

Reinventing Indigenous West African Fabric Design

for Contemporary Commercial Application

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Abstract

This study explores and reflects on the potential of global commercial application of indigenous West African fabric design in the middle to high-end interior textiles and surfaces. The study adopts design theory which encourages innovation and creativity in concepts for effective solutions. Theoretically, ideas have been utilized as a method of bringing to light the veiled aspects of practice in indigenous West African fabric production alongside its diverse and complex cultural connections. There is a practical component of the study utilizes a series of 'collaborations' with technology, new textile materials, color resources and global trends to generate forms or visual language that is then translated into commercial designs based on indigenous West African fabric themes. The experimentation has adapted traditional artistic and graphic aesthetics (symbols, design motifs, totems and insignia), creatively manipulating them via digital technology and using a mechanized printing process for completion. The designs exemplify a modern adaptation of indigenous West African design symbols for wider global markets which is hoped, will accelerate the transformation of such design forms for the contemporary market. It is anticipated that the new designs will continue to re-define indigenous West African textile expressions and their applications globally.

Keywords: *Contemporary Application, Indigenous Fabric Design, Cultural Conversation, West Africa*

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Introduction

This study seeks to increase the exposure and commercial application of indigenous West African fabric design. This entails experimentation with, and the production of, a range of practical textile samples and possibilities. Theoretically, the ideas of Sarat Maharaj's "Know-how and No-How: stopgap notes on "method" in visual arts as knowledge production" (Maharaj 2009) have been utilized as a method for bringing to light the idiosyncratic, or veiled* aspects of practice in indigenous West African textile production and its diverse and complex cultural connections. This concept of knowledge production in relation to indigenous West African textile production and their affiliation with culture, creates the opportunity for reflection and re-evaluation of the future of the industry. The practical component explores such cultural affiliations further by adopting new materials and processes. A broader set of unorthodox 'collaborations' with technology, new material and color resources are utilized to generate working designs and forms based on indigenous West African textile traditions. This experimentation adapts a traditional aesthetic language (textile fabrics, panels and clothing), creatively manipulating it with digital graphics techniques and using mechanized printing processes for completion. It further reflects on the mechanization and commercialisation of indigenous West African textiles through design and product experimentation.

West African textiles and clothing communicate important religious, historical and social information about the cultures to which they belong. They act as markers of status indicating wealth and conferring prestige; they identify members of specific cultural or social groups and play a significant part in ceremonies of initiation, marriage and death. Throughout history, the elite members of society, who created the necessary socio-political, cultural and economic environments for clothing practices to develop, have determined clothing trends. According to changing historical contexts, individuals and social groups, have used clothing as a form of body modification and to enhance their personal and social image and identity. Dress has also been instrumental in reinforcing images and social boundaries with outsiders; such images are both accentuated on the body itself or the clothes covering the body. According to Belting and Dunlap (2014), an image is more than a product of perception. It is created as the result of personal or collective knowledge and intention. People live with images as the result of personal or collective knowledge and intention. These associations exemplify individuals' bonds with cultural codes and conventions.

Although this research and practice mainly consider fabrics that find their application in interior decoration and architecture, it has drawn on studies concerning dress and clothing which have been the primary catalyst for fabric production in West Africa. Amongst the rich and varied forms of dress are the typical pieces of West African formal attire, including the knee-to-ankle-length, flowing *Boubou* robe, *Dashiki* and Senegalese *Kaftan* (also known as *Agbada* and *Babariga*), which have their origins in the clothing of the nobility of various West African empires in the 12th century. The traditional half-sleeved, hip-long, woven smocks or tunics known as *Fugu* in Gurunsi, *Riga* in Hausa, and worn over a pair of baggy trousers, are also a popular garment (Nordquist & Aradeon, 1975). They further noted that, in the beach-front districts extending from the southern Côte d'Ivoire to Benin, a substantial rectangular length of material is wrapped under one arm, hung over a shoulder and held in one of the wearer's hands; this dress is reminiscent of ancient Roman robes. The best-known of these robe-like articles of clothing is the *Kente* (made by the Akan of Ghana

and Côte d'Ivoire), who wear them as a symbol of national pride. Weaving fabrics and stitching them into garments have been regular customs in West Africa. The practice predates modern record keeping and historical examples can be seen in museums, archives and the documentation of different breeches, shirts, tunics and coats (Rattray et al., 1927).

Traditional activities such as festivals and celebrations of war victories and heroism, cultural symbolism and the decrees of kings, chiefs and overlords have all contributed to the shaping of fabric design and manufacture in the region. Gordon (2011) states that, for sacred celebrations, men and women clothe themselves in meaning that is alive and changing, yet anchored in beliefs. For a long time in Ghana, to appear at an important event wearing cloth in the same pattern as the most prominent or eminent chief has been considered an affront. Forward-thinking chiefs largely avoid such social blunders by commissioning new clothes from a local weaver in innovative patterns and colors for the most important occasions. This commission is then undertaken with a commitment from the weaver not to copy it until after the event when requests for replication are considered a compliment. Such cultural interactions and dynamics continue to drive creativity and innovation in textile production in the region.

At this point it should be stressed that the incorporation of contemporary digital printing techniques for the experiments should not be misconstrued in any way as superior to the handmade, traditional textile design traditions of the region; they should be complementary to those individuals and agencies that are working to protect them. The activities of such individuals and agencies that are working with some communities to produce handmade pieces using traditional textile production techniques are commendable. These initiatives must be encouraged as there is still a market for such products. Ethical fashion enterprises such as Fashion4Development (a global campaign that uses fashion-based initiatives to support the United Nations' broader issues in helping Africa) and the UN's International Trade Centre (ITC) Ethical Fashion Initiative, a project which connects the fashion business with African artisans, are bringing issues such as development, poverty reduction and environmental sustainability into wider focus. Since 2011, Fashion4Development, in collaboration with the United Nations, has been working with identifiable groups and individual designers in Ghana, Nigeria, Senegal and other African countries. Top fashion brands such as the British designers Vivienne Westwood and Stella McCartney, Australia's Sass and Bide and Italy's Ilaria Venturini Fendi are participating in such initiatives and working with indigenous communities to create fashion products featuring ethnic-influenced patterns, prints and designs inspired by the land and culture of the Kikuyu, Maasai, Samburu and other East African tribes (Phipps-Rufus 2013). Such efforts are very encouraging as there is enough evidence to demonstrate that these production practices are creating sustainable employment for marginalized women and disadvantaged groups.

Methodology

The Design Process

The following sections give an account of the various experiments and design outcomes undertaken during this study. The study adopts the design theory which encourages innovation and creativity in concepts for effective solutions. This further exposes textiles as a functional and decorative form based on underlining principles. It considers trend drivers and mood images, design elements, graphic compositions, print and product direc-

tions (with the theme of cultural conservations). Color has been the single most important and expressive resource for these designs. The final design produced based on the theme “cultural conversations” carried symbolic connotations or interpretations that highlight the rich culture of the people in West Africa. This theme was chosen because there is a seemingly endless cycle of dialogue between West African cultural elements used in the modern European context. It is worth noting that, this study adopted a more qualitative interpretation approach to evaluate the symbolism of the motifs, elements, and colors used in the products. Additionally, consumers were not consulted to provide any comments on the products produced in this study.

Trend Drivers and Mood Images

Trend drivers are usually catch phrases or words that underpin the designs; in this instance, words such as luxury, royalty, quality, and passion. These drivers inform material, processes, and outcome and by extension provide an opportunity to improve material efficiency and product output. Mood images can set the thematic setting for a design or explain its function in a piece of work. In this context, mood images are taken from West African culture, ecology, indigenous art, and design practices. It is a collection of textures, images and abstractions related to the design theme as a reference point. The practice tapped into the semiotics of West African fabric culture as illustrated in the ‘mood images’ in Figure 1. The selection of these images is for illustration. However, the mood images selection can vary greatly depending on the desired design outcome.



Figure 1. Mood Images (Culture). (Source: Douglas Anane-Frimpong - Photo Editor GCG, Ghana).

Design Elements

Forming the foundation for the design practice, elements were sourced from different cultural symbols. It is interesting that, these elements are rich in symbolic connotations widely cherished by the people. Figure 2 a-e shows the various design elements from different cultural symbols. These elements are either abstract or figurative shapes of animals and humans which depicts the historical meanings and symbolical significance in the culture.

Figures 2 (a-e) below, depict various design elements from different cultural symbols.

















 Funtumfunafu-Denkyemfunafu (The siamese crocodile) Symbol of Destiny	 Kae Me (Remember me) Symbol of Faithfulness	 Me Ware Wo (I shall marry you) Symbol of Commitment	 Odenkyem (Crocodile) Symbol of Adaptation
 Gye Nyame (Except God) Symbol of Omnipotence and immortality of God	 Dwanini Mmen (Ram's Horns) Symbol of Concealment	 Fofool'Folo (Seeds of Bidens Pilosa) Symbol of Jealousy	 Ntesie - Mate Masie (I have heard and kept it) Symbol of Wisdom and Knowledge
 Gyewu Aliku (The back of Gyewu's head) Symbol of Leadership	 Epa (Handcuffs) Symbol of Law and Justice	 Mmra Krado (Seal of the law) Symbol of Justice	 Nyamedua (An altar to God) Symbol of Worship and Devotion
 Hwehwemudua (Measuring rod) Symbol of Quality and Standard	 Ese Ne Tekrema (The Teeth and The Tongue) Symbol of Interdependency	 Nkyinkyini - Ohemmaa nkyinkyin (Changing oneself) Symbol of Adjustment	 Nsaa (A type of Blanket) Symbol Value and Quality

Figure 2a. Selected Adinkra symbols and their meanings.




















 Beds of Bamboo and Millet	 Grasshopper neck	 Farmers Sickle (another version)	 House of Calabash flowers
 Wealth and Luxury	 Spindle	 Fini N'Goloni Sirakele (one twisted road)	 Iguana's Elbow
 Farmers Sickle	 Wealth and Luxury (another version)	 Kolowi (Cowrie Shell)	 Iguana's Elbow
 Brave and Fearless	 Small drum	 Mali	 Yiri Boulou (tree leaves)
 Stream called the Wuwanyaniko	 Mauritanian women's cushion	 Calabash Flowers	

Figure 2b. Selected Bogolanfina motifs and their meanings. (Source: National Museum of African Art, Smithsonian Institution).

















	Adan (Bat)		Eye (Bird)		Agufon (Crested Crane)		Eye (Bird)
	Sekeseke (Cuffs)		Opolo (Frog)		Opolle Mapo (Mapo pillars)		Alangba Berekete (Fat lizard)
	Oga (Chamele)		Ejo (Snake)		Orunkun Aro Oga (Chameleon)		Ooya (Comb)
	Oobe (Smaller Bat)		Amuga (Scissors)		Kokoro (Key)		Alangba (Lizard)

Figure 2c. Selected Adire motifs and their meanings (Areo and Kalilu 2013).















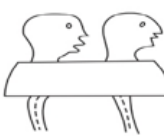
		
		
		
		
		

Figure 2d. Fon Appliqué insignias (Kent 1971).



Figure 2e. Ibadan dun – layout. (Source: National Museum of African Art, Smithsonian Institution).

Graphic Composition

The graphic composition encompasses the various stages of design evolution and development to finished products. Most of the symbols and images referenced for the designs lack elasticity when compared with other motifs such as those found in oriental and classical designs. This is because the motifs are generally representations of humans, animals or plants and it is easy for the viewer to recognise if they are placed say, upside-down. Because of their apparent lack of elasticity, placement or composition of designs was quite challenging. For instance, when working with lines, there is some flexibility of the placing and orientation without necessarily distorting the meaning and outcome (this is illustrated in Figure 3 left, with a random multicolored line-oriented composition). However, the composition may appear distorted when some symbols and images are not placed ‘appropriately’ regardless of any innovation or alteration as in Figure 3, right.

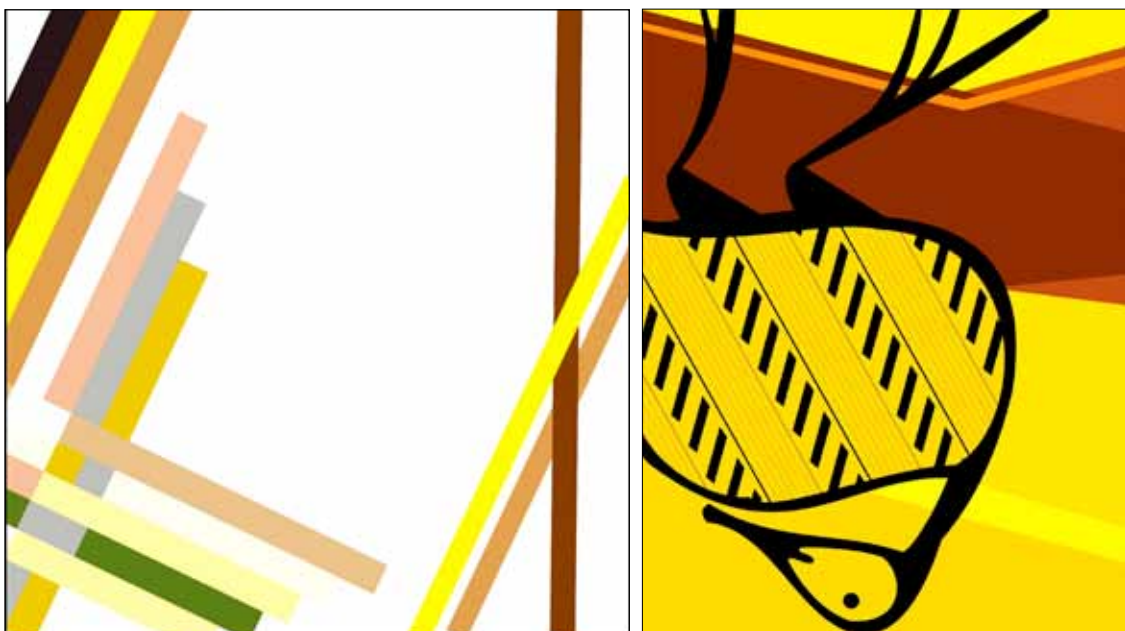


Figure 3. Left, Simple line design. Right, Motif placed up-side-down.

Figure 4 is an experimental graphic composition of multiple visuals of indigenous West African textile motifs and expressions that have been used to form one cohesive design composition. The composition could be said to be a corruption of West African symbolism because it features Adinkra symbols such as *Due Afe*, *Donno*, *Bese Saka*, *Gewu Etiko*, *Krapa*, and *Funtunfunafu* which have varied meanings and to some extent contradict each other. Furthermore, traditionally the symbols are always rendered in dark block tones, but in this instance, they are mainly mid to light tones on an uncharacteristic strong cocktail of colors as a background. This composition, and for that matter most of the designs in this experiment, reinforce the idea that this study seeks to project aesthetic appeal rather than symbolic connotation; hence the combination of unrelated motifs/symbols rendered in varied forms. In some instances, a single motif is used in the composition. The various design components including color are arranged, distributed and aligned in a way that not only has an aesthetic appeal but is also geared towards different product trajectories.



Figure 4. Graphic Composition.

The bright, vivid, colorful and animated textile fabrics of West Africa have inspired these explorative designs. The ideas were experimented with using bold drawings of traditional motifs with no textures. The strong background colors were intended to compensate for the lack of texture and to provide some space for the viewer to navigate through the composition. Bold drawings and a variety of geometric shapes have been used to make the designs elegant and rich to correspond with the end products. The bold motifs and geometric backgrounds filled with flat colors, optically contrast with the animated overlaid motifs. The concepts and design outcomes can be interpreted as filters through which one can look back in history and simultaneously look into the future for West African textile design practice. The designs are premised on conceptual art practices of West Africa and international perspectives of art and design production and the experiments migrate from traditional materials and practice into more exploratory materials and products.

Cultural Conversations

As mentioned above 'Cultural Conversations' is a general theme adopted for the series of continued experimentation with West African motifs in this study. This theme was chosen because there is a seemingly endless cycle of dialogue between West African cultural elements used in the modern European context. It is believed that the modern design context as experimented in this study can transcend time and interact with history and traditional protocols even though the outcomes are more futuristic. Manuel Castells as cited by Tardif (2002) contends that identity and the need for recognition, along with technological change, constitute the constants that create history. Cultural Conversations represent a stylistic evolution of combining indigenous designs with the new materials and technologies currently available. The designs aim to have a wide appeal and application despite the obvious references to West African design culture. There are combinations of unrelated motifs (combining motifs from different ethnic and indigenous design culture of West Africa) in the compositions. The combination of the various elements in the design composition seeks to create an amazing sensorial and semantic impact when considered in their entirety. The use of color has been an essential part of this project; the 'high impact' colored compositions have been sourced from a cross-section of global color trend forecasting and the landscape (ecology, culture and wildlife) of West Africa.

Cultural Conversations: Vortex

The range of designs in this category is a story with many interpretations. First thoughts inevitably turn to the boldness and sturdiness of designs. However, the vivid colors and their predictable associations with Bogolanfini fabric designs do not make up the full picture. Instead, blush colors, in broad vortex background shapes, celebrate a creative renaissance of design/color/technology collaboration. The colors and motifs in the designs represent this duality, soft, strong colors and radiating multicolored circular backgrounds contrasting sharply with dark veins and with the rudimentary white overlay of motifs. A breadth of colors such as canary yellow, rich salmon and sea blue has been set against a range of dark tones, including brown and grey, recalling the vast suburban sprawls of modern West African societies and their diversity in taste and preferences. The designs are characterized by bold circular color blocks, rich colors and an ornate overlay of motifs. The designs (Figure 5) could be used for products such as curtains and textile accessories.



Figure 5. Vortex - Part of Cultural Conversations Collection.

Cultural Conversations: Story Boards

Story Board is a mixed motif experimental design range inspired by the diverse lifestyles of the people of West Africa. These bright and loud panel designs encompass unusual colors such as pinks, greys, cobalt blue, sulphurous yellow, rich copper and blues. The atmosphere and responses created by the combination of images in the panels evoke a sense of mysticism. Similar to all the collection in the Cultural Conversations, the compositions comprise a collection of unrelated motifs with diverse historical and ethnic antecedence. These are designs that celebrate the many facets of life in West Africa; festivals, eating together, storytelling and belonging. Inspirations such as these are in constant flux with a blurred aesthetic coupled with subtle but solid flat colored backgrounds that are firm. Figure 6 is one of the designs in the storyboard category.



Figure 6. Story Board - Part of Cultural Conversations Collection.

Cultural Conversation Show

The design experiments culminated into a final show at the Winchester School of Art Library, University of Southampton. The show was dubbed Cultural Conversations in line with the central theme that informed the designs throughout the study. The designs for the show present an engaging examination of the textile design traditions of West Africa as a region, exploring the various design and production techniques constituting fabric creation in Ghana, Togo, Nigeria, Mali, Benin and Cote d' Ivoire by analyzing the symbols and iconography of those designs, considering the cultural implications.

The show featured a cocktail of fabrics, upholstered chairs, wall panels and digital design slideshow that featured over 200 images. The fabrics that measured 3 metres each were printed in silk, cotton panama, cotton poplin, cotton sateen, jersey and soft canvas (Figure 7).



Figure 7. A cross-section - Cultural Conversation Show.

The fabric designs (Figure 8) were set in mid to dark tone backgrounds in line with the general position of the practice. The strong but flat background makes up for the lack of textures and so that the viewers will be able to navigate around and engage with the bold symbols. Most of the images used in the designs may appear the same and sometimes symmetrical, but that is an optical illusion. The contrast of images and color was superlative which gave the set-up a gray ambience and some vibrant energy.



Figure 8. Assorted fabrics – Cultural Conversation Show.

The retro chairs (Figure 9) used for the show are more complimentary but yet infuse the space with contemporary notes. These chairs were selected because of the broad surfaces to accommodate the bold and imposing images. The leg and frame are made from beech

wood, foam and the fabrics are soft velvet. The fabric has water repellent properties so that the chair can be wiped down with a damp cloth and given a regular brush to keep the fibres smooth, soft and sumptuous. Even though the chairs fit into the product trajectory of the research, their engagement and arrangement in the show are also signifiers of conversations in line with the central theme of the show.



Figure 9. Chairs and Cushions – Cultural Conversations Show.

The 300 cm by 150 cm storyboard (Figure 10) is a stylistic representation of Fon applique ideographs to tell a story. This is part of a contemporary narrative that put unlikely symbols together to bring reflection on indigenous West African history. The storyboard exhibited in the show is an important piece because it has taken the Fon appliqué imagery and storytelling practice and adapted to contemporary digital design and digital printing technique and to satirically put forth a dialogue to engage the viewer's thought and reflection on the role African leaders played during the colonial era.



Figure 10. Story Boards, *The Ambush of Agadja* - Cultural Conversations Show.

The piece encompasses *Tegbessou*, the buffalo in tunic at the top left; *Glele*, the lion at the bottom left; *Agadja*, the ship in the middle; *Kpengla*, the sparrow at the top right; at the bottom is a connection of slave shackles and a four-arm spindle showing the way on top and

both sides. *Tegbessou*, *Glele*, *Agadja* and *Kpengla* were famous kings of Dahomey, modern-day Benin. However, as indicated in the chapter three King Agadja was vicious, and he is known for trading in slaves hence the slave ship as an insignia. This story board has recreated an ambush of Agadja by the other kings. The shackles across the bottom indicate an arrest and cessation of cruelty and the three spindle symbols spread across the board signify hope in skills and dexterity which represent the future of West Africa. The *Story Boards* reinforce the concept of cultural conversations that has been advocated through the practice and is an expansion of critical reflection and development. They emerged from a range of experimentation and testing before arriving at this final composition. Typically, one composition takes up to 25 to 50 different attempts to arrive at a satisfactorily coherent piece.

Results and Discussion

The designs project the complex nature of the various propositions within the practice and research and the commercial and cultural realities within West African and global textile design as an area of practice and commercial production. It also explores the development of pan-regional design imagery that sensitively adapts symbols and patterns from the range of cultural designs. Marrying them to contemporary colors from commercial trend forecasting about upcoming fashionable color pathways, all in pursuit of creating commercially appealing textiles for use in a breadth of product within the international design industry. The long-term aims include increasing the potential for West Africa as a textile design industrial centre in the global economy, thereby enhancing the economic growth for the region, and raising the profile and increasing the prestige of West African design traditions through sensitive adaptations and updates of the same by both West African designers and designers elsewhere. It is anticipated that this allows the West African perspective to come to the fore, that is, if designers of the region themselves are engaged in creative applications and creating cultural conversations across the different culture's design traditions. This will encourage other designers to utilise West African designs as a fresh expression and hence revitalise these practices for contemporary tastes and new applications.

The designs in the entire collection are a seemingly visual abstraction over naturalistic representation. This is because almost all West African visual expressions, regardless of medium, represent objects or ideas rather than depict them. Even the portrait heads of Ile-Ife in Nigeria, usually thought of as naturalistic representations of rulers, have been smoothed and simplified to abstract and generalized stylistic norms. Design innovation for products in the various experimentations have come from art forms from various locations in West Africa. Most of the artists and designers discussed in this study use West African design forms as a way to transform society. The aspects of activism prevalent in some of their work challenge convention and reinforce the importance of creativity. The motifs used in the various compositions are signifiers, and all the experiments in this research are very much another kind of narrative and create a reference from West African themes.

Some aspects of this study, arguments and the practical component go against the grain of most established notions of conservation and the 'purity' of West African design ethics because of the obvious cultural leaps and unusual permutations, such as combining Adinkra symbols and Fon pictographs in one composition. However, all of these seeming cultural leaps create new ways for the wider world to interact with West African designs. This is so because the practical experimentation has led to a unique set of surface designs. The de-

signs exemplify a modern adaptation of indigenous West African design symbols to wider, global markets which it is hoped will accelerate the transformation of such design forms for the contemporary market. It is believed that West African cultural expression should not be restricted by legal ownership and should be available as a resource and reference for designers. This would expand the dimension of African culture globally and allow it to become a constant part of the global design discourse. Even though it has been advocated in this study that there must be access to cultural resources, this must be accompanied by adequate documentation, reasonable education and a mutual frame of reference. This recommendation is necessary as there are variations in the cultural resources that are used; some could be used without any permission; others could be used with permission and clearance from the 'owners' or custodians. There are other forms of cultural resources that are deemed as sacred or as items of worship and are therefore not permitted to be used in any commercial production. Since the design experiments in this study have a commercial dimension and potential such sacred symbols/objects have been avoided. The experimentation with different materials aims to offer a fresh and optimistic vision for textile production in West Africa.

Implications of the Study

The implications from the creative activities in this study encompass economic opportunities, cultural exchange, cultural preservation and sustainability for practice and stakeholders. The popularity of the design elements used in the textile prints will expose the various communities to economic tourism. Also, designers adopting this design concept to produce textile prints will gain great interest and recognition hence resulting in an influence of demands for these products from local and international. This will lead to increased incomes that would go along way to improve livelihoods. Secondly, the presence of these textile prints in foreign markets will promote appreciation, exchange of cultures and deep understanding of cultural backgrounds with symbolic meanings. Lastly, the practice of adopting cultural elements in textiles prints with symbolic expressions (which clearly reflects on the rich history and cultural heritage), will aid to preserve the traditions in West African cultures passed from generations to generations.

Conclusion

The West African wax print fabric is a defining metaphor of African design, fashion and expression, an immediately recognizable icon throughout the world. However, without the mechanization and marketing strategy of the Europeans, and then later, Asian traders, would wax prints exist at all? Moreover, would the perception of African design be completely different (Relph and Irwin 2010). On the back of these rhetorical questions, it is being advocated that there should be innovative ways of considering indigenous West African textile design trajectories in a very dynamic global space. Sudanese designer, Omer Asim, has suggested that West African textile fabrics could be used to produce advanced, creative and contemporary designs reflective of the limitless artistic possibilities 21st-century education, technology and multimedia provide. Omer Asim adds that African designers have to be recognized for using their heritage in a way that contributes to the evolution of their culture, by creating contemporary versions of their traditional crafts. However, contrary to this study's more liberal views on accessibility and the use of African designs by all regardless of race or ethnicity, Omer Asim believes that European designers choose certain colors or materials without necessarily understanding their value. He pushes forward the

idea that the onus falls on 'local' designers to interpret culture and mediate its interface with the rest of the world to ensure its accessibility to Western understanding. Surely, in the spirit of creativity, there can be collaborations and sharing between indigenous West African designers and non-indigenes. Such collaborations and sharing would help safeguard the 'integrity' of sacred and restricted cultural artefacts and ensure that they are not 'appropriated,' degraded or subverted. Such sharing would be mutually beneficial as West African textiles cannot make a significant global impact if it is seen through the parochial lenses of authenticity and indigeneity that bother more on excessive cultural retention.

Furthermore, contemporary art in most cases is a result of creative experimentation with the past and in the process, restructuring, and reinventing past art traditions using modern techniques for creative innovation. The experimentations have interrogated the question of how to update designs and production techniques through the use of contemporary technological advances in digital printing and design development with the use of Adobe Illustrator, Photoshop, The CorelDraw software and printing by digital fabric printers. Broadening creative sensibilities to expand the use of indigenous West African textile designs would, therefore, lead to preserving ancient textile-making techniques which are on the verge of dying out, to the benefit of the current generation and the future. The designs are an essential part of a re-evaluation of existing imagery for new forms and design endeavours and in order to build a greater awareness of West African design cultures. It is intended that these designs would create a new showcase for West Africa's creative energies and reinforce the diversity of the region's design history.

Note

Omer Asim is a Sudanese designer living and working in London. He graduated from The Bartlett School of Architecture before completing a postgraduate at the London School of Economics and Political Science. He later attended Central Saint Martins specializing in creative pattern cutting. Asim learned his craft through a number of internships starting with Maurice Sedwell of Savile Row and ending at Vivienne Westwood. He launched his fashion label in 2011.

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