
bí kò fúnni lésè á soni níbàdí,
rému-rému lohun eni n báni mu.*
Borrowed trousers do not fit a person,

if it is not tight around the legs,
it will be loose in the waist,
its one's dress that fits perfectly.

It is very important for one to live within ones means and be contented. Living on borrowed items adds no value to a man but humiliation.

- (iii) *Aso nlá kó lèèyan nlá*
A big cloth does not necessarily portray the importance of a person.

We should not exaggerate our self importance by trying to wear expensive clothes.

Conclusion

Dressing, to the Yorùbá, is often synonymous with personality. Yorùbá people love to command respect as they appear in the public, their traditional attires attest to this uniqueness. These clothes are cherished because of the durability of the textures and their outlook.

The use of proverbs as verbal communication tool is clearly analysed as they relate to the use of *aso òkè*, a respectable traditional fabric among the Yorùbá. It is evident that Yorùbá traditional attire speaks for itself. The use of Yorùbá traditional clothing really shows the importance and veneration that the Yorùbá people accord the dress culture. The uses of these clothes signify the dignity and socio- economic status of the individual. The socio-cultural importance of Yorùbá dress is thus revealed in the language and expressions of the people, therefore portraying the relationship between the dressing culture and language. Dressing is culturally bound and it is distinctive, therefore having a good knowledge of the dressing patterns among different cultures will make one to understand and appreciate other people and be able to communicate with them effectively.

The use of proverbs has helped to amplify the importance of dressing to the body. There are some proverbs which portray a mark of affluence, token of good personality and class distinction. The metaphor of the use of clothing is also shown in some of the proverbs. The proverbs are verbal expressions and of pointers to the visual aspect of dressing, it is like a guide against wearing a wrong type of dress at the right. The use of Yorùbá traditional fabrics is emphasized because of its durability and its support for our cultural heritage and attribution. The very important reason for wearing cloth is to enhance human dignity by covering his or her nakedness, unlike this modern time when fashion affords people to be half naked and this the modern Yoruba frowns at.



Fig. 1 Agbada (aso-oke) on damask trouser (courtesy Eicher, 1976)



Fig. 2: Man in Kembe trouser and agbada (aso-oke) (Courtesy Daily Times, 1963)



Fig. 3 Woman in foreign fabric with aso-oke as gele, iborum and ipete (1996)



Fig. 4 Woman tying wrapper on agbada, the breast with beads on the neck (courtesy Eve de Negri, 1976)



Fig. 5 Man in voluminous embroidered agbada in etu (courtesy Atanda, 1980)

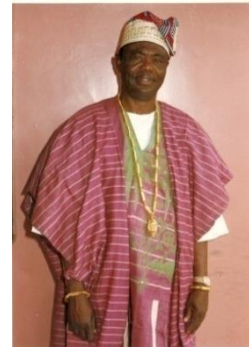


Fig. 6 Man in awotele, fila and beads on neck and hands (1999)



Fig. 7 Man in gogowu, awotele and agbada (Photo Eve-de Negri, 1976)



Fig. 7 Baba Suwe in ankanpo (Photo Baba suwe's collections)



Fig. 8 Artist in ankanpo (Photo Akinbileje T. Y., 2010)



Fig. 9 Mad woman in Ankanpo (Photo Akinbileje T. Y. 2008)

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