



ARTPRENEUR AND EMPOWERMENT AMONG FARM FAMILIES IN COASTAL YORUBA LAGOS

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Abstract:

This paper discusses the historical account of what art-preneurial activities the coastal Yoruba artistes and craftsmen engage in along with their farming occupation and how these creative endeavours have thrived and become parts of their social and economic lives over time. Their arts and farm work are creatively engaging and emotionally charged with visual gestures that transmit and perhaps give release to messages, while these equally serve as an ever-evolving cultural renaissance. Coastal Yoruba arts comprise all kinds of crafts design such as boat carving for intra and inter-community mobility as well as fishing which are major occupations of Yoruba living in and around riverine areas of Lagos State, Nigeria. Among the indigenous dwellers of Badagry, Ikorodu, Epe, Lagos Island and other Awori sub-dialects, their age-long which has not been sufficiently engaged in contemporary studies can still be seen as a sign-post amongst the people who dwell around these areas and another suburb of the coastal areas of the state. Research evidence so far reveals that while there is less attention on boat carving, it can create entrepreneurial employment opportunities for people living in and around Lagos environs with a substantial gain. This paper adopts an in-depth qualitative approach through imagery to reflect the artistic breakdown of art forms with expressive patterns, and symbols of the coastal heritage to explicitly unearth the inherent qualities of their art forms and boat carving. The paper will further help to project the uniqueness and benefits of art and crafts as means of economic survival and as a template to remediate the problems of unemployment in Nigeria. It goes further to conclude that coastal Yoruba people are unique in their crafts, and fish farming occupations whilst discussing the roles arts serve in alleviating poverty among our teeming youths and adults at large.

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1. Introduction

The coastal Yoruba of Lagos state has evolved greatly over the years in the areas of crafts design and farm-family management orientation. This has provided the opportunity of proving employment gains amongst its people both young and adults through communal activities, which has distinctively portrayed them as being creative, hardworking people. The dwellers of this vast geographical entity usually engage themselves in the production of a variety of locally fabricated functional objects such as masks, boat carving and design, trap construction, net weaving and mat weaving. These items bear the hallmark of the dwellers of coastal Yoruba entities. Meanwhile, they usually engage traditions, norms and customs in creating their concepts and inscriptions, while using locally made dyes of different pigments (*galura*), in various hues for their designs. These make their works unique and appear aesthetically superior with a relevant sense of visual appreciation. This paper explores symbolism as it relates to the choice of motifs and designs by these coastal inhabitants as well as the roles these concepts and creative works play in their everyday lives. These in practical terms open constructive discourses on the complex ideas and intentions that inform their art and craft and align these with the ever-changing contemporary world.

2. Types of Arts and Crafts Design of the Coastal Yoruba

The arts and crafts of the coastal Yoruba people are diverse and cut across all forms of creativity which bear the hallmark of the coastal dwellers' traditions, customs and symbolism of the communal lifestyle. These art works and crafts such as net-weaving, trap design, mat weaving, pottery, cloth weaving, calabash decoration etc. These art works or crafts designs reveal a drastic shift from mere decoration and hence are functional tools that are beautiful in their different sizes. The effects found on them capture oral poetry, songs, signs and patterns which are not only limited to those in the upland area of Lagos State as Oyefolu (2003) stresses in his submission, despite the prominence of their art; through the state and beyond most of the people are farmers who employ rudimentary implements, such that, most of their arts, crafts are functional and sometimes are used specifically to evoke the spirit of soil fertility and workers' prosperity.

The Awori, Epe, Ikorodu and Badagry people share several cultures such as fishing, boat decoration, and trap design which is synonymous with the different divisions of Lagos State - is one of the major sub-groups among the Yoruba Nigeria. Its Awori name, according to oral history, is derived from the legend of a floating ritual dish which *Ogunfuminire* (their progenitor) presumably followed from Ile-Ife down to Isheri (Ajetunmobi, 2003). Among other Yoruba sub-groups, the coastal are vast in creative works and industrious in all kinds of art works like other Yoruba sub-groups. They are well organised and have various artistic products that have commanded a lot of discussion, which is well documentation, from both historians and archaeologists, in the area of mat-weaving, trap-design, mask design and pottery respectively (Ajetunmobi, 2003). However, the art forms of the coastal Yoruba peoples by classifications will

be investigated and theorized in this paper in the areas of themes, styles, and subjects-matter. All these reflect the people's use of motifs, signs and patterns to communicate and analyse the various socio-cultural and environmental influences of their locality. It is the variations and adaptations of these themes and socio-cultural influences that have made popular inspirations for form, content, design, and motif among Nigerian artists such as Sam Ovrati, Kunle Adeyemi and Tola Wewe among others. It is interesting to state that the craft training in the various traditions is specifically through lineage apprenticeships, and individual training or exploration - a format where people employ or engage the services of a master artist or craftsman from a family sometimes supported by a mistress from the same communities and could even be blood relations. Their art is so diverse from *Adire* (batik textile), *Egungun*, drum ensembles and embroidery among others. The crafts design and incisions embellished on all their art forms represent their love for royalty and strength among their chiefs and sitting Kings. These motifs and patterns are zoomorphic and anthropomorphic representations, which are depicted on the ritual staffs and have equally helped to distinguish the art forms from other sub-Yoruba groups simply because of the fact that the people have water which surrounds their environment.

2.1 Post-Modern Context of the Arts and Crafts

The coastal Yoruba arts and crafts over time in history have grown tremendously bearing the hallmark of coastal Yoruba dwellers' modernity, which has responded to the dynamics of change and continuity. While the coastal Yoruba people and the artists have chosen to reflect or explore the fundamental features of the myths, tradition and oral poetry of human subjectivity through a rigorous representation of the lagoon or mangrove areas as themes or subject matter. It is worth noting, however, that the arts and crafts design has some uniqueness and functionality that makes it stand out among other art cultures. In this regard then, the paper will interrogate the idea in its creation and explicitly argue its place within the purview of the world's art historical periods; where art theory will help to situate its place, and the conceptual theory underpinning the basis for its creation and how to provoke human and existential truths. In recent times, lots of critics, art historians have creatively asked a series of pertinent questions such as why? What? When? Do we accept that an action is arts/craft, similarly, in the creation of any art forms or crafts, or should be regarded as arts on the one hand, and what informed the creation of any arts on the other hand? Reasons behind the exploration of any artistic tendencies' there are obvious reasons which can considerably help us to place the coastal Yoruba arts and crafts in its position as 'real' and 'art forms' perhaps. It has come to the fore that several of the coastal Yoruba arts and crafts designs; have increasingly held on to the idea of using the interpretative theory; which argues that a product of an action may not necessarily be beautiful but has some usefulness which is more explanatory when been considered within certain parameters when been place side by side other world arts, where there is a clear understanding that its features are more beyond aesthetic theory – hence attuned to the realities of the modern-day acceptance of what the external argument hopes on – which is the interpretative theory.

There are many ways we can view any work of art or design, such as its functionality, its message, and its tradition and at the same time while still accommodating its aesthetic, emotions, symbolism, feelings and consciousness, what the art crafts entail or seem to portray. How do we place the arts or crafts design in line with existing theory? How do we make a critical

judgement without missing its functionality within the radical version of the institutional theory; which helps to throw light on the debates or discussions that is ongoing globally – what is an art work – a theory which holds the claim that what makes a work either beautiful or just art sake or for certain use? These will further foreground the place of coastal Yoruba art works at large. The creation of arts and crafts by coastal Yoruba people is expressive of feelings, consciousness and emotions that are rooted in the existentialist philosopher's belief which states that human creation is capable of autonomous choices which is a product of freedom. Alan Dyer submits that:

“Existentialism had a widespread and important influence because of the idea that all belief systems had been wanting and that the only thing left was the individual. In other words, there were no external moral truths except those we created; in a sense we are free but we can at the same time find ourselves in a void or vacuum with nothing to aspire to.”

To further address the issue raised above, there are indications that several of the arts and crafts created by the coastal Yoruba people have been compromised. However, the evolvement based on the newness, technologies, approaches and complete newness witnessed which now speaks or available within the coastal environs have an active relationship which now affects the cognitive reasoning of the artist at large, in the areas of feelings and choices that we might be making a statement from. Increasingly new sophisticated materials and fabricated weapons and chemical interventions now help some artists to actualise, enhance, diminish or dramatically change our critical thinking, memory, moods, personality and sense of judgement when creating their arts or crafts design. It is interesting to note, however, that the paper is interrogating or questioning about what the coastal Yoruba artist meant when creating their crafts technologies or forms.

2.2 The Functionality and Contemporary Content and Contexts

The coastal Yoruba art forms have their functions and aesthetical values which make the arts and crafts creatively unique and symbolical in two ways: {1} as works of art or art objects, {2} as means of survival and creation of employment or empowerment amongst our teeming youths and adults at large. There are lots of discussions, debates and an argument, and counter-arguments that tend to review great deals of philosophy of art, and visual art theories which hold to unearth the rivalry of what should be regarded as art works or crafts design, such as what are the art-crafts intended for? There are obvious reasons behind the creation of any art works- evidently, this action which may be intentional or aesthetically created to convey messages or beauty sake. The coastal Yoruba people have a series of fragmented or distortion of symbolism, signs and patterns, and equally creatively managed to employ aesthetic theory either knowingly or unknowingly to explore a series of art works and crafts designs that is situated within the realm of art historical periods that – the statement one can comfortably really on to argue that their ideas, intentions and intuition responds to the dynamics of continuity and change on the one hand. Although, the essence of this paper is to stylistically essay the functionality of the arts and crafts design of the coastal Yoruba people at large to further foreground the basis to document and the same time help situate the found arts works within

the purview of the mainstream art cultures. Paradoxically, the visual appeal one can derive from the art pieces is that the crafts design like traps fabricated to catch fish and crabs may not necessarily be beautiful but aesthetically appealing and functional which performs the real essence of its creation: that is meant to fulfil a certain duty which to catch an animal for them for survival; but on the contrary, the design nets for-catching fish are creatively made and functional and can be linked to portray some qualities of what critics art historians or writers may hold on to situate it within the realm or interpreted within an art-historical tradition.

It is interesting to note, that lots of the crafts designs made by coastal Yoruba falls within the interpretive theory which holds its idea within the main global art theory that has gain lots of acceptance in the hands of art historians, critics and art writers over "aesthetic" theory; which many artists attuned to the reality of the popular acceptance what art works be in the world global art tradition or philosophy (Gell, 1996). The claim to hold to the facts that arts works must be situated within certain theory and art-historical periods actually made it necessarily explore the art tendencies, this action calls for thorough reflections, discussions or debates to argue for the art products which is explicitly created on the basis to argue, document its uniqueness in its entirety and to properly justify the 'real', - to situate that these arts crafts made by coastal people are just not for art sake but rather to fulfil certain purposes which are not just aesthetic purposes of majority settlers amongst Nigeria sub-ethnic groups. The battle for survival/creation of empowerment amongst youths and women over the years has paved ways to accept their culture and tradition as a lifestyle which is a clear-cut that gives wide recognition amongst other sub-ethnic regions for their arts forms thereby accepting their fish farm business as "real" form of entrepreneurship that is arguably profitable oriented form of business organisation. To a great extent, the survival of the citizenry in coastal areas of Lagos state would graciously be launched more in the acceptance of making fish farming and carving boats as a form of creative endeavour which in truth helps create a rationale for embracing the skills of engaging in fishing and farming production alongside designing of boat-caring, paintings, sculptures in the round and mat-weaving among others - thereby extending beyond mere acceptance by other ethnic regions of Nigeria.

Up until now, from the early twentieth century down to the 21st century when employment opportunities became a serious matter and people realise that there is a need for survival the fish farm business became a pointer to the creation of handy-work (craft) design in the area of boat construction which eventually lead to the creation of all kinds of crafts designs this actions actually started into series of all kinds that translate to modernity in the diversity of form we now call mainstream art practice that we may conclude to mean "modern art", which captures the interest of critics and government at large. Nigeria took it as a form of responsibility or assumption these forms of creativity can be given serious attention whilst at the same creating employment for our women and teeming youths at large – thereby satisfying a common goal in the feeling that poverty eradication can only be achieved through self-reliance. Paradoxically, these new waves explode into creating confidence in designing beautiful objects like boats which is visible that is relatively new and challenging that be practised within the sphere of imitations: but not only in the area of mimesis but also can be regarded as a form of art engagement. Boat carving and fish-farming amongst the coastal people is considerably gaining a common ground of being taken seriously and this has often been a sign-post that made Lagos culture stands out

amongst other cities in Nigeria. This attribute could be referred to or make-believe - what we called early civilisation that distinguishes the coastal areas as unique; and the region is playfully regarded or referred to as 'Greece of Nigeria (Africa)'.

This is due to her cultural contributions and the achievement of her artists whose creations have touched the sensibilities of the world in general (Oyelola, 1976). The coastal area Lagos state, like other Nigerian arts, has performed creative feats and evolved masterpieces in cultural creations, farm-family orientation, and the artistic industry whose importance has remained indelible in the sand of time. The geographical space and political entity called the coastal area in Nigeria had and still yields outputs of unique farming, and fish-rearing alongside quality representations in all forms which are explicitly daring or engaging at the same time. This craft technology has increasingly grown over time through centuries of mastery in various artistic techniques in sculpture, calabash designs, mat-weaving, *adire* design, door carving, pottery, spiritual and ornamental effigy etc to mention just a few. Interestingly note that the admiration of the entire coastal area is never in doubt like other world cultures in creativity as the case may be. It is this uniqueness, beauty and value-lateness of African arts, particularly Nigerian creativity that has resulted in the whisking away of our artefacts from Benin, Oyo, Oshogbo, Esie and many other areas by the invading colonial army paradoxically, this looting imperialist were often the bitterest critics of the Nigerian art forms. They did describe African arts like most of her other achievements as underdeveloped and non-contributory to the civilization of the world.

The need of the contemporary coastal Yoruba society extends beyond mere survival rather it expounds the horizon of knowledge base crafts designs theory which goes far in accessing precision in their art works which exceeds the need for aesthetics but rather functionality as opposed to mere creation, these art works of our creativity in solving immediate societal problems while also striving to hinder successful attainment of a high standard of living. The cultural and economic importance of the coastal Yoruba arts and artefacts of Nigeria region, especially the riverine enclave of the Yoruba region is what could and should solve the tension of unemployment and revamp the eroded glory truncated by western imperialism and subsequent cankerworm of neo-colonialism. It must be emphasized that coastal Yoruba through the policy directions of her politicians and statesmen have put much faith in the Western patterned education in the natural sciences (Biology, Chemistry, Physics) Behavioural sciences (Sociology, history, economics) and classics (Literatures, Grammar etc) and Philosophies of European organisation, this has affected the cultural potentials of our education in solving problems which have defied western antidotes. It may be that Western education had given the region an edge as people among the diverse cultural groups in Nigeria, but it has equally deprived the coastal Yoruba a great loss of a large chunk of their identity, paralysed their self-esteem and estranged individual Yoruba from their ancestral roots.

Art critics, ethnographers, art historians, art commentators, anthropologists and cultural activists in Nigeria have recommended a 'return to the root' programmes to transform, educate and enlighten the disadvantaged modern Yoruba coastal citizen and to empower them through local content productivity thus dam the continuous erosion of our cultural inheritance. However, it must be stressed that traditional art of the past is a palimpsestic concoction of waves of civilizations, thus, the total condemnation or demonization of Western influence on African

art is anti-development; rather our major concern should harp on preventing the dominating influence of other arts on indigenous creations. For this obvious reason, the contributory confluence of creativity joined to our histories, mythologies, and legends would inspire more multifarious excellence of global perspective (Ogiomoh, 2007):

“The globalized fusion of artistic ideas would create a cultural melting point which not only tantalizes creative consumption; but would put African arts on an acceptable pedestal and create a sustainable living for African artists.”

The historical evidence of how coastal Yoruba culture thrives such as the fish-farming business, and language structure where all these instincts are woven into a display of their art products, whilst their creative nuances actually capture lifestyle which is an expression of a gesture that transmits and perhaps gives release to tendencies called innovation that can be called modern or post-modern civilisation. This development, on the other hand, reveals characteristics and tendencies that are well channelled to create novel crafts design, and crafts arts which are either in abstract representation or idealisation that showcase the level of development in the art pieces on one hand; it can also be seen in their linguistic structure, musicology, anthropology, architecture, festivals and oral traditions that there exists a link between the five division of the coastal Lagos.

2.3 The Coastal Yoruba Tradition and Historical Overview

The coastal Yoruba land consists of mangrove areas of Lagos state, Nigeria (Ajetunmobi, 2003) opines that coastal Yoruba land lies between latitudes 6° 22N and 6° 42N north and longitudes 2°3° and 6° west. It covers a wide area between Badagry Local Government Areas of Lagos State to the extreme west; Lagos Island and its coastal settlement to the south and the clusters of Awori, Egba and Ijebu settlements to the north. The coastline extends more than eight hundred kilometres from Badagry in the west to the Ilaje territories of Aiyetoro, Mushin and Igbokoda in the east.

Odewunmi, 2003 also opine that the coastal settlement of Lagos being 0.4 percent of Nigerian land mass, contains within its tiny territory about 50 percent of industrial and commercial activities in the country. Lagos, a mere 3,577 square has various Lagoons, Creeks coastal rivers and estuaries which determines her economic activities when compared to their parts of the country. Lagos, more than any other part of the geo-political entity called Nigeria has witnessed socio-political intercourse with the Europeans. This has greatly altered trade relations, arts, language, culture, politics and socio-political among the people of the state. Modernity as it had been understood since the 16th century centres or revolves around Western ideology and influences the coastal Yoruba have been exposed due to cultural contact and historical intermix with colonial authority.

The coastal Yoruba people are creative and distinctive people "artist" among other ethnic sub-groups that populate Nigeria. Some of the earliest text materials found in visual arts and crafts were championed by Western researchers and artists who domiciled in Lagos. Some of the early artists are Yusuf Grillo, Ulli Beier, Simon Ottenberg, Jean Kenedy, Susan Vogel amongst others have helped in strengthening research in modern, post-modern down to

contemporary art and art history. The existence of traditional richness and modern variety in woodwork, sculpture, painting, textile, pottery, and weaving among others is central to rousing the entrepreneurial spirit and sustaining the need to initiate a strategy of combating indolence, unemployment and gradual evaporation of coastal cultural aesthetics. Filani (2005) observes that the early artists were explorers, ethnographers and anthropologists whose interests were based on the cultural significations of art objects to the neglect of form and content. However, the cultural mix of Lagos coastal area has given rise to the evolution of aesthetics and a firm focus on form and content one contributory influx of artists from within and outside the coastal area.

Fagg (1963), Carol (1964), Vassina (1984) refers to classic Nigeria heritage from Benin, Igbo-ukwu, Ife as a relic of indigenous civilization that serves as a pointer to the glorious discontinuity of the African past which could point a way to the distant future. However, it is historically noteworthy that the political contact of Benin Kingdom with coastal Lagos has imported not only the political organisation but a huge artistic imprint of various kinds on the coastal Yoruba way of life, hence their arts have great vitality. The artistic palace design, with insignia of power (*abere*), blemish less white adornment, *Keremesi* caps are some of the Benin Cultural-political inheritance of coastal Lagos which has spread across to other the sister Lagos authorities within the coastal islands.

Centuries of socio-political camaraderie, western theoretical assumptions/consumption with the cross-cultural influence of imperialism have had a huge impact on Lagos as an erstwhile capital of British colony and post-colonial Nigeria, thus bringing a merger of industrial flux with a unique modern complication in artistic expression. The role of Lagos coastal areas not only serves as a cultural laboratory of the Yoruba of the hinterland but has become the capital of modern arts in sub-Saharan Africa. As one of the enclaves of Africa with the biggest and busiest seaport, it has had an immense impact on the art and people of Nigeria. A Lagos coastal area, despite the minuteness in landmass, is one of the most populous with high density, thus, potentially having the position of multifaceted artistic productions from people of other civilizations within the Nigerian state. Oyefolu (2003:15) opines that:

“Sowe (large) proportion of Lagos culture and its manifestation are of migrant origin. For example, Ijebu notably of Ogun state origin, and Egun people of Badagry are purported to have migrated from Benin Republic both have contributions to Lagos culture...”

As a result of cultural diffusion among very many ethnic groupings of Yoruba and the external sub-regional influx populace of Lagos settlement, that has given it flavour and colouration of vivid richness which in turn engenders artistic production of greatness. The blend of traditionalism, colonialism and modernity in the production of Lagos arts has not only given rise to the diversity but a sustainable beauty of Lagos arts and landscape and continuous economic progressivism.

2.4 Arts/Crafts Design and Fishing as Empowerment/Entrepreneurship

Art, crafts-design and farm-family empowerment are common forms of occupation among the coastal Yoruba people of Nigeria. This form of creative enterprise/business has greatly moved from mere hobby to a more robust business enterprise which also gives charge to improve their

skills and on the other hand knowledge sharing versus feeling, logic versus intuition which has grown tremendously forming a great deal of knowledge base that helps in forming entrepreneurship, and has a linking line which is intertwined in a symbolic embrace which could lead to for sustainable economic development. Art, crafts design and farm-family entrepreneurship is a blend that helps proffer solutions to the unemployment problem witnessed in recent times. Akanmode (2016) sees functional education as that type of instruction which equips youths with adequate, scientific, vocational and cognate knowledge and competencies to compete effectively for job placement within their environment. Jones and Sakong (1980) define entrepreneurship as a force that mobilizes other resources to the unmet market demand. Rondsant (1984) opines that entrepreneurship is the dynamic process of creating incremental wealth and innovation.

The coastal Yoruba art which is the burden of this paper has creatively sought to look at the crafts design - signs, motifs, patterns of culture found around the environment, whilst their social behaviour, and trends etc from which artists/craft men derive inspiration or consciousness, or curiosity for their evolvment in creative work while encouraging critical thinking which affects series of the art works they produced - which in turn helps create employment opportunities among teeming youths and adults at large. Their creative engagement cum farm exploration and their orientation in self-creation depict their social life, spirituality/rituals and political class symbols which are unique and equally serve as a communication outfit or milieu from wherein creative originality merges. Many art forms of the coastal Yoruba enclave are imagistic but with a sense of reasoning that comes in imagery or representation in visual forms, thus, it has to be seen, witnessed feel that which can be appreciated by the artist.

In this painting, *'Ebute'* captures the expression of form that depicts the peculiarity of Lagos lifestyle and fishing as an occupation, the boat is creatively carved such that it looks captivating that can convey human movement during fishing exploration. The human figure is strategically placed to show actions. The rendition of hues on the figures is subtle and colour expressions are soothing and captivating, reflecting an indigenous life display of the coastal Yoruba occupation and work lifestyle. The arrangement and focal point are expressive of lighter tone hues of cream stylistically geometrical shapes derived through the conscious use of lines. The peculiar busy activities of the riverine environment depict people and the dynamic (weekend) relaxation portrayed through the arrangement of boats that gives ways to enable them to go partying (*Owanbe*) among the people. They've parked their boat after a long day of fishing activities is a feature of all the five divisions in the coastal area; their tradition reveals their engagements and celebrations which exemplified other Yoruba cultures. Filani (2003) once observed that they paint and express themselves in bright colours and display themes, forms, and skills in technique. He concluded that people at times reflect on the social life and themes relevant to their socio-cultural milieu.



Figure 1: Dr. Abiodun Kafaru, Ebute Oil on Canvas (2022)

This paper on Lagos (coastal Yoruba) arts and fish-farming entrepreneurs captures the nature that is an expression of the consciousness of meaning and qualities of their crafts - is a pointer to the cultural and artistic uniqueness of the people among other ethnic groups and its place in a city that is considered a dream home of most Africans. Lagos dubbed by social commentators in music and songs as the centre of excellence, is vital to the economic and social well-being of Nigeria, the economic nerve centre of not only Nigeria but of all sub-Saharan Africa. The city is blessed with more than abundant natural resources. It is also endowed with outstanding human resources, rich and varied artistic traditions such as *Eyo*, *Igunuko*, *Sanbgetto*, *Egungun*, and mat weaving among other crafts. The arts are so vast and equally said to have greatly influenced everyone who lives in Lagos and people who have had contact with the city as a result of migration, and a quest for white-collar jobs.



Figure 2: Dr. Abiodun Kafaru Yoruba Reading Template (2014)

These symbols can be found in coastal Yoruba crafts design (their) ideation, emotions, philosophy, proverbs, occupation, and dances among other areas of endeavour. It thus takes an 'art-preneurship' to engage him/herself with knowledge about the people and the land to create a genuine artistic and fish farming representation among coastal Yoruba people at large. The desire to explore the aesthetics, signs, symbols, motifs and patterns of the coastal Yoruba people of Nigeria emerges as a grey area for the initiated and the untrained this makes it an object of scholarly interest to explore patterns and symbols found in the artefacts, in the cultural identity and practices of the coastal Yoruba and their neighbours. This research is driven by cultural necessity and personal interest to investigate the artistic genres and aesthetics of a particular region of Nigeria, an action which subjects the artistic traditions of the coastal Yoruba people- *Ikorodu, Awori, Egun and Epe* to critical scrutiny and interrogation which will bring about an understanding and awareness of their features and patterns.

The nature and arrangement of forms reveal family lifestyle, history and destiny among others. These signs, symbols and patterns are a global fusion of artistic ideas created by melting points which not only capture acceptable intrigues of human dignity that pre-supposes a

sustainable living for African artists. On the positive side, art which brings the environment and philosophy into focus serves as a great source of inspiration and intellectual liberation for the race.



Figure 3: Dr. Abiodun Kafaru Fortune Wheel Oil on Canvas (2014)

The above art in Figure 3 reflects fortunes wheel, a mixed media painting, that investigates and represents human existence from birth, while the colours used in it capture life experiences and expression with ropes glued to the ground, which can be made in conformity with family lineage, and can also be associated with the issues concerning symbols of religious or spiritual power among the coastal Yoruba people. The painting is experimental in nature with rope, colour, and sand; a creation of relief sculpture-like form. The rope is stylistically arranged in a draft form and each one depicts different forms, symbols, motifs and patterns with a recessed plain of hues and relief features which signify 'future telling' and bright or good destiny. Suffice to state that the art of divination practice is quite very varied among the Yoruba sub-groups of Nigeria; the wheel of fortune comprises a series of symbols that signify the authority and power of the divination priest.

Fortune wheel is highly philosophically in its context, and of the Yoruba adage of ancient times, which offers: *O ju eni ma la, ari iyonu*. This literally means, "Whosoever will succeed, will not get it on a platter of ease" (Adeyemi, 2013). The brighter hue stands for good future, while all other darker colours connote the deep periods representing difficulties such as lack, stress, hunger, and trouble. Symbolically, the rope is well placed. It is systematically employed to create outlines, demarcations, textures, forms and effects of different hues within and outside of the composition; the background is intentionally made to look dark to enable an assemblage of zoomorphic forms. The creation of the painting is predicated on the Yoruba belief system of *Ayanmo* (destiny), as Adeyemi (2012) asserts: "a philosophy that posits the predestination of man, and

no matter the circumstances." This philosophy remains valid among royal kindred. In Yoruba traditional society, there is ultimately a vivid respect for reincarnation or life after death, and as such, the Yoruba belief in art as another life makes them represent these ideas in wood carvings stone sculptures, clay in relief, and wall design among others. The lighter hues are creatively harmonised with an intention to reveal expressed sand and colour symbolized by the floors of arrangement of colours and another assemblage to evoke the spirit of authority Fortunes, a mixed media painting, investigates and represents the issues concerning symbols of religious or spiritual power among the Yoruba of the coast. The painting is experimental in nature with rope, colour, and sand; a creation of relief sculpture-like form. The rope is stylistically arranged in a draft form and each one depicts different forms, symbols, motifs and patterns with a recessed plain of hues and relief features which signify 'future telling' or bright good destiny.

Elaborating on the fortune wheel concept Adeyemi 2013 describes it as highly philosophically context of the Yoruba adage of ancient times, which implies: *O ju eni ma la ari yonu*. This literally means, "whosoever will succeed, will not get it on a platter of ease". The brighter hue stands for good future, while all other darker colours connote the deep periods representing difficulties such as lack, stress, hunger, and trouble. Symbolically, the rope is well placed. It is systematically employed to create outlines, demarcations, textures, forms and effects of different hues within and outside of the composition; the background is intentionally made to look dark to enable an assemblage of zoomorphic forms. The creation of the painting is predicated on the Yoruba belief system of *Ayanmo* (destiny). Adeyemi (2012) asserts: "a philosophy that posits the predestination of man, and no matter the circumstances." This philosophy remains valid among royal kindred. In Yoruba traditional societal belief, there is vivid respect for reincarnation or life after death, and as such, the Yoruba belief that life is a cycle and kingship institution. The lighter hues are creatively harmonised with an intention to reveal expressed sand and colour symbolized by the floors of arrangement of colours and another assemblage to evoke the spirit of authority.

Some of the features of the art of coastal Yoruba land which is the focus of the study intend to appeal to populist sensitivity about the values of coastal arts, the abundance of inspiration from culture and nature and the ability of the arts in solving knotty societal challenges. The above-mentioned art work has deliberately made use of a fabric design structure reminiscent of Yoruba cultural creation, thus promoting textile arts and industry within and outside Yoruba landscape for identity, building sign, and aesthetics which expands the frontiers of industry and tourism. Today, textile design is greatly industrialised with the use of modern state of the arts machinery which duplicates handmade patterns in fragments of seconds. However, this is not to infer that the textile artists would be out of employment, rather the creative input of the local coastal artist should be a sine-qua-non in the production line of textile design and production because of his innate gift with the cultural enterprise of his community Warbuton (2003) affirms that painting of picture is a form of art/craft that helps to portray one's environment in two-dimensional forms. The environment yields a natural spectrum of colours to creative imitation through the brush of the artist. The coastal Yoruba thus share creative universality in practise and philosophy as found in many African and world cultures that put in their mythological, age-long spiritual, symbolist and environmental scenery for the consumption of other cultures and industries. The Yoruba cultural space is dominated by fanciful merriment which celebrates her egregious lifestyle, landmarks and social situations i.e.

birth, death, coronation, housewarming, chieftaincy and even store laying the foundation of a house demands one "ARIYA" or other, thus the socio-cultural context of the Yoruba cosmogony keeps the canvas of the painter busy all seasons. The colourful social outlook of coastal people enjoys the patronage of all spectrums of the arts thus the uniqueness of and peculiarity of Yoruba inhabitants finds representation in sculptures, tie and dye, mosaic, paintings and other spectrums of arts.

The painting entitled "excitement" shows the peculiarity of Lagos lifestyle; it reveals the dynamics of social activities depicted in soothing and captivating colours. The cool colours are synonymous with love of ease, enjoyment and merry-making among this Yoruba subgroups while the brighter colours reveal a people who have a zest for commerce and life. The arrangement and focal point are geometrically represented which derives from the conscious use of lines thus adding structural finesse to the artistic depiction – the painting equally showcases the ever-busy, bustling commercial interest, thus creating an aesthetic symbiosis of their love for merry-making.

Filani (1977) observes that the Eko Coastal Yoruba paintings reflect the socially relevant social lives and themes that are documented in their socio-cultural milieu. It is usually expressed in bright colours with a technique which showcases the modernity of Lagos culture. Lagos coastal Yoruba, dubbed by social commentators, and musicians of excellence, no doubt is vital to the economic and social well-being of Nigeria and Sub-Saharan Africa. The multiculturalism of Lagos is as much as blessing on the one hand and a means of development for Lagos State at large. Invariably, the land is artistically blessed with human and natural resources which bear the hallmarks of Nigeria's modernity, interspersed versed with the presence of natural habitats like lakes, swamps, and rivers, both of which could be expressed artistically through paintings, and sculpture to improve the fortunes of its dwellers. The diversity of its human resources has enabled the world to see her mask practices, song and dance, boat regatta, *Igunuko & Salumogi* dance, and textile of different lives and colours which has a positive influence on many artists in Lagos. Okediji (1999), citing (Filani, 2005), reveals that contemporary Yoruba art is prolific and rich in diversity. The coastal Yoruba could boast of great artistic cultural forms like *Gelede* displays, mat weaving, pottery, embroidery, wall decoration, boat regatta and fabric designs to mention a few. There is an urgent need for documentation, exploration and preservation through industrial prolificacy and training of the next generation to boost employment and avoid the gradual cultural extinction of the coastal Yoruba people.

Quite a number of art objects in special places such as religious and political locations shrines, palaces & important junctions constitute a form of metaphorical or symbolic narrative which artists use as a symbolic medium of communicating fresh, contemporary ideas, cultural wisdom and re-invention of culture to reflect the dynamism of indigeneity. Some of these signs and their meanings may be used to show the value of modern coastal arts.

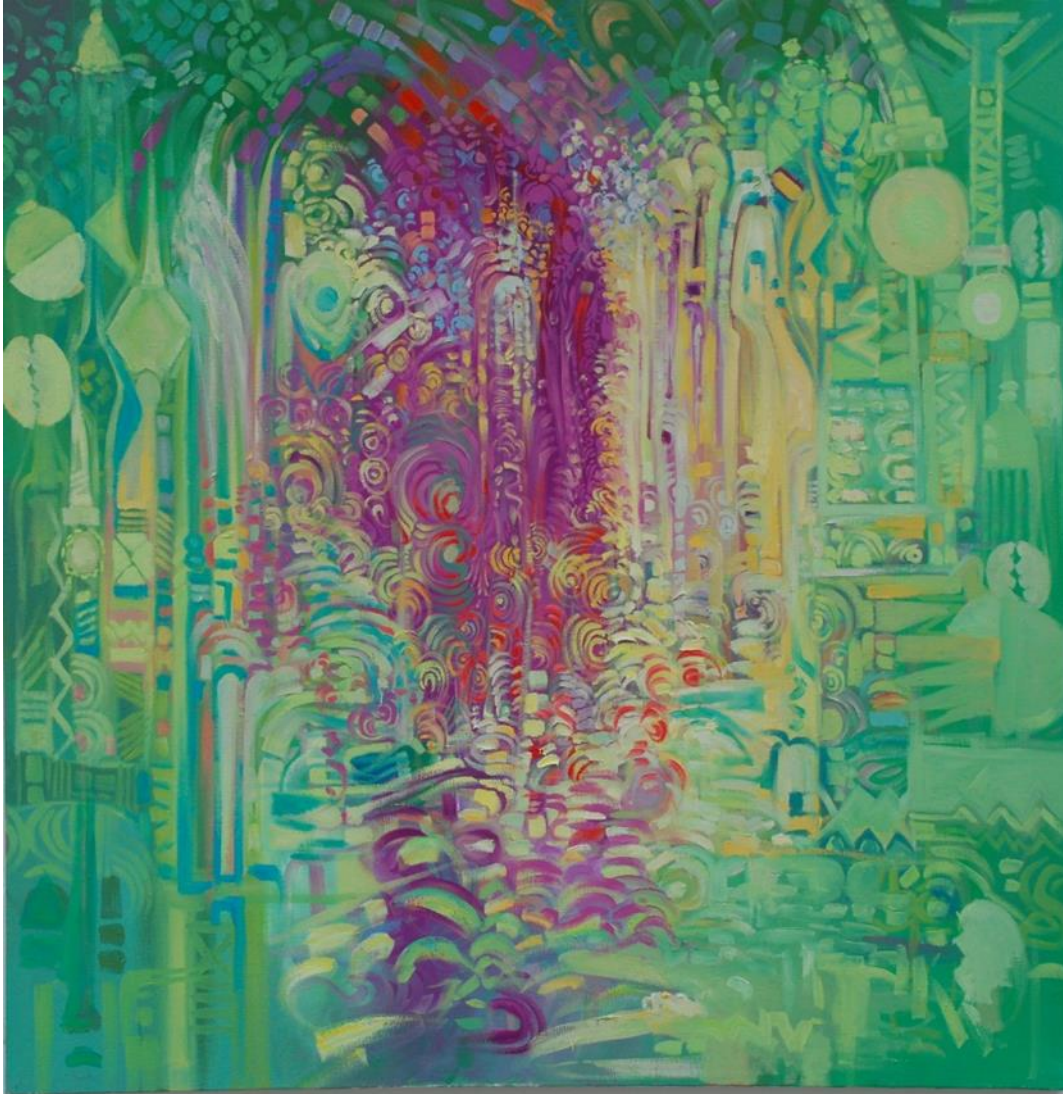


Figure 4: Dr. Abiodun Kafaru Patterns, Signs and Symbols Communication Template

This art template captures the desire to explore the coastal aesthetics of the Yoruba enclave, signs, symbols and motifs which do not just reflect academic necessity but the cultural production of the environment to solve critical social and economic problems by creating employment for our teeming youths and adults. The artistic tradition of the coastal Yoruba people namely Egun, Awori, and the Ijebu (Epe and Ikorodu) is so rich, versatile and economically viable such that it is capable of resolving the conundrum of unemployment in the Yoruba enclave if rightly harnessed.

The various histories and indigenous which shaped Nigerian Contemporary Cultural Space and art cannot be a product of one history but of histories. It is of great benefit to the experience colonial historical phase in the narrative of coastal Yoruba Lagos, Nigeria. This is what has conferred on Lagos state the status of epistemic liberation in arts/design thus engendering the much-needed positive gross domestic products when arts mediate into the economic dialogue of the coastal areas. In Nigeria, the Coastal Yoruba arts which is the burden of this paper has critically sought to look at the signs, motifs and patterns of the environment which the artist derive unique communication combining both the traditional and contemporary

art forms toward the generation of jobs, empowerment at large and promoting the industry and cultural heritage of the coastal Yoruba land.

3. Conclusion

Conclusively, the coastal Yoruba arts have transcended aesthetics and spiritual representation; but an art form which functions at the level of utilitarian benefit to the local community. This has made it a globally competitive form of creativity. It is hoped that the policymakers, government institutions, historical and anthropological bodies, NGO'S and philanthropist organisation should seize the medium that coastal art offers to solve societal problems. In a continent bedevilled by an embarrassing brain drain, high poverty rate, corruption and hostile economic environmental condition and political corruption. It now behoves us to look inward through the milieu of various spectrums of coastal Yoruba arts to restore hope for the millions of coastal Yoruba sub-groups whose salvation for sustenance is tied to white-collar jobs which are non-existence. Beyond concrete functionalism, arts should also serve as means of mental freedom from relics of colonial imprisonment and subsequent erosion of values through neo-colonial structure handed down through various socialization tools which corrupt the ideals of cultural identification. Culture, from which the Yoruba cultural arts emanate serves as a conduit which not only transfers the identity baton passed from one generation to the other, but serves as a reconstructive, restorative, re-assertive and medium of meaningful social re-engineering of coastal Yoruba populace thus leading to towards holistic development of our community.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The conflict of interest is that different perspective at which people view these artworks.

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