

## Patterned Modernity : The Role of Women in the Production of Textiles and Contemporary Art in Nigeria

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# PATTERNED MODERNITY: THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN THE PRODUCTION OF TEXTILES AND CONTEMPORARY ART IN NIGERIA

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**1. INTRODUCTION** <sup>1)</sup> \_\_\_\_\_ Textile production in Nigeria is a highly gendered practice. The textile addressed in this essay, the indigo-dyed *adire* cloth of the Yoruba people, has been made primarily by women since the early 20th century. The roles of women dyers and pattern makers during the pre-modern and modern era have been largely overlooked in art historical research, despite evidence that they were intricately involved in the processes of modernization that included trade, the global and local economy, and political activism. The contribution of women assumes greater importance in light of the fact that dress became a powerful tool of protest and resistance in the century prior to Nigeria's independence (1960), and the *adire* textile played a central role in it. Through these histories we can reach a more accurate understanding of modernity in Nigeria and consider the experiences of women not simply as textile makers but as active figures in cultural production, the economy and in politics.

\_\_\_\_\_ This essay examines the relationship between the production of textiles, the gendered divisions of its production, the development of modernity, and the appropriation of textiles by artists working in Nigeria since the time of independence. I will provide a brief history of *adire*, and the relevance it had to Nigeria's Yoruba women as the practice developed over the period of modernization and in the tumultuous decades leading up to independence. I will argue that a closer look at the role *adire* played in resistance movements will reveal that its women dyers were actively involved in such movements. Not only politically and economically, but as the producers of visual culture, they expressed themselves aesthetically through the textile pattern. This history made *adire* and its pattern language ideal for appropriation in Modern art and in critically engaged contemporary art, not only for its politically charged history and link to pre-colonial traditions, but also because of the integral role textiles continue to play in Nigerian society in collective remembering, commemorating, and communicating.

**2. A BRIEF HISTORY OF ADIRE** \_\_\_\_\_ *Adire*, meaning „tie and dye“ in the Yoruba language, is an indigo-dyed cotton textile produced by the Yoruba people of Nigeria's southwest region.<sup>2)</sup>

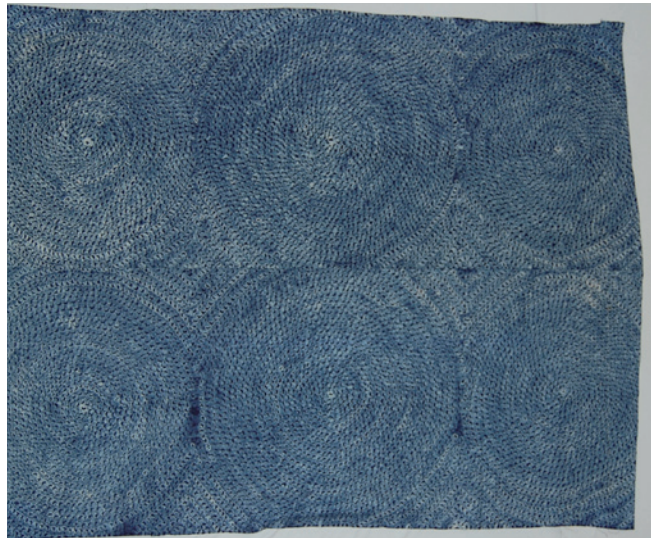
1)

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2)

It is not known for sure when indigo or resist dyeing was first practiced in the region, but the earliest evidence dates resist dyeing of threads and the use of indigo to the 17th century. However, *adire* as we know it today was first produced in the first few decades of colonization when European machine-made cotton fabric replaced the local hand-woven fabric used in *adire* production (see Byfield 1997: 79).

Originally, it was made with a locally spun and woven cotton textile that tended to have a rough and uneven surface texture. Later on, machine-made white cotton sheeting imported from Britain became an ideal substitute for local cotton in the production of *adire*. Rather than wipe out indigenous textile production, imported cotton and thread caused a burgeoning of *adire* in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. In addition to being cheaper and lighter than hand-woven cotton, imported cloth was more suited to popular *adire* patterning (Byfield 2002: 89). The smooth, even, flexible surface of machine-



produced cotton was ideal for *adire* techniques that involved painting a resist agent onto the cloth, or stitching or tying ornate designs with an intricacy and detail that was not achievable with the coarser hand-woven cotton. *Adire oniko*, for example, is created through a tedious process of sewing small sacs of fabric with raffia to create an intricate pattern of concentric circles of small rings (**fig. 1**) (Stanfield / Barbour / Simmonds 1971: 12). Such patterns required great skill and days of labor but the cloths were in high demand. Thus, *adire* production became a creative and lucrative artistic enterprise that at times employed almost entire towns or villages, particularly in the southwestern town of Abeokuta (Byfield 1997: 80-81).

— The Yorubaland region was an active exporter of raw cotton and other commodities (Ibid.: 79). Therefore, the infrastructure necessary to facilitate the textile trade was already in place when the region became an importer of European woven cotton. Up until the arrival of machine-woven cotton, the production stages of the cotton textile were shared by men: this included the raw cotton farming, harvesting and processing, and the weaving of cloth. Although the looms differed according to gender, both men and women in Yorubaland could be weavers, whereas the indigo dyeing and finishing processes were almost exclusively the realm of women, as opposed to the north of Nigeria where indigo dyeing is men's work (Stanfield / Barbour / Simmonds 1971: 18). When machine-woven cotton supplanted its traditional counterpart, it led to a virtual elimination of men from *adire*'s production sector. This development had two consequences: firstly, it allowed women to be the sole recipients of the textile's profits at the market and secondly, the machine-woven cotton offered greater room for

// Figure 01

Adire oniko, indigo tie-dyed machine spun plain-woven cotton with hems, 197 cm x 162 cm. Collection of the British Museum. © Trustees of the British Museum.

creativity in terms of design and execution of patterns (Byfield 1997: 80). Trade also introduced previously unavailable chemicals and synthetic dyes that made the dyeing process faster and cheaper, and reduced the risk of error. This allowed less-skilled dyers to enter the market, which fulfilled the high demand for the cloth but also created quality-control issues, thereby increasing the value of quality cloths made by skilled dyers and innovative pattern designers (Ibid.: 91–92).

— By the late 19th and early 20th centuries, *adire* producers and traders had customers across the coast of West Africa (Kriger 2006: 162). *Adire*'s women dyers found themselves in a position of relative affluence and power, particularly in Abeokuta. As demand for *adire* increased and stretched across West Africa, the industry helped Abeokuta and its residents integrate into and benefit from the global economy. The women who dyed the cloth were benefiting financially, socially and politically from the circumstances that left them as the sole producers and beneficiaries of *adire*'s profits, but these favorable conditions did not last long (Byfield 2002: xxxvii).

— When economic and political changes came to Abeokuta causing the circumstances of *adire*'s dyers to decline, many came together to challenge the new policies that negatively affected them, thus initiating one of Nigeria's first movements for women's rights. These changes, which were initiated by the British colonial government and enforced by the local ruler, the *Alake*, included restrictions on the chemicals and synthetic dyes that could be used in *adire*'s production. These same chemicals and dyes were part of the innovative solutions that had allowed the *adire* market to flourish in the first quarter of the 20th century (Kriger 2006: 162–163). The local authorities also instituted new but seemingly arbitrary taxes enforced on the women who worked in the markets, including textile vendors, despite the fact that women benefited from little, if any, government programs or spending (Cheryl Johnson-Odim 1992: 146). Thus it seemed as if rather than helping the *adire* industry and its work force, the local government may have contributed to its decline, inspiring Abeokuta's women to take the matter into their own hands.

**3. TAKING ACTION** — The political action taken against the local government in Abeokuta was led by a single, fierce and powerful figure: Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti. Kuti was from a well-off Nigerian family who had sent her to Britain to receive an

education. Upon returning to Nigeria, she married a reverend. But rather than settle in to a comfortable upper-class life, she began what would become a lifelong struggle for Nigerian women by teaching poor women to read and write, many of whom worked in the textile industry (Ibid.: 144–145). Kuti also founded a women's group called the *Abeokuta Women's Union* (AWU) that held weekly meetings in Abeokuta. In addition to her reading groups, the AWU also helped bring the local women together in a place where they could convey their issues to one another. The efforts of the AWU are credited with the eventual abdication of the *Alake* (Johnson-Odim / Mba 1997: 65). Since many of the *adire* dyers were illiterate, there happened to be a large number of dyers who came together through Kuti's reading group. At group meetings their concerns were voiced and their efforts could be consolidated, and as a political force they became mobilized not just as *adire* dyers, but also as women.

— Kuti's growing political engagement led her to abandon European clothing for a modern Yoruban style of dress, which meant she wore blouses with locally produced Yoruban wrappers, which included *adire*. Subsequently, she encouraged her followers to do the same. This had two significant effects: first, the women's group of Abeokuta increased their solidarity because their uniformity of dress concealed their economic and educational differences. Amongst themselves they found similarities in their discontents, and to the public eye they became a unified force (Byfield 2004: 39–41). Secondly, the switch to Yoruban dress signified not only solidarity amongst women, and amongst textile producers, but it was a visual expression of pro-nationalism. By embracing Yoruban clothing, these women aligned themselves with the dress-reform movement that began in Sierra Leone in the 1880s and spread to Lagos where it was first expressed through the sartorial choices of the elite for Yoruba styles over Western ones (Ibid.: 34–35). Judith Byfield argues that the rejection of European styles of clothing in favor of *adire* wrappers allowed women to be simultaneously modern and traditional (Byfield 2002: 70–73). Combining a locally produced indigo cloth wrapper with a tailored *buba* or blouse created a new look that was both rooted in Yoruban tradition and modern aesthetics.

— But the politics of resistance went deeper than the adoption of Yoruba style dress. In the following section, I argue that expressions of resistance can be seen in individual *adire* patterns themselves, not only in their use as fabrics.

**4. THE JUBILEE ADIRE PATTERN** — A specific cloth called *adire oloba*, meaning the „cloth with the king“, provides an example of a pattern which was altered over time to adapt to the changing face of power that governed Nigeria before, during and after its independence (**fig. 2**).<sup>3)</sup> The *adire oloba* was originally produced in 1935 on the occasion of the silver jubilee of King George V and Queen Mary’s reign. At the time of the jubilee there were a number of memorabilia produced to mark the event. They featured portraits of the two royals and often some symbols of the British monarchy such as lions, crowns, and coats of arms. When the objects and images arrived in Nigeria and were disseminated throughout the country, it inspired the creation of a commemorative pattern for the jubilee celebration. Since that time, the *oloba* pattern has become one of the most popular *adire* patterns ever created, and consequently, one of the most frequently imitated, meaning the cloths vary widely in appearance (**fig. 3**) (Gillow 2009: 82). Some scholars have used the term „devolution“ to describe the changes in the pattern’s appearance (Stanfield / Barbour / Simmonds 1971: 83–85). I suggest that while „devolution“ partly explains the differences in *oloba* cloths, some changes were intentionally applied over time in response to shifts in Nigeria’s leadership, and may even represent an act of agency or resistance on the part of the cloth’s makers.

— In many versions of the pattern certain things remain intact, including the double portrait enclosed in an oval frame, the crown on the queen, and the lion or beast motif. Additionally, a band of text appears at the edge of the cloth under the figures. Most likely, the original had an English phrase at the bottom that was later translated or changed entirely into a Yoruban phrase, as is the case with several versions of the cloth. In others, the text appears as shapes and is illegible, suggesting that the visuals were enough for people to know what the cloth meant. Any text or message was superfluous.

— In the example provided in this essay, a likeness to the King and Queen’s official portraiture is achieved, particularly through King George’s mustache and other little details, such as the part in his hair, and the queen’s jewelry and crown. Their names are also still intact near their heads. A few elements have clearly been drawn from the original jubilee paraphernalia, including the swords at the top and the lion motif that flanked the central portrait. Yet

3) For a comparative analysis of 6 different *oloba* cloths see George Jackson’s essay in Stanfield / Barbour / Simmonds 1971: 81–93.



// Figure 02  
Adire Oloba (detail of cloth), 20th century, cotton.



there are other elements that suggest the making of this pattern was not a straightforward appropriation of the British cultural imagery, but rather a blending and interpreting of one culture into another. First, at the top of the portrait is the Yoruban word *OYO*, referring to the largest and most powerful empire of the Yoruba. Within the word, the letter „O“ is replaced by a cowrie shell, formerly used as a form of currency and symbol of wealth. Thus, icons of British power and wealth are complemented by local symbols.

— Most compelling are the small bird motifs: one of which rests on the queen’s shoulder, another coming out of the king’s head, and in other cloths, the birds appear in the periphery of the portrait. I suggest these birds make visual reference to a Yoruba idiom of royalty in two ways: first, the bird near the King’s head recalls the Yoruba beaded crown, a piece of regalia worn exclusively by Yoruba kings with the divine right to rule, and distinguished by its conical shape and the appearance of birds on the sides and top (Thompson 1970: 8). Second, according to Yoruban mythology, the first king of Yoruba was aided by mythical large bird that helped him choose the location of his future kingdom. Only descendants of the many sons of the first king are able to reign over the Yoruba people. Additionally, other sources suggest that the Yoruban gods – upon creating the first female – gifted her with a bird, allowing her to counterbalance the power and advantages of men. Birds also appear on medicinal and divination staffs throughout Yorubaland, though the meanings of the birds, and indeed the accounts of Yoruba origination in general, differ widely from region to region (Ibid.: 16–17). Regardless of the interpretation, birds signify a clear link to power in Yoruba culture.

// Figure 03

Adire Oloba Wrapper: Workshop of Okseni Compound, 20th century, Ibadan region, cotton, Collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

— Thus the *oloba* came to represent royalty or power in general, losing its original associations with the king and queen of England, but gaining new ones over time. One could interpret the changing appearance of the pattern in a number of ways. My interpretation – that the blending of British and Yoruba icons of power, royalty and divinity, combined with the increasing anonymity of the king and queen’s appearance in the pattern over time suggest a subtle form of resistance to colonial rule on the part of those who produced the cloth – is supported by several developments.

— As I have recounted in the previous section, *adire* played a critical role in the making of a movement that voiced discontent with the colonial government and the imposition of a foreign culture and its values, by abandoning European dress. In addition, *adire*’s production and its effect on the local economy of Abeokuta was one of the focal points of the political action taken by Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti and her women’s union. Although we cannot know the individual intentions of the many *adire* pattern makers and dyers who created these textiles over the decades, we do know that many of these women were not only aware of the political climate, but were actively engaged in it. Thus, altering a pattern to reflect their grievances with the political situation was not unthinkable.

— The King George cloth also inspired the creation of subsequent cloths designed for new rulers. In 1936, a coronation *adire* cloth was made in anticipation of King Edward VIII’s ascension to the throne. The pattern features the would-be king without a crown and his name, misspelled though legible, above the queen’s head. It also features the word „Oba“, meaning „king“ in Yoruba, in the center below a crown motif. A later cloth bearing the date 1973 no longer featured a king or *oba* but rather depicted the Nigerian head of state Yakubu Gowon, who gained power through a military coup, and remained in power from 1966–1975. Despite the circumstances of his rise to power through militarist means, the leader is depicted in the pattern in the same manner of a king or *oba*. He is seated in a forward-facing position; his hands are placed squarely on his knees; his name is inscribed on the cloth, and he is dressed in a full-length robe and wears a crown. That these emblems of both British and Yoruban monarchy are appropriated for Gowon’s cloth suggest that the commemorative cloth was, in a sense, able to bestow power on the figure represented in its pattern, rather than simply symbolize that person’s power. Moreover, the specificity of the Edward VIII and Gowon cloths call into question the meaning

of cloths that are derived from the King George pattern but feature anonymous figures, bearing no names, dates, or identifying characteristics. These elements are typically very common in commemorative portrait cloths. Thus, for the *adire oloba* cloths to lack these elements suggests to me that what is being commemorated is no longer a specific ruler, but rather a tradition in and of itself. Just as other patterns such as the *adire oniko* continue to be produced to this day (despite the trend towards new and unique patterns at *adire's peak*), and today's ubiquity of patterns that lend themselves to easy, quick and cheap production, the *adire oloba* can also, on rare occasions, be produced and purchased.<sup>4)</sup> The reason behind the persistence of this pattern is, I suggest, not for the sake of the memory of King George's reign, but rather for preserving the memory of Yoruba visual culture, or *adire* itself.

## 5. ADIRE IN NIGERIAN MODERN ART AND THE PROJECT OF MEMORY

— We know through some *oloba* cloths that bear the date of their production that the more anonymous looking patterns were being produced by the 1960s (Stanfield / Barbour / Simmonds 1971: 83). By this time Nigeria was freshly independent and in the process of forming a national identity. Modern art played a part in this formation (Oloidi 1995: 192). Several of Nigeria's prominent modern art proponents were engaged in an ideological and aesthetic pursuit of a „Natural Synthesis“ that would selectively combine indigenous cultural forms and ideas with foreign ones so as to progress towards a new, modern artistic identity.<sup>5)</sup> These artists who formed the Zaria Art Society, and many others throughout the country, were engaged in a project of memory, a nostalgic rediscovering, exploring, preserving, and celebrating of their cultures that took on ethical, political and aesthetic dimensions (Onobrakpeya 1995: 195–197). Textiles, and *adire* in particular, played an underappreciated role in this project and in the body of work of the modern artists.

— In response to the call for a „Natural Synthesis“ Zaria artist Bruce Onobrakpeya began blending imagery from his own Urhobo culture and Yoruban culture with the printmaking and painting techniques he learned through the Western-style arts education he received at university. Rather than focus exclusively on Urhobo culture, Onobrakpeya appropriated the Yoruban *adire* cloth and some of its patterned imagery into his work as a gesture of synthesizing not just the foreign and the local, but the local with the local, in the interest of forming a national identity (Ibid.: 195).

4)

Interview with *adire* dyers in the compound of Iyaalaro Olayemi Showunmi in Abeokuta, March 3, 2014.

5)

The original manifesto of „Natural Synthesis“ written by Uche Okeke is reprinted in: Deliss 1995: 208-09.

Inspired by a phrase he saw on a postage stamp „one people one destiny“, Onobrakpeya began a series of works that explored the cultural production of the Yoruba people, beginning with a work titled *Ominira*, the Yoruba word for ‚independence‘ (Onobrakpeya 1992: 45). Thus, Onobrakpeya began to use the pattern language of *adire* to signify Nigerian culture as a whole, no longer just Yoruba culture exclusively.

— Several of Onobrakpeya’s paintings and prints appropriate the *adire oloba* pattern, as does an early untitled painting from 1959 that inspired a similar print years later in 1970 called *Have You Heard?* (fig. 4). Onobrakpeya used this pattern in his work when he „wanted to tell a story“. <sup>6)</sup> In *Have You Heard?*, as well as in the untitled painting, the pattern of two figures, which would have originally been the King and Queen, are shown side by side on the body of a woman who wears the textile as a wrapper. The title *Have You Heard?* refers to the rumors circulating in 1970 that Nigeria’s civil war had come to an end (Onobrakpeya 1992: 217). The three women that make up the composition, all of whom wear *adire* wrappers, are shown engaging in conversation. Once again, the pattern refers to the reigning power in Nigeria. As the Nigerian military regained control over the Biafra in Nigeria’s southeast region, the war abruptly ended and complete power over the country was restored to the government (Phillips). The abstraction and anonymity of the two figures in Onobrakpeya’s *Oloba* leave the fate of Nigeria’s leadership open-ended; indeed, the end of the war was followed by numerous military coups and changes in power.

— Onobrakpeya’s appropriation of *adire*’s pattern language raises an important issue that is common to historical narratives of modern art in Nigeria and beyond. Cultural production that has historically been labeled „craft“, „women’s work“ or merely „decorative“ has not only been regarded as inferior to the male dominated „high arts“, but, in many cases has served as its handmaiden. For example, the *Uli* experiment, lead by Nigerian artist Uche Okeke, explored the Igbo art form of linear body and wall painting called *uli* through drawing and painting on paper and canvas. Though the women who practiced *uli* are often given credit by the artists who appropriate their forms, the practice is regarded as frozen in the past and not as cultural production engaged in the present. As Nkiru Nzegwu convincingly argues, the appropriation

6) Bruce Onobrakpeya in conversation with the author, April 18, 2014.



// Figure 04  
Bruce Onobrakpeya, Untitled, 1959, painting.

of *uli* into modern art idioms and modern spaces reinforces the gender biases of cultural anthropology and brings them into art history (Nzegwu 2000). If practices such as *uli* and *adire* could be viewed as documents of Nigeria's modern era, as canvas painting and sculpture are, it would mean the expansion of the conception of modern art and a more comprehensive understanding of Nigeria's pre- and post-independence decades.

— One of Nigeria's best-known artists, Nike (Davies) Okundaye, has come closest to a practice that achieves the promotion of textile arts to the level of fine arts. She has done so through a lifelong career as a batik artist and painter who incorporates *adire* patterns onto her canvases. Additionally, she leads an enormous entrepreneurial and philanthropic effort to promote textile arts as Nigeria's cultural heritage, and as a way of earning a living for the many who have been trained through her workshops. These efforts, though crucial to the preservation of traditional *adire* patterns and techniques, lack the critical edge that would generate real change in the perception of textiles in Nigerian society.

— Thanks to Okundaye's work the art of *adire* has gained an international audience, as Nigeria's cultural heritage has been pushed beyond its borders through exhibitions, public and private collections, and its adoption by diaspora communities. While Okundaye and Onobrakpeya set a precedent for the use of *adire* in modern Nigerian art, a young Nigerian-American artist who is based in Lagos is using *adire*'s history and image to confront issues pertinent to Nigerians today.

## 6. TEMITAYO OGUNBIYI AND THE RE-INVENTION OF *ADIRE*

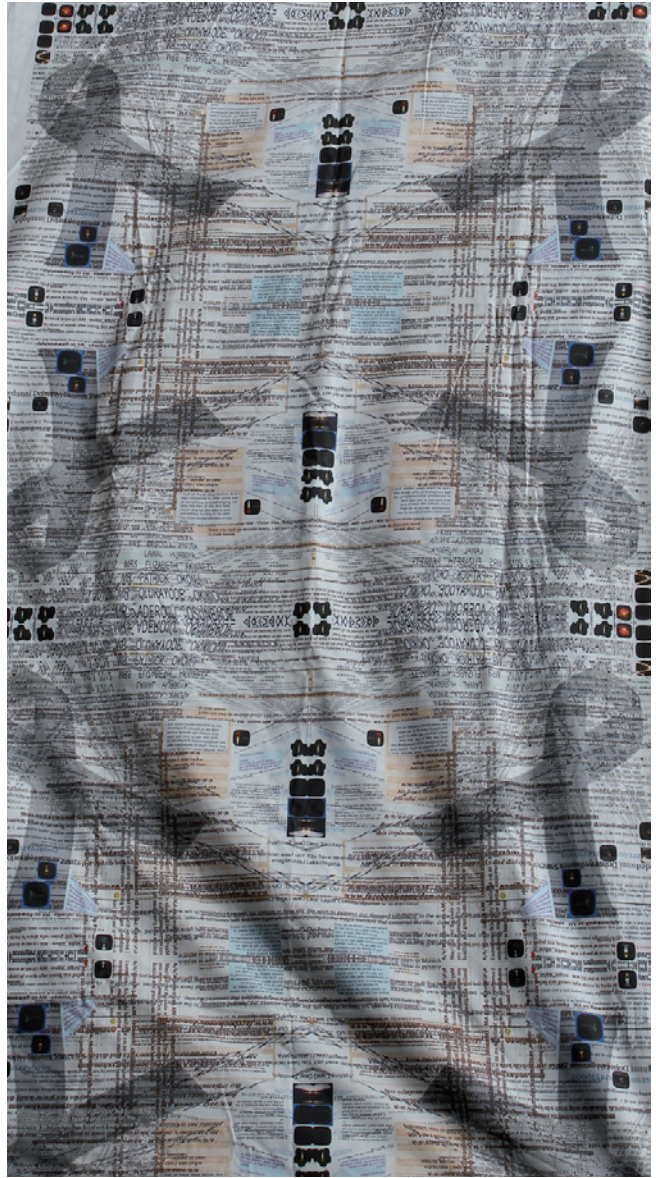
— Born in the United States to a Jamaican mother and a Nigerian father whose family comes from Abeokuta, Temitayo Ogunbiyi's textile-based practice explores themes of memory, history and migration. Since relocating from the U.S. to Lagos several years ago, Abeokuta's *adire* traditions have featured prominently in her work. Harnessing the connections to memory and the capacity for the fabric to communicate, Ogunbiyi takes *adire* out of the realm of modern art and its associations with national identity and reconfigured patterns, to relate to her younger, contemporary audiences. Despite the fact that many of her works are created in Nigeria, they often travel across borders and oceans, or undergo tie-dyeing in a layering of meaning that reflects the experiences of migration and of having a multicultural identity. Her works are steeped in the history of the indigo textile itself, which traces its

origins across the Sahelian regions of West Africa down to the coast of Nigeria. Several of her works feature a digitally reproduced *adire oniko* pattern she created with a photograph of the original cloth and manipulated digitally before reprinting it on fabric or paper. By combining the tradition of *adire* with personal elements drawn from the artist's experiences and communications with friends and family, Ogunbiyi inserts herself into the grand, collective narrative of history.

— *Towards Remembering 160-something* was designed from digital conversations extracted from email communication, Blackberry profiles and Facebook concerning the 2012 Dana Air crash in Lagos (fig. 5). First created as a digital collage, it was sent to the US to be printed on fabric, sent back to Lagos, then was brought to Abeokuta to undergo *kampala*, the modernized version of tie-dye that uses synthetic, imported dyes instead of indigo. Linking the piece to the tradition of commemorative cloths like the *adire oloba*, the textile served to memorialize those who died in the crash. Taking parts of digital conversations from the public, and part from her own private conversations, the artist constructs a history of the event through the voices of people throughout the globe who either experienced it first hand, or were affected by it abroad. Thus her contemporary textiles function in very similar ways to traditional ones: they communicate, they tell stories, and they commemorate events in ways that operate both personally and universally.

— The textile gained another level of meaning when it took a final voyage to London where it was installed at Nigeria House in conjunction with the 2012 Summer Olympics. The itinerary of the textile that brought it from Africa to the United States and the United Kingdom invokes the migration patterns of many who have left Nigeria, including the artist's father.<sup>7)</sup> Ogunbiyi's work harnesses the mobility of textiles and their communicative ability to address issues pertinent to the times, and in particular, pertinent to those whose own mobility and identity link them to multiple continents

7)  
The author in conversation with  
Temitayo Ogunbiyi, June 2012.



// Figure 05  
Temitayo Ogunbiyi, *Towards Remembering 160-something*, (detail of digital print cloth before undergoing *kampala* tie-dye), cotton, 2012. Copyright Temitayo Ogunbiyi.

and cultures. As Ogunbiyi and other female artists navigate a contemporary art world of Lagos which is still male-dominated and not yet accepting of more critically engaged work, she uses the language of the textile, and of Nigeria's traditional artistic past, to engage with contemporary issues through a visual vernacular that is socially acceptable.

— In a recent group exhibition called *The Progress of Love*, which was shown in Lagos at the Centre for Contemporary Art, Lagos, and at two locations in the United States, Ogunbiyi created a multi-media installation that included her signature textiles, but also included cell phones that audience members could use to send free messages of love to people around the world (fig. 6). Her work, and that of the other artists in the exhibition addressed the taboo subject of romantic love, which in the conservative and religious Christian and Islamic society of Nigeria, is often repressed or hidden, especially love which may be outside the accepted heterosexual, marital norms (Van Dyke et al. 2013: 116–117).

— The artist's use of social media, and communication technologies such as the cell phone, make her work very accessible to young Nigerians. But it also points to a growing trend of political activism through social media, and for young Nigerians, the cell phone has become the access mode of choice for using social media and skirting the country's restrictions on free speech (Taiwo 2010). Just as the textile was a vehicle for expressions of resistance and activism, the social media websites have become the new platform for today's generation, and the cell phone the cheap and easy way to reach it. The marriage of the textile and its pattern language with the ephemeral language of social media opens new areas for political engagement in an artistic media rooted in Nigeria's past and in the present.

**7. CONCLUSION** — In conclusion, we see in Ogunbiyi's work a navigating of a mixed, multinational identity where issues of gender are addressed through the appropriation of specific textiles whose histories reveal narratives of resistance, agency, and



// Figure 06  
Temitayo Ogunbiyi, *Lovely Love Text Message Books*, installation at the Centre for Contemporary Art, Lagos, 2012.

activism. Those narratives by and about women provide new perspectives on the development of modernity as it happened within Nigeria and in the West, and have the potential to increase our understanding of how history has been shaped through the movement of people, things and cultures across borders.

— Until the perspectives and production of Nigeria's textile weavers and dyers are taken as seriously as their artist contemporaries, and until a rigorous excavation of the women artists that have been written out of Nigeria's art historical narrative is undertaken, the picture of modernity in Nigeria will remain incomplete.<sup>8)</sup>

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**Fig. 1:** © Trustees of the British Museum.

**Fig. 2:** <http://hartcottagequilts.com/africantextiles3.ht>

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For a discussion of the erasure of women artists from Nigeria's art history see Layiwola 2013.

**Fig. 3:** © Metropolitan Museum of Art.

**Fig. 4:** Onobrakpeya 1995: 195–97.

**Fig. 5, 6:** Reprinted with permission from the artist.

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