

An Adaptive Study of Symbolic Cultural Items used at the *Nchaka* Festival in Ogbaland for Textile Design of Identity

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Abstract- The Nchaka festival, also called Egwu Ogba is usually celebrated in Ogbaland at the end of each year to mark the end of the farming season and to commemorate their victory at the war fought against the Aboh kingdom across the River Niger. Ogbaland in this research covers Omoku, the headquarters of Ogba/Egbema/Ndoni Local Government Area of Rivers State, in Nigeria. Omoku is located in the northern part of Rivers state, sharing boundary with Delta state and Imo state. The Nchaka festival is in two parts, the male and the female Nchaka, whereby elders of both sexes have different parts to play at different times. During the festival, celebrants carry symbolic cultural items such as hand fan, dane guns, spears, metal gongs, sword and wooden drums to perform various activities. The celebrants do not have a unique textiles that identify them, but rather dress gorgeously with imported acculturated textiles, also used by other communities at various festivals. This research is an exploratory study aimed at projecting and documenting the history and culture of the Ogba Nchaka festival symbols as motif on textiles for a unique identity of the celebrants for posterity. This will enrich the collection of modern Nigerian textile design and add to the cultural fabrics and symbolic items used during the Nchaka festival in Ogbaland. Photographs of a collection of the symbolic items were taken and critically studied, and key celebrants interviewed. Homes of expositors, shrines and libraries were visited for accurate records. Researchers attended the proclamation of the 2014 Nchaka festival by the Oba of Ogbaland, His Eminence, Oba Chukumela Nnam Obi. Sketches of the various items were made and compositions created as motifs for textiles. These were in turn transferred to cloth as samples with surface embellishment on batik, using flat iron-on stones and taken to the field for critic and acceptance. It was recommended among other issues that the design is a step in the right direction to document and preserve Ogba cultural heritage, historical events and symbols through textile design. The findings show that the symbols of Nchaka festival were accepted as being suitable for modern textiles of identity for Nchaka celebrants and serve as a platform for documenting the culture of the Ogba people of Omoku for scholarly references.

Index Terms- Nchaka festival, Symbolic cultural items, Ogbaland, Textiles, Identity

I. INTRODUCTION

Ogbaland (*Ali-Ogba*) covers an area of about 920 km² in the northern part of Rivers state in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria, located within the River Niger flood plains. It is bordered on the west by the Orashi river and on the east by the Sombreiro river. In addition to the main drainage systems, there are the Omoku river and many back swamps, cut offs and interconnecting streams which form a maze of drainage channels superimposed on the area. At the peak of the rainy season, these interconnected waterways are a prominent feature of the landscape. Its location in the Sombreiro-Warri deltaic plains, situates it in the rain forest zone of southern Nigeria. The area can be divided into four ecological zones: The Sombreiro river plains (eastwards), the Orashi river flood plains (westwards), the central well drained lowlands and farm mosaic between the Orashi and Sombreiro rivers and the non-tidal freshwater swamps basin.

The highest part of Ogbaland is the well drained lowland and farm mosaic with altitude ranging from 15m to 22 m. In general, the land is characterized by a gentle sloping topography of less than 10 degrees in many areas. This relatively low altitude gives the area its characteristics flat and monotonous low relief interspersed by many wetland (swamp/creek basins), which crisscross the central low lands and empties into the two main river systems,

Sombreiro and Orashi. (Ellah 1995)

As a result of its geographic location, Ogbaland enjoys all year round high temperature averaging 80 degrees Fahrenheit in the day with overnight lows ranging from 65 to 70 degrees. The area also has a minimum of ten months of rainfall totalling over 80 inches per year with very high humidity in the summer months. The climatic conditions and topography supports a wide variety of plant and animal life. The flora consists of economic trees especially oil palm trees and a variety of plants species of great pharmacological value. (Ellah 1995)

Oral history has it that the Ogba people migrated to what is now called *Ali-Ogba* (Ogbaland), from the then Benin Empire across the Niger in about the 16th century. The geographic location, migration routes, language and political structure according to Ellah (1995), are some socio-cultural and political legacies that reinforce a common origin and bind the people of Ogbaland (*Ali-Ogba*) together. Ogbaland in this context covers Omoku, a town in Rivers State of Nigeria, with a population of

about 32,000 people. It is the capital of the Ogba/Egbema/Ndoni Local Government Area of Rivers state. Wikipedia (2013) Omoku communities include, Obrikom, Okposi, Idu, Egbede, Ogbede, Obigwe, Ede, Obite, Obor, Ebogoro, Obie, Kriegane and Ali Iguto.

The *Nchaka* festival is the most celebrated festival among the Ogba people annually to reverence God at the end of year, the end of the farming season and also to commemorate the victory of the Ogba people over the Aboh kingdom war of aggression. Ohia & Onyedibia, (2002) An oral interview with Chief Olu, a 76 years old Ogba chief in Omoku, also confirmed that *Nchaka* festival does not only mark the end and the beginning of a year but also a commemoration of the war of independence fought by the Ogba people against Aboh kingdom in the coastal area across the River Niger.

The *Nchaka* festival is marked in two parts, the first part of the celebration is in honor of the women referred to as *Nchaka ka umu-nanyi*. The second part of the celebration is in honor of the men known as *Nchaka ka umu- nwaokno*. In both celebrations, youths and adults in the community dress in rich colourful acculturated traditional attire, but none have any of their festival symbols because they are all imported textiles.

This study explores the possibilities of extracting the symbolic cultural items used during the *Nchaka* festival as motif for a unique fabric design of identity for the *Nchaka* celebrants in Ogbaland. Some of such cultural symbols used during the *Nchaka* festival include dane guns (*Egbe*), *Nchaka* special sword (*Ogbachi*), metal gong (*Ukela*), ceremonial spear (*Akpuruigwe*), shield (*Akupe*), hand fan and wooden drums (*Nkwa*). Each of these items depict an area in the culture and history of the *Nchaka* festival (*egwu ogba*) and Ogbaland (*Ali Ogba*).

Many of the cultural symbols used in the *Nchaka* festival of Ogbaland are lost in years of abandonment due to the contact with other cultures as a result of western education, religious affiliations, migration and urbanization. This is a serious threat to the preservation of the various cultural items of the *Nchaka* festival. There has been inadequate documentation of symbolic cultural materials used during the *Nchaka* festival. No proper documentation has been made of their festival fabrics, as they use similar costumes with other communities, hence the need to adapt the symbolic cultural items on textile as a source of material culture. The Ogba people do not have a unique customized textiles for celebrating the *Nchaka* festival, nor an empirical study on the documentation and improvement of the fabrics used at the festival. This study therefore, aims at investigating and documenting the *Nchaka* festival cultural symbols as motif for customized fabric of identity for the people of Ogbaland (*Ali Ogbaland*). Specifically, the research will;

1. determine the extent of adaptability of Ogba cultural symbols used during the *Nchaka* festival as motif on textiles for the identity of the celebrant;
2. rediscover the cultural symbols used at the *Nchaka* festival of the Ogba people as cloth design;
3. design customized textiles for costumes for *Nchaka* festival celebrants in Ogbaland and
4. introduce a unique fabric of identity for use by the Ogba people during the *Nchaka* festival.

The results and findings on the adaptability of *Nchaka* symbolic cultural items on textiles will enable researchers to provide adequate academic material, history and literature for further research. Adaptation of the *Nchaka* symbols as motif for textile design will assist significantly in providing a durable documentation of the culture of the people, promote and give them an identity nationally and internationally. It will also be a thing of joy among the Ogba people that a customized textile design has been introduced for the *Nchaka* festival as this will highlight and promote them in the textiles and fashion industry nationally and internationally. The study would also serve as a spring board for restoring and retaining cultural materials.

Cyril-Egware (2013) states that textiles and their use as dress are seen as foremost in the expression of a people's identity. Okeke (1996); (2005) confirmed this, stating that textiles is a principal medium through which identity is expressed and symbolized all over the world, even though it's major purpose is for beautifying the body and enhancing the dignity of persons. In like manner, Chukueggu and Cyril-Egware (2009), corroborates that textiles reflects man's environment, his society and community and stand as a means of non-verbal communication in revealing the culture and history of a people. Hence, it provides considerable information and identity about the wearer, the individual personality, economic standing and nature of event the wearer is attending. Adamtey (2008) defining traditional clothing, states that it is the customary clothes that identify the wearer's place of origin or clothes for special functions. The Kalabari people of the Niger Delta who share a common boundary with the Nembe people, for example, wear dress assemblages that distinguish them from their neighbours. Eicher and Erekosima (1995), states that some items and outfits affirm their ethnic identity in ways that are often subtle as to mislead even researchers and on lookers. Bridgwood (2002) sees dress as a marker of ethnicity and can also be a symbol of relations between different ethnic groups. Different groups appear in various uniforms, especially the women's groups to dignify themselves and look beautiful and attractive. However, a unique identity with the use of the *Nchaka* symbolic cultural items would make a difference and give all the celebrants a unique outlook. This research is therefore in the right direction to give the *Nchaka* festival celebrants a unique identity and beauty.

II. HISTORY AND ORIGIN OF THE OGBALAND (ALI OGBA) AND NCHAKA FESTIVAL (EGWU OGBA)

The origin of the Ogba people of Rivers State in Nigeria is historically traced to old Bini Kingdom, particularly Edo. The event that led to the migration of Aklaka, the ancestral father of Ogba and Ekpeye, now known as Ahoada is not known, but oral tradition points to the turbulent period of Bini when Oba Ewuare the Great, who in Ogba is called *Oguaro* was said to have made laws depriving his subjects of certain fundamental rights. He retired into his inner palace and wept bitterly for his sons and asked the *Avbiogbe*, (town-criers), to announce the news to the people and asked them to mourn the death of his sons with him. He also made a strict law forbidding anyone in the land of either sex, to wash and dress-up, or to have canal intercourse for three years. This law caused great confusion as a large number of citizens migrated to various places. This could have led to the

migration of Aklaka, to the present place called Ogba. The death of Aklaka, and the tragedy at Ubuke consequently led to the separation of Aklaka's two sons Ogba and Ekpeye, with the latter finally settling at Obigwe from where his descendants Agburu, Okparaeme and other sojourners migrated to Omoku and other areas within the geographical sphere of Ogbaland.

The Aboh kingdom, now in Delta State of Nigeria, is separated from the Ogba territory by the River Niger. Many wars of conquest were fought by the Aboh kingdom against the Ogba people. One of such wars claimed the life of the young king, Oba Okoya Nwaebe, although the Aboh kingdom was defeated. Hence, the composite celebration of the victory over the Aboh warlords, and a thanksgiving occasion to God for the end of the year and harvest season in Ogba land. Ewoh (1972), notes that the *Nchaka* marks the end of the native year and at about the end of November. Ellah (1995), adds that the *Nchaka* festival marks the end of the farming season. The festival which is usually full of funfair is divided into two parts: The female and male segments. Although the latter segment is celebrated as male and female, the natives prefer to call it *Nchaka ka umu-nwaokno* (males festival). The female *Nchaka* is usually fixed on *Ahwo* (the fourth day of the Ogba week), fixed by the relevant traditional authorities. As the sun sets, female celebrants (who are usually not widows) holding fire-brands covered with *Ukesi* (Olive branches) assemble at the playground from different compounds of the Ogba communities, in circles as they continuously chant:

Ajamo biapu – Lets evil spirit leave

Ejagbra biapu – Let evil spirits personalized go

They finally all process to the river bank, where the fire-brand and *Ukesi* (Olive branches) are thrown into the river. At this point all the celebrants (non-widows) turn homewards, dancing and singing. Ewoh (1972), asserts that at the riverside, the oldest woman among the celebrants enumerate all the ills which should end with the year, the good things and conditions which the new year should bring, then the fire-brand is thrown into the river, running and shouting *Uru-o! Uru-O* (meaning, let wealth and other good profits come). It is believed that, falling in the course of running back home is a bad omen, that the victim is likely to die or encounter some life threatening events in the course of the new year.

III. MODE OF DRESSING

Their mode of dressing during the *Nchaka* festival, is usually warlike, which tells a story about the reason for the celebration. This aspect of the dressing during the festival reflects the history of the Aboh war of aggression for which the Ogba people were victorious. The *Nchaka* festival is a period of fashion display for the Ogba people. The reason is that it is a major occasion during which the native celebrants wear the best of cloths from their boxes. Christmas and Easter were strange cultural celebrations to the Ogba people in the past. The dresses worn at the festival by the *Nchaka* celebrants are divided into two parts. The elderly men and women and those who can afford it, wear the dignifying cloth of the natives called *Arigidi*, plate 7 to 11 in the photo gallery.

Arigidi is hand woven cotton cloth of assorted colours, in striped patterns. Oral tradition has it that the display of

fashionable cloth for both sexes could be traced to the Benin (Edo) kingdom who acquired their collection from the Portuguese traders in Benin and the Forcado River.

In describing the *Arigidi* and styles of fashion of the ancient Ogba, Ellah (1995) traced the fabric to several century ago, when it was made in heavy white or black cotton and plain white. This may have been the woven multi coloured *kente* cloth of the Ghana people, the woven white and black *Anger* produce by the Tiv people of Benue and the woven white *Akwa ocha* produced by the Aniocha people of in Delta state. (plate7, 8, 9 & 10)

Arigidi is tied, passing under the right armpit and tied above the left shoulder, covering and flowing down to both ankles-more or less like the Ghana dress fashion and Edo, (plates 9 & 10). Elderly women of repute tie the same wrapper, but they tie it round their chest, flowing down to their ankle, leaving their shoulders bare. (plate 11) The male *Nchaka* begins at dawn, with celebrants moving from the community to the play ground in their numbers.

The ceremony is led by the various family elders, with many celebrants carrying weapons, fans and walking sticks. Those who carry the different types of weapons are usually men. They carry dane guns, (held by matured hunters), knives, and spears, while the young men celebrants hold and brandish knives. The elderly men hold ceremonial spears (*Akpuruigwe*) to support themselves as they move, to ward-off evil spirits. Hand fans are held by the wives and daughter-in-laws of the elders for exalting the aged elders, with praise songs.

On the dawn of the *Ahwo* day, men neatly dressed in native fashion perform the same rights as the women early in the morning. They move to the play ground, led by the eldest male member of the community, then to the river bank. At this point, incantations are made by him to dispel evil spirits, and prayers of good health, wealth and peace are offered to usher in the new year. He ends by chanting: *Who-ooo! Who-ooo!* And the other celebrants respond: *Who-ooo!* Again, he says: *Cha-aa! Cha-aa!* Others respond: *Cha-aaa!* Finally, the fire band and *Ukesi* leaves handled by the eldest male member of the community are thrown into the river, and thereafter, dane guns are shot to signify the end of the riverside ritual. From this point, the active celebrants and spectators depart to their various compounds to continue with the celebration, which involves eating yam, drinking and dancing.

Ohia and Onyedibia (2003), confirmed that during the *Nchaka* festival at Okposi an Omoku community, the eldest male member of the community, especially of the Uriem kindred, moves and others follow him to the *Onosi* (river side) for the *Ichnu-njor* ceremony of the festival. Without this rite it may mean that there was no celebration of the festival that year.

IV. NCHAKA SYMBOLIC CULTURAL ITEMS AND THEIR SIGNIFICANCE ON TEXTILES

The Ogba people have various ceremonies periodically especially during the dry season. The celebrations are *Oru-orie* (working on *Orie day*), *Out* (age grade), *Oraborchi* (drinking till down), *Ebiam* (eating new yam), *Egwuji Onube* (middle year celebration), *Egwu Awudu* (elderly men's dance), *Nkwukwu Ikpochi* (locking up the farm land) when every celebrant ate pounded yam, the celebrants carry horse tail, hand

fans, walking stick, metal gong and basket. The dress worn was the traditional *Arigidi* cloth (of Benin origin) tied around the waist and draping down to the ankle. None of the colourful attires has any of the symbols used for the celebrations.

The cultural and social significance of the *Nchaka* festival is the concern of this research and it cannot be undermined. Ohia and Onyedibia (2003), reveals that it is a period worthy of commendation when all those who are enemies are reconciled and mourners of loved ones relieved of sorrow by removing and burning their mourning cloth. The festival is as important to the people of Ogba as the Christmas is in Rome. In the view of Merrile (1991), people from far and near gather like pilgrims during the occasion. They enjoy communal meals which are expressions of common beliefs, emotional feelings and renewal of relationships. Indeed, the *Nchaka* festival is a period of multi-facet renewal of the relationship amongst man, his environment and spirits.

In the study of Amakiomoree (1990), he noted the importance of symbols to the development of culture and the education of the mind. It was noted that symbols are necessary to man as they tend to send or direct the movement and pattern of play of a particular culture. Symbols also indicate or inform man of what to do at a particular point in time. In a related study, Maskol (1999), observed that most symbols and forms used in African traditional festivals and ceremonies denote and possess some charms, spirits and odor that direct the mode and pattern of play.

Ogaranya, (1999), stated That Ogba may not have forgotten this sword as an instrument of war used when they were part of the Benin Kingdom. Thus, it was not left out as an implement of war during the various wars fought by the Ogba people in defense of the Aboh aggression. In relating the "ancient wars" fought by the Benin Kingdom, noted the native sword as one of the weapons used by the people of old Benin battles.

Cultural symbols in this study are the traditional items used by the Ogba people during the *Nchaka* festival celebration. These symbols reflect history and events commemorating the Ogba war against the Aboh warlords, who according to Ellah (1995) were hunting for beasts to kill as well as men to enslave. According to Jefferson (1973), most African groups are influenced by the many legends, myths, and proverbs of their tribal past, and these he said influences much of their arts. In related studies, Ochigbo (2008) and Alagoa (2005), collaborates the importance of the culture of a people to imply the inculcation of national consciousness and national unity which the arts seek to attain is a pointer to the artists and their contributions.

Symbols in the African culture depict either evil or goodness to a particular people. Awani (1991), opined that symbols could be derived or made from wood, ceramics or clay. According to Cohen (1974), symbols in arts and culture could be used in churches, homes and shrines symbolizing a deity of a particular group.

Among the few available studies that discussed this development include Imdojemu (2008) which explored and incorporated into modern textiles Ude festival symbols enrich the fabrics and highlight the artistic expressions.

The work of Ikoro (2008) looks at the traditional motifs on Weppa-Wanna Masquerade customs which he analyzed and incorporated into modern textiles in order to project a better

understanding of the tradition. Similarly Ola- Ofolayan (2008) touches on the use of emblems of royalty in Osi Opin Ekiti Kwara State as a form of motif in embellishing modern textiles. Other scholarly works that identifies festival symbols or emblems on modern textiles include Adegoke (1995) which touches on traditional and modern garment embroideries in Oyo which are used for festival occasions. He reveals that the cultural vestiges on the modern which enriched them have been passed down from generation to generation without modification.

Okediji (1989) identifies some textiles works on display by Ona artists as having patterns reminiscent of Yoruba traditional craft practices used festive periods. He further opines that despite the fact that the fabrics are of wooden periods, symbols employed on them have made them to move beyond ordinary cloth. More so, Filani (2001) remarks that the originality of some modern Yoruba textile designs is due to the fact that the artists have incorporated Yoruba traditional festival symbols and proverbs.

In the light of above mentioned studies, there is no doubt that there has not been enough studies on the use of symbolic cultural items on modern festival textiles fabrics. Besides those of *Nchaka* festival have not been given adequate attention. The originality of the research therefore is to incorporate into modern textiles embellishments not only to create a new style but to document the people's culture. More so, it creates a better understanding of the Ogba peoples art tradition and belief systems and encourage other textile designers to take cue and revisit their cultural practices for modern concepts.

The cultural symbols used during the *Nchaka* festival could be divided into two; according to functions and uses. Some reflect battle and victory, dignity and praise such as the *Akupe* (hand fan), *Akpuruigwe* (traditional spear), *Egbe-ntnu* (dame gun), sword and knives. Those in the second group are utilized in traditional ceremonies as well as war. They include: *Ekire* (hallow wooden instrument), *Ukela* (metal gong), *Orikiri* (a number of giant, medium and small hollow wooden drums strapped with animal skin-leather).

From the above assertion, Oyelola (1981;12), states that in some areas, living creature like snakes, scorpions, lizards and tortoises are used for the decoration of certain pots and clothes in traditional plays, while in other areas animal skulls and bones are attached or used as part of the clothes used as motifs. The use of traditional symbols in the *Nchaka* festival is therefore not different from what other cultures in Nigeria use in their festivals such as Igbo, Hausa, Ibibio, Andoni, Ibani, Nembe and Kalabari.

Figure 1: *Akupe* or *Aznuru* (Hand Fan) is one of the traditional symbols as old as Ogba culture. For the Africans who inhabit the temperate regions, the *Akupe* is invented to oscillate air for steaming human body heat or refresh the user with air. The *Akupe* is made-up of a circle shaped, dried and treated animal skin, skillfully designed with leather rope. A stick of about six (6) inches covered with leather skin is inserted into the leather to serve as handle. It is made in different shapes and sizes. However, men usually use the larger ones, while women handle the small sized ones, (Ellah, 1995). During the *Nchaka* festival, women, daughters in-law or wives handle the *Akupe* for refreshing their husbands and fathers in-law who must be the eldest male members of the family. The major duty of the women is to praise sing for the eldest male celebrants, who lead

the family to and back from the Nch aka celebration, waving the hand fan on the celebrants.

Figure 2: *Egbe-Ntmu* (dane gun) is used during the festival and usually handle by mature hunters to demonstrate the war activities. However, it is mainly used to salute the formal closure of the festival after *Okiye* (eldest) have finished the incantation at the river bank. In Okposi the eldest member of the *Uriem* family declares the festival open at the *Ajie-Uwku* shrine. The dane gun also have great significance as a memorial weapon used in Ogba Aboh war. It is noteworthy that hunters seem to be the only ones who possessed and used the dane gun during the *Nchaka* festival. Dane gun must have been in use among the people of Ogbaland long after the Aboh raid on Ogba, which led to the beheading of King Okoya Nwaebe. As great hunters, the Ogba people did not find it difficult to adapt the weapon into their count of war arsenal. The *Olowu Nwa-ajie Nkwo* incident, in which it is said that the Ogba people surrendered their dane guns to the Whiteman for destruction, is evident that the Ogba people used gun to execute their wars in ancient times. This is why the dane gun is one of the symbols used during the *Nchaka* festival to commemorate the act of war by the Ogba people. It also shows that the Ogba people have great hunters who have proven their worth in the battles against men and beasts of the forest. It is worthy to note that hunters seem to be the only ones who possess and use the dane gun during the *Nchaka* festival.

Figure 3: *Ukela* (Gong) could be made from metal because of and efficiency to create a loud noise. Noreel (1989), opined that the gong, is important for conveying traditional messages which could mean emergency, peace, war or death of a warlord or chief. The *Ukela* is made from two flat curved light metal sheets joined together from the narrow top to a broad bottom. The *Ukela* is regarded in many cultures as the informant or an instrument used for drawing people's attention to the message of the town crier. Its functions and uses are appropriable to the cultural demands of the society. In Ogba culture, the gong (*Ukela*) has multiple functions, ranging from summoning human or spirits to a meeting or ritual activity, to other important roles. During the many wars fought by the Ogba people, the gong (*Ukela*) was prominent for its role in giving sound signals of imminent attack or some other vital information. In the tragic story of the death of Okoya Nwaebe, the first king of the Ogbaland, the prominence of the *gong* was noted. Ohia and Onyedibia, (2002) collaborates that when the Aboh people penetrated the defense line of the Ogba kingdom (at the estuary of the Omoku Creek), after beheading the king, they advanced inland to attack. History has it that the Uriem kindred of Omoku sounded the gong in a desperate call for a counter-attack. The Ogba soldiers rose to duty immediately chased and massacred almost all the Aboh soldiers. Ellah (1995) notes that the gong, apart from its use as a musical instrument, stands in the traditional Ogba parlance as an instrument for summoning people to hear very important information of general interest. The musical contribution of the *Ukela* during war, even as the only musical instrument in an occasion, motivates Ogba soldiers of the Aboh-Ogba war to charming inspiration. Empirical studies of Miema (1996), showed a relationship between the sound of a gong to the death of a chief in the coastal areas such as Okirika, Andoni, Ibani, and Kalabari. Also, the studies of Tekenah & Amie (2000), and Thomson (1995), show a relationship in the

areas of communicating a message through the use of the gong in the African tradition.

Figure 4: *Opia* (Native Sword) is an average long knife, broader than the common English sword. One side of it is usually sharpened for cutting enemies in battle. The use of the sword in every traditional festival depicts a more wearisome play, dance or occasion that demand or show the nature of the people. The sword is one of the major implement of war use during the Ogba Aboh war. During the Nchaka festival celebration day for the males, the most elderly male members of the families handle the sword with the left hand proclaiming: *Okama-aaa! Okama- aaa!* While others respond: *Ugo-oo! Ugo-oo!*

Figure 5: *Akpuruigwe* (Spear): This is one of the prominent items used during the Nchaka festival celebration. The *Akpuruigwe* is a modification of the rattle-spear. It is usually a straight rod, variously designed, with one of its sides well sharpened. The handling of this Nchaka traditional item is prerogative of the eldest member of each family. He holds it with the right hand, while either the sword or hand fan is held on the left hand.

The eldest male member of the celebrating family handle the spear to portrays the role of the war leader. He is usually at the frontal position of the group war, giving mystical incantations and commands against the enemy. It is believed that the importance of the spear is enhanced with protective charms. The leader taking a front position is believed to provide safety for the fighters at the battle field.

Figure 6: *Nkwa* (wooden and leather drum) is a drumming instrument constructed with a sizeable hollowed wood; the best animal leather, antelope strapped on one end of the hollow wood. The leather is strained and held to the outer body of the wood with cane ropes. Numerous types and sounds are found in the drums that harnessed and used in traditional festival. There are sounds made by machines, animals and men or natural noises in water and winds. The drumming in this festival is usually done by young men who have and know the tradition of the people. The wooden drum (*Nkwa*) is the main instrument for summoning people or spirits, either for ritual activity or war. When it sounds, the soldiers respond appropriately to the message which the sound disseminates. The messages are directed specifically to only the fighters or members of a cult who understand. In Ogbaland, the *Umu-Ngwu* kindred are the custodian of the legendry Ogba drum of war (*Nkwa*). However, the particular sound effects used in the *Nchaka* festival depend on the given circumstances and pattern of play. The drum (*Nkwa*) is an important remarkable musical instrument. Without the *Orikiri*, one of the symbols of the *Nchaka* festival that is universal among the Ogba people of Rivers State, the festival may not be complete. It is important to note that the Umuezeali kindred of Ogba are the custodians of the drum (*Nkwa*) that is used during the *Nchaka* festival celebration.

V. INCORPORATING THE NCHAKA CULTURAL SYMBOLS ON TEXTILE FABRICS

The art of shielding cultural and historic symbols from corrosive socio-cultural influences has found preservation in textile design. It is important to note that the use of Ogba *Nchaka* cultural symbols for textile design is an artistic innovation which

should be encouraged and sustained. Apart from its economic value, the post-eristic nature cannot be undermined. Jefferson (1973), opined that the Ibo today have to a great extent given up their traditional religion for Christianity. This is also the case with the Ogba people who are linguistically and culturally close to the Ibo people more than the old Benin Kingdom where they migrated from. They therefore do not make festival costume anymore.

Symbols are a means of communicating religions concepts in traditional societies and a viable channels of identity which helps in the preservation of history, culture and religion of a people. Cultural symbols help to re-enact historic events and are useful instruments for communication to the younger generation. A major advantage of this research is the transference of the cultural symbols used during the *Nchaka* festival as fabric design. It provides a durable means of preserving the cultural and historical identity of the people of Ogba, (Ewoh,1972). The jealous preservation of a peoples historical past is very important for national and international recognition and for posterity. This research and its product is a step in that direction, to preserve Ogba cultural history and historic events through textile design which is a good source of material culture.

The art of shielding cultural and historic symbols from corrosive socio-cultural influences has found preservation in textile design. Dendel (1974) in noting the importance of preserving historic events on textile, referenced the *Adinkra* a patterned fabric made by stamping design on the surface of cloth. It is an Ashanti craft worn like the Roman Togas. The story about the *Adinkra* has it that there was a king called *Adinkra* (ruler of Guynama, Ivory Coast) who in the 19th century was killed in a battle. The Ashanti seized his robe, probably as a trophy, and named it *Adinkra*. Wearing the *Adinkra* designed cloth inputs grief and farewell to the deceased although, the *Adinkra* designed cloth is worn today without recourse to its original symbolism.

Unlike the Tiv people who weave the anger, now recognized as the Benue cloth, the Ogba people use special cloths with long traditional records even though their uses may differ. The cloth in both societies seems to lack cultural and historic design. For the Ogba people, the *Arigidi* cloth is simply woven without particular designs reflecting any motif. It is an acculturated fabric, which is more or less in the form of a Roman Toga or an Edo noblemen's dress and that of the Ghanaians. The Roman Toga, perhaps the type worn by the Roman Parliamentarians in Shakespeare's Julius Caesar's has no specialized designs, just as the *Arigidi* cloth used by the Ogba people.

Artistic productions in most cases reflect or resonates cultural cum historical facts. Jefferson (2000), noting that Africans were interested in the glories of their ancestors and their kings so that carving, casting and appliquéd patterns depict battles, conquest and ceremonies involving events. In a related study of Darrma (1987), he observes that the use of traditional symbols and forms of ancient Africa has infiltrated into the fabric production and fashion of modern day. It was therefore recommended that there is the need for modern artist and designers to study the adaptation of these forms and designs into modern technologies.

Gostelow (1982) asserts that in Thailand special costumes are decorated for wearing in flirtation events. Clothes are richly embroidered with religious symbols with ceremonial significance, while in China, the influence of religion and symbolism was particularly important.

Adegoke (1995) notes the advantage of preserving originality through the medium of trado-modern garment embroideries in Oyo; which are used during festive occasions. The significance of incorporating cultural symbols into textile design is the dignity and classification which this brings to clothe.

VI. PRODUCTION TECHNIQUE

The production of this textile design is basically for the identity and satisfaction of the *Nchaka* festival celebrants of Ogbaland and to document the festival symbols for posterity, hence the use of historical and experimental research method. Data collection was from primary and secondary source to actualize the aim and objectives of this study. Oral and participant observation techniques were primary sources of data collection. This involved an intensive field work carried out in Omoku communities which include, Obrikom, Okposi, Idu, Egbede, Ogbede, Obigwe, Ede, Obite, Obor, Ebogoro, Obie, Kriegane and Ali Iguto. These communities all celebrate the *Nchaka* festival together in Omoku at the play ground and perform all the rituals. Researchers therefore observed the use of the cultural symbols, visited the celebrants and expositors of the festivals symbols and carry out oral interviews. Photographs of the *Nchaka* festival symbols and musical instrument were taken for a critical study and sketches made for fabric production. Photographs of activities were also taken during the 2014 *Nchaka* festival. The researchers witnessed the proclamation of the 2014 *Nchaka* festival by His Eminence, Sir (Dr.) Chukumela Nnam Obi II, Oba (Eze-Ogba) of Ogbaland and his Council of Chiefs. In addition, traditional craftsmen who produced some of the *Nchaka* festival symbols were also visited and interviewed. Research guide questions were administered orally, suggesting the incorporation of the *Nchaka* cultural symbols on textiles as an identity and material culture for the Ogba people. Kingdom Ukwosah, E.U. Osi, George A. Wokoma, Ijeoma Otoboh and A.B. Abali (Professional photographers) were the reliable research assistants.

Secondary sources include Library and documentary sources, where related literature from text books, journals, newspaper and thesis were sourced. Archival materials such as old photographs formed an important source of information from individuals, age-grades and traditional dance groups, and wrappers collected to document what they use currently. Shrines are repository of items used during festivals so the researchers visited some shrines in Ogbaland. They include, *Ajie-Ukwu* shrine, *Umu-Eke* shrine, *Okeleti* shrine and *Omelauju* shrine.

The Study Population include Kings, Chief and cultural groups They include, His Eminence Sir (Dr.) Chukumela Nnam Obi II, Oba (Eze-Ogba) of Ogbaland, HRH Eze A.A. Frank Okoro, Eze-Ali Obakata of Ogbaland and HRH Eze A.O. Osoh, Eze-Ali Usomini of Obrikom, Chief S.I. Dibia, Chief Mbadiwe A. Osaji, and Chief Loveday I. Ojoba

In this research materials and methods were employed in actualizing the visual works. The study of *Nchaka* festival symbolic cultural items collected lead to works from paper to fabric. (figures 1 to 18). Batik wax resist technique was used for fabric design and surface embellished with flat iron-on stone used to define the motifs. (figure) Samples were produced on

cotton fabrics measuring 72cm by 36cm (figure15 to 18), which were taken to the field for critic and acceptance. These fabrics were tested and found to be rich, durable and a good representation of the Ogba *Nchaka* festival.

PHOTOGRAPH OF SYMBOLIC CULTURAL ITEMS USED DURING THE NCHAKA FESTIVAL



Plate 1: Hand fan (*Akupa*)



Plate 2: Dane Gun (*Egbe*)

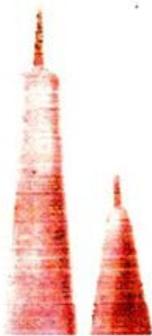


Plate 3: Metal Gongs (*Ukela*)



Plate 4: Sword (*Opia*)



Plate 5: Spear (*Akpuruigwe*)



Plate 6: Wooden Drums (*Nkwa*)

SKETCHES DERIVED FROM PHOTOGRAPHS

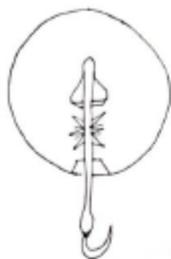


Figure 1: Hand fan (Akude)



Figure 2: Wooden Drums (Nkwa)



Figure 3: Metal Gongs (Ukwa)



Figure 4: Sword (Opia)



Figure 5: Spear (Akpuruigwe)



Figure 6: Dane Gun (Egbe)

COMPOSITIONS DERIVED FROM SKETCHES WITH TITLES

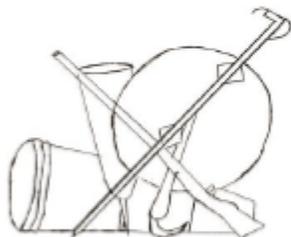


Figure 7
Title: Akru-Ekwi (Body expression)
Adapted from plates 1, 2, 3, 5 & 6

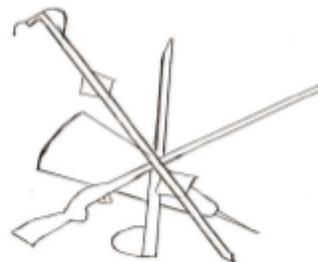


Figure 8
Title: Nkwade-ije (Performance and movement)
Adapted from plates 2, 5, 4 & 5

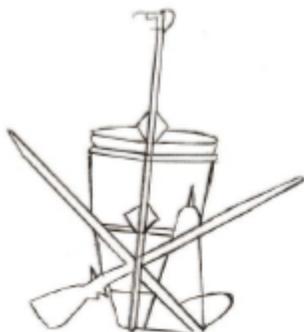


Figure 9
Title: Obuzor ka huma mreni
(Celebration is honorable)
Adapted from plates 2, 3, 4, 5 & 6

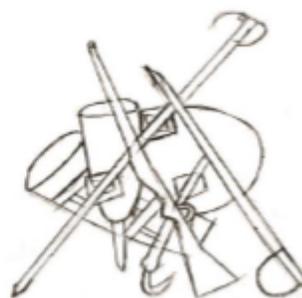


Figure 10
Title: Akru-Ekwi La ogu
(Central character)
Adapted from plates 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, & 6

PAPER WORKS IN COLOUR



Figure 11
Title: *Iperiuika* (Action Conversion)
Size: 60cm x 45cm
Medium: Poster colour on paper



Figure 12
Title: *Akrü-Ekwu* (Body Expression)
Size: 60cm x 45cm
Medium: Poster Colour on paper



Figure 13
Title: *Akrü-Ekwu La Nkwade-ije*
(Body expression and performance)
Size: 60cm x 45cm
Medium: Poster Colour on paper

FABRIC SAMPLES



Figure 14
Title: *Ife-Ogu* (Movement during war)
Size: 36cm x 36cm
Medium: Batik



Figure 15
Title: *Nkwade-Ije* (Performance and movement)
Size: 60cm x 45cm
Medium: Batik



Figure 16
Title: *Akrü-egwu* (Body expression)
Size: 36cm x 36cm
Medium: Batik



Figure 17
Title: *Akrü-egwu* (Body expression)
Size: 72cm x 36cm
Medium: Batik

ENLARGEMENT, TRACING, WAXING, DYEING, & EMBELLISHMENT

The motifs were enlarged with the use of computer and scanner, and were transferred from paper to white cotton fabric, with the use of carbon paper by placing it between the white cotton brocade material. A ruler was then used to scale the spaces for the motif to be traced.

A pointed tip like that of a pencil was carved out from thick foam to apply melted wax on designated areas of the fabric to create design. Stove and iron pot was used to melt wax to liquid and apply on fabric at a regulated temperature. The mixture of dye, caustic soda and hydrosulphite was then dissolved with hot water and diluted with cold water, enough to cover immersed fabric. The cold water added depends on the quality of colour required on the cloth.

For dewaxing, boiled water was put in a large plastic bucket, and with a strong stick the dyed fabric was stirred, lifting

it up and down in the boiled water in order to wash off the wax and excess dye from the fabric. Toilet soap was used to wash the fabric after dewaxing and rinsed in clean water until dye stopped running. After that it was then starched, dried, ironed and embellished.

SURFACE EMBELLISHMENT (FIGURE 18 TO 21)

Embellishment, according to Doubleday (1977) is a means of decoration, ornamentation, enrichment beautification of something. *Nchaka* Festival motifs were design in different colours on paper and reproduce on five yards white brocade and produced samples are sewn into garments for admiration. Samples of selected beads were studied and adapted for surface embellishment on batik. The batik surface was embellished with sequence, with needle and, thread and iron-on stones. Flat sequence was also attached with hot iron on batik for simple surface embellishment and few spaces left as plain batik.



Figure 18
Title: *Iperiuka* (Action Conversion)
Size: 60cm x 45cm
Medium: Batik with surface embellishment



Figure 19
Title: *Uruo-egwu* (Smile reaction)
Size: 60cm x 45cm
Medium: Batik with surface embellishment



Figure 20
Title: *Ikwaka* (Stylish & beautiful)
Size: 36cm x 36cm
Medium: Batik with surface embellishment



Figure 21
Title: *Nkwade-ije* (performance & movement)
Size: 60cm x 45cm
Medium: Batik and surface embellishment

ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS OF FINISHED WORK

Having analyzed the symbols, in relation with the Nchaka festival and their uses, it is necessary to relate it with the new design. *Iperiuka* (Action Conversion), figure 18, depict the demonstration of love for the men by their daughter in laws. During the festival, women hold hand fans to demonstrate side by side with their husbands and father in laws. The dane gun is used to demonstrate the activities of war by elderly hunters as a symbol used at Nchaka to commemorate the act of war where the Ogba people defeated the Aboh kingdom. *Uruo-egwu* (Smile reaction) figure 19, documents, the use and meaning of the gong, hand fan, spear and sword to the Nchaka festival and makes the

celebrants, audience and researchers to appreciate the items. It portrays a joyful mood of the celebrants and those from the upper class. Spear dignify the movement of giraffe and has value of its own, in the sense that it add colour and shape to the effect of the celebration. *Ikwaka* (stylish and beautiful) Figure 20, gives information to the audience on different kinds of feelings. The hole on the metal gong shows a space to bring people together. The circle shape signifies movement of the *Nchaka* celebrants. Sword handle at left hand shows unity and peaceful purpose which the festival is known for. The sequences symbolizes brightness, joy and happiness at the end of the *Nchaka* festival. *Nkwade-ije* (performance & movement), figure 21, portrays the

symbolic importance of the gong which gives the gesture of a dignified body movement when the occasion is announced. At that point, celebrants demonstrate with their dane guns, spears and sword. This design and title documents this aspect of the display the festival. The drum stands as a musical instrument used by celebrants as support for the songs during procession. The advantage of this research is the transference of the cultural symbols used during the *Nchaka* festival on textiles for the identity of the celebrants. It provides a durable means of

preserving the cultural and historical identities of the people of Ogba. The use of Ogba *Nchaka* cultural symbols in textile design is an artistic initiative to preserve Ogba cultural history and historical events through textile design.

The fashion or dress style of celebrants during the *Nchaka* festival is shown in figure 22 to 28 below, alongside the style of handling the sword, spear by the men, fire band and hand fan by the women.

FINISHED DESIGNS MODELED BY SOME *NCHAKA* CELEBRANTS



Figure 22
An Ogbá High chief dressed with *Ikwaka* (stylish and beautiful) in the style of royalties during *Nchaka*. He is wearing a traditional shirt with beads round his neck, holding a sword in his left hand.



Figure 23
Urwo-egwu (Smile reaction) used for a skirt and shirt, a traditional *Nchaka* festival attire. The celebrant has modeled it with a spear in his left hand. This is the fashion of the elders during *Nchaka* celebration

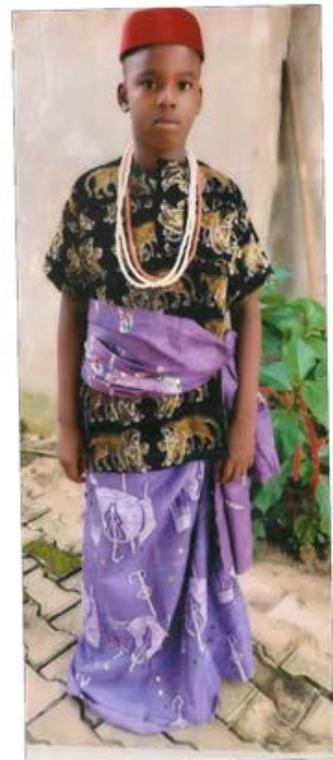


Figure 24
A young *Nchaka* celebrant dressed with *Akru-egwu* la *ogu* (central character), with a traditional shirt, *isi-egwu* and another fabric folded and tied round his waist. This is how the young boys dress during *Nchaka* celebration.



Figure 25
An elder dressed in *Nkwade-ije* (performance and movement) holding the spear in his right hand bear footed.



Figure 26
An elderly lady dressed with *Uru-egwu* (smile reaction) over a traditional white lace blouse and a shoulder cloth, holding the fire band in her left hand.



Figure 27
A lady dressed in *Iperiuka* (action conversation), over a traditional white lace blouse, holding the hand fan in her right hand. This is a model for the daughters in law during *Nchaka* celebration.

CONCLUSION

This research focused on the adaptation of symbolic cultural items from the *Nchaka* festival in Ogbaland for textile design of identity for celebrants. It was aimed at investigating and documenting the symbols used during the celebration on textiles. The symbols used extracted information on the field and focused attention on cultural materials in Omoku community in Ogba/Egbema/ Ndoni Local Government of Rivers state in Nigeria. This research identified the historical value of cultural symbols used during the *Nchaka* festival and provides a durable and mobile means of preserving, promoting and highlighting the cultural heritage and history of the Ogba people through textiles for sustainable identity and development.

Having studied the *Nchaka* festival symbols and reproduced them on textiles, it was accepted at the field that the adaptation of

symbolic cultural items on textiles would help to improve and highlight the traditional beliefs of the Ogba people. Instead of using different imported acculturated fabrics for celebrating *Nchaka* festival without any connection to their beliefs, value and norms, these patterns were accepted to be adapted on textiles to educate people locally and internationally about the history and culture of the Ogbaland in Rivers State in Nigeria.

This work makes people within the environment understand that their culture is important even to the nationally and internationally.

This study will open new ways to move design reflecting the artistic paraphernalia of the *Nchaka* festival for restoring and retaining the culture and history of Ogbaland. This study will create a new look in modern Nigerian textiles by showcasing Ogba culture in the collection of African textiles. It will

contribute to further research into the cultural heritage of the Ogba people. It shows that symbols of Ogba cultural festival are suitable for modern textiles and serve as a platform in documenting their culture for scholarly references. This study also served as an expository material to encourage other artists to adapt vestiges of African cultural festivals for dress design.

RESEARCH GUIDE QUESTIONS

In order to achieve the aim and objectives of the study, the following research guide questions were raised;

1. How did the *Nchaka* festival start in Ogbaland?
2. What are the symbolic activities or performances during the *Nchaka* festival?
3. Are there significant cultural items used during the *Nchaka* festival?
4. Do the Ogba people have customized textiles for the *Nchaka* festival?
5. Will it be a good idea for celebrants to have a customized textile design for use during the *Nchaka* festival?
6. Are there differences in the symbols of *Nchaka* festival and any other cultural symbol in the Southern part of Nigeria?
7. Does the new design show a good representation of the *Nchaka* festival?

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- [2] Interview with Chief Jackson Ojadi at Omoku (80 years) on 5th August, 2012. Interview with Elder Thomas Ordu (82 years) on 5th August, 2012.
- [3] Interview with Chief Olu (76 years) on 15th September, 2012.
- [4] Interview with His Eminence, Sir (Dr.) Chukumela Nnam Obi II Oba (Eze-Ogba) of Ogbaland at his palace (70 years) on 17th November, 2014
- [5] Interview session with HRH Eze A.O. Osoh, Eze-Ali Usomini of Ogbaland at Obrikom (72 years) on 28th November, 2014. Interview with Chief Chinyere Nwabali, the Ada-Eze I of Egbada (60 years) on 28th November, 2014.
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- [7] Interview with Queen Anasi Elizabeth Nwokocha at Okposi of Ogbaland (52 years) on 10th December, 2014. Interview with Queen Nwaeronma Beatrice Obi of Ogbaland (60 years) on 17th November, 2014.

[8] An interview with Queen Olori Jane Obi of Ogbaland (53 years) on 17th November, 2014

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Photo Gallery



Plate 7: Father-in-laws and daughter in-laws posed for picture immediate after *Nchaka* festival celebration. Groups picture collection from Chief Jackson Ojadi parlour. Ghana *Kente (Eketa)* and *pooh-pooh* cloth worn by all the celebrants. Photographs from Ijeoma collection.



Plate 8: *Nchaka* celebrants processing to the play ground on the 24th of November 2014. Photograph by Ijeoma



Plate 9: Chief Elder Jackson Ojadi dressed in *Arigidi* cloth, holding a sword in his left hand, with beads round his neck and a bowler hat. Photograph from Ijeoma's collection taken on the 5th of August 2012

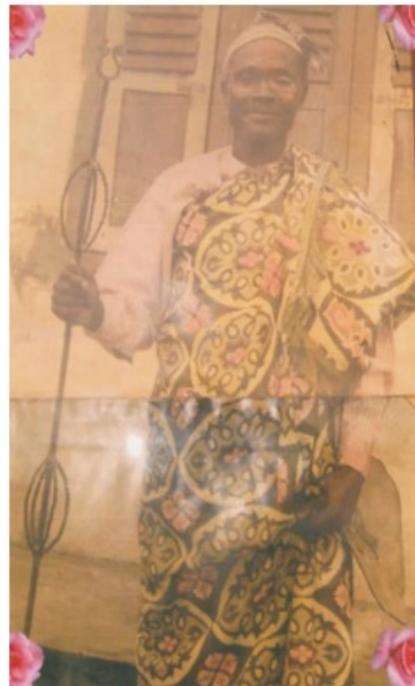


Plate 10: An *Nchaka* celebrant dressed in heavy *Arigidi* wrapper holding a spear in his right hand, dressed as an elder with woolen cap and decorated face. Photograph from Ijeoma's collection taken on the 5th of August 2012.



Plate 11: An elderly woman dressed up with *Arigidi* in the traditional fashion, tied round her chest and used as shoulder cloth and head tie. She is sitting down while other women are dancing around her.
Photograph by Kingdom, 18th November 2014