

Identitäten / Identities

Interdisziplinäre Perspektiven

herausgegeben von
Marlene Bainczyk-Crescentini
Kathleen Ess
Michael Pleyer
Monika Pleyer

unter Mitarbeit von
Teresa Anna Katharina Beisel
Cosima Stawenow

HGGS

HEIDELBERGER
GRADUIERTENSCHULE
FÜR GEISTES- UND
SOZIALWISSENSCHAFTEN



UNIVERSITÄT
HEIDELBERG
ZUKUNFT
SEIT 1386

Bibliografische Information der Deutschen Bibliothek
Die Deutsche Bibliothek verzeichnet diese Publikation in der Deutschen
Nationalbibliografie. Detaillierte bibliografische Daten sind im Internet abrufbar
über <http://dnb.ddb.de>.

© 2015 Universitätsbibliothek Heidelberg
Plöck 107–109, 69117 Heidelberg
www.ub.uni-heidelberg.de

Satz und Gestaltung: Universitätsbibliothek Heidelberg / Cosima Stawenow
Umschlaggestaltung: Heidelberger Graduiertenschule für Geistes- und
Sozialwissenschaften



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Erin Rice

Patterned Identity: Textiles and Traces of Modernity in Contemporary Nigerian Art

1. Introduction

In the global arena of contemporary arts, artists outside Africa who are associated with African art—whether this term accurately applies to them or not—have become acutely aware over the past decades of the importance of performing their African identities. This “performance” is played out for Western audiences who already have a preconceived notion of what they expect to see. This expectation is structured in part by the precedent set by artists within Africa working in the years around the shift to independence, and in part by ideas about an authenticity of Africa and African art that are based less on reality than on the West’s fantasies of an exotic place whose artists delve deeply into issues of the post-colonial condition.¹ One of the ways artists have explored their African identities and heritage, whether in response to the Western expectation or not, is to use textiles as media and subject matter in their work. As I will argue in the following paragraphs, the use of textiles by contemporary artists allows for a complex confrontation with personal and cultural identity that is realizable because the histories of Africa’s textiles reveal a globally interconnected web of trade, cultural interaction, transfer, and mobility that challenges commonly held ideas about Africa and the authenticity of identity.

1 For an in depth discussion of this issue, see the essay “Double Dutch and the Culture Game” in Olu Oguibe, *The Culture Game* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), 33–44.

The mobility of textiles themselves, as well as their patterns, is something that has not received sufficient scholarly attention, but has the potential to shed new light on the works of art in which textiles are incorporated, and vice versa. By revisiting the work of two Nigerian modernist artists, Bruce Onobrakpeya and Nike Okundaye, both of whom used the Yoruban *adire* textile in their work, I use their precedents to set the stage for a discussion of the appropriation of Dutch wax-print fabrics by the British-Nigerian artist Yinka Shonibare, and the discrepancies between the various appropriations. I will show through the work of these other artists that the analyses of Shonibare's work, which have focused on the authenticity of the fabrics he uses and his own identity, come undone when applied to similar textile-based artwork. A brief history of the Dutch wax-print and a more detailed account of *adire* will foreground these discussions, with special attention given to the mobile nature of fabrics and their patterns. Finally, I will introduce the work of a Lagos-based American artist, Temitayo Ogunbiyi, whose work explores themes of communication and memory as they relate to the experiences of current-day migration and identity using textiles native to her father's Nigerian and Yoruba culture.

2. *Adire*: A brief history

Adire, meaning “tie-dye” in the Yoruba language, was produced by the Yoruba before European cotton arrived in West Africa.² It was made with a locally spun and woven cotton textile that tended to have a rough and uneven surface texture. The arrival of white cotton sheeting from Britain was an ideal substitute for local cotton in the production of *adire*. Rather than wipe out indigenous textile production, imported cotton caused a burgeoning of *adire* in the late 19th and early 20th century. The smooth, even surface of machine-produced cotton was ideal for *adire* techniques that involved painting a resist agent onto the cloth, or stitching or tying

2 It is not known with certainty when indigo or resist dyeing was first practiced in the region, but the earliest evidence dates resist dyeing of threads and the use of indigo to the 17th century. However, *adire* as we know it today was first produced in the first few decades of colonization when European machine made cotton fabric replaced the local handwoven fabric used in *adire* production. See Judith Byfield, “Innovation and Conflict: Cloth Dyers and the Interwar Depression in Abeokuta, Nigeria,” *The Journal of African History* 38, no. 1 (1997): 79.

ornate designs with an intricacy and detail that was not achievable with the coarser hand-woven cotton. *Adire oniko*, for example, is created through a painstaking process of sewing small sacs of fabric with raffia to create a stunning pattern of concentric circles of small rings (fig. 1).³ Such patterns required great skill and days of labor but the cloths were in high demand. Thus, *adire* production became a creative and lucrative artistic enterprise that at times employed almost entire towns or villages, particularly in the Southwestern town of Abeokuta.⁴ This region was an active exporter of raw cotton and other commodities to Europe. Therefore, the infrastructure necessary to facilitate the textile trade was already in place when the region became an importer of European woven cotton. As demand for *adire* increased and stretched across West Africa, the industry helped Abeokuta and its residents integrate into and benefit from the global economy. Moreover, once the *adire* producers were exclusively using imported cloth, the need for cotton spinners and weavers, tasks typically undertaken by men, was eliminated. The women who dyed the cloth, on the other hand, found themselves in a position where they were benefitting financially, socially, and politically from the circumstances that left them as the sole producers and beneficiaries of *adire*'s profits.⁵

3. The Influence of the *Adire* Industry on Women

The economic benefits afforded to women through *adire*'s success were critical to events that unfolded in Abeokuta during colonial rule. Women dyers experienced unprecedented affluence and independence at *adire*'s peak, lending to a sense of agency and an urge to protect themselves and their market from political changes. Thus around 1920 when the *adire* industry began to decline, women took their grievances to the local representative (the *Alake*), not simply for the sake of the industry but also for the rights of women.⁶ The leader of a women's group in the Nigerian town of Abeokuta, Funmilayo Ransome Kuti, decided to lead

3 Nancy Stanfield, Jane Barbour, and Doig Simmonds, *Adire Cloth in Nigeria: the Preparation and Dyeing of Indigo Patterned Cloths among the Yoruba* (Ibadan, Nigeria: Institute of African Studies, University of Ibadan, 1971), 51–56.

4 Byfield, "Innovation and Conflict," 80–81.

5 Judith Byfield, *The Bluest Hands: A Social and Economic History of Women Dyers in Abeokuta (Nigeria), 1890–1940* (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 2002), xxvii.

6 Byfield, "Innovation and Conflict," 90–93.

her group to the streets to protest the latest changes inflicted by the colonial government. At Kuti's suggestion, the women all dressed the same in Yoruban style attire, which undoubtedly included but was not limited to *adire* wrappers, head ties, and white blouses. The idea was to conceal the economic, social, and educational inequities between these women in order to unite them against the governing powers.⁷ In the face of newly imposed taxes and restrictions on their economic powers, and a declining industry, the women who produced *adire* found themselves in an unprecedented position of political agency that was both fueled by their industry and voiced through the visual language of textiles. *Adire* was part of a critical moment of juncture between the colonial power and the Yoruban people of Nigeria's southwest. Despite the heavy influence by British culture and European imports on *adire* it nevertheless was used as an expression of anti-colonialism and it was a catalyst for political action that played a small part in bringing about independence.⁸

This instance of political activism in Abeokuta was merely one of many in the decades leading up to independence in many West African countries where the rejection of European styles of dress became a political act. This was especially true for the pan-African movement and the harbingers of its ideologies such as Kwame Nkrumah, who used African dress—in his case the *Kente* cloth of Ghana's Asante and Ewe people—in objection to the Westernization of African cultures and lingering colonial power, and to unify and identify his followers through a visual symbol of Africanness.⁹ These histories made textiles likely candidates for appropriation into modern art, which had its own (but similar) political agenda.

4. Bruce Onobrakpeya and Nigerian Modern Art

Bruce Onobrakpeya was a member of a group of artists called the Zaria Art Society while a student at the College of Art, Science and Technology (now Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria) in the late 1950s. This group of

7 Cheryl Johnson-Odim and Nina Emma Mba, *For Women and the Nation: Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti of Nigeria* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1997), 66.

8 Margaret Olugbemisola Areo and Razaq Olatunde Rom Kalilu, "Origin of and Visual Semiotics in Yoruba Textile of *Adire*," *Arts and Design Studies* 12 (2013), 22–34.

9 Jean Allman, "Let Your Fashion Be in Line with Our Ghanaian Costume," in *Fashioning Africa: Power and the Politics of Dress*, ed. Jean Allman (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2004), 144–64.

artists was responsible in part for the formation of modern art in Nigeria. Also known as the Zaria Rebels, the group worked under the ideologies of “Natural Synthesis” set forth by its leading member, Uche Okeke, as a blending of the best from local and foreign influences into an art for the new nation of Nigeria. The artists sought an alternative to the European academic training they received through the university.¹⁰

In response to the call for a “Natural Synthesis,” Onobrakpeya began blending imagery from his native Urhobo culture and Yoruban culture with the printmaking and painting techniques he learned through the Western-style arts education he received at university. Rather than focus exclusively on Urhobo culture, Onobrakpeya appropriated the Yoruban *adire* cloth and some of its patterned imagery into his work as a gesture of synthesizing not just the foreign and the local, but the local with the local in the interest of forming a national identity. Inspired by a phrase he saw on a postage stamp—“one people one destiny”—Onobrakpeya began a series of works that explored the cultural production of the Yoruba people, beginning with a work titled *Ominira*, the Yoruba word for ‘independence.’¹¹ Thus, Onobrakpeya began to use *adire* to signify Nigerian culture as a whole, no longer just Yoruba culture exclusively. Fellow Zaria artist Demas Nwoko made a similar choice in forgoing appropriations of his own Igbo ethnicity in favor of a sculptural reinterpretation of the Nok terracottas.¹²

Onobrakpeya and his colleagues at Zaria believed that in the representation of Nigeria’s cultural or national identity, the overlapping of foreign cultures in the nation’s modernization should not be ignored. In particular, the work featuring aspects of *adire* by Onobrakpeya point to a history of Nigeria that was long integrated in the global economy and in frequent contact with other cultures. As the previous section recounted, the *adire* industry was not only intricately connected to the rest of the world through the trade that brought cotton from Britain and sent indigo across the coast of West Africa, it was also an industry dominated by

10 The original manifesto of “Natural Synthesis” written by Uche Okeke is reprinted in: Clémentine Deliss et al., *Seven Stories about Modern Art in Africa* (London: Flammarion, 1995), 208–9.

11 Bruce Onobrakpeya, *Bruce Onobrakpeya: the Spirit in Ascent* (Lagos, Nigeria: Ovuomaroro Gallery, 1992), 45.

12 Chika Okeke-Agulu and John Picton, “Nationalism and the Rhetoric of Modernism in Nigeria: The Art of Uche Okeke and Demas Nwoko, 1960–1968: [With Commentary],” *African Arts* 39, no. 1 (2006): 26.

women. Therefore, by looking at modern Nigerian art—which was undoubtedly dominated by male artists—through the lens of the textile, we can approach an understanding of how some of Nigeria’s women experienced the processes of modernization that ultimately led to independence in 1960.

The development of *adire* through trade and contact with Europeans is reflected not only in its production methods but also in some popular patterns. Several of Onobrakpeya’s lithograph prints depict an *adire* pattern that was made for the Jubilee celebration of King George V in 1935, as does an early serigraph called *Have You Heard?* from 1959 (fig. 2). The textile, called *adire oloba*, meaning “the one with a King,” originally featured King George V and Queen Mary in a double portrait flanked by symbols of the British monarchy (fig. 3). In some of the older versions of the cloth, the names of the two royals can be read above their heads and their likeness, gleaned from a jubilee banner that was likely sent from Britain to Nigeria to mark the occasion, is achieved by the pattern maker. However, as this popular pattern was reproduced again and again over time, the image changed. English words are replaced with Yoruban language, the king and queen become less recognizable, and symbols suggestive of Yoruban royalty are introduced: a bird motif, cowrie shells, and the word “Oyo” which refers to the great Oyo empire of the Yoruba. This change in the pattern’s appearance has been called “devolution” by some scholars, but I would like to suggest that, intentionally or not, the pattern was merely adapted over time to shifts in Nigeria’s leadership.¹³ The *oloba* came to represent royalty or power in general, losing its original associations, but gaining new ones over time. For Onobrakpeya, the pattern serves numerous purposes, but all relate back to the original symbolism.¹⁴ In *Have You Heard?*, the pattern of two figures, which would have originally been the King and Queen, are shown side by side on the body of a woman who wears the textile as a wrapper. Yet in Onobrakpeya’s rendition of the pattern, the two figures are anonymous and abstract, and the text below them that once referred to the royals now shows the artist’s name. The title *Have You Heard?* refers to the rumors going around in 1970 that Nigeria’s civil war had come to an end.¹⁵ The

13 Stanfield, Barbour, and Simmonds, *Adire Cloth in Nigeria*, 83–85.

14 For more examples of Onobrakpeya’s appropriation of this and other *adire* patterns, see Richard A. Singletary, Bruce Onobrakpeya (New York: The Ford Foundation, 2002).

15 Onobrakpeya, Bruce Onobrakpeya: the Spirit in Ascent.

three women that make up the composition, all of whom wear *adire* wrappers, are shown engaging in conversation. Once again, the pattern is used to signify the reigning power in Nigeria. As the Nigerian military regained control over the Biafra in Nigeria's southeast region, the war abruptly ended and complete power over the country was restored to the government.¹⁶ The crude abstraction and anonymity of the two figures in Onobrakpeya's *Oloba* leave the fate of Nigeria's leadership open-ended; indeed, the end of the war was followed by numerous military coups and changes in power.

5. Nike (Davies) Okundaye

Easily the best-known artist working with *adire*, Nike Okundaye has not only left an indelible mark on Nigerian art with her batik and *adire* inspired paintings, but has single-handedly rescued and revived indigo dyeing in parts of Nigeria. Taking the popular patterns of *adire* that are made by applying starch resist with the tip of a feather or a brush (*adire eleko*), Okundaye reproduces them as paintings, often with an overlaid scene of village life, echoing the Zaria Art Society's appeal for a synthesis of indigenous and foreign forms in the formation of modern art. This approach has the double effect of recording *adire* patterns in a more permanent, almost archival manner and creating a new outlet of mobility for the *adire* image as Okundaye's works are collected and exhibited throughout the world. The artist also wears *adire* dresses, wrappers, and head-ties almost exclusively, linking her to the women of the past who wore *adire* in solidarity with each other and fellow dyers in opposition to the colonial government's policies.

6. The Transferability and Mobility of Textiles

As Okundaye and Onobrakpeya have translated the pattern language of *adire* into modern art forms, the textile has become further integrated into Nigerian cultural production at large. Particularly as newer forms of tie-dye and batik are popularized, such as *Kampala*, which uses synthetic

16 Barnaby Phillips, "Biafra: Thirty Years On," BBC News, January 13, 2000, accessed March 24, 2014, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/596712.stm>.

dyes and vibrant colors, *adire* loses its cultural specificity and becomes a signifier of Nigerian identity, especially outside of Nigeria.

In a similar way that a fabric like *adire* originating in Nigeria can gain more universal significance, so too can textiles which did not originate in Nigeria be culturally translated and appropriated to gain local meaning and acceptance. One instance of this taking place within Nigeria is with the adoption of imported *madras* cotton cloths from India by the Kalabari people of the Niger Delta region. Through processes of altering the pre-existing patterns by pulling and cutting out threads, the Kalabari women have made an entirely foreign product into something that to locals is instantly recognizable as Kalabari.¹⁷ The result has been a full-scale adaptation of the cloth, known to the locals as *injiri*, into the social, religious, and ceremonial structure of Kalabari society. A hierarchy and vast variety of patterns have created a visual language used exclusively by members of the Kalabari communities for the purposes of social identification. Collected and used from birth until death, and serving essential roles in funerary ceremonies,¹⁸ the *injiri* cloth has become practically synonymous with this African culture, yet not a single one of the cloths was ever produced in Africa. A similar fate was met by the Dutch wax-print, known in Nigeria as *ankara*,¹⁹ which is ubiquitous in Nigerian life and fashion. As I have demonstrated through the modernists' use of *adire*, and will now demonstrate through contemporary artists in the diaspora, art can mediate in the transfer of textiles from one culture to another.

7. Yinka Shonibare and Dutch wax-print

Arguably one of the most successful artists of the 1990s and early 2000s, Yinka Shonibare has built an impressive artistic career through his

17 Tonye V. Erekosima and Joanne B. Eicher, "Kalabari Cut-Thread and Pulled-Thread Cloth," *African Arts* 14, no. 2 (1981): 50. They describe this adoption/adaptation process as "cultural authentication."

18 Joanne B. Eicher and Tonye V. Erekosima, "Kalabari Funerals: Celebration and Display," *African Arts* 21, no. 1 (1987).

19 This typically refers to machine-print fabrics that are imported from places other than central Europe. Cheap imitations of Dutch-wax have been produced in West Africa, China, and likely Turkey, in view of the name given to the imitation cloths. This interpretation comes from my discussions with people in Lagos; I have not been able to verify whether this is the origin of the name.

use of the Dutch wax-print in an irony-filled subversion of the West's concept of African authenticity. The vibrantly patterned textiles he uses as media in paintings, sculptures, and elaborate installation pieces are associated with Africa throughout the world, but have a complex history of production that originated in Indonesia as Javanese batik, and were brought to West Africa by the Europeans who began producing them in Holland and England by the mid-19th century.²⁰ Also broadly referred to as "African print," the Dutch wax fabric gave Shonibare's work the authentic "Africanness" the art world sought, while using materials that are, in the artist's words, "a colonial construction."²¹ However, in satisfying the demands of his audiences, Shonibare was nevertheless entering the discourse of his own mixed identity as a member of the itinerant generations that emigrated from Nigeria and took up permanent residence or citizenship in Europe or the United States. Additionally, I suggest that Shonibare alters the identity of the fabric. Despite the subversive edge to his intention, the popularity of his work has prompted other artists, specifically Nigerian artists, to pick up the same medium. As a result, while this fabric is used to (mis)represent Africa as a monolithic culture it develops a new specificity through the artist's appropriation. As Shonibare's name grows more synonymous with wax-print, wax-print becomes ever more synonymous with Nigerian art and fashion.²²

Shonibare was prompted to explore notions of identity in his work while at art school in London. He was interested in the theme of *perestroika* when his painting instructor remarked that the work did not reflect the artist himself. Unsure what to make of this comment, he began to question what it was to be African or to be European. He realized that the instructor implied that his work didn't reflect his African identity, paying no mind to the part of him that identified with European and British culture. His response was to begin a series that juxtaposed icons of European popular culture with icons of traditional African culture that were used as typical displays meant to represent Africa in European museums. In answering a call to make his work reflect his African culture,

20 Robb Young, "Africa's Fabric is Dutch" New York Times, November 14, 2012, accessed November 1, 2013, <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/11/15/fashion/15iht-ffabric15.html?adxnnl=1&pagewanted=all&adxnnlx=1353427727-Uz6qMwPEzGt6YU8g-FE4kQQ&r=1&>.

21 Oguibe, *The Culture Game*, 42.

22 Anthony Downey, "Art: Interview: Yinka Shonibare," BOMB – Artists in Conversation 93 (Fall 2005), accessed March 3, 2014, <http://bombmagazine.org/article/2777/>.

he deliberately chose to play into the stereotypes of two cultures: one modern, the other “primitive” and exotic.²³

Throughout the 1990s, Shonibare further probed the notions of Africanness in Europe through intentionally exoticized works using the Dutch wax fabrics, embracing a role as an artist he perceived as predetermined by the West. “Playing the Other,” as Olu Oguibe described it in his controversial collection of essays titled *The Culture Game* (2004), was a meal ticket into the international art world.²⁴ The fabrics allowed Shonibare to satisfy expectations that his work would reflect his African identity for an increasingly wide audience who was hungry for more of his work, while at the same time presenting a notion of cultural identity that became unhinged when examined through the lens of authenticity.

Embedded within the fabrics that comprise his *oeuvre*, and directly referenced in works such as *Nelson’s Ship in a Bottle* (fig. 4), Shonibare’s work addresses the global interconnectedness achieved through trade, migration, and colonization that has shaped world demographics for the last three hundred years. *Nelson’s Ship*, Shonibare’s first commissioned work of public art, was placed in Trafalgar Square on a raised plinth from 2010 to 2012. The oversized ship in a bottle refers to the maritime victory of the British Royal Navy against the French and Spanish fleets during the Battle of Trafalgar in 1805. Lord Nelson, who commandeered the HMS Victory—the ship featured in the sculpture—led Britain’s fleet into battle. His success led to the expansion of the British Empire, and thus was a key moment in the formation of modern Britain and its multicultural population, which is symbolized by the colorful fabric that makes up the sails. The notion of the authenticity of cultural or national identity is undermined by the very histories that shaped cultures and nations.

The thematic strands of multiculturalism, post-colonialism, and globalism in Shonibare’s work situate him within the post-modernist traditions in which he is well versed. He is often featured in exhibitions that are classified as African art, but show the work of artists who may have African roots but have grown up in Europe and the United States. It is this very “post-colonial hybrid” condition, a phrase he has used in describing himself, which is identified through the fabric.²⁵ The

23 Nancy Hynes and John Picton, “Yinka Shonibare,” *African Arts* 34, no. 3 (2001).

24 Oguibe, *The Culture Game*, 19.

25 “Biography,” Yinka Shonibare MBE (RA), accessed February 20, 2014, <http://www.yinkashonibarembemba.com/biography/>.

fabrics satisfy the desires on the part of his international audiences for something that looks African; but because the cloths are known to have originated in Indonesia and were produced by the Europeans, the notion of “Africanness” is subverted. Yet, rather than challenge preconceived notions about Africa, or about artists of the African diaspora for that matter, Shonibare’s work may arguably reinforce them. Olu Oguibe exposed this peculiar situation, describing Shonibare’s iterations of his “Africanness” as being “transparently fictitious but also critical of the demand for difference” while also stating clearly the dangers of “playing the other” in the game of culture:

Western insistence on a set vision of postcoloniality is nestled in an economy of meaning and praxis, a game of difference in which the postcolonial artist is precariously situated. By yielding to this economy of Otherness, post-colonial culture jeopardizes the possibility of constructing autonomous subjectivities. However disguised, playing the Other inevitably implies complicity in a subjugatory relationship. It fosters mythic identities and “realities” by converting difference into formula and promoting a culture that seeks its significance solely in quaint peculiarity. Not only does this define postcoloniality as a lack, by extension it institutes a self-perpetuating charade that banishes the complex of postcolonial social and historical experiences to the fringes of validity and integrity.²⁶

Although Oguibe and Shonibare have declared that his work is only pretending to be “authentically” African through his choice of textile, the artist’s work does not stray very far off course from the work of the artists who use the textile within Nigeria, or artists in the UK such as Sokari Douglas Camp who uses the Kalabari *injiri* cloth as a Nigerian-British artist.²⁷ Shonibare is neither the first nor the sole practitioner of textile appropriation. He is situated in a line of artists who have also appropriated the textile since the formation of modern art in Nigeria.

²⁶ Oguibe, *The Culture Game*, 32.

²⁷ Alisa LaGamma, Christine Giuntini, and Metropolitan Museum of Art (New York, NY), *The Essential Art of African Textiles: Design without End* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2008).

However, it seems that the critiques of such appropriations are limited to him. Both Okundaye and Onobrakpeya have been spared from any discussions of authenticity and identity. So too have the many artists who have taken to using wax-prints or *ankara*, such as Kolade Oshinowo, a Lagos-based artist who, in a decades-long career, has of late made the wax-print the primary medium in his textile-based paintings; Peju Alatise who uses the fabrics to build up sculptural surfaces on paintings; and George Edozie, to name a few.

8. Temitayo Ogunbiyi and the Re-invention of *Adire*

A Nigerian-American artist living in Lagos, Temitayo Ogunbiyi has taken the capacity within *adire* for national identification out of the realm of modern art and reconfigured patterns such as the *adire oniko* to relate to her younger, contemporary audiences. In much the same functions of traditional textiles in Nigerian culture, Ogunbiyi's textiles address issues of memory and communication. Though many of her works are created in Nigeria, they often travel across borders and oceans, or undergo tie-dyeing in a layering of meaning that reflects the experiences of migration (particularly into and out of Nigeria) and of having a multicultural identity. Though her work is based in Lagos, American-born Ogunbiyi has exhibited a number of times in the United States, and especially in London, where she was part of the Nigeria House exhibition held in conjunction with the 2012 Olympics. Nigeria House was intended as a celebration of Nigeria's diverse cultural heritage. Ogunbiyi chose to represent this through a textile pattern that bears the history of its female dyers, their role in modernization, and the intricate layers of foreign elements and cultures that make up the *adire* cloth, alluding to the part of Nigeria's cultural and national identity that does not reside within the borders of Nigeria.

Ken Hill Bar is a textile-based installation at the Nigeria House location that appropriates the unique *adire oniko* pattern (fig. 5). This *oniko* was made by first photographing a real *oniko* cloth during a trip to Abeokuta, then digitally manipulating its image, giving it a psychedelic feel, and having it machine printed on white cotton in a final step that more closely mirrors contemporary textile production.

Other pieces of Ogunbiyi's work, such as *Towards Remembering 160-something*, have undergone similar printing processes (fig. 6). Additionally, this piece, which was designed from digital conversations extracted from email communication, Blackberry profiles, and Facebook concerning the 2012 Dana Air crash in Lagos, was brought to Abeokuta to undergo *kampala*, the modernized version of tie-dye that uses synthetic, imported dyes instead of indigo. Linking her piece to the tradition of commemorative cloths (such as the *adire oloba*), the textile served to memorialize those who died in the crash. The textile gained another level of meaning when the artist sent the pattern to the United States to be printed, then brought it back to Nigeria for *kampala* and finishing, and finally to London where it was also installed at Nigeria House. The itinerary of the textile invokes the migration patterns of many who have left Nigeria for the United States and Britain, and, as in Ogunbiyi's case, have returned to Nigeria.²⁸

In a third and final nod to *adire* and the commemorative function of the textile, *Eagles Will Fly* depicts the Nigerian football greats of seasons past (fig. 7). In the same manner as King George V, Queen Elizabeth, the presidents of many African nations, Barack Obama, and many other powerful royals and rulers who have been honored through their own portrait on fabric, these football players enjoy a reverence in Nigeria that would rival that of the country's most powerful politicians, chiefs, or past kings.²⁹

Ogunbiyi's work harnesses the mobility of textiles and their communicative abilities to address issues pertinent to the times, and in particular pertinent to those whose own mobility and identity link them to multiple continents and cultures.

9. Conclusion

In the wake of Shonibare's success a number of scholars and critics have scrutinized his use of the Dutch wax-print, and the "authenticity" of the cloth itself. Nigerian scholar Tunde Akinwumi has been vocal about the cloth's *inauthenticity* because of Vlisco and other European

28 Personal communication with Temitayo Ogunbiyi, 2012.

29 See a pictorial collection of many of these cloths at <http://tomathon.com/mphp/2013/10/african-commemorative-cloths-a-series/>.

brands' neglect of symbols or patterns that may reflect any aspect of real Africanity, even calling the "African print" a "hoax."³⁰ However, other accounts of European manufacturers' involvement with the West African textile market show that many of the patterns marketed in West Africa were made specifically to suit the requests of African traders and wealthy clientele. This included drawing inspiration from textiles produced within Africa.³¹ Based on these histories and these artists one could argue that the *injiri* and *adire* textiles are no more nor less African than the wax-print. In that same vein, I would suggest that for all his claims of transparent fictiveness, there is little to nothing fictive about Shonibare's work. On the contrary, the blending of "African" prints with icons of the Victorian era only alludes to a history of Britain and Africa that was already blended. In attempting to undermine the Nigerian part of his hybrid identity, he has done no more than reveal it as such to the rest of the world. It is not as though this is not needed or desired. A broader understanding of identity as motley and in flux would be beneficial to a huge and growing portion of the world population that identifies with more than one nation, culture, religion, gender, race, or place. It seems the only thing Shonibare lays claim to that withstands close examination is the speciousness of authenticity.

For Okundaye and Onobrakpeya, who have openly embraced using traditional Nigerian culture in their work, the issue is not about authenticity or any confusion over identity. However, if one day their work ceases to reference traditional culture, ceases to 'look' Nigerian, I suspect that this will be the day they are questioned, as Shonibare was, as to the validity of their artistic choices. The appropriation of textiles thus serves as a double-edged sword. It satisfies the need for work to reflect an 'Africanness,' fortifying such notions even further, and at the same time undermines 'Africanness' through the histories of the fabrics that show they were cross-cultural all along. The extent to which the latter becomes clear through the work differs from artist to artist; indeed many of them have no subversive intention in the first place. But the capabilities for textiles to bridge such a wide range of critical and technical artistic

30 Tunde M. Akinwumi, "The 'African Print' Hoax: Machine Produced Textiles Jeopardize African Print Authenticity," *The Journal of Pan African Studies* 2, no. 5 (2008): 179–92.

31 Christopher B. Steiner, "Another Image of Africa: Toward an Ethnohistory of European Cloth Marketed in West Africa, 1837–1960," *Ethnohistory* 32, no. 2 (1985): 97–99.

intentions is undoubtedly what keeps the allure for both the artists and their audiences.

The research done in Nigeria for this article was made possible by the Omooba Yemisi Adedoyin Shyllon Art Foundation (OYASAF).

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11. Appendix



Fig. 1: Adire oniko, indigo tie-dyed machine spun plain-woven cotton with hems, 197 cm x 162 cm. Collection of the British Museum, Af1987,05.9. © Trustees of the British Museum



Fig. 2: Bruce Onobrakpeya, *Have You Heard*, 66 x 48 cm, Serigraph. © Hourglass Gallery:
http://www.hourglassgallery.com/web_pages/bruceonbrakpeyahaveyouheard.html



Fig. 3: Adire Oloba (the cloth with a king). Photo by the author.



Fig. 4: Yinka Shonibare, *Nelson's Ship in a Bottle*, Trafalgar Square 2010–2012. Photo by QuentinUK (Own work) [CC BY-SA 3.0 (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0>)], via Wikimedia Commons



Fig. 5: Temitayo Ogunbiyi, *Ken Hill Bar Arodudu Deep Space 9*, Textile and mixed media installation, Nigeria House exhibition, London 2012. Photo by T. Ogunbiyi, reproduced with permission.



Fig. 6: Temitayo Ogunbiyi, *Towards Remembering 160-something*, 2012, Textile portion of piece shown before undergoing kampala, full installation exhibited at Nigeria House, London 2012. Photo by T. Ogunbiyi, reproduced with permission.



Fig. 7: Temitayo Ogunbiyi, *Eagles Will Fly* (detail), 2012, Digital image printed on cotton. Photo by T. Ogunbiyi, reproduced with permission.