ANALYZING ONYIGE'S *AGBADIH* TRADITIONAL MUSICAL INSTRUMENT OF OGBA PEOPLE AS SYMBOLIC NARRATIVE FOR BATIK TEXTILE FABRIC PRODUCTION

BY

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Abstract

Ogbaland is situated in Ogba/Egbema/Ndoni Local Government Area of Rivers State. Ogbaland is largely blessed with rich cultural and traditional values. These values have been able to pass on from generation to generation. One of such cultural values is their musical instruments. Musical instruments mean a lot to them because they are employed to entertain people during cultural events. They are also used as a medium to disseminate information. It serves as symbol for the promotion and preservation of the people's cultural heritage. Observably, findings in recent times in Ogbaland has shown that other foreign musical instruments are being used for just functions in the area, neglecting the use of especially the Agbadih (wooden animal skin drum) of Ogba people. This situation presently is affecting younger generation of Ogba people because it has prevented most of them to know the traditional musical instruments of Ogbaland. Thus, to preserve the culture from eroding into extinction, Oruchi decided to document the *Aghadih* (wooden animal skin drum) by adopting it as a motif on fabric to produce batik textile fabric to create a cultural identity for the people, Finally, the batik fabric produced commands aesthetic value due to the unique simplicity of one colour that was used to produce the work, thus, it was what created the interest for the reviewer to review the work. The paper alter all analysis concluded and recommends that further documentation should be carried out on other musical instruments of Ogba people.

Keywords; Ogbaland. *Agbadih.* Musical instrument. Batik

Introduction

The effort of artist in promoting, sustaining and preserving the cultures of people in our society is helping to preserve the cultural traditions of our people. In view of this fact, Oruchi Onyige who happens to be a textile artist, and has practice for about two decade decided to use the musical instruments of Ogba people as symbolic motif on fabric to produce fabric, using the batik technique. The aim of using the *Agbadih* (wooden animal skin

drum) as a symbolic motif to produce the fabric according to Onyige (2018) was to document the musical instruments and culture of the people. The need to use that technique to produce the fabric was aimed at ensuring that the musical instrument is well showcased or present on the fabric, this is because, batik according to Banjoko (2000) has a magical quality or secret writing technique to sustain signs, symbols and motifs on fabrics. Banjoko adds that batik is an Indonesian word, derived from the word "tik" meaning "a little bit'- or "a drop". This refers to the tiny drops of hot melted wax used on the design to resist the dye. The tradition is held to have originated in Java, the most populated Island in Indonesia, the batik process is another popular dye-resist technique in which the design is applied to the materials via a substance that will resist the action of the dye. This resistant substance is commonly wax. It is usually applied or the fabric to resist dye to get into all the parts of the fabrics. This technique was adopted in producing the work being analyzed.

The production of this batik fabric no doubt has helped in documenting, promoting and preserving the drum activities in Ogbaland, but largely it has also expanded the genre of batik technique of fabric production. Vividly, viewing the batik fabric produced, it shows that the fabric is endowed with a very appealing rich colour which helps to protect the drum. Also, the dexterous manipulation of the wax also helps a lot in defining the drum for easy identification. Importantly, the colour appeal, aesthetic values, medium relevance and social-cultural value of the fabric inspired the analysis of the fabric.

Oruchi Onyige was a graduate of the River State College of Education Port Harcourt (Now Ignatius Ajuru University of Education) and she specialized in textiles. As a trained textile educationist she has been leaching textile in schools in Port Harcourt metropolis. Oruchi is an indigene of Ogba/Egbema/Ndoni Local Government Area of Rivers Slate. She loves promoting and preserving her culture which led her to use the *Agbadih* (Wooden animal skin drum) as a symbolic motif on fabric to produce this textile fabric under analysis.

This is a fact because most of her works reflect the culture of her ethnic group which is the Ogbaland.

Ogbaland is noted for her rich cultural heritage and one of such is the traditional musical instrument which is showcased through different medium. Drumming is one major aspect of cultural ceremonies and events in Ogbaland. Generally, drum is very important because it act as a medium of communication, interaction and for entertainment purposes. Basically, drum in Ogbaland guides

dancers and also direct their steps on performance. This is largely exposed during marriages and other cultural activities and masquerade performances. Polk (2006) opines dance is the movement to the beat effect on an individual. Polk adds it puts participants onto the same values united by the thread of music beat. One thing that makes musical beats very interesting is drumming or instrumental beats. The word "drum" according to Hornby (2010) is a musical instrument made of a hollow round frame with plastic or skin stretched lightly across one end or both ends which is played by batting it with slick(s) called drumsticks or simply with the hands. Akpabio (2003) points out that drums made of skin are common all over the continent of Africa where they are used as musical instruments accompanying song and dance performances, but also confirms that some are capable of "talking" in the situation of the Ogba people different types of traditional drums are used for cultural performances, as shown on the textile fabric produced which is under analysis. The *Agbedih* drum is made of wood and animal skin and it is usually beaten with a wooden slick or hand.

As stated earlier the need to analyzing this work becomes relevant due to the aesthetic value of the motif of fabric and the innovative batik technique adopted to produce the work. Also, due to the socio-cultural, traditional and educational values of the fabric in trying to educate younger generations about the cultural traditions of the people.

Theoretical Implication of the *Oruchi's Agbadih* Batik Fabric

Theories are mediums which aid people to better identify, explain, interpret and understand artworks. It is obvious that theories have been able to make known the essence of art in terms of a single key concept such as expression" or the knowledge of art theories has also helped in enabling people to carefully examine and explain the concept of art and distinguish them accordingly from another event. Art theory according to Collins English Dictionary (2019} is a formal idea or set of ideas that is intended to explain something. Similarly. Webster's definition of art theory adds that art is also an abstract thought, speculation and principles of a body of fact etc.

There are different kinds of art theories today in our society which are propounded by theorists but for this analysis, it is believed that the artist Oruchi Onyige was largely guided by expression theory to produce the textile fabric thus, the analysis of the fabric is analyzed based on expression theory. Expression theory is a theory that relates the emotional life of the artist to be the emotional impact of the work of art. This theory holds that an artist needs to have experience with an emotion in order to express it to viewers through a work of art. Although it's not necessary for an artist to be sad when producing a batik textile fabric, a picture expressing sadness, the artist must have felt sadness at some point and be able to recall the experience. This theory was popularized by Leo Tolstoy and Robin George Collingwood. Matravers (2009:1) States that Leo Tolstoy was the best analyst of the expression theory. Matravers adds that the term "expression theory" has a broad and a narrow usage. According to Noel (1999:61) Leo Tolstoy in this theory of expression thinks of expression as a form of communication in art. While Collingwood in his view also sees art as the (1965: expression of emotion (Kemp. 2017). According to Khatchadourian 336) while also viewing Leo Tolstoy's expression theory sees "a work of art as an expression of the artist's feelings and emotions embodied in it by the artists. The simplest interpretation one can give to the assertion given by the author, concerning the theory is that when one expresses himself to another, the person has expressed an emotional feeling to the other. Very important to note is that the mode of communication differs from artistic communication. Artistic communication deals with visual presentation as a form of communication and this communication reflects emotions as it were in the expression theory. Just as the mathematician uses number, so artists use lines to communicate or express themselves. As a musician communicates through notes and sounds, artists use form, space and texture to express themselves.

Bruyn (2017) while viewing the definition of art by Tolstoy as it relates to his expression theory points out that Tolstoy defines it; art is an expression of a feeling or experience in such a way that the audience to whom the art is directed can share their feeling or experience. Bruyn adds that Tolstoy also claims that interpretation or criticism of art is irrelevant and unnecessary, because any good work or art is able to express thoughts and feelings which can be dearly understood by most people. Bruyu further explains that Tolstoy argues that any explanation of such thoughts and feelings is supper flows because art ultimately communicates feelings and experiences in a way which cannot be expressed by any words. Going by the meanings and assertions made by the authors cited, it is obvious that expression theory is built based on the expression of emotions, feelings and communication of issues, situations and events among others. The basic fact that is derived from this theory as it relates to this study is that it helps and

guided Oruchi Onyige in a visual form to communicate and express the Agbadih musical drum which is gradually sliding into extinction due to the influence of Western musical drums or instruments.

Analysis of Agbadih (Wooden Animal Skin Drum) as Motif on Batik Fabric



Plate 1

Artist; Oruchi Onyige

Title; Agbadih (Wooden animal skin)

M.eduim; Batik

Size; 5 yards

Year; 2018

Drum as a musical instrument is very important to Ogba people because it acts as a medium of communication, interaction and for entertainment purposes. Basically, drum in Ogbaland guides dancers and also directs their steps during festivals performances. The drum or musical instrument used in producing this Batik fabric is called and known as "Agbadih" in the local dialect of Ogba people, in English translation means drum. This type of drum is usually constructed with hollow wood, covered with animal skin. According to Akpabio (2003) drums made of skin are common all over the continent of Africa where they are used as musical instruments, accompanying song and dance performances, but also confirmed that some are capable of “talking”. In the situation of the musical instrument, or drum appearing on the Batik fabric produced for this study, the drum fabric produced for this study,

is mostly used during ceremonies and festivals. The basic inspiration for the use of this wooden and animal-skinned wrapped drum or musical instrument is the physical appearance and construction of the drum. Another has to do with the statement by Alvaro Obregon that "One must look at the richness of your past culture and integrate it into the present (Obregon, 2016), It became imperative to preserve this drum because of its use in Ogbaland which is fast eroding due to the influence of modern western musical instruments dominating the modern African societies.

The structure and composition of the drum as a motif for the Batik fabric production conforms with the principles of art. The drum on the fabric is done repeatedly and shows a good balance. The work is just produced in purple colour. Therefore, it reflects purple colour and white which are the original colours of the fabric. The work was produced with the careful development of thumbnail sketches of the drum as a motif which guided the study with a manipulation of stenciling of the motif and waxing of the fabric with wax. The process of exploration was diligently followed, which accomplished the production of the fabric design.

The need for the production of the fabric with the "Agbadih" (wooden drum) in batik is aimed at preserving, sustaining and promoting the drum culture and history of Ogba people. And it was motivated by the philosophical statement by Hodgson (2016) who states that art and cultural practice is one of the most participatory, dynamic and social forms of human behaviour. Hodgson adds that it can trigger reflection, generate empathy, create dialogue and foster new ideas and relationships and offers a powerful and democratic way of expressing and sharing values. Hodgson further states that it can help us build new capabilities and understand how to imagine and recharge a different way of being and relating. It can enable us to design useful and meaningful things and increase the source of our livelihood. Critically viewing the statement of art and culture allows us to express our cultural values and potential. This is what largely motivated the researcher to document the Arochi Agbadih wooden drum musical instrument of Ogbaland in batik textile fabric production.

Cultural, Historical and Philosophical Content

This batik fabric work entitled Agbadih (wooden animal skin drum) is a reflection of the culture of drums in Ogbaland. Most importantly, the batik fabric work produced historically documents the drum culture of Ogbaland. Culturally as pointed out earlier drums play very vital roles in giving information, serve as medium of communication and for entertainment. To the Ogba people drums are very important to them because they use them to gather their people, communicate and also use it for entertainment during their ceremonies. In this batik textile

work, one can observe that just one kind of drum is presented, the drum has its unique function and sound when it is put in use during ceremonies, the drum communicates and directs dancers and the need to document the drum culture history of the people was motivated by the philosophical statement by Hodgson (2016:7) who states that art and culture core practice is one of the most participatory dynamic and social forms of human behaviour. Hodgson adds that it can trigger reflection, generate empathy, create dialogue and foster new ideas and relationships and offer a powerful and democratic way of expressing, sharing and shaping values. Hodgson further states that it can help us build new capabilities and understand how to imagine and recharge a different way of being and relating. It can enable us to design useful and meaningful things and it is increasingly the source of our livelihood. After critically viewing the statement of Hodgson; it is obvious that the practice of art and culture gives us our opportunity to express the drum of Ogbaland.

CONCLUSION

The batik textile fabric work produced by Oruchi Onyige and has been reviewed obviously is a very fine work which artistically commands a lot of aesthetic, cultural and even historical values of Ogbaland in Rivers State, Nigeria. The work truly promotes the culture of the people and imperatively it has also created more advantages to the people to know the types of drums or musical instruments that their people have and use during cultural festivals in Ogbaland.

There is no doubt, the use and the idea of using batik technique to document the Agbadih drum of Ogbaland is very commendable because it helps to promote the use of batik technique in the production of fabric. Most importantly, it has further encouraged other textile artist to use the medium. Generally, the fabric is aesthetically attractive and is very alluring to buyers to buy and own due to its choice of colour manipulation and ingenuity exhibited in the production of the fabric.

Recommendations

Consequent to the finding, the following recommendations are made:

1. More musical instruments or drums as motifs on fabrics should be identified and used to produce a fabric that will promote and document the culture and the history of people.
2. Lecturers and Teachers teaching especially Fine Arts should teach their students how to adopt traditional motifs to produce artwork in their schools because it will create more room for experimentation in fabric production.

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