RESPLENDENCE: THE IMPORTANCE OF STRATEGIC SARTORIALITY AND THE ROLE OF AṢỌ ÒKÈ IN THE CULTURE OF THE YORÙBÁ OF SOUTH WESTERN NIGERIA

By

ENITAN OLUREMI BANKOLE-RACE

Word count: 30200

ROYAL COLLEGE OF ART

MPHIL.

ABSTRACT

There are certain factors that ensure the preservation and significance of *Aṣọ òkè* in the Yorùbá understanding of resplendence: the most important of these is that it is still considered important to wear traditional attire at milestone occasions like weddings, investitures, and funerals, and *aṣọ òkè* is reserved for special occasions where formal or elevated dressing is required. This is the reason why the Yorùbá say '*aṣọ l'a ńkí ki a tó kí ènìyàn'* 'one salutes the cloth(es) before greeting the wearer'. My research examines the phenomenon of resplendence as it presents in Yorùbá culture, specifically through the use this pre-eminent prestige cloth of the Yorùbá.

The axiological empirical study focused on upper and upper-middle class Yorùbá living in Lagos, the commercial capital of Nigeria, using their sociality as a prism to extrapolate contemporary resplendence manifestation among the Yorùbá. It explores the centrality of resplendence to the core value-system of the Yorùbá of western Nigeria: how strategic sartoriality informs and is informed by concepts of morality, traditional religious beliefs, kinship and beauty. My research includes an exploration of the employment of 'skilled vision' in the understanding of this sartorial appreciation and in the transposition of roles in relation to typical western hierarchies of creative production, as the weavers' status remains as artisan while the 'accomplished' wearer of *aṣọ òkè* is elevated to artist.

I believe that my research offers an opportunity to produce a cohesive body of knowledge on the phenomenon of resplendence and the concept of strategic sartoriality as practiced and manifested within contemporary Yorùbá society. This will extend the current knowledge regarding the inter-relationship of the Yorùbá value-system and sensibility and its traditional textiles while congruently exploring the socio-psychological impact of the continuation of the phenomenon in a postmodern age. This context is rife with non-cultural distractions and competition, including facing the impact of COVID pandemic realities. The research undertakes a multi-method approach through the following research questions:

- **What is the significance of the concepts of Resplendence and strategic sartoriality in Yorùbá culture? How do integral cultural signifiers survive contemporisation and continue to retain their specific cultural symbolism and meaning?**
- **What are the dichotomies of cultural gender expectations within this society and are they viewed as onerous or positively assistive? How are any gendered inequalities or inequities of socio-cultural pressure manifested, and what mechanisms are employed to negotiate these pressures?**
- **What are the psycho-social armatures that support the continued expectation of strategic sartoriality and the manifestation of resplendence?**
- **What has been COVID 19's impact on this milieu and the practice of resplendence? What factors militated against seizing the opportunity the pandemic presented for a societal recalibration regarding resplendence?**
- **Why would a society (or individual) persist in the practice of a retrogressive version of resplendence even when the practice is apparently inimical and counterproductive to societal and individual wellbeing?**

The study also offers the opportunity to provide a contemporary account drawn during the COVID era, exploring circumstances under which cultures may appear to work against their own societal wellbeing or interest.

In this research I coined the term 'strategic sartoriality', which is the intentional targeting of attire and adornment in order to manipulate situations, as well as the word 'psychosphere,' which I use to describe the psycho-cultural social milieu in which this behaviour and the study takes place.

Key words: Strategic Sartoriality, Resplendence, Psychosphere, Yorùbá, *Aṣọ òkè*

DECLARATION

This thesis represents partial submission for the degree of Master of Philosophy at the Royal College of Art. I confirm that the work presented here is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

During the period of registered study in which this thesis was prepared the author has not been registered for any other academic award or qualification. The material included in this thesis has not been submitted wholly or in part for any academic award or qualification other than that for which it is now submitted.

SIGNED: 

DATED: 5th December 2022

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

LIST OF ACCOMPANYING MATERIAL

Appendix A: Additional illustrations
Appendix B: Video footage
Appendix C: Strategic Sartoriality questionnaire responses
Appendix D: Consent form
Appendix E: Bibliography
Appendix F: Citations

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Research for this thesis was funded by the TECHNE Arts and Humanities Research Council and the Royal College of Art. I would like to express my gratitude for all their assistance.

The Yorùbá say *'Ẹlẹ́dẹ̀ a d'Ọyọ́, ariwo l'ó le pọ̀ '* (The pig WILL make it to 'Ọyọ́ , the journey may just be noisy and messy). I feel this is an apt description of this research journey. Although I consider myself to be a strong, self-motivated woman/person, a great deal has happened in the four years since its inception, especially with regards to major complications with my physical and mental health, and many times I doubted the possibility of completion, or whether I would actually be here to complete. However, *Ènìyàn l'aṣọ mi* (people are my clothing), and the vicissitudes of this journey have certainly proved that to me.

I am grateful to God for the grace to still be here and the reminder that I have more to accomplish, and to all of my Ancestors for not sleeping and for letting me know they were not yet ready for me.

I would like to thank the following people; without whose assistance this research would not be possible:

Dr Peter Oakley, my initial supervisor, who was actively instrumental in enabling me to seek and receive TECHNE studentship and was always so enthusiastic, encouraging and supportive of my research, even through the most challenging of 'writer's block' periods. I appreciate your apparently infinite knowledge of luxury material culture and your attempts to steer me onto the straight and narrow, when the tangential beckoned temptingly. Regardless of the outcome, I am so grateful and feel blessed that you and I met and had that conversation after my presentation in Milan all those years ago.

Dr Catherine Dormor, my final supervisor, thank you for 'rescuing' my almost sunk ship and guiding my new direction. Without your firm clarity, I could not have reached this point. And thank you for being a great encourager of the despairing.

My main field research was undertaken between December 2019 and February 2020 with shorter forays to Nigeria prior to that. During these field trips, I travelled to various parts of the southwest and I would very much like to thank all of my contacts, facilitators and participants in this study.

The weavers from the Ajíṣafẹ Weavers' Compound, Ìsẹ́yìn, especially Mr Akanbi, Baba Mufu and our 'introducer' the very obliging Mr Saliu Ajọ́fá. It would have been a joy to serve a 'mini apprenticeship' among such artisanship.

Iya 'Démọlá and Iya 'Bejì, the enterprising female a*ṣọ òkè* beaters in Òjé market Ìbàdàn were very gracious with their time. Their accounts of being female in a 'male' preserve were as enlightening as they were hilarious.

Mr Ṣeun Òdúyalé Managing Director of BISBOD Aṣọ òkè, Surulere, Lagos, for his valuable insight into the commercial and logistical workings of the *aṣọ òkè* business.

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the venerable Prof. Adetowun Ogunsheye, for granting me an audience and honouring me with her wisdom regarding *aṣọ òkè* and other related topics.
All my questionnaire respondents and interviewees, thank you for making the time to honour my requests and being willing to answer my sometimes-uncomfortable questions. I am eternally indebted to you. My gratitude to the cohort of Lagos 'socialites', for welcoming me so warmly into your inner circle.
To my sisters, Abíọ́lá and Olúfuńkẹ́, thank you for being my *aṣọ 'bora* and facilitating this research in every way you could: for enabling doors to be opened to me in places both high and low. *Mo dupe o. Ayé ò ni yà wa o, ńkan're la ó maa bá'ra wa ṣé.*
To my friends, Cathy, Anne, Ekky, thank you for being my cheerleaders in the dark times - bless you all.
Well, *Ìbẹ̀rẹ̀ kò kí ńṣe oníṣẹ́, àfi ẹni t'ó bá rọ́ jú ní àforítì títí tó fi d'òpin* (merely starting a task doesn't make you a 'worker', that is gained by having the patience to see it through to the end). Hopefully I can now call myself a worker.

This thesis is dedicated to my daughter, my lodestar, Olivia Eyimofe, without whose love, absolutely none of this would have even been conceivable.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

This study is an axiological investigation of the role, importance, and significance of strategic sartoriality among the Yorùbá people of South-western Nigeria. Using the prism of Yorùbá ceremonial and celebratory traditions which are the main drivers of the contemporary practice of strategic sartoriality and the preservation of the continuing centrality of *aṣọ òkè* , my research investigates the cultural armature and drivers of the phenomenon of resplendence – tradition and 'fashion' – and semiotically explores the contribution to the understanding of grandeur sought by all participants - the weaver, the wearer and the observer within the psycho-social environment of contemporary Lagos. My research includes an exploration of the employment of 'skilled vision' in the understanding of this sartorial appreciation and in the transposition of roles in relation to typical western hierarchies of creative production, as the weavers' status remains as artisan while the 'accomplished' wearer of *aṣọ òkè* is elevated to artist.

The first chapter provides an overview of the Yorùbá people in their historical and cultural context and examines the close connections between their culture, philosophy and their interaction and use of textiles. It also introduces the apogee of Yorùbá sartorial sophistication, *Aṣọ òkè* and its significance in the societal practice of strategic sartoriality and the manifestation of resplendence. The next chapter examines and expounds on the axiological prism and the bricolage theoretical underpinnings that guided the research, piecing together canon from disparate theories ranging from African/Yorùbá philosophy to symbolic interactionism. In chapter 3 which examines the methods and methodologies used during this study, I explore the ambivalence of belonging and my own singular style of contemporary ethnography. In chapter 4, I discuss my findings which show that identification with a peer group serves as a reference point for interactions with community and culture, and this connection could be positive or otherwise. I also interrogate the impact of the COVID 19 pandemic on strategic sartoriality and the practice of resplendence within my study milieu. Defining strategic sartoriality and examining its functions as a continuation of the relationship between the Yorùbá and their cultural sociality with its motivators of identification and

differentiation, and an exploration of the Yorùbá sensibilities of dress are the focus of the next chapter. In the final chapter, I bring together my argument that the sartorial manifestation of resplendence is central to Yorùbá culture and *aṣọ òkè* speaks a language of specific aesthetic sensibilities and cultural values governing the communal Yorùbá understanding and usage of what is an intangible sensorial experience.

There may be a significant number of unfamiliar words, terms and phrases in this thesis, and explanatory annotations are provided in the footnotes at the bottom of each page. There is therefore no separate glossary. Within the chapters, the section headings also generally alternate between Yorùbá and English, this is intentional.

***'An anthropological manifesto is one that makes manifest what otherwise is implicit in the practice of populations'* (Miller & Woodward, 2005).**

The Descendants of Gods

The Yorùbá nations, with about 40 million people and the largest ethnic group in Africa, claim to be descended from the *Òrìṣà*.[1] Their culture is unique and can be traced back to Oduduwa, with Ile-Ife considered the birthplace of civilization. The status of the word 'Yorùbá' is a point of contention between social historians and people who might be called 'neo-essentialists.' While there is a lot of information about post-1850 history that illustrates a prime example of how missionaries, colonialists, and post-colonialists shaped cultural identities of ethnic groups, this same wealth of data has allowed other scholars to craft a definition of Yorùbá culture into an essentialized and often ahistorical overarching narrative that tends to hide real changes and differences between the nations' cultures. (Clarke, 1998).

One of the major ethnic groups in Nigeria and West Africa, the Yorùbá occupy the south-western states of the country (*Ogun, Lagos, Ondo, Oyo and Ekiti*), and some parts of *Kwara* and *Kogi* states in Northern Nigeria. Besides Nigeria, Yorùbá are also found in sizable numbers in the South-eastern part of the Republic of Benin, Togo and Dahomey in West Africa, in West India and in South Africa (Balogun 2009, 1). They have been historically diasporic and there is a strong Yorùbá culture in South America and the Caribbeans, especially in Brazil and Cuba, where the descendants of unwillingly emigrated people who came to the New World have been able to retain their identity and keep their culture alive. (Gbadegesin 1991, 174).

[1] deities

Historically, traditional Yorùbá social order was based on a community philosophy, with several families, all of which belonged to the same lineage, cohabiting. Lineages were patrilineal, and an extended family residence was known as an *agbo-ile*, or lineage complex. The compound was made up of individual homes that the *idile*[2] or *ebi*[3] as well as some outsiders (*alejo*) lived in. '*The father of the family is considered the 'head' and his first wife is the mother of the house. If her husband chooses to marry another wife, that wife must show proper respect to the first wife even if the first wife is chronologically younger. Children are taught to have respect for all those who are older than they are. This includes their parents, aunts, uncles, elder siblings, and cousins who they deal with every day.' — Bascom 1969.*

While these living arrangements may be obsolete in urban areas, and certainly are, among my study group, elements of patriarchy and filial respect very much still hold sway. In Yorùbá society and culture there is an absolute veneration for the elderly, who as custodians of the societal culture and heritage, are considered the epitome of wisdom, experience, knowledge, civil discourse and noble character deserving the emulation of the younger generation. One of the most powerful prayers is *'w'àá j'ẹun ọmọ'*[4]. However, it is important to note that an individual only assumes the social honour that comes with age if they internalise and exhibit socially approved norms and values in their character, with the social structure scorning the elderly who fail the existing normative value. *'The Yorùbá social structure also disdains the ignoble aged. The ignoble aged is the one who fails to act within socially approved norms. Such aged people are described as lacking a sense of maturity, self-respect and dignity. The Yorùbá social structure is embedded with normative values that abhors ignobility among the aged in all ramifications.'* (Omobowale, A.O.). This is the practical demonstration of the *ọmọlúàbí* principle, the Yorùbá definition of virtue and good breeding.

For the majority of modern day Yorùbá, Christianity and Islam have ostensibly superseded traditional *Òrìṣà* worship and ancestor veneration, with religious effigies now seen as 'demonic', especially among devotees of the new 'Redeemed' and 'Evangelical' Christian denominations. However, these non-traditional religions are very often merely a thin veneer over an underlying and culturally entrenched belief in the concept of *Orí*[5] as a metaphysical concept important to Yorùbá Yoruba spirituality and way of life (*Orí*, literally 'head,' refers to one's spiritual intuition and destiny, and represents the reflective spark of human consciousness embedded into the human essence) and it is impossible to understand the world in which the Yorùbá live without appreciating the part that religion plays in their lives. Yorùbá religious and political beliefs complement each other and in the process of venerating the Supreme Deity, *Olódùmarè*/God,

[2] descent groups
[3] extended family
[4] you will eat food cooked by your children: reap the reward of your labour
[5] personality-soul

ancestral forces are incorporated into the social system. The Yorùbá also believe that it is their destiny to be clothed. In an *Ifá* divination,[6] explicitly linking cloth with *Olódùmarè*, the close relationship between cloth and immortality is expressed:

Young ones never hear the death of cloth,

Cloth only wears to shreds.

Old ones never hear the death of cloth,

Cloth only wears to shreds.

Young ones never hear the death of Olodumare,

Cloth only wears to shreds.

Old ones never hear the death of Olodumare

Cloth only wears to shreds.[7]

Through these links, one can see the explicit connection the Yorùbá make between cloth, life cycle, their cosmology and power. For example, the Ijebu (one of the Yorùbá nations) weave and use a particular style of *aṣọ òkè* known as *Aṣọ ọlọ́nà*[8] because of its distinctively abundant array of weft float motifs, provide an excellent illustration of this point. The cloth, which depicts water spirits and other potent symbols, is used as badges of chieftaincy, priesthood, and Osugbo membership. As such, it is fundamental to the authority and rule of the Ijebu.

[6] Ifá is a Yorùbá religion and divination system. Its literary corpus is the sixteen-volume Odu Ifá. There are a total of 256 Odu, and these constitute the foundation of traditional Yorùbá spiritual knowledge. Instead of being written down, Ifá proverbs, stories, and poetry are transmitted orally from one Baba'láwo (Ifá Priest)to the next. Ifá is consulted by Yorùbá for divine intervention andspiritual guidance.

[7] ***Odù Ifá Verse ix (trans.) Beier, U (1970)*** Yorùbá Poetry: An Anthology of Traditional Poems, Cambridge University Press

[8] cloth with patterns

Fig 1. ***Aṣọ ọlọ́nà Ceremonial*** **regalia of** ***Oṣugbo*** **membership, Ijebu-land.**

The ubiquity of the notion of textiles having history-holding qualities is fundamental, but the language developed to explore it needs to be complex. requires specific expertise to decipher and understand the concept. As the purpose of traditional textiles is to convey much more than the merely decorative, the pattern, the weave, the thread, even the weaver and circumstances of usage all bear witness to a narrative to be passed down through the generations, sometimes even appearing in the family *oríkì*. In Yorùbá traditions, the more a prestige textile depreciates in physicality, the more it appreciates in status and value. They say that while cloth is the glory of a family, the family are reciprocally also the glory of the cloth. Even if heirloom cloths (inherited through generations) are too frail to be worn, the fact of their age confers high status which is reflected on the owner/family – *'b'ọmọdé tiẹ̀ l'aṣọ bí àgbà, kò lé l'àkísà bí àgbà'*.[9] No lineage arose on earth rich – even the most prestigious of families had to start somewhere, thus, even, a 'peasant' hand-woven cloth is honoured among aṣọ òkè as documenting a lineage's beginning. During the question and answer session of the talk at his curated exhibition in 2017 at the Camden Arts Centre, the Yorùbá designer Duro Olowu (famous for the apparent ease with which he parts with objets d'art within his collection) was asked if there was anything he would never part with. His answer - the textiles and garments that he had inherited from his father and grandfather. Although most were unwearable due to age and decrepitude, he considered them tangible physical symbols of his ancestry and therefore priceless.

[9] even if the young have clothes to rival the elderly, they cannot have as many rags

Aṣọ iyì, aṣọ èyé

***Aṣọ òkè*, also called *aṣọ ofi*, is the most culturally important Yorùbá prestige textile, (the name operates on two levels – *aṣọ òkè* (literally higher cloth) as well as *aṣọ ìlú òkè* (cloth from the 'upper country' (hinterland, hilly country) where it originated) is traditionally hand-woven on a loom that produces strips of cloth a few inches wide. The strips are customarily about 14cm wide, and are usually stitched together to make an outfit, with the number of strips dependent on the type of cloth and design. There are very many *aṣọ òkè* types, including *Adoji* – drawn-string laced with red and white warp stripes: *Waka* – an *Ijebu* cloth, solid black, with occasional red warp stripes; *Opa Aro* – dark blue with green stripes; *Ifun* – beige/light brown and navy popular among the *Owo* and *Ondo*; but the three most widely recognised and considered pre-eminent are *Sányán, Alaari* and *Etu* in their many variations (Clarke 1998, Ogunsheye 2019, Bankole-Race 2015). *Sányán* is regarded as the pinnacle of all Yorùbá cloths, illustrated in the saying'*Sányán, Ọba aṣọ (Sányán,* king of cloths). The fibre used for making this cloth is obtained from the cocoons of the Anaphe silkworm which are processed and hand-spun into silk threads before being washed and soaked in corn-starch. The natural colour of the silk gives *Sányán* its distinctive beige colour. Many of the vintage high status *aṣọ òkès* can be very plain, of subdued pattern and colour, and the mistake is often made that the more elaborate or colourful, the more prestigious the cloth. But *Sányán*, plain and undyed beige, is considered the 'Father' of cloths (*Sányán baba aṣọ*) for a number of reasons. Because of its light colour, it is easy to get dirty in the dusty African sun. Therefore, an intact inherited *Sányán* with a patina of age declares to the world that this family does not wear their clothes like fools. A traditional prayer is '*Kí ayé má ta epo sí mí l'aṣọ* '[10]. Wearing *sányan* is therefore a declaration of wealth and breeding, proving that one has more than one 'court attire'– *'ẹní wọ sányan r'aṣọ fí pàràṣ',* (one wearing *sányan* obviously owns more than a single garment) and that one 'knows' how to wear such prestigious clothing, indicating good breeding. My family (Bankole of Isan-Ekiti) *oriki* (praise song) refers to this, calling us '*ọmọ Àlà,a m'ọ́ lá hàn...*' which means descendants of *Àlà* celebrants (white cloth wearers) showcasing their blessingsand good breeding.[11]**

***Oriki Ọbàtálá* – Praise song for the Lord of the White Cloth**

Obanla o rin n'eru ojikutu s'eru

[10] may the world not spatter palm-oil on my cloth (in other words, may our lineage not be besmirched, our family name notsullied, our societal standing maintained).

[11] *Àlà* is frequently translated to mean white cloth which is the Ifa symbol for the source of consciousness in Creation. *Obàtálá* is derived from the elision of '*Oba ìta àlà* ' meaning 'King of the crossroads of white light'.

Oba n'ílé Ifọ̀n, Alábalaṣẹ, Oba pátápátá ní'lé

ìrántjẹ

Ó yọ́ kẹ́lẹ́kẹ́lẹ́ ó ta mí

l'ọrẹ

Ó gbà a gìrì l'ọ́wọ́

òṣikà,

Ó fi l'emí aṣ'òóto

l'ọ́wọ́

Oba igbó olúwa'yé rè é

ó

Osùn l'álá ó fi kókó àlá

rú'mo Oba igbó

Àṣẹ

Chief of the White Cloth never fears the coming of Death

Father of Heaven forever rule for all generations

Gently dissolve the burdens of my friends

Expose the mystery of abundance

So that I become like the White Cloth

Protector of White Cloth, I salute you

Father of the Sacred Grove

So be it.[12]

[12] (trans.) Evachango, Lukumi Church of Orishas (2005) www.awostudycenter.com

Fig 2. *Ọbàtálá* celebrants at a reception in honour of Oba Aladesanmi, *Ewi* of Ado. Ado-Ekiti, 1977

CHAPTER TWO LITERATURE REVIEW

I use the bricolage method in my axiological approach to my topic, resplendence and strategic sartoriality among the Yorùbá, piecing together disparate theories ranging from Africanists/Yorùbáists such as Gbadegesin, Fayemi, Oluwole (*Ọmọlúàbí*), and Ajayi, through western canon such as Veblen (conspicuous consumption), Schroeder (Value Theory), Vidich & Lyman, Grasseni (Skilled vision), Mead, Blumer (Symbolic interactionism), to the varying perspectives of fashion theorists like Miller, and Woodward. As de Certeau put it, bricolage is *'the poetic making do.*'

Axiology as a branch of philosophy examines values in general, as opposed to moral values in particular, and usually highlights their multiplicity and heterogeneity while accepting their various forms of realism. There are two primary types of values: ethical inquiry involves examining morality and ideals, while the study of what is beautiful or pleasing is called aesthetics. Values here are to be understood as beliefs that are held about what is right and wrong and what is important in life. Moreover, the centrality of the place of values in Yorùbá culture as a heritage that is passed down from one generation to another, cannot be overstated, and is why a philosophical appraisal of Yorùbá culture and values is not only pertinent and timely, but also appropriate (Idang, 2015). '*It is through the ocean of the oral tradition of a non-literate culture that we explore the historical being and their contribution to the philosophical world*' (Gbadegesin, 1991).

What is culture?

There have been various attempts to categorically define 'culture' from the earliest anthropological attempts by Edward B. Taylor '*…complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, customs or any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society'* through to Bello (1991) *'the totality of the way of life evolved by a people in their attempts to meet the challenge of living in their environment, which gives order and meaning to their social, political, economic, aesthetic and religious norms thus distinguishing a people from their neighbours*'. In its conventional sense, culture refers to the sum total of characteristics and behaviours distinctive to a people to the extent that it distinguishes them from other peoples or communities (Aziza, 2001). It encompasses things like social conventions, taboos, ideals and values within the society. '*These peculiar traits go on to include the people's language, dressing, music, work, arts, religion, dancing and so on. It also goes on to include a people's social norms, taboos and values. Values*

here are to be understood as beliefs that are held about what is right and wrong and what is important in life' **(Idang, G.E., 2015).**

The Yorùbá view indigenous culture as being fundamental to daily life, despite modernity being influenced by colonisation and the post-colonization dominance of westernisation. Even in instances where the impingement of modern culture is noticeable, traditional culture remains resilient. This is evident in greeting forms, salutations, belief systems, traditional political institutions and social conceptions about the elderly, among other issues. '*The child just grows into and within the cultural heritage of his people. He imbibes it. Culture, in traditional society, is not taught; it is caught. The child observes, imbibes and mimics the action of his elders and siblings. He watches the naming ceremonies, religious services, marriage rituals, funeral obsequies. He witnesses the coronation of a king or chief, the annual yam festival, the annual dance and acrobatic displays of guilds and age groups or his relations in the activities. The child in a traditionalsociety cannot escape his cultural and physical environments.'* (Fafunwa, 1974).

Ọmọlúàbí and Àṣà

Ọmọlúàbí **is a philosophical and cultural concept that is intrinsic to the Yorùbá people and is used to describe someone of good and virtuous nature. In relation to social virtues, the *Yorùbá* have been described as '*virtuous, loving and kind*' (Johnson, 1921). Like the Greek *eudaimonia*, the Yorùbá use the concept of *ọmọlúàbí* as the guiding standard which determines morality and immorality in society - a combination of all virtues. in deeds and in action. According to Oluwole, *ọmọlúàbí* is '*a phrase that means 'ọmọ tí ó ní ìwà bíí ẹni tí a kọ́, t'ó sì gbá ẹ̀ kọ́ ' (a person (child) [sic] who behaves like someone who is nurtured and lives by the precepts of the education he/she has been given*)' (Oluwole 2007,). The Yorùbá use the term therefore to indicate a person who is polite and cultured, one who respects themselves and others, and who carries themselves with dignity, and characterise the noun '*ọmọlúàbí*' as a virtue that aids in the acquisition and application of skill, knowledge, and wisdom to better one's own circumstances as well as that of one's community. As a result, an '*ọmọlúàbí'* must always be prepared to give back to his community, not just n words but also in deeds. (Adebowale, B.A. 2019). Fayemi on the other hand, considers it as a compound word constituted of suffixes and refers to it as an adjectival Yorùbá phrase and breaks it down thus: *ọmọ + tí***

+ Olú + ìwà + bí. 'Literally translated and separated, ọmọ means child, tí means that or which, olú-ìwà means the chief or master of Ìwà (character), bí means born. When combined, ọmọlúàbí translates as 'the baby begotten by the chief of ìwà.' Such a child is thought of as a paragon of excellence in character **(Fayemi, 2009, Adebowale, ibid). While purists such as Majasan (1967), and Arikeusola (1973) insist on the unsullied**

and unsulliable nature of the true *' ọmọlúàbí'*, it is recognised that this template is an ideal, and in reality, an *ọmọlúàbí* may not be of impeccable character or flawless, as *Yorùbá* society, practitioners of practical philosophy, *'abhor all claims of absolutism, and believe that as humans we can only, and ought to, strive towards the ideal, because perfection is illusory'* (Fayemi 2009, 171).

The word generally used for culture, tradition and manner is *àṣà*. In this connection the Yorùbá declare *'àṣà ilẹ̀ wa ni'* :[13]

Ẹ jẹ́ kí a ṣé

Bí wọ́ ń ti ńṣé

Kí ó lè báa rí

***Bí ó ṣe ńrí*[14]**

Abiodun expands on the concept of tradition as it is expressed in the Yorùbá language. *'The word àṣà in Yorùbá can mean either 'style' or 'tradition.' Àṣà is broadly conceived as any set of ways, approaches, or practices that characterise a person's behaviour or mode of work of a group of people or a period.* It is reasonable to theorise that *àṣà* (tradition) develops from *àṣà* (choices regarding social, political, religious, and artistic ways of expression) given that tradition emerges from the choices people make about these modes of expression (style). Moreover, in Yorùbá art and thought, the meanings of *àṣà* as 'tradition' and 'style' are connected and not necessarily contradictory to one another. This inherent dynamism is why *àṣà*, whether 'tradition' or 'style' defies stagnation. (Abiodun, 1994: 40).

Duncan Clarke also views tradition/*asa* as 'non-passive', even though they may require outside forces (choices) for motivation. '*This is useful in directing our attention to the present, and to the actors in the present, who are actively engaged in selecting, in choosing those elements from the past which will be reproduced. To the question of what is handed on, we need to add that of, what are the mechanisms through which selections are made and by whom. We need to be careful with this notion of selection however since it risks misreading the nature of artistic creativity.*'' He concludes that the development of a tradition maynot consist solely of selecting from a set of options already explored in the past, nor even from the

[13] they are the customs/traditions of our land
[14] Let us do it, As it is customarily done, So that we may get the usual result.

possibilities available in the present. It may actually include broadening these options and generating new ones and therefore, we must also consider the conditions under which invention happens and the context of this part of Creativity. (Clarke, D. 1998 ibid).

Culture, Psychology and Dress

Until now, anthropologists of aṣọ òkè and other Yorùbá textiles (Clarke, D. (1997), Asakitipi, O. (2007), Olaoye, R. A, (2005)), have focused primarily on the physicalities of fabric or on textual socio-historical information, and less on the meaning, significance, and importance in the socio-cultural story or the social psychology, while documentarists and commentators on Yorùba culture and philosophy such as Abiodun, R., Abimbola, W. (1975), Akiwowo, A., Moloye (2004) have concentrated and written extensively on language, religion and ritual.

In the 1950s, according to Rudd (1991), dress and human behaviour began to be investigated using sociological, economic, psychological, and social psychological theories. The social psychology of dress examines how an individual's attire influences his or her own behaviour as well as the behaviour of others toward that individual (Johnson & Lennon, 2014), dress being defined as *'an assemblage of modifications of the body and/or supplements to the body'* (Roach-Higgins & Eicher, 1992). This conflation of non-Western cultures into homogeneous monoliths within which innovation is disdained '*the 'salvage paradigm*' has been addressed by many scholars who critique the re-sequestering of non-western cultures into *'an impossibly hermetically sealed world of tradition*' (Clifford, 1989). As Jennings (2013) asserts, '*Contrary to the accepted view of African traditions as monolithic and unchanging, the evolution of dress practices and sartorial acumen confirms fashion's role as a potent visual expression of a continent in constant flux.*' In agreement, Hansen states that *'the passion and cultivation of fashionable body display in Africa draws on a variety of apparel from numerous sources… but when it comes to the study of dress practice in Africa, we are confronted by a wide-spread scholarly tendency that privileges Western exceptionality and denies any non-western agency in the development of….'* (2013, p1), and until relatively recently, that would have been di?cult to argue against. There has been a less western-centered approach to the discipline as evidenced in the recent/ongoing Africa Fashion exhibition at the V&A Museum in London. However, even this is an 'external' look at modern fashion, with no meaningful reference to traditional dress, ignoring Clarke's '*directing our attention to the present, and to the actors in the present, who are actively engaged in selecting,in choosing those elements from the past which will be reproduced'.*

When referencing Polhemus and Procter, Edwards asserts that fashion can be described in terms of adornment, of which there are two types: fashion and anti-fashion, with anti-fashion being static, and although different depending on which cultural or social group one is associated with or where one lives, within that group or locality the style changes little and lacks dynamism – in other words, traditional (usually non-western) dress. However, and I concur, through the globalisation and commoditization of clothing and accessories, the lines between fashion/anti-fashion, dress and costume have been blurred. (Edwards, 2011 p.21). According to Rovine (2009, p.134), fashion '*is the changing styles of dress and body adornment motivated by the social value placed on innovation, its hallmark being change…*' While I agree that there is an inevitable and significant degree of doxic thought inherent in 'cultural' dress habits and conventions, despite Polhemus and Proctor's labelling as anti-fashion, traditional dress is anything but static, with both subtle and obvious changes demonstrated in design and fabric, motivation and demographic.

Ìríni sí, nì s'ọ 'ní l'ójú

Fig 3 Chief and Madam M.O. Idowu, impressively strategically sartorial on a visit to the UK, 1953

The Yorùbá '*Ìríni sí, nì s'ọ 'ní l'ójú*'[15] principle is supported by symbolic interactionism, a theory first expounded by Mead in 1934 and built upon by others (Stone, Blumer, Kaiser etc.), its first premise being

[15] one's appearance determines the respect accorded

that the meaning and significance that we assign both material objects and other people, shapes our behaviour towards them. According to Kaiser (1997), when this is applied to appearance and/or dress, it means that our response to another person is predicated on or at least influenced by their attire. (Johnson et al, 2014). Clothes *'change our view of the world, and the world's view of us*' according to Virginia Woolf (1927).

'Fashionable clothing has been widely explained as a culturally communicative phenomenon by many authors, and it is now generally understood that we each make daily decisions regarding the social status and role of people we meet, based on what they are wearing'. **(Lurie, 1992). Candy's assertion is that the significance of clothing is inextricably intertwined with broader conceptualizations of how the skin's surface relates to ideas of self, with western ontology prioritising depth and distinguishing the intangible self residing deep within from the relatively insignificant, artificial, and ephemeral outer surface. (Candy, 2005). Sontag appears to disagree, stating there is *'no opposition between a style one assumes and one's true being…'* (Sontag, 1966), while Miller's contrary perspective is *'The established philosophical sense of ontology that assumes being always resides in depth, and that things of the surface, such as clothes are intrinsically superficial, the concept of being that is by no means shared by all people'* (Miller, 1995) *'But we cannot assume that the Western philosophy of depth and self will apply within other societies, or for that matter that it is unchanging in our own.'* That the politics of dress are so crucial to the critical discussions of society, only serves to highlight the contradiction of its easy dismissal on grounds of superficiality. Considered transitory or facile, this attitude is thereby blocking a fundamental route into further knowledge of ourselves and our motivations. (Bari, 2019).**

Blumer asserts as the second premise of symbolic interactionism that objects hold no inherent meanings. Meanings can only be derived from social interaction with others, and must therefore be shared between others to be learned. This raises a traditional question of axiology concerning whether the objects of value are subjective psychological states, or objective states of the world. Put more prosaically, ' ...*goods are endowed with value by the agreement of fellow consumers' (*Douglas & Isherwood, 1996). In her book Culture and Sense (2002), Kathryn Linn Geurts posits the theory of a 'sixth sense' that is culturally constructed by each community and can be interpreted or experienced in a variety of ways, ranging from a belief in extrasensory perception (ESP) to an intrinsic understanding of specific disciplines including balance. She contends that the sensory order of a society is a fundamental feature that 'humanises' it *'I argue that the sensory order – or multiple, sometimes conflicting sensory orders – of a cultural group form the basis of the sensibilities that are exhibited by people who have grown up within that tradition'...* a view with which Connerton agrees '*…images of the past commonly legitimate a present social order. It is an*

implicit rule that participants in any social order must presuppose a shared memory…' **(Connerton, 1989)**

Skilled vision: Imú ni àlejò fi ńrí'ran

'Imú ni àlejò fi ńrí'ran'.[16] ***'In other words, my own bodily multi-sensorial experience was crucial to a more profound understanding of Yorùbá art and the culture and history that shaped it.'*** **(H.R. Drewal, 2005). The sartorial manifestation of resplendence in Yorùbá culture is not dependent on brashness or bright colours, making Grasseni's work on 'skilled vision' particularly pertinent to my research, as** ***'...vision is cultural, and that different cultures hold radically different metaphors and hierarchy from the Western visualist traditions'*** **(Howes, 1991, 2004). The third premise is that meanings are continuously modified through an interpretative process in which the actor interacts with himself (Blumer). When applied to sartoriality, this principle implies that the wearer, along with the observer, has agency in determining the meaning of an item. (Johnson et al (2014). This suggests that sartoriality involves a certain degree of inherent, even if often unconscious, performativity. According to Thorstein Veblen, the proclivity for performative achievement and aversion to futility are both drivers of economic and, by extension, social mobility. He theorised the phenomenon of conspicuous consumption - material possession and display as contest/competition.** ***'In contrast to the individual's static maximisation of utility according to exogenous preferences, as posited by the neoclassical approach, Veblen develops an evolutionary framework in which preferences are determined socially in relation to the positions of individuals in the social hierarchy*** **(A. B. Trigg, 2001).**

Veblen's theory is that individuals crave status; status is conferred and enhanced by the possession and display (and in some cultures, the strategic destruction) of material signifiers of wealth. ***'The possession of wealth confers honour: it is an invidious distinction. Nothing equally cogent can be said for the consumption of goods, nor for any other conceivable incentive to acquisition, and especially not for any incentive to the accumulation of wealth.' (Veblen, 1899, p.22).*** **Pierre Bourdieu's Habitus extends this continuum even farther. One of several relational concepts he developed (along with Capital, Doxa, Symbolic violence, and Field) to enable exploratory analysis of diverse sociological phenomena, ranging from class and distinction to cultural reproduction and social positioning and mobility, and thus transcend certain interconnected dichotomies such as objectivism/subjectivism, theory/practice, and structure/agency. (Ignatow, 2009),(Murphy, Costa 2015). Bourdieu believed that striving for recognition (symbolic capital) was the fundamental existential goal of the human condition, and one through which individuals confer meaning on their lives, and that it was this source of constant symbolic competition that galvanised societies' progress/improvement/motion. (Peters, G. 2011). He ties it to the spaces in which they interact to access the**

[16] the uninitiated/outsiders 'see' through their noses

internalised behaviours, perceptions and beliefs that individuals carry with them and which, in part, are translated into the practices they transfer to and from (which I call the *psychosphere*).

Echoing Blumer's second premise of symbolic interactionism, Douglas & Isherwood (1996) however temper that position and state '*goods are endowed with value by the agreement of fellow consumers… enjoyment of physical consumption is only a part of the service yielded by goods; the other part is the enjoyment of sharing names*' (p51). There is an emphasis on the enjoyment/satisfaction provided by the consumption, whether symbolic or otherwise, in contrast to Bourdieu's concentration on status competition, *'the dominant class with the symbolic signs of 'class' which are, as one says, de rigueur in all exclusive ceremonies of the bourgeoises' self-worship, which is the celebration of its own distinction'.* (Bourdieu, 1996, p29).

Lipovetsky (1994) argues that consumption is no longer necessarily governed by the desire for social recognition, but merely driven by functionality, pleasure for its own sake and the pursuit of well-being.

However, as Veblen observes, no class of society, no matter how abjectly poor, entirely forgoes societally recommended elements of conspicuous consumption. *'In order to gain and to hold the esteem of men, wealth must be put in evidence, for esteem is awarded only on evidence' (p. 24).* Conditions under which 'Veblen effects' (when consumers are willing to pay higher prices for functionally equivalent goods) arise from this innate human desire to achieve social status by signalling wealth through conspicuous consumption. These positions are of course, to some extent, congruent with the Yorùbá one regarding wealth acquisition and status, except that there is a counterbalance against the '*olowo l'agba'* (wealth is might/supreme) view, with '*ìsàlẹ̀ ọrò l'ẹ́gbíń'* (murk lies beneath every mystery/ there is a murky depth to unexplained wealth). It is essential to emphasise that *Ọlà, 'a state of self-suficiency, respect, and regard,'* (K Barber, 1991) and not necessarily *Ọlá* (wealth) is the picture that one strives to project.

In recent years, there has been criticism of the continuing relevance of Veblen's view of conspicuous consumption on three main grounds - firstly, its restrictive nature and over-reliance on the 'trickle-down' consumption patterns in social hierarchy, as trend setters may also appear among the lower echelons of society (Fine and Leopold 1993; Lears 1993). Secondly, it is argued that modern status is conveyed in a more subtle and sophisticated way, with less conspicuous displays of wealth (Canterbery 1998; Mason 1998); and thirdly, lifestyle, rather than social class is the major determinant of modern consumer behaviour and display. (Featherstone, 1991: McIntyre, 1992). My argument against all three points of criticism is that they can be conflated and rebutted in this conflation by the fact that their proponents have approached the issue from a totally western socio-cultural perspective without any consideration of non-European traditional/cultural sensibilities, values and mores. I discuss this further in the body of my research.

Gender in Yorùbá culture

Because there is rarely any overt rationale between the lives women lead and the garments they wear, especially outside the functionality of rural work clothes, they have of necessity deployed ingenuity and innovation - strategic sartoriality - to serve their various purposes (physical safety/security, material advancement, anonymity, etc.) through the ages. Being dressed appropriately for a situation gives a certain amount of self-confidence in their ability to interact with and overcome any hurdles (Kwon, 1994, Rafaeli et al.,1997, Adomaitis and Johnson, 2005, Peluchette and Karl, 2007).

Irrespective of women's social positioning or background, the pivotal dynamic which underpins how women choose what to wear is first of all what is 'easy' and 'safe', and then clothing that conveys

transformative properties. '*Clothing continually places us in a relationship to a body that we can forget or deny, but in which we always are.'* (Bari, 2019). Guy and Banim's (2000) study on how women used clothing as means of self presentation in everyday life identified three distinct perspectives: Firstly, *'that the women used clothing to formulate positive self-projections. Favourite items of clothing in particular were identifiedas useful in bridging the gap between 'self as you would like it to be' and the image actually. achieved withthe clothing. The second category of responses was labelled 'the woman I fear I could be'. This category of responses reflected experiences where clothing had failed to achieve a desired look or resulted in a negative self-presentation. Concern here was choosing to wear clothing with unintentional effects such as highlighting parts of the body that were unflattering or concern about losing the ability to know how to dress to convey a positive image. The last category, 'the woman I am most of the time' contained comments indicating the women had a 'relationship with clothes was ongoing and dynamic and that a major source of enjoyment for them was to use clothes to realise different aspects of themselves'.*

This difference in the representation and expectations of women and men in the public sphere is illustrated by John Berger in his '*Ways of Seeing*' (1972) where he offers the following contrast :'*A man's presence is dependent upon the promise of power which he embodies… A man's presence suggests what he is capable of doing to you or for you…' 'One might simplify this by saying; men act and women appear. Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at.'*

This reinforces Bari's acknowledgment of women's un/conscious deployment of strategic sartoriality '*Yet when so much of your existence is front-loaded, your value discerned from what can be viewed externally, there can also be a kind of knowing, a conscious consideration even, of the surfaces by which you will be understood'.* (Bari, 2019), which the misogynistic lens may perceive as manipulative, rather than self-preserving, especially in the social negotiations within a traditionally gender-bound culture. '*Indigenous tradition does not happen in a vacuum, it is made of everyday negotiations… the question is notwhether cultural transformation occurs, but what kind of transformation occurs - negative or positive?'* (Kaunda, M. 2016). It is di?cult to deny that this misogyny of perceptions permeates the *'structural ambivalence surrounding the character and status of women in industrial society,*' (Oakley, 1974a, 80-90),even within contemporary Yorùbá society.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODS AND METHODOLOGY

My research was conducted in the South-Western part of Nigeria where the Yorùbá are the indigenous peoples. *Aṣọ̀ òkè* is the paramount prestige textile amongst the Yorùbá. For the purposes of this study, observation of the social element (celebrations and events) was concentrated in the urban metropolis of Lagos, Nigeria's most populous city, commercial capital and home to over 37% of the urban population (Odebiyi, 2010). Lagos is famed for its intricately sophisticated *'owa mbe*' (high society/trendy) culture and *aṣọ̀ ẹbí* practice, two armatures of strategic sartoriality-driven resplendence. The axiological empirical study narrowly focused on a cohort of upper and upper-middle class Yorùbá living in Lagos, using their sociality as a prism to extrapolate contemporary resplendence manifestation among the Yorùbá.

The research methodology for this project has been qualitative and tangentially predominantly ethnographic, due to the nature of the investigations being undertaken, which necessitated an exploratory and open-ended approach.

'*The qualitative researcher may be described using multiple and gendered images; scientist, naturalist, field-worker, journalist, social critic, artist, performer, jazz musician, filmmaker, quilt maker, essayist…'* (Denzin, N.K. & Lincoln, Y.S. 2008). The qualitative techniques I used include many of the above identities in my employment of historical and contemporary analysis of *aṣọ̀ òkè* usage and semiological archival research, discourse analysis and diary analysis.

A significant degree of my methodology was to have been auto-ethnography, which would include collaboration and commissioning with a master weaver, to explore the physical connections between commissioner and the weaver with the product of his manual labour as opposed to the 'intellectual proprietorship' of the designer, and examine the subtle subversion of hierarchy with regards to the Yorùbá tradition of resplendence where the 'expert' wearer is considered the artist, rather than the weaver. Karl Marx talked about 'commodity fetishism', where commodities which have been alienated from their makers (in this instance the weavers), gain or mimic agency having been 'mysteriously' invested with significance drawn from '*the abstract, often ugly and always competitive social relations of capitalism'*. (Bari, 2019). I chose ethnography as a key aspect of the methodology because this research was originally planned to be a

doctorate by project. Initially I had the intention of undertaking an apprenticeship to a Master Weaver. Unfortunately, due to complications with my health, I was unable to follow through on those plans.

Miller talks of ethnography as being parochial and specific. The connection of intimacy and personalisation to ubiquity in a unique manner, even within the arena of sartoriality. (Miller, 1995). According to Vidich & Lyman, there is a requirement for '*A suficient degree of social and personal distance from prevailing norms and values to be able to analyse them objectively. Usually, the ability to engage in self-objectification is suficient to produce the quality of orientation necessary for an individual to be an ethnographic sociologist or anthropologist'*.

A secondary reason for the choice of ethnography was my closeness to the subject matter, coupled with a certain degree of ambivalence engendered as a Yorùbá person with a degree of dislocation from their roots. This has required a self-interrogation of my personal positionality, within the social context of the psychosphere of my research/field work reality, and necessitated the development of a novel and contemporary form of ethnography, which while has roots in conventional ethnography, is definitely an extension to the genre.'*There is surely no other form of scholarly enquiry in which relationships of intimacy and familiarity between researcher and subject are envisioned as a fundamental medium of investigation rather than as an extraneous by-product or even an impediment. This onus towards comradeship, however incompletely and sporadically achieved, provides a vantage point interviewed at once with significant analytical advantages as well as poignant dilemmas, ethics and social location.'* Amit (2000). I expand on my internal debate regarding my ability to detach myself sufficiently from *'the particular values and specialinterests'* (Vidich & Lyman, 2000) of my study group in order to gain a level of understanding not colouredor overtly inRuenced by *a priori* experience, in the following section.

The Ambivalence of Belonging

'*Ethnography decodes and recodes, telling the grounds of collective order and diversity, inclusion and exclusion… It describes the processes of innovation and structuration and is itself part of these processes.* Clifford J., Marcus G.E. (1986).

Argument with self:

'The issue I'm grappling with with regards to my ethnography is that of perspective…'

'What do you mean - surely the only perspective you can have is your own?'

'Yes, but what IS my perspective? Am I a dispassionate and objective observer or am I writing as a 'child of the house'?'

This is a reconnaissance through my struggle with methodology, based on my relationship to the culture I am interrogating and my emotional ambivalence to my primary field site. My anxiety is mostly fueled by my ambiguity, my tenuous 'belonging-ness' to this culture, this 'home'. I have never felt quite as much a part of it as I should have and assume there must be a part of me which, like a child, looking in through the window, longs to belong entirely, fostering the complication of my emotional connection to it. We are all haunted by this dichotomy to some degree, the dissonance between what is us and what is not, where we think we belong and where we don't, being a part of something and on the outside, looking in. This contradiction informs our reaction and response to all experiences and intentions. It is the definer in our worldview, and is hidden, so instinctual that we rarely recognise it. But for the purposes of this project, it is vital not just to recognise it, but to place it centrally in the undertaking of my research, as it is fundamental not just in the methodology of the research and its reception in my field site, but also to my ability to understand and mediate the nuances of the culture I am studying, in order to do it properly. '*There is surely no other form of scholarly enquiry in which relationships of intimacy and familiarity between researcher and subject are envisioned as a fundamental medium of investigation rather than as an extraneous by-product or even an impediment. This onus towards comradeship, however incompletely and sporadically achieved, provides a vantage point interviewed at once with significant analytical advantages as well as poignant dilemmas, ethics and social location.'* Amit (2000). This is especially salient as, largely, the expectation is that an ethnographer's field work occurs far away from their 'home' and involves building relationships with 'the natives' (sic) in new locations and for a sustained period. Gupta and Ferguson (1997), Amit (2000). '*The boundary between anthropological field and home, which has so often been demarcated by the metaphor of travel has incorporated a presumption that 'home' is stationary while the field is a journey away. It is a presumption that is undone as much by the cognitive and emotional journeys which fieldworkers make in looking at familiar practices and sites with new ethnographic lenses as by the transnational organisation of many academics' lives.'* Amit (2000). 'After all, if 'the field' is most appropriately a place that is 'not home', then some places will necessarily be more 'not home' than others, and hence more appropriate, more 'field like'. 'Hierarchy of purity of field sites' Gupta and Ferguson (1997). However, auto-ethnography (participant observation) is increasingly bucking the historical trend, principally as many non-western anthropologists are turning their eyes inward/homeward and interrogating their own cultures and history.

The Yorùbá say '*ọmọ àlè l'ó ńfi ọwọ́ òsì júwe ilée Bàbá rẹ̀* '[17]. One does not disrespect their own 'home' - culture,

[17] only a bastard indicates their father's compound with their left hand

lineage, family, country by casting aspersions or imputing negative things about them. Dirty linen must never be washed in public. Any contentious issues are settled within the home. Virginia Caputo contends that there is an instability to the ground that marks 'doing' anthropology at home because it requires constant shifting of positions between situations, people, identities, and perspectives. And this is the source of my apprehension – which approach do I take in my research? Do I take the stance of an objective, dispassionate outsider, looking in, cognisant of Hastrup's asymmetry of discourse, *'However much we replace the monologue with dialogue the discourse remains asymmetrical, like the languages involved. The purpose of ethnography is to speak about something for somebody. It implies contextualisation and reframing. At the autobiographical level ethnographers and informants are equal; but at the level of the anthropological discourse, the relationship is higher hierarchical. It is our choice to encompass the stories in our narratives. We select the quotations and edit the comments.'* Hastrup (1992). Or am I an '*ọmọ onílé'*, a 'child of the house' who, while not obligated to turn a blind eye to any flaws, is certainly not expected to expose them or discuss them with 'strangers' who are outside the house. I find that like a bat – *'kò ṣ'ekú, kò ṣẹyẹ…',*[18] I am caught in the interstices between two states of being and will have to negotiate my passage through. In terms of my social access to Yorùbá culture, my position mirrors that of Naeke when in response to any advantages his relationship to his research culture might confer on him ' *as an insider I know the language of the Dagaaba as well as the narratives that I now analyse. I grew up listening to these narratives and retelling them myself to my peers. Additionally, growing up among the Dagaaba helps me to know and understand the context in which cultural narratives arise and the unstated messages in these narratives. Some of the research informants are known to me personally and that makes it easy to contact them.'* Naeke (2010).

Noel Dyck poses the following questions in his look at the practice of anthropology at 'home' - how can anthropologists reconcile participation with observation while conducting ethnographic research in places and on issues with which they are personally involved, and which considerations should govern what, where and how we write about relationships and activities that may involve relatives, neighbours and consociates? Dyck (2000).

Changes wrought in time, unfolding spatial configurations, the intricacies of even the most contained and continuous relationships ensure that we are always chasing context but never squaring it off.

According to Judith Okley (1992), fieldwork necessitates a long-term and thorough immersion, and though she states that it needs to be '*a total experience, demanding all of the anthropologist's resources, intellectual, physical, emotional, political and intuitive*', she recognises the sociality of the exercise, as opposed to it being a solitary experience, '*mediated by and constituted through the fieldworkers relationship with others.'* (ibid.) and has argued for autobiographical reflexivity as a fundamental component of ethnographic fieldwork. An emic perspective requires the recognition and acceptance of multiple realities. Emic observation is ultimately a perspective analysis on the inherent cultural distinctions that are meaningful to the members of that society, and is frequently considered

[18] neither rat nor bird

to be an 'insider's' perspective. This perspective may originate from the idea of immersion in a particular culture, but the emic participant does not have to be a member of that culture or society. The ability to more thoroughly explore the specifics of a society's practices and beliefs is made possible by the observer's ability to immerse themselves in the culture they are trying to understand. The important distinctions made by the members of the culture are emphasised. Hence, an emic analysis is culturally specific with the mentality of insider's beliefs, thoughts and attitudes. Local knowledge and interpretations are essential, and it is the viewpointof the participant that conveys significance about mental and behavioural dimensions for the understanding of cultural context.

Helena Wulff's argument against Kirsten Hastrup's insistence on 'othering' as an essential part of anthropological practice and, theory of a stark dichotomy between 'native' and anthropologist, is based on a more emic, nuanced shifting multiple subjectivity experienced by many anthropologists. Wulff's research and her fieldwork backstage of the Royal Swedish Ballet company was enabled by her ability to contextualise the dancers' biographical narratives and her understanding of the physical rigour demanded in ballet was made possible by her experiences and relationships as a former dancer herself. And I agree with Wulff's opinion that her perspective on relationships as an ex-ballet dancer and the new forms of 'nativeness' she acquired during her 'fieldwork' were not mutually exclusive and crucially informed the ethnographic lens she now trained on the ballet world. Research undertaken from an intentionally emic perspective can therefore often include more detailed, nuanced and culturally rich information than studies done from an etic point of view.

The emic/etic approach was developed by the linguistic anthropologist Kenneth Pike (1954, 1967) as a distinction in linguistics between the phonemic (particular)/ phonetic (universal). When emics and etics are applied to the interpretation of human behaviour and cultural systems, the two concepts represent opposite perspectives of either the insider or the outsider where, among other interpretations, the outsider may represent the position of a researcher (investigator) and the insider that of the people under investigation. Xia, (2011). In Pike's view, the relationship between emics and etics is dynamic with neither holding greater significance than the other. Both concepts provide a way of discriminating between various types of data for the study of cultural phenomena. According to him, (Pike 1967), '*it proves convenient - though partially arbitrary - to describe behaviour from two different standpoints, which lead to results which shade into one another. The etic viewpoint studies behaviour as from outside of a system, and as an essential initial approach to an alien system. The emic viewpoint results from studying behaviour as from inside the system'* (ibid).

Marvin Harris in 'The Rise of Anthropological Theory' (1968) modified the emic/etic issue and introduced an examination on their implications to anthropological research. While sharing Pike's basic ideas of emphasising cultural norms and human behaviours, Harris developed the theory into a materialist approach of culture. Xia, JingFeng states that *'In anthropological research, specifically with ethnographic fieldwork, the applications of an*

insider-outsider comparison are very relevant and practicable. With a well-designed fieldwork plan, an ethnographer usually spends an extensive period in a group of people, observing their daily routines and thoughts. The cultural norms and behavioural patterns of the group are synthesized based upon the researcher's recordings and observations of what the natives have expressed in verbal and motion forms, alongside his or her knowledge and understanding of cultural norms and behavioural patterns from the generation of other previous investigations and even his or her own culture.' **A major problem that anthropologists encounter, however, is that people tend to act differently when they are being observed. It is especially hard for an outsider to gain access to certain private rituals, which may be important for understanding a culture.**

The question I have is whether or not an entirely 'etic' study is even possible. In order to answer questions given from the outside, the etic perspective collects data from the outside. According to this theory, researchers should conduct their studies and analyse their findings with an unbiased and objective mindset, adhering to a set of standard, materialist and positivist criteria. However, ***'Ethnographers are noted for their ability to keep an open mind about the group culture they study; this quality however does not imply any lack of rigour. The ethnographer enters the field with an open mind but an empty head. …The ethnographer also begins with biases and preconceived notions about how people behave and what they think - as do researchers in every field. Biases serve both positive and negative functions.'*** **Fetterman, (1998). The reality of course, is that no analysis is possible without a degree of subjectivity encroaching. We are all creations of our past, experiences, traumas, experiential prejudices, unconscious biases, and try as we may, it is impossible not to filter our perspectives through these.** ***The notion of immersion implies that the field which ethnographers enter exists as an independently bound set of relationships and activities which is autonomous of the fieldwork through which it is discovered. Yet in a world of infinite interconnections and overlapping contexts the ethnographic field cannot simply exist, awaiting discovery. It has to be laboriously constructed, prised apart from all the other possibilities for contextualisation to which its constituent relationships connections could also be referred. This process of construction is inescapably shaped by the conceptual, professional, financial and relational opportunities and resources accessible to the ethnographer. The construction of an ethnographic field involves efforts to accommodate and interweave sets of relationships and engagements developed in one context with those arising in another. Or perhaps to view ongoing relationships from altered perspectives as ethnographers ask different questions on 'entering' and 'leaving' the field.*** **Amit (2000)**

Although emics (ideational, phenomenologically oriented) and etics (materialist, philosophically positivistic) are frequently regarded as essentially in conflict with one another, a conceit I am using for my own purposes in this section, the complementarity of both approaches to anthropological research is widely recognised and accepted as markers along a continuum, particularly in areas of interest concerning the function of human society. Xia (2011), Fetterman, (1998). ***'It is only when trained researchers systematically compare what people say with what people do***

that emic and etic modes can be properly separated' **Sandstrom and Sandstrom, (1995). Helen Calloway's analysis is that *'ethnographic research involves prolonged interaction with others yet anthropological discourse conveys the understanding gained in terms of distance, both spatial and temporal.* (1992)**

However, the emic approach has drawbacks. Studies conducted from an emic perspective can introduce bias on the part of the participant, especially if that individual is a member of the culture being studied, failing to consider how their activities are regarded by others and perhaps leaving out vital information. Indeed, Frykman and Lofgren warn of the perils, not of becoming engrossed in a new culture (becoming native), but of failing to remove oneself sufficiently from an overly familiar milieu. Dyck, (2000). Naeke buttresses this point *'the insider/outsider status can wrongly assume that insiders are better suited to do research about their culture and outsiders are not but that is not exactly right. Some insiders may be emotionally and ideologically distant from their own culture to the extent that they cannot speak authoritatively on the culture where some outsiders could be more knowledgeable about a culture that is not native to them. Some outsiders have lived in the new culture longer than natives, as in the case of sudden missionaries. (ibid). 'ethnographic research in one's home city is not easier than research far from. It can be much harder, demanding a degree of self-consciousness that anthropologists may aspire to everywhere but find especially acute in the role conflicts generated by this kind of ethnographic fieldwork'.* Amit-Talai, (1994). That is, I think, one of the major conflicts I have with regards to my research, and which I imagine I'm going to continue to contend with for the duration. That self-consciousness and the necessity to view the 'known' with an ethnographic eye means the re-negotiation of existing and established social and familial relationships and commitments. Originally conceived as a celebration of heritage material culture, I am coming to realise that my research is not just a cosy exploration of *'afẹ́fẹ́ yẹyẹ'*[19], but that there might probably be unsettling and possibly uncomfortable underpinnings to the 'psychosphere' in which it all exists. *'…home once interrogated is a place we have never before been'.* Visweswaran (1994).

I am also mindful of Young's (1991) ethical question of whether studies of one's own community constitute participant observation or espionage – will I be able to turn off the ethnographic lens or will all my observations, 'on duty' or 'off' inevitably feed into my research? In Dyck's opinion, it may neither be wise nor possible to 'mute' this internal 'anthropological radar'. How willing or able am I to be this dispassionate objective observer, and how prepared am I for the consequences of what I may or may not uncover? *'…it would seem appropriate not only to leave open for examination the nature of the relationship between anthropology and 'home' in any ethnographic project, but also to take note of the particular ways in which an individual ethnographer may incorporate different aspects of 'home' and anthropology in his or her performance as a positioned subject.*

[19] resplendence and spectacle

Between the ostensibly diverging objectives of self-realisation and self-transcendence lies a common prerequisite task of self-identification. **The poet Jane Kenyon exhorts us to** ***'Tell the whole truth. Don't be lazy, don't be afraid. Close the critic out when you are drafting something new. Take chances in the interest of clarity of emotion.'***

'No matter how I tried to abstract personal heritage into purely intellectual concerns, vivifying this research is also the remembrance of my ancestors, the genesis of my family and myself, and the accommodative afinity offered by my contemporary kin' **(Arumugam, I. culanth.org/fieldsights).**

Fieldwork

Most of my fieldwork was undertaken in Nigeria (2019-20). This included observation and documenting at occasions where strategic sartoriality was displayed, but due to the global COVID 19 pandemic, I was unable to carry out any further fieldwork.

I carried out audio and video interviews of key actors in the research area. I visited two weaving compounds in Ìsẹ́yìn and one in Abẹ́òkúta where I filmed and interviewed weavers at work. I investigated the major *aṣọ́ òkè* markets such as Jàǹkara in Lagos, Ẹdẹ (notable for its mix of cheap novel designs and pre-owned vintage cloth), and the largest *aṣọ́ òkè* market, Ọ̀jé in Ìbàdàn.

Fig 4. Vintage *aṣọ́ òkè* for sale at Ẹdẹ market, 2019

I interviewed stakeholders such as Ṣeun Òdúyalé, Managing Director of BISBOD, one of the leading *aṣọ́ òkè* traders , and several of the '*Ìyá oges*'[20] and *'Bàbá ètòs*'.[21] I attended and observed at 9 weddings, 3 funerals, 5 birthday parties and numerous other miscellaneous events ranging from book launches to art gallery openings.

I also liaised with other scholars and collectors of aṣọ òkè such as Professor Adetowun Ogunsheye of The Ogunsheye Foundation. Prof. Ogunsheye has been collecting *aṣọ́ òkè* for over 5 decades and has one of the largest collections in private ownership. It was illuminating to interview her and I also visited the part of her extensive collection housed at the Olusegun Obasanjo Presidential Library in Abẹ́òkúta.

[20] elegant women
[21] fashionable men

Fig 5(a). Exhibits from the Ogunsheye Collection at the Olusegun Obasanjo Presidential Library. Abeokuta, 2020.

Fig 5(b). Exhibits from the Ogunsheye Collection at the Olusegun Obasanjo Presidential Library. Abeokuta, 2020.

I conducted two sets of structured questionnaires disseminated to 11 individuals. The first, pre-COVID questionnaire, explored respondents' attitudes to sartoriality and resplendence in general and *aṣọ òkè* in specificity. The second questionnaire was devised and conducted during the pandemic, and subsequent to my pivot of focus regarding the research question. This interrogated the respondents' attitude changes while also examining any psycho-social issues that they may encounter in their negotiation of the milieu, both pre and post-Covid. I was intentionally narrowly focused in my cohort of participants particularly among the wearers as I was seeking a specific perspective - that of habitual practitioners of strategically sartorial directed resplendence.

According to the data I gathered, Yorùbá apparel has always been and continues to be a reflector of one's social position within the community. The term 'reflecting' is used here in its broadest sense, encompassing the lustre of the fabric as well as the nature of relationships between individuals and groups. A show of affluence to enhance and secure social position is intrinsic in Yorùbá society, as is the acquisition and wearing of precious metals or unique trinkets with the fabrics. My research refutes Lipovetsky's (1994) argument that consumption is no longer necessarily governed by the desire for social recognition, but merely driven by functionality, pleasure for its own sake and the pursuit of wellbeing.

I had the privilege of interviewing Professor Adetowun Ogunsheye, owner of the Ogunsheye Collection, one of the largest and oldest private collections in Nigeria. On her first 'real' encounter: '*My first real encounter with aṣọ òkè was when I came back from studying abroad. I was preparing for my wedding. I was a young woman just back from Cambridge who wanted a quiet 'white wedding'. However, my father confronted my fiance and I with a bombshell - we had to go to Ijebu Igbo for the ceremonies to get the permission, blessing and participation of the elders in the family! For the event we had to face a traditional wedding ceremony in which aṣọ òkè– sányán, alaari and ẹtù must feature in the gift pack. Traditionally, if we were a weaving family, I would have had to weave them myself, including a large cover cloth for the bridegroom, the special kíjìpá variety cover cloth for men. I had an aunt who wove from her own loom but she did not pass on that skill to the next generation*.' (F. Adetowun Ogunsheye, 2019, Fifty Years of Aṣọ okè, Spectrum, Ibadan).

I also interviewed Ṣeun Òdúyalé, Managing Director of BISBOD *Aṣọ okè*, one of the major *aṣọ òkè* trading firms in Nigeria, for multiple reasons. Firstly for his insight into the business and logistical aspects of my field of study, but also for his perspective as a young person commercially involved in the phenomenon. Speaking about the longevity of the tradition: '*… literally speaking it means top cloth, and that definition*

***or that connotation still holds today, … the beauty of the business is, it has a natural longevity because there are always reasons to celebrate… So it doesn't have a forced lifespan – I mean, in order to show you are relevant and most new designs and of course other things, customer service, but aṣọ́ òkè in itself will always exist – its part of our culture.*'(Ṣeun Òdúyalé, MD Bisbod).**

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

This chapter is a response to my overarching research question - 'What is the significance of the concept of Resplendence in the culture of contemporary Yorùbá society?'.

Resplendence - *Ẹwà àmú yẹ*[22]

Fig.6. Lola and Ife Akinyele at their traditional engagement ceremony, Ikoyi, Lagos 2016. The groom is from Ondo, so the couple are wearing *àlàárì* which is the 'native' *aṣọ òkè* of the Ondo.

My research reveals that within Yorùbá society, status was and is, inextricably interwoven with clothing, attire being quite literally reflective of social standing within the community. I use the word 'reflective' in its many manifestations – the sheen of the cloth, the relationship within social groups and so on. Wealth,

[22] The quality of almost unbelievably majestic beauty

and consequently status (and power), are further manifested visually by the possession and wearing of precious metals or rare ornaments with the textiles, and the display of prosperity to elevate and secure social status is inherent in society. It illustrates the labyrinthine and not always benign interconnectedness of cultural mores, values and habits on the one hand, and the expectational pressures of contemporary societal norms on the other when focused on the usage of specific/particular high-value material culture such as aṣọ *oke*. Prestige cloth intensifies sociology in rituals of birth, initiation, well-being, milestones and death and as Fox states, cloth *'swaddles the new-born, wraps and heals the sick, embraces and unites the bride and groom, encloses the wedding bed and in the end, and shrouds the dead'*.

***'Iri'ni si, ni so ni l'ojo'*[23]. In traditional culture, status was conveyed by more than mere economic prowess. A person's standing in the community was also reinforced by one's wardrobe, especially one's sartorial presentation on formal or ceremonial occasions. *'... one's personal appearance as well as that of one's associates communicates importance because they prize affluence and rank. In dress, a state of elegance, dignity and composure is sought.'* (Cordwell, 1983, 56).**

The appropriate clothes, made from prestige textiles and augmented in the appropriate manner, were indications that the presenting grandeur was more than skin-deep. When the explorer Bain Hugh Clapperton (1788–1827) met the *Aláàfíń* of Oyo-Ife/Katunga in 1825, his notes state *'the monarch was richly dressed in a scarlet damask robe, ornamented with coral beads, and short trousers of the same colour with a light blue stripe, made of country cloth; his legs, as far as the knees, were stained red with henna, and on his feet he wore sandals of red leather*' (Lander 1830:212).

A few decades later the African-American Richard Campbell recorded his encounter with the *Aláké* of Abeokuta '*His body above the loins was nude; otherwise his attire consisted of a handsome velvet cap, trimmed with gold, a costly necklace of coral, and a double strand of the same ornament about his loins, with a velvet cloth thrown gracefully about the rest of his person, under which he wore his shocoto, a sort of loose trouser reaching only to his knees*.' (D. Clarke, 1995).

Thus we hear: *Ó yọ s'ojúde Oba, bi i mọ̀nọ̀ -mọ́nọ́ kọ́ ni…*[24] This significance and importance of light-capture is illustrated in the extensive vocabulary used to differentiate the many forms of reflection and refraction:

[23] one's appearance (attire) determines the level of respect accorded
[24] … their appearance at the royal court was like lightning, flashing…

***Dán* – shine, glow; *Kọ́* – gleam/sparkle; *Bì* – iridescence; *Sọ* – soft shimmer; *Dán yirin yirin* – glittering.**

For example, a beautiful dark-skinned woman would be complimented as '*Adu maa dán*'.[25]

Fig. 8. *'Ó yọ s'ojúde Oba, bi i mọ̀nọ̀ -mọ́nọ́ kọ́ ni…'* Mrs Abiola Agbaje shimmering resplendently in gold and *sányán*,. Lagos, 2019.

[25] so dark she glows

The Yorùbá pay very close attention to social formalities, to etiquette, to status differences and to institutional procedures and roles because these conventions stand as the foundation of their community life, providing a contextual framework and a material reality. Any esteem acquired does not only pertain to the individual, but to their family, their lineage, their 'house' (*ẹbí*). One of the most common and self-defining proverbs is *'B'órí kan bá suwọ̀ n, á rań'gba'*.[26] Rather than celebrate individuality therefore, there is a belief in the communality of both acclaim and shame. Historically, the end point was to be attractive or important enough for others to want to forge alliances, primarily through marriage, but also through trade or politics – after all, *'eni t'ó kan àkànpé ẹ̀wù ti kúrò ńńúu ilé sáń tàbí ilé ó sáń'*.[27]

A dramatic people, their theatricality in the most somber of situations is evident even in their diasporic

locations. Ceremonial occasions such as chieftaincy investitures, weddings and funerals are therefore theatres for ornate attire and wealth to be displayed for the enhancement of both family and individual status.

Fig 8. Ornate occasions to display resplendence; Mr Jimi Agbaje & Mrs Abiola Agbaje dancing into the wedding reception of their daughter. Lagos, November 2016

[26] if one destiny is successful, it must affect the rest or, one person's glory is reflected on a swathe of others

[27] the breeding of one who 'understands' appropriate dressing is beyond questioning

This resplendence of cloth and dress must however be underpinned by a corresponding resplendence of character, an armature of breeding, good manners and respect, else one becomes a '*garawa ofifo*' – an empty barrel, all noise and of little use. The futility of beauty without meaning is often highlighted, and among the Yorùbá, beauty has to be 'mindful', and functional, however minimally. As the proverbs go, *'ìwà l'ẹwà'*,[28] and '*ìwà rere l'ẹ̀ ṣó ènìyàn*'.[29] A person is therefore generally prepared to connect their self-image with what others see them do.

Omo'luabi

The concept of *ọmọlúàbí* in *Yorùbá* culture could be considered an analysis into the *Yorùbá* understanding of characteristics constitutive of a person - *'a decent individual of integrated personality, who demonstrates fairly well the positive use of the mental, physical and psychological features of the human person, as well as moral uprightness in his/her life in society*'. An *ọmọlúàbí* demonstrates and exhibits the inherent virtue and value of *Iwa'pele*. *Iwa'pele* is ultimately the basis of moral conduct in *Yorùbá* culture and a core defining attribute of an *ọmọlúàbí*.

The fundamental tenets exhibited by an *ọmọlúàbí* are holistic in that they encompass all aspects of Yorùbá life. Firstly, *Opolo pípé*[30], which in Yorùbá society is not necessarily aligned to being educated. '*... is not merely a question of being literate, bookish and having prowess in Arithmetic and the Queen's English. It goes beyond that, and this perhaps accounts for the Yorùbá proverb that - ìwé kì ńṣe ọgbọ́n, à lé jọ́ íkún ni*[31] (Balogun 2008). It is manifest in the ability to 'read' situations, and at all times display 'common sense' as pertains to the *àṣà* of society. This includes sartoriality and an awareness of attire appropriate to situations, as illustrated in the saying *'sìn mí k'á r'òde, o lọ w'ẹ̀ wù etù…'*[32] Next is *Ọ̀rọ̀ sísọ.*[33] The Yorùbá are renowned for their extensive oral traditions and the high regard they have for eloquent and skilled speech, which is one manifestation of resplendence. Yorùbá linguistic conventions and the philosophy controlling their cultural principles and attitudes span all elements, from the ethical to the spiritual, and are deeply rooted in the history, culture, and social psychology of the people. This is a treasure trove from which the Yorùbá usage of proverbs and sayings in everyday speech takes both its aesthetic form and cultural value. Yorùbá speech is rarely 'naked', instead appearing enveiled in folds of complexity that require wisdom, as well as particular sensibility to properly decipher the myriad levels of its meaning *'ààbọ̀ ọ̀ rọ̀ la nsọ fún ọmọlúàbí,*

[28] one's character is one's beauty
[29] a good character is the best attire
[30] Intelligence
[31] literacy is not wisdom, but only an addendum to already acquired knowledge
[32] I asked you to accompany me out - you dressed in *etù*…
[33] Articulacy

***t'óbá dé inú ẹ̀ á dí odindi'*[34]. For example, a jobsworth may be chastised with *'tí wón bá rán ni ní'ṣẹ̀ ẹrú, á fi t'ọmọ jé ẹ'*[35]; or a frustrated parent may tell a wayward youth, *'Iṣu ẹ, ọwọ́ ẹ l'ó wà. Ọ̀bẹ́ ẹ, ọwọ́ ẹ l'ó wà…'*[36]. In fact, proverbs are regarded as the vehicle for true understanding and meaningful communication, as '*òwe l'ẹṣin ọ̀ rọ̀ , ọ̀ rọ̀ l'ẹṣin òwe b'ọ̀ rọ̀ bá sọnù, òwe l'á fi ńwa a'*[37]. *Ọ̀tító,* Honesty is the bedrock of traditional Yorùbá communal society: '*Orúkọ rere sàn ju wúrà àtí fàdákà lọ '*[38]. Also highly rated is *Akíńkanjú* - bravery, courage, not only or even necessarily physical prowess as displayed on the battlefield, but more importantly, moral and/or political. The ability to display fortitude in the presence of opposition even in the face of risk or at personal, professional or societal cost. To possess the courage to defend the vulnerable in society and speak truth to power. *Ìtẹ́ríba*[39] and *Inú rere*[40] are also key prerequisites of the *ọmọlúàbí* concept.

'Iṣẹ́ l'ogun ìṣé'[41] is the background mantra in Yorùbá society. Unlike western parameters of elite and 'higher' classes, diligence and a propensity for industriousness are prerequisites for admiration and emulation. I find there is therefore a radical divergence from western perspectives and Veblen's theory of the leisured classes being the ultimate aspiration, '*Abstention from labour is not only a honorific or meritorious act, but it presently comes to be a requisite of decency… Abstention from labour is the conventional evidence of wealth and is therefore the conventional mark of social standing;*' (Veblen, T. 1899) and definitely not because *Yorùbá* culture has not progressed beyond what he describes as '*lower barbarism*', - '*the most imperative of these secondary demands of emulation , as well as one of the widest scope, is the requirement of abstention from productive work. This is especially true during the barbarian stage of culture. During the predatory culture labour comes to be associated in men's habits of thought with weakness and subjection to a master. It is therefore a mark of inferiority, and therefore comes to be counted unworthy of man in his best estate.'* (ibid 28), but because work, gainful employment of some sort, no matter how tenuous or at what remove, is considered a prerequisite of *ọmọlúàbí,* or good breeding and high class, and it would be anti-ethical to be reputable and idle, just as real beauty must be functional or useful. Finally, *Ìwà pẹ̀ lẹ́* - self-restraint, a calm nature. *Ìwà*[42] is not merely determined by one's personal good behaviour, but may also incorporate *ebi*-related proper observance of *àṣà* , which in turn engenders '*ase*'[43]. *'Ìwà is the very stuff that makes life ajoy because not only does it please Olorun (the High God), it also endears one to the hearts of all men.*'(ibid, pp 240). An *ọmọlúàbí* is therefore a person of good character in all its ramifications - '*respect for old age,*

[34] one only needs to say half the word to an ọmọlúàbí - it becomes whole within them
[35] even when sent on a slave's errand, there is always the option of delivering it as a freeborn
[36] your yam and the knife to cut it are both in your hand – your destiny is in your hand to be shaped by your life choices
[37] proverbs are horses which carry one swiftly to the discovery of ideas sought
[38] a good name/reputation is better than silver or gold
[39] Humility
[40] generosity of spirit
[41] industriousness is the panacea for poverty/indigence
[42] character
[43] agency

loyalty to one's parents and local traditional honesty in all public and private dealings, devotion to duty, readiness to assist the needy and the infirm, sympathy, sociability, courage and itching desire for work and many other desirable qualities' **(Majasan 1967).**

A contemporary example of this is the politician Jimi Agbaje, who is popularly known as *Ọmọlúàbí Eko' (the 'Ọmọlúàbí of Lagos)* because of his impeccable family pedigree as well as his own personal characteristics, noticeable in an unprepossessing political field.

Fig. 8, *Ọmọlúàbí Eko:* Lagos politician, Jimi Agbaje

It is however recognised that this template is an ideal, and in reality, no *ọmọlúàbí* will be of impeccable character or flawless, as the *Yorùbá* with practical philosophy, *'abhor all claims of absolutism, and believe that as humans we can only, and ought to, strive towards the ideal, because perfection is illusory'* (Fayemi 2009, 171).

The *Aṣọ ẹbí* Phenomenon

Partying in Lagos is an enterprise not for the fainthearted, requiring a degree of commitment and fortitude. For some people it's almost a full-time job with all the expectations and responsibilities attendant. If one is a 'person of substance' (*eniyan iyì)*, then your presence may be 'humbly requested' at as many as 10-15 occasions every week, heavily weighted towards the weekend. And during the 'wedding season',[44] one may find oneself with as many as 6 invitations on the same day, at least 3 of which cannot be refused for risk of damaging relationships, and whether personal, professional, political or otherwise, there are certain expectations of reciprocity.

It is the custom for hosts/celebrants to indicate a dress code, usually stated on the invitation which could either be a colour, or a particular fabric (*aṣọ ẹbí*). The concept of *aṣọ ẹbí*, (*aṣọ*- cloth, *ebi* - family), a peculiarly Yorùbá tradition in which family members (or friends) wear matching outfits on special occasions, and which has now been exported to other cultures in almost every part of the world (Nwafor, 2011) is based on familial closeness.

[44] November to April

Fig. 10 ***Aṣọ ẹbí*** **dress code notifications**

Fig 10. ***Aṣọ ẹbí*** **Lagos 2019. Guests at a traditional engagement ceremony, pink being the colour of the day.**

The traditional family system of the *ẹbí,* consists, not just through generations of a particular genealogy butalso families from different genealogies whose links can be through marriage or adoption or other relationships arising from human or natural factors. *Aṣọ ẹbí (aṣọ t'ẹbí dá jọ*[45]*),* originated as funerary contributions of cloth to wrap a family member before burial. The practice has evolved into a way of distinguishing a celebrant and/or host and their family from the guests at social gatherings. However, as fictive kinship[46] is an integral aspect of culture, and therefore kinship ties extend far beyond the nuclear unit, reaching into long-standing friendships, and even to one's parents originating from the same geographical area, *aṣọ ẹbí* in its complicated gradations of familial intimacy enables one to gauge (with someaccuracy) the degree of kinship to the host by the *aṣọ ẹbí* worn by guests.

[45] cloth the family has contributed

[46] in contrast to 'real' kinship, a type of social connection that does not require a shared genetic or marital ancestry

Fig. 12 Family *aṣọ ẹbí at the funeral service of Madam Dorcas Bankole. Lagos, 2023.*

Sociologist J.A. Sofola, convincingly argues what he sees as the sociological functions of *aṣọ ẹbí* - that it demonstrates sympathy and solidarity with the celebrant, creates mutual obligations, aids historical memory, soothes tensions over wealth imbalances, and promotes the therapeutic effect of public ceremonial (1973). According to Ajani (2012:111), the ubiquity of *aṣọ ẹbí* acceptance in the Nigerian society at large and among the Yorùbá is consequent on a number of reasons - a positive attitude towards associational culture and social life; a reliance on these associations as substitutes for statutory protection and/or patronage; a recognised or expectational need to build a social identity and social relations analogous to Veblen's pecuniary emulation.

Sofola (1978), Familusi (2010) and Ajani (2012) all agree as to the social significance of the practice of *aṣọ ẹbí* as a mechanism for reinforcing community identity and solidarity among wearers and as a status-leveller even if only temporarily. Despite the acknowledged unifying potential of the practice of *aṣọ ẹbí*, it is not without its critics and it is not difficult to surmise why. It has been claimed that contemporary practice '*undermines the values of the long age practice of solidarity and social integration.*' (Ogbechi & Anetor, 2015). An example of this is the proliferation of *aṣọ ẹbí* - ranging from cheap ankara to specially commissioned aṣọ oke - at the same event, defeating its role as a social leveller, and instead emphasising the distance between social classes, further fragmenting that '*spirit of oneness*' which, coupled with empathy and fraternity, Familusi (2010) considers major defining characteristics of Africanness. As Clarke put it, '*For all apart from a small affluent elite, then, it is clearly impossible to accept all the cloth one is invited to buy. Yet if someone hardly ever buys aso ebi from her friends, she is not likely to be able to muster much enthusiasm when it is her turn to stage a ceremony. This may not be too serious a problem for older people who have already established a certain level of respect and social status, but it can become a real concern to younger women who have yet to stage their own engagement and wedding. Careful judgement is needed to distribute a limited number of acceptances in the most socially advantageous way and to minimise any*

offence caused by the inevitable refusals to participate. Men, who are normally expected to spend only N100 or so on the single strip of cloth necessary to tailor a cap largely avoid these problems.' **(Clarke, pg 355)**

The behaviour chronicled in this research is not unique or confined to Lagos but is duplicated to varying degrees in every south-western city/town, or wherever the Yoruba live. So the *ọ̀yàyà, ówàńbè* and *feferity* will be found in Ibadan, Ado-Ekiti, Ijebu-Ode as well as Abuja and Ilorin and the diaspora. Outside the main cities, and Lagos in particular, the social scene may be more tempered – people are generally less affluent, and celebrations are more restrained. In the smaller villages and more rural settings, the underlying customs still pertain however, although the extravagance and the intensity of psychospheric pressure may be less oppressive. However, this does not mean that the '*ṣe k'á rí mi*' syndrome does not exist, it is merely muted. The provincial village *Ìyá ìjọ* (church matron) in Ọyẹ́-Èkìtì is just as desirous of looking her best, sartorially matching (if not surpassing) the pecuniary standards of living and dress that obtains within her community, and is therefore just as vulnerable to the pressures of the psychosphere. The main difference between her and my subject group is that of frequency of occasions for sartorially strategic display and expenditure involved.

That pecuniary principle becomes even more evident in the frequent exploitation of the profit-making potential inherent in the *aṣọ ẹbí* practice. Collective responsibility and support is a tenet of culture, and therefore it is the norm for gifts, contributions and donations (financial or otherwise) (Dopamu, 2010) to be made to celebrants to help defray the cost of the celebrations. Taking advantage of this custom, unscrupulous celebrants have begun inflating the price of chosen *aṣọ ẹbí*, sometimes by the most extortionate amounts, sacrificing the traditional/cultural values and import of the practice on the altar of personal gain. As one of the respondents to the questionnaire in my primary research put it *'because I sell fabrics, aṣọ ẹbí tends to be presented to me at cost-price or close to it, but I am often shocked at the exorbitantmark-ups they are asking others to pay…'*
The ambivalence is also demonstrated in the following responses:

What influences your decision to attend an event?
My relationship with the celebrant i.e. family or close friend

How often do these invitations have a colour/dress code?
Most times

How often is there an *aṣọ́ ẹbí*?
Maybe 80% of the time, but usually only for events like weddings & funerals.

How often do you oblige a) with the colour code *Always*; b) with the *aṣọ́ ẹbí*?

You have to be close family or a really close friend for me to do it

Do you, or have you ever felt under any pressure to 'take' *aṣọ́ ẹbí*?

***Sometimes, but they are only worn once and I remember what a waste it is*.**

Do you think times have change in respect to the younger generations and the expectations around *aṣọ ẹbí*?

Yes. I think people are feeling less pressure to do it, but they will to show the person is important to them. '

What influences your decision to attend an event?

Relationship with the invitee

How often do these invitations have a colour/dress code?

All the time

How often is there an *aṣọ́ ẹbí*?

Almost 99%

How often do you oblige a) with the colour code ; b) with the *aṣọ́ ẹbí*?

a) 100% of the time

b) 90% of the time

Do you, or have you ever felt under any pressure to 'take' *aṣọ ẹbí*?

Yes

My findings regarding societal ambivalence towards the practice of *aṣọ ẹbí* reflects Ogbechi & Anetor (2015). According to them, *aṣọ ẹbí* has undergone a metamorphosis to become a '*medium of social strive, display of affluence, and discrimination against people, who are either unwilling or unable to buy...'* as opposed to its traditional unifying purpose. In their 2015 study of *aṣọ ẹbí* practice in Lagos, the responses to their questions on its 'sociality' were surprisingly non-committal for such a bedrock of societal partying. ***'45% of the respondents were of the view that aṣọ ẹbí is not vital for wedding ceremony, while 44% of the respondents subscribed that aṣọ ẹbí is vital for ceremony; 45% of the respondents do not subscribe to the important of aṣọ ẹbí for a funeral ceremony, while 43% of the respondents subscribed to the use of aṣọ ẹbí in funeral ceremonies. Furthermore, the result depicts that 43% of the respondents were of the opinion that the use of aṣọ ẹbí in union meeting and traditional gathering is unnecessary, while 42% afirmed the important of aṣọ ẹbí in union meetings and traditional gatherings. The outcome further shows that 45% of the respondents were of the view that that aṣọ ẹbí do not give a sense of belongings, while 43% subscribed to the view that it does give a sense of belonging. Finally, the outcome shows that 45% of the respondents do not subscribe to the view that aṣọ ẹbí shows unity in events while 45% subscribed that it does show unity in events. It could be inferred from the preceding results that the purpose of aṣọ ẹbí is fast losing its original purpose as a mean of social identity and solidarity among the s and in other ethnic groups in Nigeria.*' **(Ogbechi,R. Anetor, F.O.).**

The following sketch was written in the Nigerian Guardian by the veteran Nigerian journalist Reuben Abati. Though quite long, I have included it in almost its entirety because it captures a very common dismissively aggrieved and misogynistic male perspective on the topic.

'I WAS in the company of four of my friends the other day; in the course of socialising over drinks and assorted talks about the Nigerian condition, one of the guys, an otherwise comfortable professional with a large heart for the womenfolk, and an absorptive capacity for mischief, had pushed the discussions in the direction of what he called 'the aso ebi syndrome'. He was not drunk. He is in fact one of those fellows who can finish a carton of beer and still remain standing. We often joke that his parents must have met at a beer parlour or in the vicinity of a brewery!

But this evening, he was more concerned about aso ebi, starting a mini debate that consumed more bottles of beer, and plates of 'isi ewu' and 'orisirisi'. 'I don't know what my wife is up to', he announced. Eyes and ears

were immediately pointed in his direction, more so as he sounded as if he was about to invite the general public into a private marital affair. 'Our wardrobe is full of all kinds of aso ebi', he added. 'I can't even find space for my own clothes any longer. Every week, a friend or a relation sends my wife aso ebi, sometimes a complete set, with lace, damask, ankara, and notes about what colour to wear at particular times. I am no longer finding it funny, because I am the one who is forced to pick up the bills.'

'Why are you complaining? Your wife keeps collecting lorry loads of aso ebi, because she knows you can afford it. My own wife will never try it. She knows that if she goes about town collecting clothes like a coxcomb, she will be the one to pay for it. That is why she is working. I don't attend parties, and there is no reason why I should go bankrupt just because someone else is having a party and I want to make them happy.'

'I think it is a woman's thing', someone else volunteered. 'Women like parties a lot. And being seen in aso ebi makes them feel special'

'Is that why they should inconvenience their husbands?'

'In fact, I hear that the ones who do not have husbands are willing to do anything to keep up appearances on the party circuit. Many of those society women you see, they sleep with men to furnish their wardrobes. Some of them take loans to buy aso ebi.'

'You are exaggerating. You have come again'

'That means you don't know what is going on in this town. All those women you see on the party circuit, have you bothered to find out how much it costs to sustain one outing. When one of those partying and jollofing women steps out, you are talking of about one million naira, complete: head tie, handbag and shoes, lace, jewellery. And the jewellery has to keep changing as the aso ebi changes.'

'The aso ebi that was sent to my wife last week was N250, 000 complete set. And the people who send these things don't even have the courtesy to ask you whether you are interested or not. They just send the thing. And it is so bad, because in this town, somebody is always having a party'

'I don't face that problem because I am Ibo. It is you Yorùbás who are always partying all over the place. If you invite me to a party, I will wear whatever I have in my wardrobe. What you need is my presence, not dressing up like a Christmas tree.'

'It is no longer a Yorùbá thing oh. Even the Hausa/Fulani, Ibos, in fact every group now wears aso ebi.'

'They learnt it from the Yorùbá. Your women too like to show off. One of the problems we have in this society is that people pretend a lot. If you know the number of people who do things that they are uncomfortable with, just because they want to please other people. My friend, look, you have to set down the rules in your own house. Tell your wife, no more aso ebi. The thing is called aso ebi anyway. Family attire. The idea is for members of the same family to wear a uniform when they have an event so that they can be distinguished from guests. You just tell your wife that she can not belong to every family in town'

'I don't know why you are preaching. A friend of mine simply banned the wife from attending parties. She is also not allowed to have too many friends. It is when a woman starts belonging to this group and that group that she becomes a prisoner of social conventions. My friend's wife knows her limits. If she goes against that instruction, she knows the implications.'

'That sounds like you. You always like to terrorise people.'

'It is a matter of principle. I don't tolerate nonsense. And the aso ebi syndrome is becoming a piece of social nonsense. What annoys me is that people are using it to raise funds for the parties they intend to hold. If a piece of damask is let's say N6, 000 for example, somebody who is having a party can send it to your wife for N15, 000. Then when she goes to the party, they will distribute some gift items. The truth is that she already paid for those items and the celebrant had collected money from everybody to finance the party in addition to the money people will still give her.'

'I think our women need to be conscientised to send back the aso ebi that they do not need or that they have not requested for. They should not allow themselves to be cheated in the name of friendship'

'It is not that easy. Women don't always want to offend each other. How would a woman send back the aso ebi for a friend's daughter's wedding for example? You don't want to give the impression that you are not happy with your friend's achievement. My wife always says it is a form of social investment. When you have your own party and you ask people to buy aso ebi, it is the same people you supported in the past who will rally round you.'

'Okay, you make your friend happy and you inconvenience yourself. The following week, somebody else brings another aso ebi. And you buy. Then the following week, another aso ebi. And so on. My elder sister

has a whole wardrobe of acquired aso ebi which she never wears. Once the party is over, she just throws the clothes into one corner of her room.'

'Oh, I know that type'

'Those women have to keep buying aso ebi, to remain relevant. In fact, I gather that they compete among themselves, over style, body shape, and male attention.'

'I keep insisting that husbands have a job to do. It is for you as the family head to lay down the ground rules in your own house.'

'That is if you are the head of the house, if you are the breadwinner. But if you don't have a penny in your pocket and you want to ban aso ebi in your own house, then you know you are wasting your time.'

'A husband is a husband, even if he is a poor one.'

'That was then oh, not these days. Today, most of those women you see are the ones feeding and clothing their husbands. Many young guys fall into that category. They are like houseboys in their own houses.'

'Sit down and enjoy yourself. When you get home now, your wife may have collected another aso ebi for you to buy. Mr darling'

'It is not exactly a battle anybody can win. We can only complain. It is an African thing. There is something cultural about the way the African relates to his neighbours. The white man doesn't have such problems.'

'Wetin concern white man with party attires, aso ebi or whatever you call it? But for us, culture should be dynamic. The aso ebi syndrome is an abuse of the extended family system. There must be a limit to the extension. One family was having a naming ceremony, they asked people to buy aso ebi'

'People should learn to be moderate. Women must learn not to judge themselves by other people's standards. Buying three different clothes, specially for one party, and changing jewellery like a blacksmith's forge is not about belonging to the happening social crowd, it is plain silliness'

'I really must be on my way now. But I want to say that some men are guilty of this thing that we are talking about too.'

'You mean some men also wear aso ebi. Well, okay yes, may be if they have to. But I really don't think that Nigerian men are into like the women.'

'No. I am telling you that there are some men in this society who buy as many aso ebi as the women, and who hop from one party to the other dressed like mannequins. They call it enjoyment.'

'I call it foolishness.'

'It is their money they are spending mind you. And these men that I am talking about also buy jewellery. When you listen to them discuss the price of gold jewellery and the difference between different grades of lace, you will be shocked.'

'You are talking about those people.'

'Which people?'

'AC-DC. Front and back she-men '

'No. I am talking about perfectly normal people who just compete with their wives for aso ebi.'

'You know in this society, there are all sorts. That is what you get when a society is this complex.'

'I really must go, now'.

'Okay, greet madam, oh'

Fig 13a. Aṣọ ẹbí Lagos, 1980s. Wives of the Circle of Friends at the birthday party of one of the members.

Fig. 13b. The husbands of the Circle of Friends at the same birthday party as previous photo.

It is obvious that there are passionate opposers of the tradition, and that even among those regular practitioners resigned to the custom, there is a psychological fatigue - to quote one of my respondents '*...I wish to note here that aṣọ ẹbí, which traditionally was meant to identify members of a particular family when there were meetings (akin to the Scottish clan kilts) has morphed into a must buy for some people who just want to identify: keeping up with the Joneses, the seen and be seen crowd. Because the language has different meanings for the same word depending on the inflection, the aṣọ ẹbí now also means aṣọ ẹ̀ bi (guilt cloth), and aṣọ ebi (hunger-making cloth) to those against its bastardization.*' (Respondent 3 2021).

To quote Veblen *'It frequently happens that an element of the standard of living which set out with being primarily wasteful, ends with becoming, in the apprehension of the consumer, a necessary of life; and it may in this way become as indispensable as any other item of the consumers habitual expenditure.*' (ibid, 68).

It is considered a privilege to be asked to 'take' *aṣọ ẹbí* with a celebrant, but also an honour for the celebrant to have their request accepted. An insightful saying is *' B'óo l'ọ́ mọ́ ógún, b'òo l'ọ́ mọ́ ógún, - wo ẹ̀ hìn rẹ wò''*.[47]A celebrant need be neither wealthy nor influential to be recognised as the 'leader' of the occasion, and whenhe gets up to dance, his 'followers', most in *aṣọ ẹbí* will accompany him en masse. This is a public validationof the celebrant, supported by *' Ènìyàn laṣọọ mi'*.[48] In this sense, their presence or willingness to identify with a celebrant by virtue of wearing *aṣọ ẹbí* acts as a cover for him or her and is seen as a strong expression of communal solidarity and love. This suggests that not being identified with is synonymous with nakedness or unprotected (Perani, Wolff (1999), Aremu (2006), Familusi (2010)).

Fig.10 *'B'óo l'ọ́ mọ́ ógún, b'òo l'ọ́ mọ́ ógún, - wo ẹ̀ hìn rẹ wò'*

[47] it is only when a leader looks behind them that they realise how many followers they have
[48] people are my clothing

As each celebrant wants their occasion to be unique, there can be absolutely no collaboration with regards to the dress code. Rather, there exists an undercurrent of competition and 'one-upmanship'. This very often presents popular invitees with a slight problem. If you have been invited to two events, one with a blue *aṣọ oke* and the other where just a colour has been specified, then one could simply wear that colour and have your *gèlè* and *ìborùn* in the *aṣọ oke*. As *aṣọ oke* is the pre-eminent fabric, it can be combined with any other fabric, thus 'raising' them.

The situation becomes more difficult if one must attend two or three events where one is either close enough or otherwise obligated to wear the designated *aṣọ ẹbí* and either none is *aṣọ oke*, or all are *aṣọ oke* but different colour schemes and so cannot be matched with the same *iro* and *buba*.

This quandary can lead to quite ridiculous situations.

My hostess in Lagos and her husband had been invited to 7 events that weekend and had apportioned them thus. It was decided he would attend three, since he had to give speeches at them, while we would cover the other four, since we merely had to 'show our faces'. However, it was impossible to make the outfits work colourwise as each celebrant had chosen diametrically oppositional colours. The location of the venues were also problematic. We were setting off from the 'old money' GRA suburbs of the Apapa peninsula, with its infamous traffic gridlocks and precarious bridges, with our first party in Ikeja at one end of the Lagos mainland. We could only stay an hour, as our next destination was clear across town in Ikoyi on Lagos Island. From there, we had to go on to Victoria Garden City (VGC) and the Lekki Peninsula. Each of these events had a different dress code that we (or at least my hostess) were obligated to honour.

We found ourselves leaving the house fully dressed but having to pack three additional complete changes of outfit - shoes, *gèlè*, jewellery and all - and having to change between events in my hostesses' vehicle. Luckily, said vehicle is a chauffeur-driven and air-conditioned mini-bus with tinted windows, and because this was not an alien situation to her, fully equipped with mirrors and pins. There is precedence for this, as I remember that my Stepmother, in the 70s and 80s also had her 'weekend bus' in which she would travel to parties all over the region, fully packed, including large envelopes of cash for any 'spraying'[49] she intended. As previously noted, socialising at this level is not for the faint-hearted.

[49] a custom where celebrants (or indeed any favourites) on the dance floor are literally showered with money by their guests. Thehigher the denomination of the notes, the more impressive.

Fig.15(a) The 'mobile dressing room', Apapa, Lagos 2019

Fig.15(b) The 'Weekend bus'. Lagos, 1979. My stepmother is in the middle, holding the 'irukere'[50]

[50] ceremonial horsetail whisk

Invitations to these events are not given lightly. Weddings in Nigeria, and Lagos in particular, are magnificent spectacles. A 'small' wedding will probably have 150 guests, but even with the larger carnivalesque celebrations of wealth and pomp, each invitation is carefully considered in every ramification possible before being issued.

Fig 16. Typical wedding invitations.

As may be gleaned from the level of ceremony and attendant rituals surrounding weddings, marriage among the Yorùbá is much more than the simple solemnising of a couple's love, it is also the formalising of kinship ties between two families and their attendant ally networks. While ostensibly held to celebrate the union of a man and woman (homosexuality is proscribed in Nigeria with a 14 year prison sentence), weddings also appear as vehicles to demonstrate the social standing of the families and very often resembles a potlatch competition between both sets of families. '…*Today, marriage ceremonies are often occasions for conspicuous consumption, or to show off one's strength – or the strength of the relatives – with substantial money spent on food, drink, clothing, and entertainment.*' (Eades, 1980).

Fig. 17 (a, b). 'Fẹ́fẹ́rity'[49] Yorùbá sociality and conspicuous consumption: the elaborate décor reflecting the resplendently attired guests. Lagos, 2019.

Keeping up with the Joneses

While there is no mandatory compulsion to achieve a certain degree of pecuniary standard of living, the desire to be counted as '*ọmọlúàbí*' is a primary driver. There is need to, at the very least, be on a consumption level with those one considers (or would like to consider) one's peers. In real terms, there is never and can never be a limit - the more one obtains, the higher one aspires. As Veblen puts it, *'the*

standard is flexible; and especially it is indefinitely extensible, if only time is allowed for habituation to anyincrease in pecuniary ability and for acquiring facility in the new and larger scale of expenditure that follows such an increase' (ibid).

Life then becomes a continual exercise of 'running on the spot' to maintain one's position or suffer loss of face. *'It is much more dificult to recede from a scale of expenditure once adopted than it is to extend the accustomed scale in response to an accession of wealth'.* That is the essential problem with being on a pedestal – one spends one's entire life trying to keep one's balance to stay on, caught on the frozen but perpetual apogee of a parabola of exhausting responsibilities and impossible expectations - with the depressing knowledge that at least some degree of the situation is self-generated.

'The standard is not the average, ordinary expenditure ought already achieved; it is an ideal of consumption… The motive is emulation – the stimulus of an individual comparison which prompts us to outdo those with whom we are in the habit of classing ourselves… In other words, our standard of decency in expenditure as in emulation, is set by the usage of those next above us in reputability. **(Veblen, 71)**

Clothes in themselves cannot change status. Another proverb states '*Aṣọ nlá kọ́ ni ènìyàn nlá*'.[51] A poor man who appears in expensive attire and is mistaken as wealthy will know that he is not a rich man even if others do not, and a wealthy man dressed plainly loses no status. Regarding self deception, the Yorùbá say '*Ẹni tí ó bá tan ara rẹ̀ ni Òrìṣà òkè máa tàn*',[52] a reminder for honesty in all things. Dressing like the wealthy just for a day on account of donning the same type of cloth (*aṣọ ẹbí*) will not change one's personal circumstances. One is therefore advised to 'cut one's coat according to one's size' '*Ṣe b'óó ti mọ, ẹlẹ́wà Ṣàpón*' or risk the cutting jibe *'ṣàkì ńṣe bí ọ̀ rá, eegún ǹṣe bí ẹran'*[53] and laying oneself (and one's *ebi*) open to ridicule. At best, one has to be honest about the 'acting up'. An example of this was a wedding party I attended in Lagos during my 2019 field study trip. I was seated at a table with some extremely wealthy women, who were wearing 'named' jewellery sets.[54] In the course of conversation, I was complimented on my 'set' and asked for details. Wisely, I was honest and said it was an inexpensive, but lucky find from TK Maxx, the designer 'end of line' store - just as someone across the table casually mentioned they had seen something similar in the store. An attempt to 'cut a bigger coat' for myself would have diminished not only myself, but also the standing of my hostess (who is of their circle) in their esteem. '*Goods are endowed with value by the agreement of fellow consumers… enjoyment of physical consumption is only a part of the service yielded by goods; the other part is the enjoyment of sharing names*' (Douglas & Isherwood (1996) p51) There

[51] appearing gorgeously does not imply that one is important or influential

[52] one who deceives himself will be deceived by the Deities

[53] tripe with pretensions of being fat, bone pretending to be good meat

[54] [53] a 'named' set is one from an exclusive designer like Bvlgari, Van Cleef and Arpels, Harry Winston, Mikimoto or Graff

is an emphasis on the enjoyment provided by symbolic consumption, while Bourdieu concentrates on status competition, *'the dominant class with the symbolic signs of 'class' which are, as one says, de rigueur in all exclusive ceremonies of the bourgeoises' self-worship, which is the celebration of its own distinction'.* (Bourdieu, 1996, p29)

As indicated earlier in the methodology chapter, I was intentionally quite narrowly focused in my choice of participants, in order to reflect a particular perspective from a specific social class, one in which perfomative strategic sartoriality was displayed at both a high level and high frequency. I was fortunate enough to have relatively easy access to the group.

My cohort consisted of 'Lagosians' of a high socio-economic strata. Financially comfortable, successfully professional or entrepreneurial. Most of the group are of Yoruba descent of 'established' families, although considering the cosmopolitan and diverse nature of the city, most people are 'Yoruba adjacent' due to intermarriage and social mixing, and many Yoruba customs and practices have been adopted by other cultures. There is also the fact that long-term residents of Lagos are referred to as Lagosian (this is rare in Nigeria, where one's forbears' state of origin is considered one's – even if you have never stepped a foot there…). There is however, a distinction made between the '*ọmọ oní'lẹ̀*' and the '*at'ọ̀hún rìn wá'.* Most of the women were educated with at least first degrees, and as is common in Nigeria, many had moved from executive to entrepreneurial professions. Those still in formal employment were at C-Suite levels, while although some described themselves as 'housewives', they generally had an income-generating 'hobby' (which often generated millions of Naira). Many are members of international clubs and organizations like Zonta International and Soroptimist International, and sit on Boards as non-executive directors as well as doing charity work.

The older members of the cohort largely have children of marrying age or who are married, and some of these children are now participating in the cycle. The cohort were all well and frequently travelled, with jaunts abroad to the destination weddings of friends' children a very common occurrence.

They have not set themselves up as arbiters of societal good taste or trend-setters in the common understanding of the term, and indeed generally lean towards the conservative in styles of the outfits they wear, although not with regards to fabrics or jewellery. The women have devised their own understandings and metrics of the nuances of the narrow chasm between tastefulness and resplendence and gaudy '*àṣejù'*. Not for them the over-reliance on Lurex/krowntex threads which add a shine (not always necessary) to *aṣọ òkè* , or brash colour combinations and outré dress styles – those are left to the nouveau riche. For this group of women, the aim is to look effortlessly elegant, with every sequin, stone and scarf serving a precise purpose towards a definite end. The performativity of their manifestation of

resplendence is not lost on them, but they are also aware of its place in the consolidation of their societal status.

While the lifestyles of my subject cohort may be atypical of the average Yoruba, the difference is mainly a matter of scale, intensity and level of expenditure, rather than any fundamentals. The desire to achieve resplendence, and the practice of strategic Sartoriality cuts across all societal strata.

Boas refers to an analogy - as a craftsman works upon an object, he modifies or produces a surface; if he is highly skilled, a virtuoso, the surface produced is so regular as to be aesthetically pleasing. Moreover, the virtuoso will often play with his material, thus producing an intricate pattern, which may later be transferred to a new medium, e.g., from cloth to pottery. The artist, in contrast to Boas' craftsman, is aware of himself and of an audience for his creation. He looks at his work from the point of view of his audience, and he directs his virtuosity toward the creation of forms that, he anticipates, will have certain kinds of impact upon the audience (Boas, F. 1940, pg 535-6). The artist in the context of resplendence is not the weaver of the prestigious textile, *aṣọ oke*, but the wearer, who *'directs his (their) virtuosity' towards the impact his(their) appearance will have on his(their) audience*', with deliberate intent. It is important to emphasise that *Ọlà, 'a state of self-suficiency, respect, and esteem...*' (K Barber, 1991) and not necessarily *Ọlá* (wealth) is the desired image being endeavoured to portray.

The Duality of Utility and Waste

The Yorùbá saying *'Ọ̀mùtì ó kí ńṣe àpà, owóo rẹ̀ l'ó ńná...*'[55] may be the underpinning rationale or definition of the sartorial manifestation of resplendence in contemporary Yorùbá culture. The requirement for an extensive wardrobe, constantly being replenished and all the accoutrements attendant to that - the jewellery, the external trappings - may have started as competitive expenditure, but soon became an indispensable habit which defined their status as 'blessed' and therefore essential to their reputability. Or as Veblen puts it '*whatever form of expenditure the consumer chooses, whatever end he seeks in making his choice, has utility to him by virtue of his preference. The use of the word 'waste' as a technical term therefore implies no deprecation of the motives of all the ends sought by the consumer under this canon of conspicuous waste*' (Veblen pg 65).

[55] a drunkard isn't a wastrel as he's spending his money to his satisfaction

There is an inherent duality in the objects of resplendence, necessarily containing both elements of waste and utility. The multiplicity of iterations of what appears to be the same outfit being re-conjured in that fashionable Lagos matron's wardrobe may hold a high degree of waste in its very existence, but there is no denying its usefulness to her in both the aesthetic and personal satisfaction it gives, as well as in its securing societal status by its very unnecessariness. A man who is blessed with a rich wardrobe or many changes of raiment is saluted as *'ó ńpàrọ aṣọ bí ọ̀ gà'*.[56] The attire in these circumstances therefore evokes a multifaceted, culturally significant and positively evaluated type of meaning that the beholder instantly experiences in a way that transcends literal sensibilities and comprehension. '*An article may be useful and wasteful both, and its utility to the consumer may be made up of use and waste in the most varying proportions… Even in articles which appear at first glance to serve the purest temptation only, it is always possible to detect the presence of some, at least ostensible, useful purpose (Veblen 69).*

To be frank, many of the items that appear integral to the well-being and living standards of the affluent classes are mostly ceremonial, but once they have been incorporated into the fabric of consumption, they become indispensable, even though they actually serve no ostensible useful (practical) purpose. At every party or occasion, guests are presented with gifts to serve as souvenirs of the event. These souvenirs are expressions of the host's appreciation of the guests' presence, but also serve as a further avenue to display wealth and largesse. Even the most financially embarrassed tenant in a '*face-me-I-slap-you'* tenement room celebrating a child's naming ceremony will ensure that his guests leave with something, even if it's just a packet of plastic cutlery or a cheap plastic bowl.

[56] one who can change his attire as often and easily as a chameleon changes colour

Fig.18. Wedding souvenirs and Funeral memento. Lagos .

For the more upscale hosts, the sky's the limit, and the most unlikely items could be given away as party favours. Costume jewellery sets, bales of fabric, bottles of expensive alcohol, fans, handbags, live goats, full sets of crockery, artworks, full canteens of cutlery, cars, have all been given out as party souvenirs on the Lagos party scene. Generally, the more expensive and extravagant gifts are reserved for the 'inner circle' - close friends, those who have bought the expensive *aṣọ ẹbí*, and those the host is trying to impress. Very often, the cheap souvenirs are actually just left at the venue to be gratefully appropriated by the waiting staff and others who will find them useful. Every middle/upper middle class home has a surfeit of

plasticware, accumulated from event attendance, and so even when the guest does leave with the 'gifts', most of it is in turn passed on to their domestic staff - househelps, drivers, gatemen.

The Psychosphere

An important aspect of my shift in research focus has been a growing awareness that while the cloth (*aṣọ́ okè*) is of paramount cultural importance within the society, it is actually the effects of this import on the internal lives and psychological processes of those 'caught' within the pressures of the milieu (which I have termed the *psychosphere*), that is of primary interest to me. My research therefore concentrates on the social psychology of the wearers of the material culture and the 'effects' of its usage. It attempts to answer questions concerned with how an individual's dress-related beliefs, attitudes, perceptions, feelings, and behaviours are shaped by others and one's self, and how attire affects the psyche, emotions and self-expression – how emotions and sociality are expressed through dress.

The word anxiety has various definitions in common usage - according to Tyrer (1999 pg3-4), '*a state of agitation, being troubled in mind, a solicitous desire to effect some purpose, uneasiness about some coming event*…' Woodward talks about *'… a myriad array of local forms of anxiety…'* Fashion has always been intertwined with culture, psychology, and politics, and rational explanations have never been especially effective in regulating or controlling consumption and sartorial habits. The psychological foundations of an individual's manner or style of sartoriality may range from the extremely personal - to compensate for perceived defects in physical shape, self-esteem, to grandiose dreams of social elevation or observance of perceived society norms. These elements determine not just what and which sartorial choices are made, but also how and why, and it might be argued that it is the concept, the socially shared symbolism of the costume, rather than the dress itself that is significant. The non-physical mental/psychological milieu of the expectational demands of societal stratification and rank, shaped by culture, custom and traditions; the pervasive influence of the encompassing intangibles on all major aspects of 'real life' – decision-making, self-recognition and actualisation; the complications of negotiating this environment. When clothing holds symbolic meaning for the wearer, it is inevitable that it affects the wearer's behaviour (Adam & Galinsky, 2012). Clothing, used to prime specific self-knowledge, also impacts self-description and perception, image and identity, so this effect may occur on a macro level, inducing greater, increasingly Ramboyant displays of performativity in their engagement with their milieu, or may manifest on an 'invisible' micro-level in the form of mental and psychological stress or compromised wellbeing.

My research bears out Oduyoye (1999) that most African rituals force women to obtain a certain identity and to live with identity in a constraining way - what I perceive as a perpetual performativity. In this context, all major aspects of 'real life,' including decision making, self-recognition, and actualization, are impinged upon by the pervasive influence of the encompassing intangibles and complicated by the psychological milieu of the expectational demands of society stratification and rank, moulded by culture, custom, and traditions.

Sartorial resplendence among the Yorùbá is a gendered phenomenon, both in the display of performativity and in the expectational demands of society. '*No matter how similar the clothes of men and women may appear, or how different, the arrangements of each are always being made with respect to the other. Male and female clothing taken together, illustrates to people what the relations between men and women to be, besides indicating the separate peace each sex is making with fashion or custom at any given time.'* Just as tailored suits put a final seal of disapproval on gaudy clothes for serious men regardless of class, so too with the restrained colour palette of men. This distinguishes them radically from women in social arenas. '*when it comes to presentation, Yorùbá men are the Italians of Africa… colourwise, we are slightly conservative – you will hardly find men wearing cerise, fuschia or other wild colours, but whites, blues, brown, grey black – we rarely stray from those tonalities, even in our patterns, we are more subtle (than women)… '* (Olaoluwa Jeje, 2020, interview). The subtle condescension in the description of the 'female' colours as 'frivolous' is not unnoticed. This difference in the representation and expectations of women and men in the public sphere can be illustrated by John Berger's Ways of Seeing (1972) where contrasts men and women thus: '*A man's presence is dependent upon the promise of power which he embodies… A man's presence suggests what he is capable of doing to you or for you…'* The implicit power dynamics behind that statement is just as valid in Yorùbá society. *'By contrast, a woman's presence expresses her own attitude to herself… Her presence is manifest in her gestures, voice, opinions, expressions, clothes, chosen surroundings, taste…' 'One might simplify this by saying; men act and women appear. Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at.'*

Fig.20. '…*whites, blues, brown, grey black – men rarely stray from those tonalities*…'

While I am not blind to and certainly do not agree with the 'female = inferior' coloration of these illustrations, it is difficult to deny that this dichotomy of perceptions infuses the '*structural ambivalence surrounding the character and position of women in industrial society.'* (Oakley, 1974a, 80-90). Woodward talks about *'… a myriad array of local forms of anxiety…' 'The contradictions and ambivalence which are core to women's clothing choices… Irrespective of women's social positioning or background, the pivotal dynamic which underpins how women choose what to wear is between clothing which is 'easy' and 'safe', and clothing that allows women to transform themselves.'* (Woodward, 2005)

Situated in particular contextual location, habitual clothing would be items which women 'know how to wear' because they wear them all the time, 'everyday wear' which is reliable and known, with no unusual expectations or (hopefully) results, but which also limits creativity. The ubiquity of aṣọ oke usage does not negate the personal expression of self - even in the context of *aṣọ ẹbí*. Paradoxically, if anything, it is this very ubiquity that fosters a determination to stand out, to shine: it encourages creative individualism. However, unlike suits where the rebellion is against the <u>wearing</u> of the attire, aṣọ oke incorporates the design and stylistic changes with no loss of desirability, uptake, or status. It is this that transforms traditional attire from mere cultural symbolism to a somatic entity that communicates personal identity as well as 'cultural currency'. For Yorùbá women, the medium of dress contributes fundamentally to their social configuration. I concur with Clarke/Miller in their statement *'in studying patterns of selecting and*

wearing clothes, we are studying the constitution and not simply the present representation of persons' **especially when considering women and the strategic sartoriality employed in their quest for resplendence.**

Do you feel any pressure as a woman to look good at these events? Why?

Yes. Don't want to feel self conscious about not looking my best

Where do you think this pressure originates?

Societal pressure – peer group pressure

Do you find the constant expectation for resplendence onerous?

Very much so

(Questionnaire respondent 1)

'*The relationship between anxiety and possibility, creativity and constraint*' – I take it further and agree with Clarke/Miller in their statement *'in studying patterns of selecting and wearing clothes, we are studying the constitution and not simply the present representation of persons'*, especially when considering Yorùbá women and the strategic sartoriality employed in their quest for resplendence. This tension is exponentially heightened where the woman has to fulfil certain societal obligations to 'appear' constantly. When she is in a position of perpetual performativity. What should be an occasional anxiety then evolves into the chronic due to its expectational relentlessness. Non-daily habitual clothing which involves self-conscious engagement with a woman's image '*who should I be today, could this be me, who am I*' involves a constant and continuous upping of the ante, exacerbating the stress of having to make what should be occasional sartorial decisions almost every day.

COVID and the Psychosphere

The COVID 19 pandemic also forced a redirection of certain aspects of my methodology. Having begun my research and conducted some of my fieldwork prior to the COVID19 pandemic, the global restrictions on travel forced a curtailing of further field study in situ. However, this imposition of my physical non-proximity to the subject matter provided an additional and not insignificant platform from a more etic perspective than hitherto from which to garner even more unique observations of the practice of strategic sartoriality and the manifestation of resplendence in a COVID era. The pandemic and the strictures the Nigerian government imposed on the populace at large had (in my view) provided an opportunity for Yorùbá women of a particular social class to organically disengage from the sartorial treadmill they were caught on. This section examines their re-engagement with a practice that a significant proportion of them

ostensibly find onerous.

COVID-19, has been one of the singularly most defining and transformative influences or forces of the twenty-first century, wreaking havoc on societal and community norms and forcing an unprecedented and almost global readjustment in search of what could be accepted as a 'new normal'. From the mundane backdrops of life — school, the commute to work, hanging out with friends at the mall, the pub, or in people's homes — to the rare and significant — *owambe* celebrations[57] — everything has had to be adapted to survive.

The surprisingly swift and seemingly competent initial measures to counter the COVID-19 pandemic threat in Lagos State included a total ban on all religious gatherings and social activities. This was followed by a complete lockdown of all social events except for 'essential transactions' (i.e. domestic shopping etc.). For a society that seemingly exists on a tripod of Faith, *Feferity* and Finance (with the three often indistinguishable), this was a sobering moment. The easing of the lockdown did not bring much comfort to the socialising classes - gatherings were limited to 25 people, a ludicrous number in a society where a small wedding could include at least 150 guests and funeral party guests could (and often did) fill a football field. The questions that immediately sprung to mind were:

- **Regarding the superficial/facile effects of COVID19 - long and short term; (e.g. fashion - will masks be incorporated seamlessly into resplendent attire?)**
- **Could this be the end of this iteration of this manifestation of resplendence?**
- **Since *Ọ̀yàyà* is dependent on numbers, (*eniyan l'aso mi*) will the curtailing of numbers signal the death of *owambe* and *fẹ́fẹ́rity* = resplendence, or will it transcend the current circumstances and re-emerge in another form?**
- **The possibility of COVID as relief from the '*owambe'* treadmill?**

In my opinion, the pandemic presented a unique opportunity for a mandatory unforced disengagement from the 'hamster wheel' – the rigours of strategic sartoriality manifesting as resplendence that very many women felt (and expressed in their responses) they were condemned to. A tenet of Marxism is that capitalism, and other manifestations of oppression operate not only through forced tyranny, but also by the persuasion to collude in one's own oppression by subscribing/aspiring to the myth of upward mobility, the motivator of the carrot and the stick.
This brings me back to one of the central questions of my research. Why would a society persist in a practice which is demonstrably inimical to individual health and counterproductive to societal wellbeing? Any

[57] weddings and funerals

attempt to craft or build 'rational' explanations for cultural/societal behavioural phenomena based on mere observation is prone to misconstruction, misdirection or simply self-generated unconscious bias to paraphrase Kuchler, 1997. '*If by 'understanding' we mean that the outside world will ultimately correspond to our expectations and thought structures, then we admit that the diversity of the world is seen through a predetermined filter and that there will be different kinds of understanding, distinguished according to individuals and groups*'. (Burkert, W. 1983.) In talking about religion, which is so akin to culture in its reach and hold, Burkert contrasts the lack of self-explanatory interior exposition internal discussions within this 'sphere of power' (the psychosphere) as the religion becomes its own attempt and agent of expression as well as medium of communication resonating with its adherents; In my view, it is more akin to a sealed glass echo chamber, within which the oxygen of objectivity cannot enter, be entertained or sustained, eroding the agency of all but the most strong-willed: as opposed to outside observation, even when furnished with a lexicon as *'…a lexicon will not give us an understanding of the language if the grammar is unknown or disregarded and if the practice under discussion has not been understood.' (ibid).*

Identification with a peer group acts as a reference point for an individual's interaction with their community, and more widely, their culture. This relationship has the potential to be positive, negative, or aspirational. Strategic sartoriality acts as a continuation of this relationship, with its motivators or both identification and distinction. '*But if reality were not anthropomorphically or at* least *intellectually determined, then understanding in a personal sense would be altogether impossible. The possibility remains of using our consciousness, fully aware of these problems, to unravel the course of received tradition and to adapt the structures of understanding to the ever-new realities with which we are confronted and to which man, whether he likes it or not, remains tied.'* That participants are under a degree of societal tyranny due to this focus on appearance and style being presented and established as a paradigm of status is further developed in the body of this study. I was particularly struck by the following questionnaire responses, highlighted because of the generational gap in perspective regarding the pace of sociality, but alignment regarding the psychospheric pressure and relentless grip despite COVID. Full responses are attached in Appendix A.

RESPONSE 1

Please answer all questions as fully as possible.

Where would you place *Aṣọ̀ òkè* in the hierarchy of textiles/fabrics? Why?

On a scale of 1 – 5 , Aṣọ̀ òkè will be 2

Do you own any *Aṣọ́ okè*? Did you purchase them of your own volition, were they *aṣọ́ ẹbí*, gifts or were they inherited?

Yes, I own aṣọ òkè. I purchased some; majority are Aso-Ebi and few are gifts

How large is your wardrobe/collection of traditional outfits? *Iro* and *buba, gele/ipele/iborun* etc. (An estimation will be fine)

Over 200

SOCIAL EVENTS

How often are you invited to social events (weddings, funerals, birthday parties, all ceremonies)?

Pre Covid, very often

How many invitations do you receive weekly/monthly (on average) and how many do you honour (on average)?

About 12-15 per month. I honour about 8-10

Do you think times have change in respect to the younger generations and the expectations around *aṣọ ẹbí*?
Yes

GENDER ISSUE

Do you feel any pressure as a woman to look good at these events? Why?

Yes. Don't want to feel self conscious about not looking my best

Where do you think this pressure originates?

Societal pressure – peer group pressure

Do you find the constant expectation for resplendence onerous?

Very much so

What do you think would happen if one did not conform to sartorial norms?

With the benefit of hindsight, nothing really. The urge to feel a sense of belonging may have caused the habit

Do you believe that men are under the same sartorial pressure? Why?

Yes. The same reason as women- to feel they 'belong'

CHANGES THROUGH COVID

Has the COVID pandemic made any difference to the way you view the social scene? What difference has it made?

It has made a huge difference. I do not feel under pressure to align with what 'society' wants. This period has given me the opportunity to get my priorities right and be my own person

Have you made any changes to your attendance at social events since the beginning of the pandemic – this could be attire, frequency of attendance or duration at events. What engendered this change?

I rarely go out to events anymore

Have your feelings regarding social events changed from this time last year when the pandemic was morevisibly in the media? Why?

Yes, I had time to actually define my priorities

Did you believe that the COVID19 pandemic would effect a lasting change on the nature and manifestation of social engagements? Why? How?

It definitely should and it will. This has been a period that unwittingly has given an atmosphere of deep reflection on life and any smart person should take the opportunity to effect a lifestyle change

What do you think now?

Social engagements had reached an alarming crescendo and needed a serious toning down and it has been toned down now.

<u>RESPONSE 2</u>

Where would you place *Aṣọ̀ òkè* in the hierarchy of textiles/fabrics?

Premium and traditional

Why?

It's high quality because it's hand made; and can be customised.

Do you own any *Aṣọ̀ okè*?

Yes.

Did you purchase them of your own volition, were they *aṣọ̀ ẹbí*, gifts or were they inherited?

I own a few pieces handed down by my mother, and one from my wedding. I've never purchased it myself, I don't have any occasion to wear it.

How large is your wardrobe/collection of traditional outfits? *Iro* and *buba, gele/ipele/iborun* etc. (An estimation will be fine).
It could probably fit into 2 suitcases

GENDER ISSUES

Do you feel any pressure as a woman to look good at these events?
Yes

Why?
It's a competition. It might be a Lagos/Nigerian thing but everyone wants to out do their neighbour, or at the very least look like they belong.

Where do you think this pressure originates?
Nigerian life is a show. How you present yourself is how you will be treated. If you look like a million bucks you get treated like it. Look the opposite and you get no respect, even from the waiters at the wedding.

Do you find the constant expectation for resplendence onerous?
No. I tend to dress for myself even though I like to look good. I would personally never dress beyond my means. Besides, I like to shop. Events are always an excuse to buy more.

What do you think would happen if one did not conform to sartorial norms?
You stick out, which isn't always a bad thing. Thanks to social media what our parents thought as weird is seen as innovative. Just look at Denola Grey or Bobrisky or Lipgloss Boy. They haven't conformed and are now celebrated for their difference.

Do you believe that men are under the same sartorial pressure?
Yes

Why?
With guys it's harder to 'fake' quality. As a woman I can get away with dressing up a topshop or Zara dress, but with men people will judge you on the make of your shoes, your jewellery and the quality of agbada you have on. Depending on your social circle, topshop shoes don't cut it when your mates have on Loubs.

COVID-19

Has the COVID pandemic made any di?erence to the way you view the social scene?

No

What di?erence has it made (if any) and why?

I still see the social scene the same and can't wait to be fully vaccinated so I can go out again

Have you made any changes to your attendance at social events since the beginning of the pandemic – this could be attire, frequency of attendance or duration at events. What engendered this change?
I choose which events I go to very carefully. Only those necessary. This year I've been for a total of 4 events, all weddings, and all first cousins.

Have your feelings regarding social events changed from this time last year when the pandemic was more visibly in the media? Why?

I think they remain the same. To be honest the social scene in Nigeria hasn't changed much since COVID. People still go out, but the party ends earlier cause there is a curfew. I've just made it a personal choice to keep away for safety sake, but I still socialise in my bubble.

Did you believe that the COVID19 pandemic would e?ect a lasting change on the nature and manifestation of social engagements? Why? How?

Based on what I had seen in the parts of the world I did

What do you think now?

Like I said nothing really changed. Clubs & restaurants only closed for a few months. But beaches were still open. All night house parties came back into fashion to avoid curfews. It's been business as usual.

<u>RESPONSE 3</u>

Where would you place *Aṣọ̀ òkè* in the hierarchy of textiles/fabrics? Why?

Aṣọ̀ òkè is right at the top of the hierarchy of Yorùbá traditional textiles. Its presence in a Yorùbá woman's wardrobe is an acknowledgement of her maturity. It is one of the non-negotiable fabrics that must be provided by a groom's family in her trousseau.

Do you own any *Aṣọ̀ okè*? Did you purchase them of your own volition, were they *aṣọ̀ ẹbí*, gifts or were they inherited?

I have a very extensive collection of many colours and different types of threads. I also have aṣọ̀ òkè from the

3 groups – inherited from mother and grandmother, bought by me and received as gifts from others.

How large is your wardrobe/collection of traditional outfits? I*ró* and *bùbá, gèlè* or *ìpèlé /ìborùn* etc. (An estimation will be fine)

About 400

SOCIAL EVENTS

How often are you invited to social events (weddings, funerals, birthday parties, all ceremonies)?

I am invited very often. The city of Lagos has a vibrant social scene. There is always an event

How many invitations do you receive weekly/monthly (on average) and how many do you honour (on average)?

An average of 8 a month. I used to honour about half.

What influences your decision to attend an event?

The determining factor is usually the degree of closeness to the celebrant.

How often do these invitations have a colour/dress code?

About 75% of the time.

How often is there an *aṣọ ẹbí*?

About 60% of the time.

How often do you oblige a) with the colour code ; b) with the *aṣọ ẹbí*?

I abide by the colour about 70% of the time. I buy the aṣọ ẹbí 10% of the time.

Do you, or have you ever felt under any pressure to 'take' *aṣọ ẹbí*?

Yes, I have. But I learnt a long time ago that bowing to pressure was not the way to go! One can only have so many outfits.

Do you think times have change in respect to the younger generations and the expectations around *aṣọ ẹbí*?

My children's generation see aṣọ ẹbí as a mark of 'belonging', as being 'part of the crowd'. I wish to note that aṣọ ẹbí, which traditionally was meant to identify members of a particular family when there were meetings (akin to the Scottish clan kilts)… has morphed into a must buy for some people who just want to identify : keeping up with the Joneses, the seen and be seen crowd. Because the Yorùbá language also has different

meanings for the same word depending on the inflection, the aṣọ́ ẹbí now also means aṣọ́ èbi (guilt cloth), aṣọ ebi (hunger making cloth) to those against its bastardization.

GENDER ISSUES

Do you feel any pressure as a woman to look good at these events? Why?

Yes. Peer comparisons and a personal wish to look as nice as possible.

Where do you think this pressure originates?

The competitive nature of women

Do you find the constant expectation for resplendence onerous?

Personally I do not.

What do you think would happen if one did not conform to sartorial norms?

This is a very subjective question. It depends on the individual and the value they place on 'belonging'. The observer will just know that such persons are not on Lagos best dressed list!

Do you believe that men are under the same sartorial pressure? Why?

Far less! The ratio of seemingly eligible men is skewered in their favour so less effort is required by them.

COVID-19

Has the COVID pandemic made any di?erence to the way you view the social scene? What di?erence has it made (if any) and why?

The pandemic has made a huge difference to me personally. I no longer see the necessity for spending so much money and inviting so many people to events. Many are just acquaintances, who really should not be on the guest list.

Have you made any changes to your attendance at social events since the beginning of the pandemic – this could be attire, frequency of attendance or duration at events. What engendered this change?

The invitations still come, especially since Nigeria eased restrictions, but I attend far fewer events. I have not lowered my standard of dress, but spend less time at events because of the risk of exposure.

Have your feelings regarding social events changed from this time last year when the pandemic was more visibly in the media? Why?

Maybe slightly as restrictions have eased, but I do not think I will go back to accepting invitations to the carnival like events (weddings, funerals) which were the norm before COVID.

Did you believe that the COVID19 pandemic would effect a lasting change on the nature and manifestation of social engagements? Why? How?

No I do not. We have over time evolved into this party hard, noise making community. The pandemic OF NECESSITY (respondent's emphasis) kept many away from socials. It was not by choice. As things are seemingly returning to normal, I can also see a gradual return to the old ways. We cannot wait to enjoy our 'owambe' (see & be seen) parties again!

What do you think now?

Given the downward spiral of our economy, the tense security situation and widespread poverty in the land, circumspection should be the watchword.

There was a distinct generational gap in the responses to the questionnaires featured above, with a more casual attitude to the wearing of *aṣọ́ òkè* being evident with the younger respondent (mid-20s, newly married), but with its significance/relevance and import as a cultural definer recognised across the age strata. ***'I argue that the sensory order – or multiple, sometimes conflicting sensory orders – of a cultural group form the basis of the sensibilities that are exhibited by people who have grown up within that tradition'*****. (Howes, 2013).**

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

Strategic Sartoriality

This chapter defines strategic sartoriality and its deployment, particularly in the Yorùbá pursuit of resplendence. I also explore the Yorùbá sensibilities of dress and highlight cultural armatures that support and sustain them and discuss the necessity of employing a degree of skilled vision for an appreciation of the cultural and societal nuances.

Sartorial (adjective); of or relating to clothing or style or manner of dress. (Dictionary.com)

Strategic (adjective); done as part of a plan that is meant to achieve a particular purpose or to gain an advantage. (Oxford Learner's Dictionary)

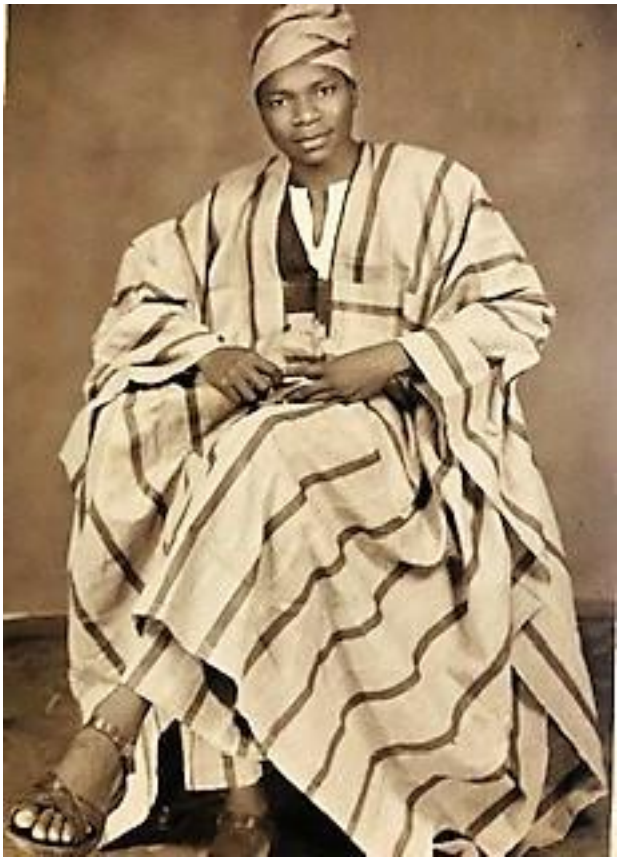

Fig. 21. ***'Aṣọ la rí kí o,***[58] ***awa kìí kí ènìyàn'***[59]

A Yorùbá legend tells of a society in confusion as everyone goes about naked and the fundamental norms of social life are not upheld: children do not acknowledge the authority of their father, the father does not cherish his children, the husband and wife do not greet each other, nor engage in the complementary activities that are essential to the household. In an effort to resolve this crisis, *Ifá* is consulted and the necessary sacrifices made. *Èṣù*, who acts here as the messenger of *Ifá*, collects the sacrifice of raw cotton bolls and arranges for it to be ginned, spun, spread into a warp, then woven into a cloth. The cloth is secretly taken to the family head, who is told to wear it when he first leaves his room the following morning. He ties the cloth about his shoulders before stepping from his room . At once the process of establishing social order begins. He greets his children and they, in awe at the added prestige, prostrate before him, as children should in greeting their father each morning. Acknowledging his new adornment, they exclaim:

'*Aṣe aṣọ tiệ ni iyi ènìyàn!*'[60]

Like most aspects of Yorùbá culture however, sartoriality is not a 'face-value' phenomenon. Unlike the mere spectacle and performativity of Le Sapeurs, Yorùbá sartoriality is culturally underpinned by the cosmological values of the society. In contrast to the ọmọlúàbí principle, Le Sapeurs are usually drawn from the lower echelons of society and use their sartoriality as an escape from the bleakness or tedium of their reality.

While it can be argued that every time we put on clothes, every time we dress, we are making a statement, my research indicates that for the Yorùbá, particularly when it comes to social engagements, there is a specific intentionality to the sartoriality - a nuanced, informed, and targeted intentionality behind every outfit donned to meet each occasion, and imbued in every article that is a constituent of that attire.

Knowing how to connect the dots by weaving through each piece of a traditional Lagos wardrobe requires an understanding of its dynamics. Personal style in Nigeria's capital has changed over the years due to a variety of factors, including the effects of globalism on the population's psyche and the modernisation and luxuriation of traditional styles to appeal to the socialising class. According to Nwachukwu (2022), the true ethos of Lagos style is resilience, which is embodied by its capacity to adjust to rapid change while still retaining a certain amount of panache: '*Lagosian dressing commands respect,' she explains, 'The women and men who live here have very strong personalities. The people of the city are [and have always been] well*

[58] It is the cloth we greet
[59] we do not greet the person
[60] So, it is the dress that makes the man!

***educated [and] well-travelled, and that strongly influences their style*.' Odio Oseni, creative director, Odio Mimonet (ibid). This dynamism can be demonstrated by observing the concept of *'Aso Asiko'* (trend-setting, fashion forwardness) among my study group both at home and the diaspora, which propels the constantly changing trends in traditional styles and design, especially *aṣọ òkè*. Intentionality: strategic sartoriality is beyond fashion however, it is the art of utilising dress to facilitate a desired outcome. It can be argued that every sartorial choice or decision made is a strategic one, no matter the level of consciousness at which it is made. A Lagos 'madam'[61] knows to dress down in the humblest 'ankara' when going to the market for her weekly food shop to keep the prices low and will be unrecognisable in her full finery among her peers at a high society event mere hours later.**

My research supports Ogungbemi's position that according to the Yorùbá, being conscious of oneself requires being aware of oneself, and this awareness necessitates having cognition and an understanding of one's own identity. Despite the fact that people are aware of their 'beings,' they may not always actualize them to the same degree. (Ogungbemi, 2007, 119). For the Yorùbá, rather than just 'existing' in the world '*gbigbe aye*', the correct indicator of an authentic existence is '*ṣíṣe aye* '– 'doing the world', the world being visualised akin to a Shakespearian stage with dramatis personae making intentional choices. *'The earth which is the measure of the present, and the locus of mortals and where you and I, in the form of existence, dramatise our distinctive destinies'* (Ibitokun, 2014, 21–22).

Fashion, in Theory

***'…to demonstrate the primal and often sacred original purpose of dress, which is to represent, in terms of self-imposed and noticeable bodily applications - which may include distortions and disfigurement – the spiritual aspirations, imaginative projections, and the practical sacrifices that divide self-aware human adults from careless infants and innocent beasts.'* (p7).**

While I am conscious that this research thesis is not focused on fashion, I have chosen to explore some aspects of fashion theory because I believe there are certain interdisciplinary issues which are useful in examining my subject.

Clarke and Miller (2002) posit that the theory of fashion should start not just with a study of the fashion industry, but also with a study of personal anxiety of dress, given that most people's primary point of reference with regards to clothing is not the fashion industry, but their own *'personal point of anxiety about what to wea*r' (ibid). Whilst recognising the theory of personal anxiety of dress, I have found however,

[61] A 'madam' in Nigerian English is a mature woman of substance or authority, and the word has no unsavoury connotations inthe society

that the primary point of reference of Yorùbá women in my study is not to the fashion industry, but first to the cultural and societal norms governing their milieu, and only then, themselves.

... if contextualised beyond 'fashion' (or where fashion is only one aspect of its study), clothing and dress offers a site from which to gain empathy for the lives of others, through a vital engagement with the emotionally charged experiences that are derived through our minds and our bodies.' **(Candy, 2005)**

All apparel is worn with intent – the intent to seduce, intimidate, stun, announce the presence, the status of the wearer, to illustrate their relationship to their community and indicate who they are to the world around them. This has always been the case, dating from pre-historic pre-textile eras, when the choice of leaf or penile gourd was carefully considered not just because it was a signifier of societal position, but was also an illustration of one's personal style within community conformity (Bankole-Race, 2017). In the eyes of the world what you wear is what you are, and clothing plays a vital role in the ways that individuals relate tothe world and to each other.

But while the Yorùbá aver that *"Ìríni sí, nì s'ọ 'ní l'ójú''*,[62] there are rules that govern both personal and societal strategic Sartoriality, such as *'aṣọ ńlá kó nì ènìyàn ńlá'*[63] or *'a kii de fila ẹtù lasan, oni eni ti ori ree…'*[64]. Ceremonial occasions such as chieftaincy investitures, weddings and funerals are theatres for ornate displays and performativity for the enhancement of both family and individual status and the centrality of the culturally defined armature of breeding, good manners and respect, cannot be overstated, in order that *'Ẹni tí ó kan àkanpò ẹ̀ wù, o kúrò níìnu ilé sáń tàbí ilé ò sáń*[65] is fulfilled. The futility of beauty without meaning is often highlighted, and among the Yorùbá, beauty has to be 'mindful', and must be functional, however minimally. As the proverbs go, ' *ìwà l'ẹwà*',[66] and '*ìwà rere l'ẹ̀ ṣó ènìyàn*'.[67]

I contrast this with the Trinidadian worldview according to Miller's ethnography. '*In Trinidad people believe that it is the outside of the person that offers the most reliable opportunity to honestly appraise them, to find out about other people's values. In contrast the inside, held deep within, is hidden from* public *scrutiny and so seen to be potentially false, a site of lies and self-deception. Miller guides us to understand that for Trinidadians, clothing is the very best way to find out who and what a person is about and this is the case both for others viewing the wearer 'and even for oneself, since it is through dressing that one confronts who one is, and reveals how certain self representations and pretensions are really delusions'*

[62] one's appearance (attire) determines the respect one is accorded
[63] 'big' clothes do not necessarily confer worth
[64] only certain heads are fit to wear an ẹtù cap
[65] the breeding of one who is dressed appropriately is beyond question
[66] one's character is one's beauty
[67] a good character is the best attire

(Miller, in press).' (Candy, 2005)

Semiotics

It has been argued by many artists and designers, that an essentially hermeneutic view that considers our reality as a text that we are constantly in the process of interpreting, has enforced a sense that the meanings evoked by a designed object are located predominantly outside of the self (Aldrich, 2004).

The tendency to feel that objects are only significant in connection to other things beyond ourselves raises the possibility that the world of designed objects risks becoming detached from the world of people, resulting in a diminished grasp of what constitutes human life as a lived reality. By reading clothing solely as overt graphic communication, as outfits that play a type of social semaphore (Simnel, Veblen, Barthes), we ignore its capacity to effect intimacy and perpetuate a semiotics-heavy way of thinking about the meanings of clothing. The regulation of semiotics may underpin the interpretation received as 'fashion' and a reading of style in which garments have been seen more significant than dressing in and wearing them, but its consequences are that the subjective inner feelings of wearers have been generally disregarded.

Aṣọ òkè **has to be viewed both semiotically (because of its cultural significance) and personally (in order to encompass the internal constructs of the wearers). Just as the significance of language, the oral transmission of ideas, beliefs and values in understanding the life of a people, cannot be over-emphasized, neither can their attire, concrete illustration of their values and artistic sensibilities which can be seen as their history worn on the body. '*…the actual relation between politics and fashion remains somewhat uncertain, since people often wear things for perverse reasons or without reasons.*' Or for unconscious reasons and '*it is clear that there is no simple correlation between artefacts of material culture and neatly bounded ethnic entities…'* (Kasfir, 1984).**

Lurie refers to garment combinations that are made up of an inner and outer layer as a possible metaphor for inner and outer self and appears to conflate this with an expression of the interior landscape, stating *'the wearing of a white shirt with a dark suit does not mean that you are outwardly serious and inwardly honest and trustworthy, merely that this character type has always been considered desirable in business and the professions.'* But while Lurie is willing to take the superficial (outward dress) as the readings of the individual's self-expression and assume that that they concur with inner mental states, my interest is in the possibility of a disconnect between the 'outward show' and the inner motivations especially when seemingly inescapable pervasive cultural or societal parameters are the drivers of specific patterns of dress. '*…that takes its form from inward life – common memories and allusions. Perverse current references, things carefully*

***learned by rote, other things learned by half-conscious habits, obscure jokes, open secrets and a host of unconscious collective fantasies in flux through time…*' (Hollander, A. 2016). My research appears to validate the theory that 'cultural' dress has its own agency, which is fed by the collective will of the people who created it and to whom it belongs, and that agency itself then drives its usage, creating a self-perpetuating circularity: *'soldiers or cabin-attendants, schoolchildren or clubbers, fashion victims or accountants: such groups are linked not only through their shared adoption of particular signifiers but also through their shared experience of the feel of the garments in question and the restrictions and possibilities that their materiality entails' (Sweetman, 2001).* '*Clothes show that visual form has its own capacity, independent of practical forces in the world, to satisfy people, perpetuate itself and make its own truth apart from linguistic reference and topical allusion.*' (Berry, S. (2008))**

Skilled Vision: *Imú ni àlejò fi ńrí'ran*[68]

<u>Partying in Lagos - a snapshot</u>

I arrived in Lagos on 11 December 2019. On 12 December I had a social engagement already - the Christmas party for the Alumni Association of one of the top Boys' Schools. The dress code was smart casual. As with most things, terminology is contextual; and while smart casual for London might be a pair of jeans and nice T-shirt or a nice top with a jacket, the Lagos version of smart casual attire ranges from a full floor length kaftan/*bou-bou* dress through a pair of smart trousers to a full-on sparkly evening gown. Fabrics which are produced for evening wear – the sparkling, shimmering, embroidered and mirrored – in the West are routinely worn to daytime engagements in Lagos.

Dressed, I presented myself to my hosts and was deemed appropriately dressed – although I did have to borrow a pair of shoes. We set off at 7.00 for a 9 o'clock party and by 8.30 we had only gone a mile due to the infamous Apapa standstill traffic, at which point we turned around and went back. That was my first foray into the social life of Lagos.

Two days later we were invited to a book launch and Christmas concert at the MUSON Hall on Lagos Island. The author of the book, Prof. Konyin Ajayi is a very close family friend. The vicar at one of the biggest Methodist churches in Lagos, he is also a Professor of Law and a SAN (the Nigerian equivalent of QC).A dress code may not be overtly dictated, but is understood by the participants within the particular milieu; and this brings

[68] the uninitiated or outsider 'see' through their noses: understanding requires the deployment of senses beyond mere sight

me back to Grasseni's theory of '*skilled vision*', which by exploring vision as a '*ductile, situated, contested and politically fraught means of situating oneself in a community of practice*' (Grasseni, 2009), underpins the reality of a generally understood but unstated knowledge of the nuances of a culture, e.g. dresscodes. For example, In the same way the British know not to attend an audience with the Queen in a bathrobe or a white tie event in swimming trunks, if you are looking in from the outside, it may not be possible to understand the gradations of nuance but within the milieu, it is inherent even if a learned inherence. Stephen Field and Keith Basso (1996), and Paul Stoller (1989, 1997), amongst others, have commented on this sensual phenomenology of everyday practice, and the way this is linked to the construction of knowledge and the positioning of persons intheir world.

This event was chaired by the Vice-President of the country and was attended by the State Governor and was quite heavy on the dignitaries front. The 'dress code' therefore was elegant, sparkly, silks and chiffons, *aṣọ́ òkè gèlè* or *ìborùn* (definitely not full *aṣọ́ òkè*), not overly dressed up, just enough to fulfil the requirements of 'appropriate' spectacle. Due to the cultural import/weight of *aṣọ òkè* a Yorùbá person understands that unless oneself is the host/celebrant at an event, it would be inappropriate to don a 'complete' *aṣọ òkè* ensemble - it would be seen as *àṣejù* -'doing too much', as exemplified by the saying ' *'sìn mí k'á r'òde, o lọ w'ẹ̀ wù etù…'*. other criteria to determine sartorial appropriateness include how traditional an event is – milestones (weddings, chieftaincy investitures, funerals); the calibre of the attendees; the location - city or rural; relationship to the host; an inexhaustible myriad of subtleties nuanced to an infinitesimal degree.

On the 24 December I went to a 75th birthday party on Victoria Island at the very plush Mandarin Oriental Hotel, one of the most magnificent hotels on the continent. It was held on one of the expansive patios of the hotel on an extraordinarily hot day. It was wonderful to be under the night sky and stars while huge fans, strategically placed, wafted a cool mist of water to dissipate the heat. The dress code for this party was explicit - WHITE. Everybody was to come in their own interpretation of white. This was an excuse for a stylistic free-for-all - attire ranged from teenagers in eye-wateringly short romper suits to majestic matrons, decked in full length opera gowns and pearls and everything in between. Everybody complied; from Nobel prize winner Wole Soyinka (white buba and Sokoto) to the American Ambassador (white linen shirt and white chinos).

Fig. 22 75th White party birthday celebration, Mandarin Oriental Hotel, Lagos Island, December 2019.

Fig. 23 Attendees at the White party. Mandarin Oriental Hotel, Lagos Island, 2019.

In Culture and Sense (2003), Kathryn Linn Geurts proposes a theory of there being a 'sixth sense', which is a culturally specific construction of each society, interpretation/experience of which can range from a belief in Extrasensory Perception (ESP) through balance to an innate understanding of particular disciplines. *'Of course, by 'sixth sense' not everyone means the ability to receive messages from the dead. A quick search on the Internet generated about six hundred thousand matches…. They included … a third eye, a gut instinct,*

intuition, déjà vu, moments of just knowing something the defies logic and reason, a religious sense (openness or sensitivity to God), the act of skateboarding, a sense of humour, a classic elegant style of dress that some women possess, an electromagnetic sense (located in the bones…). **(pg 6) (my emphasis). She argues that a culture's sensory order is one of the fundamental elements that 'humanises' it.** ***'I argue that the sensory order… of a cultural group form the basis of the sensibilities that are exhibited by people who have grown up within that tradition.***

I believe a simplified visual explanation could be drawn as: Body automatism --> concept of habit --> social memory --> commemorative ceremonies --> performativity. This multi-layered analysis that occurs almost instantaneously in the 'mind's eye' of the discerning observer, the appreciation of the essential harmony of all parts is what confers beauty and also elevates it to resplendence. That all constituents are in congruence – resplendence catches the eye, design and quality engage it. If the people within a culture have a unique perception of sensoriality/sensibility, this will inevitably influence the manner in which their bodies as well as their minds grasp and express a '*historical residue of personal and cultural habits*' (Connerton,1989). Conveying and sustaining communal memory involves bringing together recollection and bodies in a novel way. *'…images of the past commonly legitimate a present social order. It is an implicit rule that participants in any social order must presuppose a shared memory…'* (Connerton, pg 2).

Over the course of the next couple of weeks, I was more socially active than I had been in the preceding five years, and sported a more diverse and elaborate wardrobe, ranging from the 'smart casual' through the varying fabrics conflated as 'lace' in Nigeria to the acme of textiles, *aṣọ̀ òkè*.

Fig. 24 80th birthday celebrations for Chief E. Lucas. Lagos Island, 2020.

Fig. 25 Wedding reception. Lagos, 2018.

Fig. 26 Wedding party with Mrs Abiola Agbaje. Lagos, 2019.

Fig. 27 Wearing aṣọ ọ̀kè aṣọ ẹ̀bí at the funeral ceremonies for my aunt Chief Abimbola Odugbesan. Lagos, 2018.

Yorùbá Sensibilities of Dress

I assert that *Yorùbá aṣọ òkè* not only speaks, but its language of particular aesthetic sensibilities and cultural values govern understanding and usage of what is an intangible sensory experience, an extension to Omatseye & Emeriewen position that African cloth, having an inherent aesthetic in its symbolic usage, motifs, colours, 'speaks' (2012). Furthermore, the various attempts to harness this intangibility into a prism, reRecting the resplendence of the wearer in order to achieve their sensorial objective, actually dazzles the senses of onlookers, establishing the wearers' status as 'beyond the ordinary'. '*Cloth in this context is a wordless means of communication that is well understood by those who use it*' *(ibid,* 2012). *'Yorùbá aṣọ òkè is an art extraordinaire and, like vintage paintings and wines, a collector's delight.' (Adesanya, A., 2008)*.

The elements of a full Yorùbá woman's outfit (called a complete) are an *ìró* wrapper , *bùbá* blouse, *gèlè* head-tie and *ìpèlé* stole or *ìbórùn* shawl which is usually hung on the shoulder of the user. Traditionally, there was an optional girdle *òjá* for nursing mothers to strap their babies on with, but while this practice still obtains in the daily dress of the lower classes, it is not considered *'aṣọ òde'* or courtly dress.

Fig. 28 A woman's 'complete'. Mrs Agbaje wears a unique bespoke *etù* 'complete' especially commissioned from BISBOD for her daughter's wedding.

***Ìró* are traditionally tied on the left side of the waist. This was so a woman had her right hand free (as using**

the left was frowned upon) even if her wrapper came undone, but recently there has been a trend for 'tulip-tied' wrappers, scandalising the more conservative. The meaning in the left hand tuck is not necessarily lost, merely set aside temporarily for a season of 'fun'. In the same way, the rolling folds at the top of the *ìró*, deliberately thicker for married women to mimic the thicker waistline of one who had given birth, signifying fertility and prosperity, are rarely observed by modern young wives (or even older ones). The contemporary preoccupation with youth and seeming nubility has proven stronger than the desire to appear mature and 'respectable'. As for the 'old fashioned' convention that women (especially older women) tie two wrappers – one at the breast and one at the waist, pre-dating the adoption of the *bùbá*: that is long forgotten, consigned to the annals of history and only seen in sepia coloured photograph.

Fig. 29 Contemporary tulip-style *ìró*. Available at https://www.pinterest.co.uk/pin/442337994625224549/

Fig. 30. 'Old-fashioned' *Aṣọ òkè* double wrappers. Manchester, early 1960s.

In the same way, *gèlè* have metamorphosed from often subversive commentaries on domestic and political issues to anodyne fashion statements. Gone are the days when co-wives could publicly insult each other without the menfolk having the faintest clue that all-out war raged around them; these days, while elaborate fantasies are still fashioned in *gèlè*, they are usually based more on contemporary trends and less on interpersonal relationships, convivial or not.

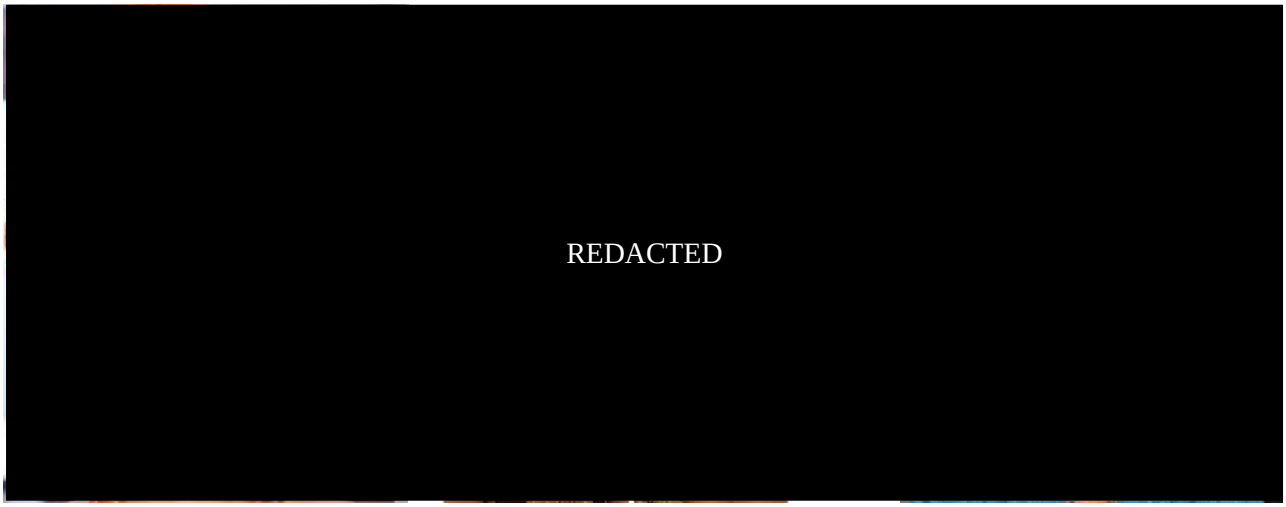

Fig. 31 Contemporary *gèlè* fantasies

A man's 'complete' would consist of ṣòkòtò trousers, *bùbá* or *èwù* tunic, *agbádá* (a large, embroidered Rowing over-gown) and *filà* cap. Within the strictures of 'male dress', there is still an enormity of stylistic divergence: is a man wearing Gbáriyẹ, or *bùbá* and *ṣóóró, ọ̀ lẹ ńtẹ̀ l'àfà* or full *agbádá*: ankle length *ṣòkòtò* or are the young fogies sporting *kẹ̀mbè:* are they going retro with their *filà* in the *a b'etí ajá* style?

Fig. 32 *Gòbí* and A *b'etí ajá filà* styles

Fig. 33 *kẹ̀mbè* style (left) compared to conventional *ṣòkòtò.*

By convention, men tend to dress in the more sober end of the spectrum, but the fabrics are expensive lightweight wools or rich brocades, embossed, embroidered or sheened. *'when it comes to presentation, Yorùbá men are the Italians of Africa… colourwise, we are slightly conservative – you will hardly find men wearing cerise, fuschia or other wild colours, but whites, blues, brown, grey, black – we rarely stray from those tonalities… '* (Olaoluwa Jeje, 2020, interview). However, this colour convention rarely applies to male celebrants. Very rarely do people wear dull and matt (as it would be considered uncourteous to the host) except for funerals of the young or the childless.

Fig. 34 Prof. Adebayo Williams regal in an embroidered brocade agbada with a gold *aṣọ òkè* stole and fila.

The contemporisation of 'traditional wear – change from loose haphazardly tied heavy wrappers, unmatched *bùbá/gèlè*, heavy with import and significance, with clear delineation as to usage, into sophisticated drapings of relatively light fabrics and radically adapted/simulated folds could be read as mirroring the evolution of societal values and mores and interpreted as a necessary and inevitable relaxation of overly-staid traditions – a realisation of the need for a degree of conformity with the contemporary world the new generations are operating in in order that the underlying traditions be preserved. Hansen laments '*...*when it comes to the study of dress practice in Africa, we are confronted by a wide-spread scholarly tendency that privileges Western exceptionality and denies any non-western agency in the development…'(2013, p1),* arguing against the conflation of non-Western cultures into homogeneous

monoliths within which innovation is disdained. (Clifford, 1989). But it is observably and demonstrably obvious that just as the mysterious idea of what is 'in' suddenly appears in the great design houses of Paris, Rome, London, New York, with hemlines being raised or lowered (sometimes concurrently), with shoulders padded or collars exaggerated, so too with Yorùbá sensibilities of *aso-ebi* led fashion. *Bùbá* appear with necklines deepened or embroidered, sleeves fitted or flared, *ìró* tied as minis one season, floor-length the next. '*Contrary to the accepted view of African traditions as monolithic and unchanging, the evolutionof dress practices and sartorial acumen confirms fashion's role as a potent visual expression of a continent in constant flux*' (Jennings, 2013 p3).

I have established that in traditional Yorùbá culture, status was conveyed by more than mere economic prowess – standing in the community was also reinforced by one's wardrobe, especially on formal or ceremonial occasions. The appropriate attire, made from fitting prestige textiles and augmented in the appropriate manner, were indications that the presenting grandeur was more than skin-deep (Bankole-Race, 2009). Cloth was utilised to consolidate social bonds and rally support for a common cause, and there are a number of human activities that have contributed to the cloth's continuing salience in cultural and social life. '*...on a worldwide scale, complex moral and ethical issues related to dominance and autonomy, opulence and poverty, political legitimacy and succession, and gender and sexuality, find ready expression through cloth.' (Weiner AB, Schneider J, 1989).*

There are certain factors that ensure the contemporary usage of traditional textiles such as *aṣọ òkè*, the most important of which is that traditional attire is still considered essential at important milestones in life, such as weddings, investitures, and funerals, where what Clarke (1997) describes as the 'classic triumvirate'of Yorùbá success: *owó, ọmọ, orí ire*[69] are celebrated, and it is imperative for men and women to be well dressed in the appropriate manner. *aṣọ́ òkè* is therefore considered 'courtly clothing,' designated for exceptional events requiring formal and dignified clothes. Asakitipi (2007), pp.101-115; Oyelola (2004), p132. It has been argued that when Yorùbá people put on *aṣọ́ òkè*, they are aware that they are taking part in a continuing tradition, but that it would be a mistake to infer that they are trying to make a 'statement' about that tradition. Instead, they are merely taking part in and perpetuating the phenomenon (Clarke 1997). I beg to differ. My singular insight as an *'omo oni'le'*[70] coupled with interviews with my respondents refute that argument to a large part - choosing to wear *sáyán, ẹtù* or *àlàárì* is, for the vast majority of people, an intentional act meant to convey meaning, demonstrating that the wearer has sufficient knowledge of Yorùbá culture to choose a cloth with a long-standing reputation with both high

[69] wealth, children, and good fortune
[70] child of the house

status and the celebration of milestone events. The Bride's Father who wears a vintage inherited *agbada ẹtù* even if (or possibly because) it has a few moth-holes, is making a statement to all about the longevity of the family's prosperity and high status standing.

In contemporary Nigeria the women dictate and influence fashion trends and at the same time ensure that the traditional hand-woven cloth is always a part of Yorùbá fashion. In a social milieu where one may be required to attend as many as three events in a week-end, the almost frenetic dynamism of the social scene and its constant search for innovation, coupled with the tradition of commissioning bespoke designs to be woven for almost every important occasion – weddings, investiture of chieftaincy titles, funerals – have fuelled an emphatic resurgence in the adoption of *aṣọ òkè* among the young middle class and a consolidation of its centrality as a prestige fabric. Commissioning *aṣọ́ òkè* from a topflight house like BISBOD would be a process involving several steps: the client approaches BISBOD with an idea or colour 'We want to order purple and green…'

'OK. So we sit with you of course, ask you what the event is, and we ask some of these questions that may seem irrelevant to the customer, or may look like, 'Why are you being nosy? It's none of your business. All I want is sányán.' But the reason I will ask all these questions is so that we know what to tailor. If it's very bright we know that it has to be a bit bright. So we ask, 'OK, who is wearing it? Is it for your mother? Is it for a burial? Is it this? Is it that?' … when we get these answers, then we show you various sányán sheets as well. We can bring out some swatches from inside and show you, because there are shades of sányán. So what's the shade that you envision, or you think is the perfect sányán shade and texture as well. Some are harder than the others. Some people like soft Aṣọ́ òkè, some people like it pretty firm so that it stands on your head. So all of this we try and get and then if you like what you see then that just makes it easier. Like if you see something that's exactly like what you want, then we go into full production. But if you don't, if you have a bit of suggestions or recommendations or you want to amend what you have seen, then we take that into consideration. Then we run a sample…'

So you run a sample - the weaver makes a sample?

'*Yes, like a strip or sometimes half, just something that's enough that you can almost imagine what it will look like as a gèlè, and then if you like it or if you have any other – we can do another sample, but if you like what's been done then we go onto talking about pricing, quantity or what's the use.*

So samples normally take two weeks. Sometimes of course some customers won't have that luxury, so we have to expedite the process . And then once commitment has been made from the customer – it also depends on quantity, you know. If it's like five bundles, it is shorter than aṣọ ẹbí of 500 sets. That will need at least two months. Two months beyond the sample, like two months to three, because it's also done by hand.'

So, yes, because of all of these issues – so the natural issues of consistency, because it's done by hand. So you can supply 50 and it's beautiful and you love it – and the next 10 afterwards, absolute trash. It's like, 'Were you people sleeping when you were doing this.' So that's why we like to ask for ample time so that we can – there's enough time to take this out, 'No, definitely I don't want this.' And because it also affects our business integrity.'

Fig. 35. A small selection of *Aṣọ òkè* samples at BISBOD

'*Each tradition has its history, a history that must take account of the nature of the tradition itself. Traditions vary enormously in their creative expectations. Some are certainly conservative in that the replication of existing forms is expected. Other traditions permit and perhaps encourage exploration in form and medium - it is within such traditions that we can expect to find innovative development*' (Picton, 1992:39). Contemporary innovations have produced versions which are light and relatively comfortable to wear and have undergone such contemporising that it is possible to satisfy any design requirement. aṣọ òkè is now enlaced, embroidered and embellished in more ways than would be thought possible, and there are different categories, including designs woven with metallic thread and sequins. *'...there is basket weave, some they call egg holes, some they call – there's basket, there's cable. So all of that you know… it keeps evolving, it keeps – you know what was trendy five years ago is not trendy now. So is it done on a wider loom or is it the same… So this one? basically they just used the threads and mixed it with like taffeta and something just to lighten it– yes, this is hand cut, because it's hand cut – you know, like I said over the years, of course, to make it trendier, to make it more relevant. So it's evolved.*

So brides wear this, maybe they feel like aṣọ òkè is too heavy or they feel like after the day they can't wear it, so it doesn't have that functionality. So we like to do things like this. Yes. This is going onto like bridals or celebrants, just more bespoke – the more bespoke aspects of aṣọ òkè. So this is where all of these come in. Hand cut, laser cut and all of that. Because this one comes in any colour and also the design can change – so this is where the machine comes in, because you need a machine to do this sort of embroidery.' **(Seun Oduyale)**

Fig. 36 Laser-cut plain *ẹtù* inlaid with traditional striped *ẹtù*. An innovative design specially commissioned by Mrs Abiola Agbaje for her daughter's wedding. Lagos, 2016.

The changing demographic of wearers is also reflected in a corresponding shift in the commissioning and production process. ***'… a lot of things that she*** **(his mother, the company founder)** ***may not have been keen on are necessary for business and relevant today, like brand visibility. In her time we didn't need to know the owner. In today's generation we like to know faces. We want to know WHO is the owner of BISBOD. We want to know you. So she is not a camera person. She is not – she can live her life without anybody knowing who the real Bisbod is. Only very few people know that, 'Oh, you are Bisbod.' But, yes, but in our generation it's the opposite. We want to know who the Governor's wife is, how we are perceived. We want to Google you. And also it's because you cannot be given the right accreditation that you deserve if you are not visible as a brand.'***

'So when they said 'Oh, my God Bisbod is amazing, there was no way to capture that. She wasn't online, she's more online on the phone. Because of her age when she retires, WE become the aṣọ ẹbís of tomorrow. The brides or the grooms of today become the aṣọ ẹbís of tomorrow. So if we don't capture them now, it will be too late. So we young ones have to keep it alive.'

'And we love social media, we like all of this content, quality package. So when I joined, maybe a mother tries to convince her daughter, 'Oh, come to Bisbod. They've got exactly what you want,' and they were like, 'Mummy, I can't find them online. How can you convince me that they can do all that? There's nothing for me to see.' Because we're a very visual generation. So of course I had to do the social media and all of that, and also develop store ambience - finicky little things. And also it is a Yorùbá dominated industry so there is a lot of Ọ̀yàyà,[71] *apọ́nlé*[72] *and observing respect because I think we Yorùbás are the most sentimental people.'*

(Ṣeun Òdúyalé, MD, BISBOD Aṣọ okè, Lagos)

This perpetuation has been made possible by the continued existence of the various cadres of makers (weavers, spinners, beaders, embroiderers, beaters) harnessing the imagined blessings of ancestors and divinities. Traditional weaving among the Yorùbá is historically upheld by an armature of myths, beliefs, divination and supplication, sacred acts and practices. Traditional ceremony forms part of the feature of lifeamong the Yorùbá. Each ceremony has a dialectic relationship with cloth in that such a ceremony and the type of cloth used in celebrating it are entwined, with the language of sensoriality and societal aesthetic sensibility informing that dialogue. '*The ritual and discourse that surround manufacture establish cloth as convincing analogue for the regenerative and degenerative processes of life, and a great connector binding humans not only to each other but to the ancestors of their past and the progeny who contribute will constitute the future.*' *(Weiner AB, Schneider J, 1989).* The advent of capitalism-led production and demand reconfigured the *'symbolic potential of cloth*' in several ways. According to Wiener & Schneider, (one of which is/ first) by disrupting the discourse between weavers and their spiritual underpinning eliminating '*the opportunity for weavers and dyers to infuse their product with spiritual value and reflect and pronounce on analogies between reproduction and production'*. However, the strict parameters governing the authenticity of *aṣọ òkè* , handwoven strips etc; and its inability to adapt to modernisation in the form of mechanisation has limited its full exposure to capitalist production. Colonisation also had a negative effect on the Yorùbá of southwestern Nigeria's consumption and production of *aṣọ òkè*. It progressively superseded the traditional technique of handspun cotton and silk fibres employed by the Yorùbá in the manufacturing of these handcrafted textiles (*aṣọ òkè*). With it disappeared the knowledge of dye extraction (indigo dying), which synthetic colours had conquered. In Òṣogbo and Ẹdẹ, Oṣun state, where traditional indigo dyeing was once a source of family pride, the majority of historic dye pits are now used as garbage dumps or open-air toilets. Because vegetable dyes are no longer processed, 'genuine' àláárì varieties of aṣọ

[71] bonhomie
[72] blandishment

òkè are no longer created in 'Ìsẹ́yìn ,' the renowned birthplace of aṣọ òkè. However, its continued status as a craft-based industry has ensured that, while there is a decline in overt ritual beliefs and practices among the artisans (similar to the decline in traditional Yorùbá religion in society as a whole), the connection and relationship with the high-status and celebratory milestones remains essential.

Authentic, high quality *aṣọ òkè* is inimitable to the initiated. The criteria for quality are many, juxtaposing both the subtle and the obvious, and identifying this property is dependent on various sensorial components that make the whole.

Underpinning everything is the quality of the thread. It has to be a high-grade cotton, preferably unstarched, or with a minimum of starch. Next, how the thread is loaded on the loom has a bearing on the final adaptability of the cloth to the body – not too tightly loaded, which would make the weave too tight and the *aṣọ òkè* too unmalleable and heavy, yet not so loose as to render it light-weight and tawdry.

To be considered top quality *aṣọ òkè,* the cloth must be strip woven. Although a degree of laxity has been introduced regarding the actual width of the strips, authenticity still demands that *aṣọ òkè* is woven on a narrow strip loom. From the 1990s, single (broad) loom *aṣọ òkè* was briefly toyed with as an 'easier' form of the cloth, but it never really received broad adoption, except mostly non-Yorùbá people, and its usage generally petered out among the older demographic. Currently, it is mostly considered appropriate for the construction of wedding outfits for the younger generation, or for up-market home décor. However, when thse younger generations start to purchase 'proper' *aṣọ òkè,* it will be in strips. Another criterion is the use of metallic threads, known by their trade names – Lurex/Krowntex. These must be incorporated into the weave tastefully and judiciously. Too much shine or gleam will, to the sensibilities of the cognoscente, render the *aṣọ òkè* vulgar or too loud.

To quote Respondent 3. "*I do not like single loom aṣọ òkè. I prefer strips because it is the authentic cloth, and also, that way I can manage the size of my headtie. Pure cotton is my first choice. The colour combination is very important. There are some aṣọ òkè that I have bought as aso ebi, that I will never wear because I find the colour combinations too loud, or just incomprehensible. Too much lurex/krowntex is also usually a negative for me. "*

There is also an understanding among the connoiseurs that certain colours or weights of *aṣọ òkè* are not appropriate for certain occasions – overly bright/fluorescent lurex at a funeral may be viewed askance; or that one should 'read the room' before dressing. Even if it is impossible to avoid 'upstaging' one's host by the quality of one's attire, an attempt should be made not to upstage them with regards to spectacle.

Fig. 37 Ajíṣafẹ weavers compound, a typical rural *aṣọ òkè* weaving 'factory'. Ìsẹ́yìn 2019

Traditional *aṣọ òkè* was 'beaten' to a shine after weaving, as the final step in its production. The stiff nature of the cloth lent itself to this treatment which served the dual purpose of compressing and making it more malleable, as well as putting a high sheen on the rather sober colours available at the time. With innovations in thread and colour, there is not such a need for this with the modern forms of aṣọ́ òkè, but traditionalists, wearers of 'proper *aṣọ́ òkè* or owners of vintage cloth will always require the services of a good *onílù.*[73]

'…wielded two heavy mallets, thumping with each alternately on the strips of cloth resting on a block…'

(Balfour, P. 1996). Beating *aṣọ òkè* is a very laborious and highly prized skill, and very expensive to be done properly. The prestige that was accorded one's appearance when so outfitted was therefore quite considerable. Unfortunately, it is also a skill that has almost completely disappeared as the few beaters left are in late middle age or elderly and in my interviews with the only two female *onílù,* it was made clear to me that none currently in the profession has passed on or in truth, wished to pass on such a physically arduous and financially unrewarding career on to their descendants in the capitalist modern world.

[73] beater

Fig. 38 Iya 'Démọ́lá, one of the rare last female *aṣọ òkè* beaters at work in the depths of Oje market, Ibadan 2020.

It is often said that the amount of jewellery worn by the Yorùbá is excessive – they are considered gaudy, vulgar, some of the accoutrements belittlingly described as 'bling'. However, this negative perspective is informed by a lack of understanding of the peculiar sensibility governing Yorùbá dress protocols. '*ọmọ òní bá 'pèlé ìyá àtí bàbá rẹ, kó ṣi aṣó dá* .'[74] Whether it be one exquisite statement piece or many layered rows of pearls or coral, the intention and effect are always the same – to catch the sun in order to draw the eye of the onlooker so that 'they' can see how 'blessed' by the light one is. There are many different ways that clothing is connected to self-definition, and in some instances the relationship is particularly obvious, such as when the accumulation of textiles and other material culture over many generations comes to represent the gold standard of a family's worth or, at the very least, their historical significance. The omnipresence of aṣọ oke usage does not negate the personal expression of self - even in the context of *aṣọ-ebi*. Paradoxically, if

[74] one who is well-born will possess innate sartorialism – understand how to behave appropriately

anything, it is this very ubiquity that fosters a determination to stand out, to 'shine': it encourages creative individualism. It is this that transforms Yorùbá traditional attire from mere cultural symbolism to a somatic entity that communicates personal identity as well as 'cultural currency'. For the Yorùbá, the medium of dress contributes fundamentally to their social configuration and it could be argued that the salience of *aṣọ òkè* owes much to its ability to be both modern and part of a tradition, or perhaps better, that it lends itself to modern ways of thinking about tradition in a way that many other pre-colonial material culture do not.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION

This chapter illustrates that resplendence manifestation among the Yorùbá is multi-dimensional, encompassing a holistic vision of person that transcends the merely sartorial or performative. It axiologically spans the behavioural, the ethical, the spiritual as well as the sartorial.

**It is clear that the most obvious visual aspects of resplendence are driven by quite specifically calculated strategic sartoriality. One of the societal 'understandings' is *'Ìríni sí, nì s'ọ 'ní l'ójú,*[75] and wealth, and consequently power (status) are accorded the esteem due based on the visually manifested possession and display of conspicuous consumption. Wearing the appropriate clothes, made from prestige textiles and augmented in the appropriate manner, is further indication that the presenting grandeur is more than a veneer. However, any inevitable slide into a modern '*olowo l'agba'*[76] sensibility is still met with a vigorous countervailing and withering reminder of '*ìsàlè ọrọ̀ l'ẹ́gbìn'*.[77] This resplendence-acquired esteem extends beyond the individual and is seen as both a reflection on and a reflection of their familial relationships (*ẹ́bi*) to their family, their lineage, their 'house'. Any claims of entitlement to the resplendence being displayed *'ọmọ oní 'bi nìran'*[78] must transcend performativity or one lays not only oneself, but by extension, one's *ẹ́bi,* open to the opprobrium of the label *'ọmọ ojú ò r'ọlá rí/ọmọ ati àpata dìde'*.[79] Miller guides us to understand that for Trinidadians, clothing is the very best way to find out who and what a person is about and this is the case both for others viewing the wearer '*and even for oneself, since it is through dressing that one confronts who one is, and reveals how certain self representations and pretensions are really delusions*' (Miller, in press) (Candy, 2005). Although the Yorùbá *'irini si'* philosophy appears to mirror this view of the 'outward show' being of most import, there is the powerful countervailing *'agbádá nlá kọ́ ni ènìyàn nlá'*,[80] especially as the *'irini si*' automatically factors in the multi-layered 'understandings' peculiar to the discerning, utilising 'skilled vision'. To reiterate Drewal (2005), '*Imú ni àlejò fi ńrí'ran*'[81]. In other words, understanding requires the deployment of senses beyond mere sight. '*...vision is cultural, and that different*

[75] it is how one dresses that one is treated/ one's appearance (attire) determines the respect one is accorded
[76] wealth is might
[77] there's a murky depth to unexplained wealth
[78] one with a lineage of good breeding
[79] social climber/jumped up nouveau riche
[80] 'big' clothes do not necessarily make nor imply importance
[81] the uninitiated/outsider 'see' through their noses

***cultures hold radically different metaphors and hierarchy from the Western visualist traditions.'* (Howes, 1991, 2004).**

Beauty

The Yorùbá understand beauty as dual-aspected. For them, beauty, (*ewa)* is not merely skin deep but is the manifestation of the well-made or well-done. Being pleasant to behold or experience, attracts *(f'ani mọ́ 'ra*) eliciting admiration, honour and respect and conferring prestige (*iyi*). *Ewa*'s dual-aspects are *ẹ̀wà ode*[82] dealing with the superficial and outward appearance, while *ẹ̀wà inu*[83] refers to intrinsic worth. '*In man, ẹ̀wà inu is frequently implied in the word 'iwa' character, while in objects, it is implied in the word 'wíwúlò ', or functional utility.*' Lawal, (1974). There is an insistence that beauty is not merely decorative but must '*wúlò*',[84] '*Even in articles which appear at first glance to serve the purest temptation only, it is always possible to detect the presence of some, at least ostensible, useful purpose.'* (Veblen, 1859). From these elements one can then discern the ìwà, or essential nature, and finally *ẹ̀wà*, or beauty. *'While the appreciation of ẹ̀wà ode is relative and varies from person to person, the possession of ìwà is universally accepted as the sine qua non of beauty. Hence the saying ' ìwà l'ẹ̀wà'.*' (Lawal, 1973). The centrality of the concept of *ọmọlúàbí,* that ideal of '*Yorùbáness*', to the phenomenon of resplendence has been established. A person who is 'well-made',[85] and of good character and lineage (*ọmọlúàbí*) would be considered *'A r'ewà ènìyàn*'.[86] Outer resplendence, manifested in visual display of attire and adornment must be matched by a corresponding resplendence of character, an armature of good breeding, impeccable manners, respect and enterprise. I have also shown that while alignment exists with Veblen in the Yorùbá practices of conspicuous consumption and emulation of pecuniary standards of living, there is a particular divergence from western models as one of the tenets of the *ọmọlúàbí* concept is hard work or at least industriousness - *'ise l'oogun ise'*.[87] Reputability and idleness would be anti-ethical.

Resplendence

This study has established that *Yorùbá* resplendence therefore lies not only in what catches the eye but alsoin the àṣẹ derived from the completeness of all the nuances of the performativity and spectacle. The

[82] outer beauty
[83] inner beauty
[84] be useful
[85] character is beauty
[86] a beautiful person
[87] work is the panacea for indigence

knowledge that all constituents are in congruence – spectacle catches the eye, appropriateness and quality engage it. *Aṣọ òkè* is undoubtedly an integral element of the historic and cultural landscape of the Yorùbá, representing a sartorial element of social status as well as national identities. Its centrality to traditional sartorial continuity can be compared to the significance of the *Gáńgaǹ*[88] to Yorùbá musicality. The *aṣọ òkè* tradition reflects the tenacity and the worldview of *Yorùbá* culture. This is consistent with its use, which the *Yorùbá* consider *'àṣà* '[89] and which paradoxically encourages resilience where necessary and dynamism were required hence the saying; *'ìgbà l'aṣọ, ìgbà l'ẹ̀ wù '* (clothes and cloth have their season) that is, a recognition that the fashionability of particular cloths wane with time but not their inherent relevance. *'In the case of aṣọ oke at least, contrary to the implications of a linguistic theory of dress, the selection of a particular cloth cannot be unambiguously associated with a definite 'meaning'. Rather it is evidence of continuing participation within an ongoing tradition, which, as we have seen, has a variety of links with earlier dress practice, but has evolved into a process intricately bound up with the changing nature of urban Yorùbá society since the mid-nineteenth century. It is a tradition that embraces and even represents modernity, through the 'latest' fashions, rather than standing in opposition to it.' (Clark, D. 1998)*

My research observed that the sartorial manifestation of resplendence among the contemporary Yorùbá is an increasingly gendered phenomenon, with the drivers for its perpetuation residing in the socio-cultural norms that govern gender, dress, place, status, as well as in women's role with regard to sociality. The febrility of the aṣọ ebi practice which in turn fuels the aṣọ òkè market, is an example of the responses that people create for themselves to address or cope with particular societal/cultural problems, I found thatthe women participating in the practice generally hold an ambivalent relationship with it, yet conscious of the extent to which they are regularly '*...consumed by the gaze of others*…' (Woodward, 2005), they escalate display and performativity, exhibiting an almost stockholmian syndrome inured to the imbalance of socio-cultural expectations and the psychosphere. To a degree, men could be considered the backdrop as well as the audience of the stage on which women perform. Other women are (unwillingly and unwittingly) co-opted as bit actors, and female spaces are the stage. The psychosphere serves as the auditorium where all the unconsciously conscious drama plays out.

Ẹ̀wà amu ye **means sartorially manifested resplendence: the appropriate clothes, made from fitting prestige textiles and augmented in the appropriate manner, are indications that the presenting grandeur is more**

[88] Talking drum
[89] tradition, habit

than skin-deep. Particularly when portrayed in the usage of *aṣọ òkè,* combining both *iyì*[90] and *èyẹ́,*[91] it is therefore an acknowledgement that all the multi-faceted societal requirements and mores have been satisfied.

I believe that my research, conducted from the singular perspective of having grown up within the culture and milieu, intimately cognisant of its nuances, but able to observe with a degree of objectivity due to extended diasporic dislocation and translated through what I term a contemporary ethnography, offers an opportunity to produce a comprehensive and cohesive body of knowledge on the phenomenon of resplendence and the concept of strategic sartoriality as practised and manifested within contemporary Yorùbá society.

The influence of culture, and its practices on health and wellbeing is immense, affecting perceptions and engagement with health, illness and even death belief systems about causes of disease and how ill health and pain, especially psychological, are experienced, and articulated. It is my opinion that it will extend the current knowledge regarding the inter-relationshipof the Yorùbá value-system and sensibility and its traditional textiles while congruently exploring the socio-psychological impact of the continuation of the phenomenon in a postmodern age rife with non-cultural distractions and competition and facing the impact of COVID pandemic realities. It also offers the opportunity to provide a contemporary account drawn during the COVID era, exploring circumstances under which cultures may appear to work against their own societal wellbeing or interests and whether seemingly retrogressive cultural practices are always as malignant as they ostensibly appear.

[90] honour, respect, prestige
[91] celebration, display, performativity