

## THE ACCULTURATION OF FACTORY PRINT

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“An ignorance of textiles is an ignorance of cultural realities”  
—John Picton (1988)

When the factory-printed cotton cloth introduced to the Gold Coast by Dutch and English traders in the 19<sup>th</sup> century reached Lagos, it was named ‘*ankra*’ by Yoruba speakers who coined this word from the name Accra, capital city of the Gold Coast. The Igbo-speaking people of Nigeria, however, distinguished between the wax print of superior quality with fast colours and the roller prints (‘fancy prints’) of inferior quality which faded more quickly. The former were called *abada* whilst the latter were called *osiba* on the Asaba side of the Niger and *akara* on the Onitsha side. The people of Rivers’ State called the superior prints *alu* and the others *akara*. Many Igbo speakers refer to genuine Dutch wax prints as *Hollandais*, a word printed on the selvedge as part of the trade mark. Throughout the rest of this article, the work *ankara* will be used generically to include both wax prints and fancy prints.

Now produced in textile mills in Nigeria, ‘African print’ has antecedents linking it to Asia

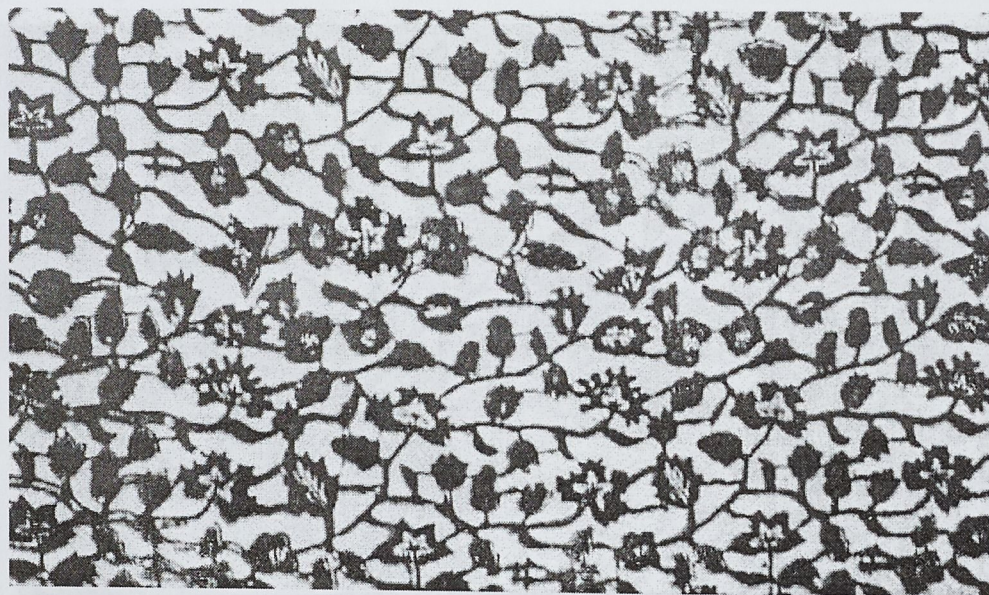


Javanese batik showing Iranian influence in floral motifs



Javanese batik.

Note the similarity to the "strong tree" design, a European factory print.



"Strong tree", factory print



**J.B.T. Prévinaire (1784-1854), inventor of La Javanaise, a machine for producing imitation batiks.**



**Jon Kooy (painting by J.C. Leich, 1882). Was honoured for 12 years of military service.**



**Ebenezer Brown Fleming (1858-1912), textile entrepreneur for West Africa**

and Europe with the Dutch acting as intermediaries. The former Dutch colony of Indonesia was renowned for its delicately executed batiks with intricate designs based on curvilinear floral patterns or small geometric motifs reminiscent of flowers, leaves or the cross-section of fruit.

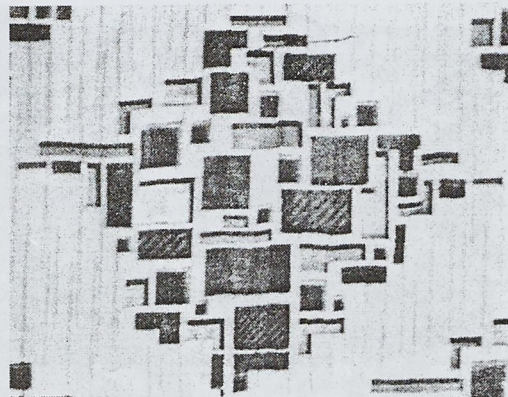
From the early 17<sup>th</sup> century onwards, women applied the molten wax resist to the surface of the cloth with a *canting*, a tool which enabled the artist to create images of great detail. In the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, the *cap* was invented to speed up the batik process. This was a tool into which strips of copper were incorporated to form the desired design. It was pressed against a pad soaked in hot wax and then stamped on the fabric as a resist. Batik cloth was worn by both men and women in the form of a sarong, similar to the West African 'wrapper'.

The Dutch, who were in control of Indonesia from the 17<sup>th</sup> century until 1945/49, seeking profitable markets for the products of their textile mills, used a machine invented by the Belgian J. B. T. Prévinaire in the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century to produce imitation batiks, using resin instead of wax. These were sold in Indonesia, much more cheaply than the original, hand-crafted batiks. Though lacking the aesthetic value of the originals, Dutch factory batiks were a commercial success.

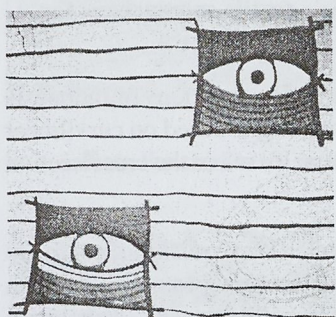
But what has this to do with Nigerian *ankara*? It is often forgotten that the Dutch had established a presence in the Gold Coast as far back as 1637, holding sway from Elmina Castle. From c. 1835, Africans were recruited for the Dutch East-India Army and went to serve in Java, often with great courage. It is this group, who on their return to the Gold



**“Her husband’s heart”  
factory print**



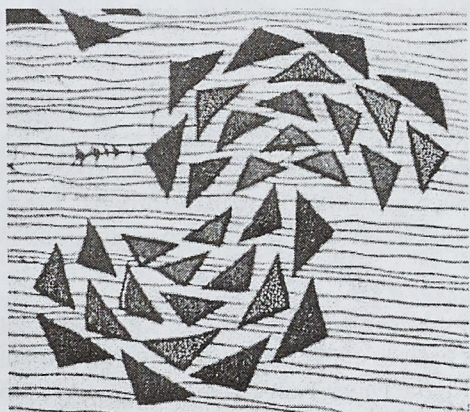
**“Block 1004”  
factory print**



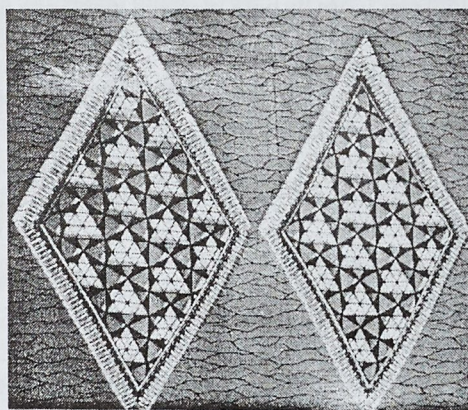
**“Eye-witness”  
factory print**

Coast, brought back with them Javanese batiks and Dutch batik prints, popularizing them among their people.

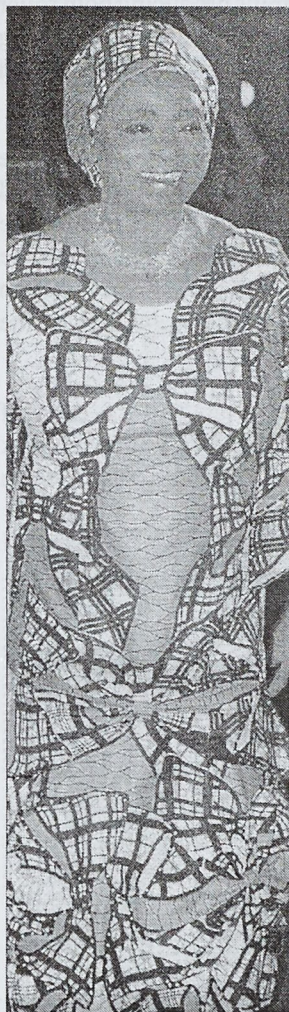
The Dutch left the Gold Coast in 1872 and were succeeded by the British, but an observant Scots entrepreneur, named Ebenezer Brown Fleming, learned about the West African taste for imitation batiks and started shipping Dutch prints to the Gold Coast. These were distributed through young European men who settled down to trade on the West Coast of Africa, engaging African women to help them in their business. Through these liaisons, the European merchants learnt about local preferences for colours and designs whilst



**“Broken plate”  
factory print**



**Another “Broken plate”  
Factory print**



**Hajia Abbah Folawiyo, alias Labanella, fashion-designer, wearing *ankara***

the women became prosperous textile traders. The information was relayed to Europe where textile mills began to produce designs specifically for the West African market. Brown Fleming initiated many new designs, produced in Holland and Manchester, some of which became classics and are still in production today.

Manchester had been an important player in the West African textile market since the 18<sup>th</sup> century when, observing the popularity of Indian printed cottons in Africa, Manchester textile mills modified their designs to suit West African tastes. Later, in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, careful market research was carried out through agents sent by Manchester textile printers to the West Coast to bring back samples of indigenous cloth.<sup>1</sup> Basing their production on this, Manchester merchants exerted a firm grip on the West African textile trade, to the detriment of hand-crafted *adire* and some types of women's broad-loom cloth,<sup>2</sup> which like factory print, were 'everyday' fabrics.

In 1891, there was an application to patent a printing machine in England 'for irregular or nondescript patterns such as are suitable for the Indian, Chinese, Japanese and African markets being (by preference but not necessarily) printed in indigo either all of one shade or of various shades and depths of colour.'<sup>3</sup> This would suggest that samples of Yoruba *adire* had come to the notice of English textile printers.

As well as wax prints, European textile mills produced roller prints, also called 'fancy prints', designed for the West African market. These cost-efficient textiles were less colour-fast, fading more quickly than wax prints, a characteristic quickly observed by the users. Wax prints have maintained their superior status until today which has led to some deception in the labeling of fabrics by some textile mills!

<sup>1</sup>See the Beving Collection in the British Museum.

<sup>2</sup>For example, *kijipa*.

<sup>3</sup>From the archives of Brunnschweiler, Manchester.

From 1960 (the year of Nigeria's Independence) onwards, textile mills producing both roller prints and wax prints were set up in Nigeria with investment from England, India, Hong Kong, China and Japan. From 1980, Europe stopped producing 'fancy prints' and concentrated on the more prestigious and expensive wax prints.

As has been indicated above, the earliest Dutch wax designs were imitations of Javanese batiks where stylized flowers and foliage predominated with a sprinkling of Indian and Chinese motifs reflecting foreign influences on Javanese culture. Such motifs include the Indian 'Tree of Life', which takes the form of curving branches bearing large, elaborate flowers, often with birds perching among the foliage and the 'wing' pattern derived from a mythical bird that carried the Hindu god Vishnu. Designs of Chinese origin include the immortal phoenix, the dog-lion and stylized clouds.

With the expansion of the West African market for Dutch wax prints and the entry of Brown Fleming on the scene, there was a dramatic change in the character of Dutch wax prints. Exchange of information between colonial officials, missionaries, West African textile traders (usually women) and consumers, European company representatives and the textile manufacturers resulted in the production of printed textiles aimed at appealing to the local aesthetic. Designs became bolder, often bearing references to the West African cultural environment.

The staff of kingship motif, based on an Akan ceremonial wrought iron sword from the Gold Coast, with an undulating handle like a snake, appeared on wax block prints as early as 1904 (Picton: 1995). Variants of this design on both wax and roller prints are still being produced today. In Nigeria, the design is known as 'Cork-Screw' and even 'Opener' because of the shape of the sword-handle. In the Gold Coast, it had more serious connotations. It was a state sword, *afenatene*, used by the Asantehene "in rituals, political gesturing and oath-taking" (Cole & Ross: 1997). Such a sword was captured from the Asante and acquired by the British Museum in 1896 (Picton: 1995). It may possibly have also had some deep proverbial significance for the inhabitants of the Gold Coast. A similar sword illustrated in Cole and Ross (1977) fig. 311 shows a bird with beak aiming at the snake handle. Could the textile design, based on the sword, be interpreted to refer to the



Staff of kingship  
factory print

Akan proverb: "It is the bad fowl that sits by and watches its young being eaten up by an enemy"<sup>4</sup>

In Igbo-land in Nigeria, the snake motif is a symbol of protection, used on doors and carved panels, whilst the similar python motif is found on murals, panels and doors as a representation of ancestral power (Onwuakpa: work in progress). Was it these associations which originally made the design popular east of the Niger? Succeeding generations might not know the significance of the snake symbol, but once the popularity of the design was established, people would buy it without understanding the original symbolism.



**Modern design using two different ankara prints**

As Orjinta (1989) has pointed out: "The designs are now only aesthetically appealing but have lost majority (sic) of their symbolic meanings."

A popular wax print with a long pedigree, bearing deep red designs on a yellow ground (a colour combination much appreciated east of the Niger), is named "Ebe-bell" after one of the motifs. Orjinta, a male writer, identifies this motif as a bow-tie, wine-glass or dumb-bell. However, it resembles the woman's pestle for grinding pepper which, among the Igbo, is a symbol of pride and motherhood (Onwuakpa: work in progress) and is used in *Uli*<sup>5</sup> designs on walls. The *ebe* motif is also found on hand-woven Akwete cloths, deriving its origin from an instrument used on ritual occasions (Okeke: 1985). A similar motif appeared on the hand-woven cloth of the Nsukka area. There it was known as *odude*, the stool used by titled-men (Okeke: 1985). The same pattern or motif is often interpreted in different ways by different individuals (Oyelola: 1989)<sup>6</sup> but the various interpretations of the "Ebe-bell" motif all have positive associations for Igbo-speaking peoples. According to Orjinta (1989), motifs and their sources are factors which contribute to

<sup>4</sup>See Cole M.M. and Ross D.H. 1977 *The Arts of Ghana*. California: U.C.L.A., page 79.

<sup>5</sup>*Uli* is a corpus of motifs based on stylized designs derived from nature and man – made objects found in the Igbo. Speaking area of Nigeria. These motifs were formerly painted on the human body, carved on wooden doors and panels and used in murals.

<sup>6</sup>Oyelola's research into the motifs found on adire eleko revealed that the same design is sometimes given different names by different individuals.

the market success of a cloth, along with the weave, colour and association with highly placed people.

Another classic design, still being produced today in various colour combinations, is the "Hand and Fingers". The palm of the hand holds twelve large dots, representing coins, while the separate fingers form a border along both selvages. Could this design have been originally produced tongue-in-cheek: "Just so our customers won't forget there are twelve pennies in a shilling"? However, customers in West Africa interpreted this design somewhat differently. In Igbo-land it is known as "*aka ji aku*" (the hand that has or makes money) and can be worn to show social status or spite somebody (Chukwuocha: 1998).

It is when the design on a printed cloth has significance for the consumer that its market success is assured. This significance may differ from that ascribed to it by the producer. For example, an early indigo and red wax print c. 1905 featured a large central heart with a crown and under it the inscription "Gold Coast." It was surrounded by smaller hearts, each containing the names and stamps of the ports of the colonial Gold Coast (Picton: 1995). A very similar design is being produced today with all the inscriptions erased. It very popular in Igbo-land and has been named *obi di ya* (her husband's heart). It can be worn to make a co-wife, other woman or even a sister-in-law jealous by indicating the wearer's supremacy in the family (Chukwuocha :1998).

A 1945 design of five linked rings called by the producer "Olympia" sold millions of yards in the Gold Coast but not because of its connection with the Olympic Games. For the inhabitants of the Gold Coast, the rings meant chains and evoked the popular song "Don't be too unhappy because I am in prison and walk with my hands tied" (Nielsen: 1979). This brought to mind many a Gold Coast politician who had been imprisoned during the struggle for Independence.

Some designs which hit the right note with the consumers were named by them, especially in eastern Nigeria: this was a sure indicator of market success. Names of cloths were sometimes based directly on the patterns. Flying Duck,<sup>7</sup> Jumping Horse and Kiri Kiri (small



**Senator Florence Ita Giwa  
in ankara outfit designed  
by Labanella Lagbaja**

<sup>7</sup>A flying duck is not a particularly graceful bird. Could this design have been derived from a popular form of English wall-decoration in the shape of these flying plaster ducks?





A Labanella design

stylized leaves in groups of three, increasing in size from one selvedge to the other, suggested the name "Happy Family" to the users. An abstract design of multi-directional yellow and black lines like broom-strokes became known in Igbo as *Ama n di a na eze* (one is not sure of whom to avoid). (Orjinta: 1989)

small) Star need no explanation. "NITEL" was so named because the motif suggested a satellite dish and cables. A cloth bearing an over-all design of a single eye enclosed in a square was called "Eye-witness", implying that God sees everything. Square and rectangular shapes piled up in blocks suggesting buildings gave the name "Block 1004" to a cloth manufactured at the time when the multi-storey residential quarters for Federal legislators were built in Lagos. A series of cloths known as "Broken Plate" feature sharp-edged triangular motifs like fragments of broken china (Chukwuocha: 1998).

However, there is not always an obvious connection between name and design. A cloth can be named because it appeared at the same time as an important event took place or at the time an important personality came into prominence. "Toll Gate" was made in the year Nigeria started collecting toll from motorists across state borders, however, there are no motifs on the cloth suggesting roads, toll-barriers or money "Mirror in the Sun" was imported when the popular soap opera of the same name was running on Nigerian television. Others from the same Igbo consumer group called it *osisi n' ami ego* (the tree that grows money) because the design featured tree-branches with large disks like fruit. "Nelson Mandela" a cloth produced in 1990 and named after the icon of the black liberation struggle in South Africa who was released that year after 27 years in prison, is covered in small light and dark triangles (Chukwuocha: 1998).

Some patterns have a significance for their users which reflect their own societal values and expectations. A design of branches and leaves placed close together all over the surface of the cloth is named in Igbo *Oke Ossisi* (strong tree), the appellation given to someone who has made a mark in society (Chukwuocha: 1998). Sprays of



Variations on a theme

background designs can be commissioned from the factory but only for a specified minimum number of metres. These fabrics are made up into the garment of the individuals' choice and worn to show solidarity with a prominent person such as an *oba* on his installation (or anniversary of his installation) or a politician during his election campaign or victory.

Funerary cloths are similar in design to commemorative cloths and are worn at the time of the obsequies to show support for the deceased and his/her family. At the funeral of an elderly Yoruba person, it is customary to wear prestige cloth such as damask, lace or *aso oke* for the church service and *ankara* for the post-funeral reception. If the family has not commissioned a special funerary cloth, they will choose a print (preferably wax) available in sufficient quantity and sell it to friends who are free to have it made up into the garment and style of their choice. It has recently become customary to prescribe two different prints for a funeral: one to be worn at the wake-keeping and one at the reception. According to Akinwunmi (1990) this practice of *aso ebi*: or "family event uniform" started in Lagos in the 1920's, first using hand-woven cloth.

Roller-printing, which produced the so-called "Fancy prints", much cheaper than wax-prints, could produce fine linear detail and combine numerous colours. This resulted in a vast variety of designs both abstract and those based on almost everything in the natural and man-made world: animals, birds, fish, butterflies, snails, spiders, trees, flowers, fruit, planets, space-rockets, electric fans, hand-bags, even mobile phones and computers. There are also cloths, which skillfully reproduce the patterns on hand-printed and hand-woven African textiles such as *adinkra*, *adire*, *aso oke*, *akwete*, *bogolan* and *kente*. The colours and designs of these cloths are so faithfully reproduced that an examination of the texture is the only way of distinguishing them from the genuine article.

Commemorative roller-prints<sup>8</sup> featuring a combination of portraits, text and decorative

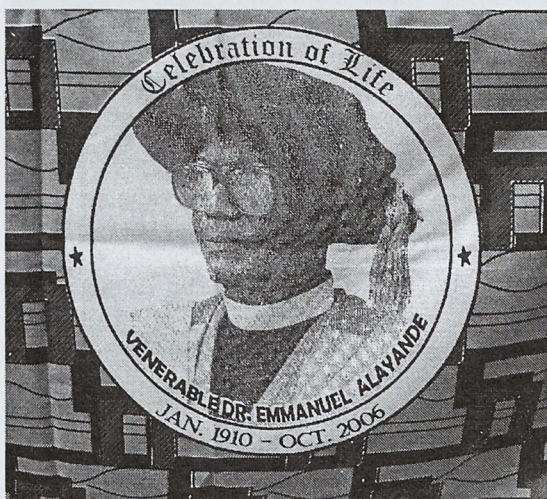
<sup>8</sup>Special designs can also be commissioned for societies both secular and religious e.g. National Council of Women's Societies (Nigeria), Mother's Union etc. In this case, the cloth carries the logo of the society and an appropriate design.

Commemorative cloth, whether in honour of the living or the dead, follows roughly the same pattern. The portrait bust of the protagonist, usually reproduced from a photograph, dominates the cloth enclosed in a medallion and is repeated at one metre intervals. The full name and title with relevant dates are printed around the medallion. Other inscriptions relevant to the purpose of the cloth may be printed in English or (in the case of cloths produced for use in Yoruba-land) in Yoruba e.g. *oye a mori* (may the title stick to your head i.e. may you not be deposed), for the installation of Oba Emmanuel Adegboyega Adeyemo Oparinde I, Olubadan of Ibadan; *Igba odun odun kan* (two hundred years, one year i.e. your life will be so enjoyable that two hundred years will pass like one year) for the first anniversary of the installation of Oba (Dr.) Adegboyega Dosumu, Olowu of Owu.



Commemorative cloth for the installation of  
Oba E.A. Adeyemo, Oparinde I

The clothing worn by the protagonist in the portrait is usually a clear indicator of status. Cloths associated with an *oba* show him wearing a crown. The funerary cloth for the Ven. Dr. Emmanuel Alayande (Jan. 1910–Oct. 2006) shows him in clerical collar and doctoral



Funerary cloth for Ven. Dr. E. Alayande

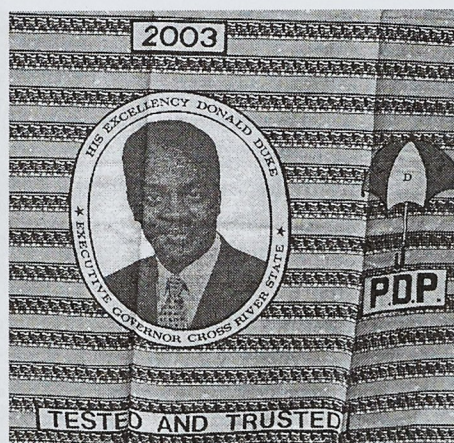


Commemorative cloth for the 1<sup>st</sup> year  
anniversary of the installation of Oba  
(Dr.) A. Dosumu, Olowu of Owu

hat, indicators of his ecclesiastical and academic rank.

Two of the political campaign cloths issued in 2003 show cool, composed and confident images of the candidates—who were already in office but seeking re-election. The portraits are repeated at one metre intervals. Slogans are printed boldly above and below His Excellency Donald Duke, Executive Governor of Cross River State, dressed in suit, collar and tie—“Donald Duke our choice” and “Tested and trusted”. The symbol of the People’s Democratic Party appears at intervals between the portrait—an umbrella with green, white and red segments. The background to these images is vivid lemon yellow crossed by transverse black and green lines. The presidential campaign cloth simply has a portrait-bust of the candidate dressed in Yoruba attire with his signature *aso oke* cap and “Vote Olusegun Obasanjo for President in 2003” above and below. The background is a cool, pale blue with an all-over design of black stems and leaves, very similar to the “Strong Tree” design; was this deliberate or a happy co-incidence?

As Bickford (1997) has pointed out, the designers of roller-prints have a *horror vacui*: the surface of commemorative cloths is densely covered with small, decorative motifs, which may or may not be related to the personality concerned. For cloths connected with an *oba*, small European-style crowns often feature among other motifs. The Olowu cloth has crowns among stylized flowers. The Olubadan cloth has a pattern of *akoko* leaves (*Newbouldia laevis*) enclosed in squares. These are placed on the head of a chief at his installation. The funerary cloth of Chief Obafemi Awolowo had a border and background design of palm-trees (symbol of his political party, the Action Group) and light-bulbs (symbolizing the spread of “enlightenment” through education). The Alayande funerary cloth has an abstract pattern of purple and lime-green rectangles as a background to his portrait.



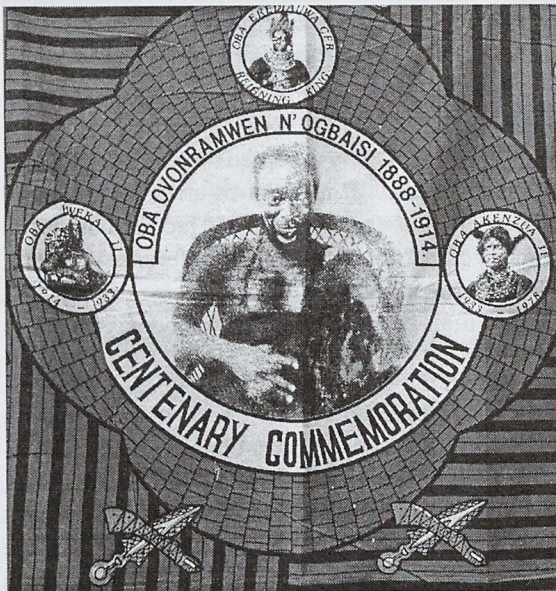
Campaign cloth for H.E. Donald Duke



Campaign cloth for President  
Olusegun Obasanjo



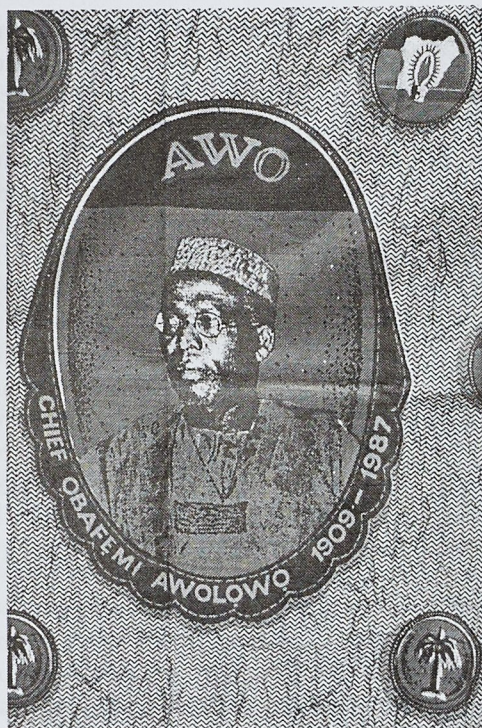
Commemorative cloth for the Beatification of Father Tamsi



Commemorative cloth marking the centenary of the exile of Oba Ovonramwen from Benin

Events can also be marked with cloth. FESTAC 77 (The Second World Festival of Black and African Culture) inspired designs, which featured the Benin ivory mask, symbol of the Festival and the National Theatre, designed by Bulgarians for the event. Operation Feed the Nation, a government programme of the 1970's, was publicized through cloth printed with farming scenes enclosed in rectangles. The cloth produced for the second visit of Pope John Paul to Nigeria in 1998 for the beatification of Father Tamsi was a veritable poster with portraits, bold inscriptions and a hovering dove radiating light over all.

The year 1997 was the centenary of the exile of Oba Ovonramwen from Benin. This was marked by a whole series of events (plays, art exhibitions, lectures) and by a special factory-printed cloth which featured images of Oba Ovonramwen and his successors. In this case, the portrait departed radically from the usual kingly images shown on commemorative cloths. It is the much-reproduced photograph of Oba Ovonramwen, stripped of his regalia, on board the boat which carried him to exile in Calabar. However, around him, framed in small circles, are the portraits of his successors in full kingly splendour with the dates of their reigns—Eweka II (1914–1933) Akenzua (1933–1978) and the reigning monarch, Erediauwa. The border and background are decorated with the *ada* and *eben*, the ceremonial swords



Chief Obafemi Awolowo

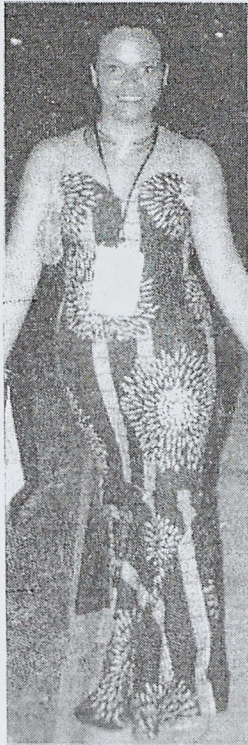


Commemorative for the coronation of Oba Adedotun Alaka of Abeokuta

symbolic of royal authority.

Ankara (both wax and roller print) is a versatile fabric, widely accepted throughout Nigeria. Being 100% cotton, it is indeed for a tropical climate. It is worn by men, women and children in southern Nigeria, however Hausa men wear only brocade and jacquard in pastel colours or white. A Hausa tailor, Mr. Ibrahim, could not explain this preference but said, "We have left *ankara* for the women". Hausa women wear full-length dresses of *ankara*, but their head is covered and the upper part of their body is draped in a modesty-shawl in conformity with Islamic custom.

Ankara can be made up into a wide range of garments for men and women in both European and West African styles: skirts, jackets, dresses, blouses, boubous, kaftans, up-and-down (long fitted skirts with matching tops), *buba* and wrapper (Yoruba style), wrappers (Igbo style), shirts, *agbada*, *buba* and *soro* (loose collarless shirt and straight trousers, Yoruba style) and "jumpers" (loose collarless tops worn by Igbo men). The Pope John Paul/Father Tamsi commemorative cloth was made into chasubles for Catholic priests as well as various garments worn by the laity.



**Ankara used for a  
skirt-length dress**

There are certain ethnic differences in the use of *ankara* for dress. An Igbo married woman always wears wrappers in pairs when seen in public. The inner wrapper is ankle-length, the outer wrapper comes to mid-calf. She may wear a single wrapper when in the house doing domestic chores. On public occasions, Dutch wax wrappers are worn<sup>9</sup> with a lace or elaborately beaded blouse and head tie. Igbo women often refer to Dutch wax prints as “Hollandais”, part of the trade-mark printed on the selvedge. Young women wear *ankara* as dresses, skirts or “up and down”.

An Igbo woman receives lengths of Dutch wax print as gifts at important stages in her life. It forms part of the “dowry” given to her by her fiancé and is also presented to her by her husband on the birth of her children. When her daughters marry, Dutch wax print is on the list of gifts which her sons-in-law have to provide for their mother-in-law. She will keep these cloths as souvenirs which will become heirlooms to be distributed to her daughters on her death.

Dutch wax prints have also entered the realm of avant garde art in England through the work of Yinka Shonibare who uses them to dress head-less, life-size mannequins, often in Victorian style (Picton: 2001). His work has attracted a lot of comment and interpretation but a detailed analysis is beyond the scope of this article. However, one of his works is particularly relevant. Shown at the 1995 exhibition of African textiles (which included *ankara*) at the Barbican in London, were three headless and armless mannequins dressed in the full-length, frilled and bustled gowns of the Victorian lady—all made of wax and fancy print, including the ‘Staff of kingship’ design. The title: “How does a girl like you get to be a girl like you?” The mannequins demonstrate the source of wealth, which enabled many a Victorian lady to live an elaborately dressed life of leisure—the West African textile trade!

Yoruba women of means do not hold Dutch wax prints in the same high regard as their peers east of the Niger: for them *aso oke* and “lace” are THE prestige fabric for important occasions. *Ankara* used to be treated with contempt as something worn by “the low class” (Fashion and Style: Jan. 06), unworthy of a woman of standing. It was also worn when mourning a young person (Lifestyle: Oct. 2006) so had undesirable connotations. Wax prints, whether foreign or local, were regarded as superior to roller prints, but were not accorded much respect. Nevertheless, if *ankara* (wax or roller) was prescribed as *aso ebi*:

<sup>9</sup>Dutch wax print is not the only fabric of choice. “George” is also popular.

by a friend for a particular occasion, especially a post-funeral reception, she would buy it and wear it with expensive accessories on that occasion.<sup>10</sup>

Older Yoruba women of modest means wear *ankara* sewn into *buba* and a single wrapper as everyday dress. An *ankara* wrapper without *buba* may be worn within the house. Younger, middle-class women wear *ankara* on informal occasions made up into boubous or kaftans and enriched with machine embroidery around the neck and sometimes the sleeves. Young women are looking at *ankara* with a new approach, as will be seen later.

*Ankara* is also used in a funerary context. The Kalabari of Rivers State display prestige cloths in the room where the body of a distinguished citizen lies in state on an elaborate brass bed before burial. Dutch wax print is ranked among these prestige cloths and is arranged in bolts on the bed beside the body. (Spencer: 2001). Other more elaborate prestige cloths, imported or hand-woven, may be hung on the walls or manipulated into artistic shapes by women specialists for display on the bed after the burial (Eicher and Erekosima: 1987).

At the funeral in Lagos of an elderly Yoruba a lady with Ghanaian ancestry on her mother's side, a length of *ankara* chosen as *aso ebi* for the post-funeral reception was placed into her casket together with toiletries so she could freshen up when she reached the other shore. Mourners were given a narrow strip of *ankara*, torn from a different cloth by a Ghanaian lady seated near the casket, to tie round their wrist. These strips were later thrown into the grave. Behind the table displaying the photograph of the deceased at the wake-keeping was hung a roller-print of *kente* design.

*Ankara* is also appearing in the context of interior design. An international hotel in Lagos used *ankara* squares very effectively over plain table-cloths. It has also been used as slip-covers on chairs at receptions. Simple bed-covers can be made from lengths of *ankara* whilst *ankara* patch-work makes striking duvet covers. Remnants are made into purses and wallets or used to cover note-books and journals.

In the realm of clothing, a revolution has taken place in the attitude towards *ankara* West of the Niger. There are several life-style magazines, full of colour photographs, which publicize high-profile social events, focussing on ladies of fashion. When people saw that *ankara* was the fabric chosen as *aso ebi* by multi-millionaire Mike Adenuga for his

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<sup>10</sup>Ladies wearing *ankara* for a birthday, wedding or funeral reception wear carefully chosen toning or contrasting head – ties and shawls (*iborun*), beads or real gems and matching shoes and hand – bags. Young professional men will have their outfit (often a simple *buba* and *soro*) sewn by a tailor of repute and will wear it with designer sandals and an expensive watch. Six yards of Nigerian wax print cost approximately ₦1,500 but the accessories are much more expensive.





**“Patch” technique**

mother’s funeral (Nov. 05) and by other affluent citizens for birthdays and weddings, it received the cachet of approval and respectability (Lifestyle: Oct. 06). *Ankara* is also worn by people of African descent in Europe and America as a badge of ethnicity.

Fashion-designers suddenly opened their eyes to the potentials of *ankara* and created an enormous variety of styles, some times using *ankara* in combination with other plain fabric as a contrast. They also evolved new techniques inspired by the fabric. “Patch” involves cutting out motifs from the *ankara* and using them as appliqué on the garment according to the imagination of the designer. Labanella (Hajia Abbah Folawiyo) arranges cut-out motifs from *ankara* in layers on plain fabric. In “Lagbaja style”, small strips are cut from the fabric, twisted and attached to the garment by the short ends so that they dangle. This style takes its name from the popular musician, Lagbaja, whose face is covered by a cloth mask and who wears a costume with long strips of cloth dangling from it like a Yoruba *egungun*.

*Ankara* featured regularly in newspapers and life-style magazines throughout 2006. President Obasanjo now wears *ankara agbada* (when he is not wearing *adire*). He and his family and well-wishers wore *ankara* for part of the funeral ceremonies for Mrs. Stella Obasanjo in 2005. Democracy has now extended to dress and given *ankara* respectability.

*Ankara*, both wax print and roller print, is available in shops and markets all over Nigeria. It is sold in 6yd. and 12yd. lengths: it is not possible to buy fewer than 6yds. Fabric is not measured off a roll as it is in Europe or America: it is already folded ready for sale in 6yd. or 12yd “bundles” bearing a fancy manufacturer’s label, often with gold foil detail. Fabrics are hung in rows on the walls of shops and on strings across the front of the shop. The cloth trade is in the hands of women who, in the case of influential dealers, can provide ideas for colour combinations and designs to the factories where they are executed by designers.

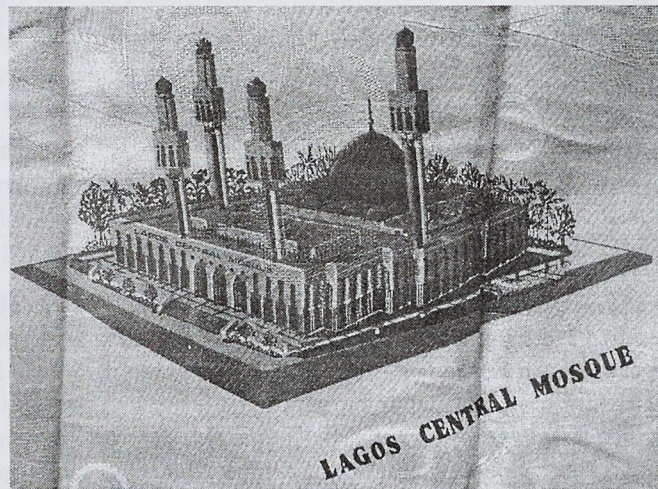
Dutch and English wax prints still find their way into Nigeria and are the most expensive prints on the market. Their designs are sometimes copied by Nigerian textile mills. Prints from Mali, Senegal, Ivory Coast and Ghana can also be found. These are bought by fashionable ladies wanting a print that is ‘not common’. Nigerian print, whether wax or roller, comes in a wide variety of colours and designs. Colours are strong and bold and the surface of the fabric is densely patterned all over.

Factories producing wax prints and roller prints were set up in Nigeria from 1961 onwards with foreign partners. There was rapid expansion in the 1970's and by 1978, one million people were employed in the textile industry in approximately 150 companies. Twenty five percent of the textiles produced were exported to West African markets. However, there was a downward trend in the industry from the 1980's onwards attributable to several causes:

- Increase in the price of raw materials.
- Erratic power and water supplies.
- Large – scale smuggling of cheap textiles into Nigeria.

Pirating of successful Nigerian designs which were copied cheaply in China and Korea and smuggled into the market. At the present moment, only 32 textile mills are functioning in Nigeria with a work force of 30,000.<sup>11</sup>

In spite of the down-turn in the textile industry, *ankara* is still a bright presence in the streets of Nigeria. As a fabric, it has become assimilated into the local aesthetic and is referred to as “part of Nigerian culture”.<sup>12</sup>



Commemorative printed brocade  
for opening of new LagosCentral Moaque

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<sup>11</sup>Information from N.T.A. programme on the Nigerian Textile Industry transmitted on Jan. 20 2007.

<sup>12</sup>See “ Style and Design” supplement to *This Day*, Oct. 1<sup>st</sup> 2006.

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## THE DAY I SAW THE ECLIPSE

The eclipse happened on Wednesday, the 29<sup>th</sup> of March. The eclipse lasted for about 20 minutes. I saw the eclipse with a pair of special glasses made from filter and foil, which were given to me at the Forestry Research Institute.

What cause an eclipse is when the moon comes between the sun and the earth This eclipse was only partial, so it was only a little bit dark. Then the moon moved away and there was light once more. What a beautiful day.

—Kitan Sogo, Level 3, Age 7  
Rhenua's Private School, Ibadan

The day I saw the eclipse, there were many people there. It happened on Wednesday, the 29<sup>th</sup> of March. It lasted 30 minutes. I saw it was very nice, but I was afraid. It looked like evening. I used special glasses. I felt scared, it was so dark. My heart was beating so hard. I felt that it was evening, then it became so light and I wasn't scared again. It was exciting. It was all because the moon covered the sun.

—Moyinoluwa Shoroye, Level 2, Age 6  
Rhenua's private school, Ibadan

On the day I saw the eclipse it was Wednesday, the 29<sup>th</sup> of March 2006. It was 10:00 am in the morning. Many people were there when we saw it at the Federal College of Forestry.

When we got there, we didn't have the solar eclipse spectacles, but the people here gave us some. I saw it and I was so excited. Soon the moon blocked one quarter of the sun. Then it became half, then it became a crescent. Before we knew it it became smaller than a crescent. Everywhere started getting dark. Then the moon went the opposite way, and it started getting brighter.

We thought we would witness total darkness, but the eclipse was only partial. It looked like 6:00 pm in the evening. I thought it was Judgement day and I was very scared! That is what happened on the day I saw the eclipse.

—Daniel Shoroye, Level 5, Age 9  
Rhenua's private school, Ibadan