

REBRANDING AFRICA, RECLOTHING AFRICA: THE ROLE OF EMERGING  
DESIGNERS IN THE PRODUCTION OF AESTHETIC COSMOPOLITANISM IN LAGOS

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von

Adwoa Owusuaa Bobie

aus

Ghana

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Der Dekan, Prof. Dr. Ralph Ubl



To my support system:

Kwame, Papa and Barima.

May our lives be as colourful and vibrant as the Ankara cloth

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	VII
ABSTRACT.....	IX
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION TO THESIS.....	1
1.1 Problem Statement .....	8
1.2 Research Question.....	9
1.3 Relevance of Study.....	9
1.4 Area of Study .....	10
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW .....	13
2.0 Introduction .....	13
2.1 African Clothing as Seen Through the Colonial Gaze.....	14
2.2 The Loss Versus The Adaptive Theory of African Fashion .....	19
2.3 Introduction of Sewing.....	23
2.4 Conclusion.....	28
CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHOD AND ANALYSIS.....	31
3.0 Introduction .....	31
3.1 Accessing the Field .....	36
3.2 Selecting the Sample .....	39
3.3 Analysis of Data.....	48
3.4 Interpretation and Organisation of Data.....	52
3.5 Definition of Fashion .....	54
3.6 Key Concept: Aesthetic Cosmopolitanism .....	55
CHAPTER FOUR: LOOKING GOOD IS GOOD BUSINESS.....	73
4.0 Introduction .....	73
4.1 The Social Context of Lagos Fashion .....	74

4.1.1 You Are Addressed Based on How You Are Dressed .....	77
4.1.2 We Are <i>Aso Ebi</i> People .....	80
4.1.3 Packaging: Original or Good Copy .....	88
4.2 Political Interventions .....	91
4.3 Economic Contingencies.....	97
4.4 Conclusion.....	101
CHAPTER FIVE: FROM THE “MAMA IN THE GARAGE” TO THE DESIGNER ...	103
5.0 Introduction .....	103
5.1 Professional Background.....	105
5.1.1 Education.....	106
5.1.2 Skills Training .....	116
5.2 Identity Construction.....	127
5.3 Conclusion.....	140
CHAPTER SIX: CREATING COSMOPOLITAN FASHION.....	143
6.0 Introduction .....	143
6.1 Fabric Trends in Contemporary Lagos Fashion.....	148
6.2 Contemporary Aesthetic Fashion Designs .....	170
6.3 Conclusion.....	191
CHAPTER SEVEN: MEETING THE COSMOPOLITAN CONSUMERS’ NEEDS: DIVERSIFICATION OF FASHION PRODUCTION.....	193
7.0 Introduction .....	193
7.1 Changing Dynamics of Class Structure and Consumer Demands .....	194
7.2 Diversification of Production Lines .....	199
7.3 Diversification in Target Market.....	216
7.4 Conclusion.....	227
CHAPTER EIGHT PUTTING IN THE MECHANICS: STANDARDISATION AND STRUCTURE IN FASHION PRODUCTION .....	231
8.0 Introduction .....	231

8.1 Branding .....	236
8.2 Labour Resource .....	241
8.3 Workspaces .....	251
8.4 Equipment .....	255
8.5 Advertising .....	258
8.6 Building An Ecosystem of Fashion Industry .....	265
8.6.1 Business Networking .....	266
8.6.2 Media .....	272
8.6.3 Related Professions.....	276
8.7 Conclusion.....	279
CHAPTER NINE: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION.....	281
REFERENCES .....	293
APPENDIX A: THE LAGOS FASHION AND DESIGN WEEK, 2017 .....	307

## LIST OF TABLES AND FIGURES

Figure 4.1: <i>Aso ebi</i> at a Wedding Celebration.....	86
Figure 5.1: The Designer Versus the Tailor.....	133
Figure 6.1: Embellished or beaded <i>Aso eke</i> .....	151
Figure 6.2: <i>Akwete</i> cloth .....	153
Figure 6.3: Varieties of <i>Adire</i> .....	157
Figure 6.4: Varieties of <i>Ankara</i> cloth .....	162
Figure 6.5: Varieties of lace fabric .....	166
Figure 6.6: Couple in <i>Aso eke</i> .....	176
Figure 6.7: Lace Fabric in Contemporary Kaba and Slit.....	177
Figure 6.8: <i>Aso eke</i> Short Gown .....	178
Figure 6.9: <i>Ankara</i> in Short Gown.....	179
Figure 6.10: Kaftan Design.....	182
Figure 6.11: A Mix of Two-pieces Agbada with English suit.....	189
Figure 7.1: Stock of Ready-to-wear Clothes.....	204
Figure 7.2: Plus Size Model in Makioba Dress .....	211
Figure 7.3: Bespoke three-pieces suit .....	214
Figure 7.4: Stock of Women Clothes with Men Ready-to-wear Shirt on Mannequin .....	218
Figure 7.5: Showroom of Dupe, boy clothe.....	222
Figure 7.6: Showroom of Dupe, girl dress.....	223
Table 7.1: Average prices of clothes among designers of the study.....	226

Figure 8.1: Illustration of design by respondent .....	245
Figure 8.2: Drafted Pattern for Outfit .....	246
Figure 8.3: Part of Workshop of Babs .....	251
Figure 8.4: Machine for Making Boxers.....	256
Figure 8.5: Adjustable Computerised Machine .....	256
Figure 8.6: Embellishing Machine.....	257



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## ABSTRACT

In the last decade, African fashion has become increasingly recognised globally. Not only are Western designers such as Stella McCartney, Vivienne Westwood and Jean Paul Gaultier incorporating African fashion into their designs, but more importantly, African fashion designers are making their presence felt globally. The creativity, innovation and vibrant designs that characterise the work of contemporary designers have paid off; cities like Lagos, Accra, Nairobi, Marrakesh, and Johannesburg burst with fashion innovations that are attracting global audience. A crop of emerging designers has been identified as the driving force behind the innovation and creativity. While studies either focus on the creative works of fashion production or the emerging designers behind the production, this study seeks to explore the connection between the emerging designers and their works: the rise of contemporary designers from Africa who are innovatively producing fashion that cuts across geographical boundaries without losing its indigenous distinctiveness. Contemporary fashion from Africa reflects aesthetic cosmopolitanism (Regev, 2009); the combination of indigenous cultural elements with foreign influence to produce innovative fashion that speaks to the cosmopolitan nature of world societies.

Engaging in a qualitative research on Nigerian fashion industry (Lagos), the study shares emerging fashion designers' experience of negotiating global influence with local culture to produce fashion that are both indigenous and internationally appealing. Designers' first step to aesthetic cosmopolitanism is their dual fashion background (local and international training) which position them at intersection of two or more cultures, offering them varied range of cultural possibilities to draw on when designing. They are conscious of their position as cultural intermediaries between the local and the global and in innovative ways, they are fusing the two spaces in their work to produce aesthetic cosmopolitanism fashion. Fashion designers are adopting skills and technologies from the global fashion industry, merging them with local elements and expertise to professionalise the craft of fashion production. This professionalism is seen through their cosmopolitan designs, the diversification of production, and standardisation of production structures.



# CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION TO THESIS

“For Nigeria, it is [a] fashion conscious society and I will not say seemingly just because of the economic situation, Nigerians are embracing made in Nigeria more, I think the appetite for good fashion is growing too.”

(Chris, a participant)

Fashion has always been an integral part of culture in most African societies. Though there have been several debates on the nature of clothing and style of some African societies in comparison to Western societies, Eitcher (1995) argues that, contextually, African societies have always been fashionable. Clothes evolve through designs and trends amidst its slowness, causing many to criticise the rapid change feature inherent in African fashion. The Yoruba people of the state of Lagos have a long history of cloth making, trade in cloth and fashion which influenced their foreign trades and contacts (Byfield, 1997). During major political and economic events of the state and the country, such as, Euro-African trade, colonisation, struggle for independence and independence, fashion was used as a tool of communication and identification, signifying an era of boost or crisis, indigenisation or foreign influence, political stability or otherwise (Byfield, 2004; Renne, 2004; Oyeniya, 2012). Contemporary fashion in Nigeria is a careful hybridisation of cultural, social, political, and economic history and present condition of the country in relation to identity construction pertaining to individuals and the entire nation. There is a rise in the production of fashion in Nigeria and other African countries that has drawn the world’s attention to the enormous culture, mixed with modern creativity to produce what can be described as aesthetic cosmopolitanism fashion (Regev, 2007). Simply put, fashion that fuses foreign influence with local cultural elements, hybridizing cultures in innovative ways that appeals to a broader audience other than just local consumers. The innovativeness of the current fashion phenomenon has raised several questions about fashion production in contemporary times. While most of the questions have focused on the aesthetic works itself (Rovine, 2015), others discuss some of the emerging designers who are making waves in the industry (Faber, 2010; Jennings, 2011). This study is interested in exploring the

connection between the “emerging”<sup>1</sup> designers and their works: the rise of contemporary designers from Africa who are innovatively producing fashion that cuts across geographical boundaries without losing its indigenous distinctiveness, thus, the role of emerging designers in producing aesthetic cosmopolitan fashion in Lagos, Nigeria.

The background to fashion in Africa has been variously discussed over the years from the different foreign accounts written by missionaries, travellers, colonial officials and recently, academic authors. Foreign contacts through trade and later colonisation significantly altered fashion in most colonial societies, however, this does not undermine the extent to which indigenous agency played a vital role in the various changes in clothing. Even in societies where indigenes were perceived as ‘naked’ (nakedness or nudity were based on Eurocentric perspectives), the introduction of clothing was not a one-way imposition of foreign clothes on indigenes. Rather, Comaroff and Comaroff (1997) argue that there was a dialectical construction of clothing introduced by the West in Southern Africa societies, where indigenes were influenced by the colonial officials’ clothing and vice versa. Indigenes adapted the clothing to suit their fashion sense and taste while some colonial officials were reported to have, at a period, combined their foreign clothes with indigenous cultural elements or worn clothes that had been adapted by the locals. Fashion, no matter the pace of change in some societies, is part of human existence, an essential method of identifying personhood and community. Goody and Goody (1996) explain that, even in less clothed societies like the Tallensi of northern Ghana, people are conscious of their appearance and make efforts to consistently use new materials (leaves and skins) for the clothing as a means of staying decent and fashionable. Thus, fashion which thrives on change in clothing and style (Seeling, 1999) can be found even in less exposed societies and not only in advanced societies.

The growth of fashion and fashion designing has recently become a topical issue in the ongoing debates on growth and development in Africa. The upsurge of creativity in the fashion industry has drawn the attention of global fashion houses such as Hermes (Alderman, 2012) and academics (Rovine, 2010) who have expressed awe and love for the works of new, emerging African designers (Jennings, 2011). Fashion works created from the continent appeals to a global audience who crave for style and innovation while speaking to African culture and heritage. The combination of foreign fashion arts with indigenous culture is what differentiates

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<sup>1</sup> Chapter five gives an explanation to the use of the word “emerging designers, juxtaposing them to the traditional seamstress and tailors and the first generation of designers in Africa.

and at the same time gives fashion from Africa the creativity edge in global fashion industry. Contemporary society is argued to be cosmopolitan society (Beck, 2008), that is the interconnection of various countries and societies to form transnational and international non-state characters which go beyond individual states or nations. Thus, there is fluid interaction of information, humans and goods in the purpose of mitigating world risks which are universal and not just local, such as terrorism and climate change (ibid). Unlike globalisation that focuses more on economic and political transnational transactions, cosmopolitization of contemporary societies as postulated by Beck (2008) allows for the proliferation of multiple cultures across different national boundaries. It is based on this premise that Hannerz (2006) argues that cosmopolitanism addresses both political and cultural factors. While Beck's works have focused more on the political cosmopolitization of global societies, Regev (2007), a sociologist at the Open University of Israel, has extended the theory to include cultural cosmopolitization. Regev's interest in cultural studies and popular music led him to study the cultural fusion that undergirds the Indian movie industry and the Spanish pop music industry. Under the study, he introduced the term aesthetic cosmopolitanism, a concept that explains the merging or fusion of foreign cultural elements with local cultural elements to produce innovative ethno-national culture. Thus, local cultural arts are no more strictly indigenously produced but a combination of foreign cultures with indigenous arts. This sets the aesthetics beyond local boundaries while not losing local agency in creation. Contemporary societies are mixed societies, that is, societies that draw in people from various backgrounds with different experiences. Therefore, consumption is more diverse and at the same time, inclusive to reflect such diversity. This principle guides most of current aesthetic works, including fashion, music and movies. Therefore, the current fashion development in some African countries is no exception to the production of aesthetic cosmopolitan fashion.

Within the framework of aesthetic cosmopolitanism, we are witnessing a crop of new designers who understand the changes of social, political and economic order of contemporary times and therefore, they are engaged in fashion production that reflects the image of the change. Emerging designers are adding value to fashion production, propelling the competitive development of fashion from Africa on global platforms. The study started out with a simple curiosity of knowing what these emerging designers are doing differently from the traditional tailors and seamstresses who have long been the producers of clothes and fashion in Africa. I was interested in the sudden hype of fashion from Africa, by African designers and how the locals are responding to the development. While this period is not the first-time in African

fashion history that local creativity and innovativeness has gained international recognition (the first generation of trained fashion designers made a significant mark on the global scene due to the timing of their venture and their ideology for production) (Loughran, 2009; Jennings, 2011), the novelty of the current situation lies in the number of designers involved, the scale of production and the innovativeness of their work that comes from the hybridity of foreignness with indigenous (Faber, 2010; Jennings, 2016).

While these designers can be found in various cities in Africa, Lagos stands out as an iconic city for fashion in Africa (Azieb Pool, 2016). Lagos, the economic capital of Nigeria has a long history of cosmopolitanism in fashion through trade and appropriation. The production of cloth- *aso eke* and *adire* - created trading relations between the people of Lagos and other neighbouring West African societies. While they export these two fabrics, they import foreign fabrics and fashion designs from their trading counterparts from Senegal, and Benin (Byfield, 1997). The Afro-European trade also ushered in textile trade from the Dutch and the English, which till date is an integral part of Nigerian fashion. Like many other African societies, Nigerians influenced the production of the Western wax print in terms of quality, design, and price (Steiner, 1985; Gott, 2009; Axelson, 2012). The wax print cloth is currently considered an indigenous cloth in many African societies including Nigeria through years of appropriation and authentication (Eitcher, 1995). The struggle for independence and its aftermath ushered in strong nationalist stance on clothing as a symbol of liberation from colonial rule and patriotism to the new country. Both elite and non-elites took to indigenous clothing, this time including the wax print cloth and the further appropriation of lace fabric from some European countries (Plankersteiner and Adediran, 2010; Oyeniyi, 2012). Lagos, at this period was the nation's capital and therefore accommodated large number of both internal and external migrants who migrated in search of better job opportunities. Amidst the economic motive of migration, most people, especially internal migrants adopted the traditional clothing styles of the Yoruba who are the indigenes of Lagos. The *iro* and *buba* for the women and the *buba* and *sokoto* for the men were the commonly worn clothes, while *agbada* for the men was reserved for special occasions. The *bubuu* and *kaftan* style of clothes was at this time adapted from neighbouring countries like Senegal and was integral to the fashion of Nigeria (Oyeniyi, 2012). Nigeria's openness to foreign fashion elements was further manifested during the economic crisis of the last three decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. To aid their declining economic status, Nigerians took to the wearing of foreign second-hand clothes that started off, initially, as a form of donation and later a full-blown economic venture. Second-hand clothing altered, in a significant way, the

fashion taste of Nigerians who then became exposed to global fashion trends and designs. When trade liberalisation was introduced under the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP), the foreign fashion market was fully established. People imported both new and second-hand clothes from European, American and this time Asian countries, creating a wider market for foreign appropriation of fashion (Muhammed, 2018). There have been various policies by subsequent governments from the SAP period to promote indigenous clothes and the use of local and appropriated cloths. However, most of the interventions have been short lived due to unfavourable economic conditions of the country which makes second-hand clothing an affordable alternative to locally produced clothes and the citizens' exposure to foreign fashion consumption. Nonetheless, Nigerians have always maintained a culture of fashion premised on indigenisation especially for traditional and cultural events. Foreign clothes can take on the regular, everyday fashion, however, with social and cultural events such as marriage or funeral, local fabrics and local designers are preferred to foreign clothes. Thus, for a long period, seamstresses and tailors have focused on producing bespoke clothes that best fit these social and cultural events, leaving the domain of the regular wear to foreign clothes. Conventionally, the elderly patronise locally produced clothes more than the youth even on regular days. The challenge has been to get the youth to the patronage of locally produced clothes.

The turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century has witnessed a change in clothes production in Nigeria and as the opening quote suggests, there is a gradual shift by locals, both young and old, in the acceptance of locally produced clothes, this time not just for social and cultural events but for regular functional wears. While there have been government policies such as the Monday and Wednesday “wear made in Nigeria” that has fuelled people’s interest in locally produced fashion, this development is argued to be facilitated also by the crop of new designers who understand the fashion taste of their local consumers (and foreign consumers as well) and produce clothes which is a hybrid of the foreign and the local (Jennings, 2011). The study discovered that, these emerging designers can be qualitatively distinguished from the traditional producers – seamstress and tailors – and the first generation of African designers through their educational background and training and features that directly influence their creativity and service delivery, making them globally competitive producers. Their education and training background open them up to foreign, current and innovative fashion which is combined with local cultural elements of clothes. Thus, they are simultaneously positioned at the interception of cultures – local and foreign – creatively interacting these cultures to produce their work (Regev, 2007).

Designers in Lagos are aware of the on-going interconnectivity of world societies and how fashion is informed through the connections, therefore, they have engaged in education and training that insert them into the global space of the art of designing while carrying along their local culture of fashion and clothing. As most are university graduates, respondents express their exposure to foreign cultures through knowledge acquisition and personal interaction with colleagues from different states and ethnic backgrounds within the country and foreigners. The integrative nature of university campus life and the knowledge acquired on different cultures become designers' basis of understanding the interrelatedness of their society. The interesting feature about the designers who make up this study is their dual professional training in clothe making and fashion designing. All respondents have Nigerian as well as foreign – United States, United Kingdom, France and India – training in the production of clothing. This phenomenon is intriguing considering the purely local background of seamstresses and tailors and the purely Western background of foremost designers (Jennings, 2011). The combination of both training backgrounds by the designers give reasons to their appreciation of contemporary social order of integration which is reflected in the daily lifestyle of most people across the world. The dual training background also ensures their local and foreign exposure to wider consumers as well as industry competitiveness. Considering the clothing and fashion history of Nigerians over the years –exposure to foreign fashion taste through trade and consumption– their sense of fashion has been significantly shaped by both the local and foreign fashion. Emerging designers are faced with competition by both locals who import foreign clothes and multi-national clothing chains that have established outlets in some local cities, especially, Lagos on the one side, and the threat of local tailors and seamstresses who have, over the years been the main producers of local fashion. Therefore, to penetrate and sustain a credible market, emerging designers need to create a market niche that is different from foreign competitors and the already established local producers. Thus, their dual training background gives them experience in two or more cultures, merging the cultural experiences to influence their work to offer consumers a mix of their foreign exposure and their locality. The dual training also gives designers upper leverage on their competitors; foreign multinationals are inexperienced in the local fashion culture, while traditional producers lack the foreign insight and experience that consumers have been exposed to over the years. Emerging designers' ability in “balancing contemporary fashion's pursuit of the new with an appreciation of the ideals of beauty and adornment that are deeply rooted in Africa's cultural and social consciousness” (Jennings, 2011:8) is their hallmark of distinction.

The study therefore further describes how the designers apply their training in the production of contemporary fashion in Lagos, Nigeria. Thus, subsequent chapters discuss broad themes of Cosmopolitan Fashion- that is, the combination of foreign and local experiences in producing fashion styles and trends. The use of local fabrics for foreign designs and vice versa is the reigning trend of fashion among the designers. In the broad spectrum of foreign and local combination, there are individual designer styles and permutations that make each designer unique. The rising use of locally produced and appropriated fabrics speaks to indigenisation of fashion, at the same time some of these fabrics are mostly designed in western fashion styles. In situations where western or foreign fabrics are used, the design is mostly locally styled.

Another theme that came up is the Diversification of fashion production. Emerging designers are combining local and foreign fashion sales and marketing strategies that offer consumers convenience and uniqueness in fashion consumption. From opening retail outlets at convenient places to producing for specific body physique, social and economic targets and producing on ready-to-wear basis, designers are offering consumers convenience and accessible market as offered by foreign fashion houses. Amidst these foreign strategies, designers are conscious of not “over producing” to saturate the market with singular design. Nigerian fashion thrives on uniqueness, therefore, there should be a balance between availability and uniqueness. The last chapter of analysis discusses some structural changes in fashion production. This chapter takes on the foreign practical and some non-practical structures that have been infused with local structures of clothes production in contemporary times. The establishment of division of labour in the production functionaries in most firms is a new phenomenon that ensures effectiveness and quality in delivery. This has given rise to establishing fashion schools that provide training in specific skills which are all employable. Other professions have sprung up around the industry and this has given impetus to the development of the sector. Professions such as fashion media, blogging, styling, and photography. Though media and photography are long established industries, there is a convergence of these professions with the fashion industry, a feature that is lifting the image of fashion. Fashion blogging, modelling agency and styling are relatively new professions directly linked to the fashion industry. Thus, there is a budding fashion industry that is well structured in their production to serve consumers who are well exposed and integrated.

## 1.1 Problem Statement

Over the years, Africa's place in global fashion has been obscured under the guise of "exotic inspiration" for the western societies. Contacts with Europeans have produced different narratives that point to the passive nature of African fashion with little or no regard to local agency and creativity. From being characterised as "primitive", "traditional" and "static" to being the source of Western inspiration, clothing produced in Africa suffers from less fashion recognition and acceptance. Further, not just the clothes produced are unacknowledged but local clothes producers do not attract recognisable respect in fashion circles. Their training system and quality of their work have been widely criticised by both local and international observers (Langevang and Gough, 2012; Oyeniyi, 2012). Pioneer African designers, with European background, who emerged in the 1960s amidst the struggle for independence impacted the image of African fashion less than expected (Klopper, 2000). Their inward-looking strategy of producing "African styles" with "African fabric" as a means of creating or emphasising the new African identity plunged their work deeper into the "traditional", "primitive" discourse surrounding clothes in Africa (ibid). However, the latter part of the 1990s and the 21<sup>st</sup> century has witnessed changing narrative on African fashion on its creativity and innovation (Mendy-Ougoundou, 2002; Menks, 2012; Obeng-Odoom, 2014). This spin on Africa fashion discourse has two central themes: the rise of new designers and the creative fashion works. Some scholars have attributed the on-going development in the fashion industry to the rise of new designers who are exposed to both the international fashion market and the local communities equipping them to produce creative and competitive designs (Faber, 2010; Jennings, 2011; Jennings, 2015). Their works acknowledge the complexities of fashioning modern national culture, which includes not just local culture, but a wider range of 'other' world cultures that have contributed to the current African fashion developments. Their work is globally competitive and representative, staking them conspicuously against world renowned fashion designers (Mendy-Ougoundou, 2002).

Therefore, it warrants that fashion thrives on the back of change, change driven by responsive fashion designers who are open to changing local and international ideas. The current designers' response to cultural and economic change of current societies, including the many expanding African cities in which they work, is their source of creativity and innovation. However, there is limited research on the on-going developments in the African fashion industry especially, the links between the two themes: designers and their creative works. Authors such as Faber, (2010), Rovine (2010) Jennings (2015), Azieb Pool (2016), Gott,

Loughran, Quick and Rabine (2017) have worked on various aspects of the developments, however, none provide a comprehensive, in-depth, contextual analysis of the situation. This study delves into the practical and non-practical aspects of the development of the Lagos fashion industry, connecting the themes of “emerging designers” and the “creativity of their work” in a context of cosmopolitanism in artistic work of fashion. The non-practical aspect reviews the background and the social context of the designers and how these features translate into the practical production of fashion. Adopting Regev’s (2007) concept of aesthetic cosmopolitanism as the major framework for analysis, the study gives an in-depth, and holistic outlook of contemporary fashion development in Africa in the fashion renowned city of Lagos, Nigeria.

## **1.2 Research Question**

The rising discourse on fashion in Africa and Africa’s emerging designers has attracted audience around the world due to designers’ ability to create styles that resonate with wider global audience. The cosmopolitanism outlook of current fashion aesthetics has opened the industry to global competition and recognition. The core of this creativity is the dual representation of the art of fashion, that is, foreign adaptations, merged with indigenous culture and art elements. Thus, though fashion from Africa continue to carry its indigenous roots of either fabric or style, designs are a mix of different contemporary seasonal designs cross the globe. According to Regev (2007), in creating aesthetic cosmopolitanism, producers’ ability to intersect two or more fields of cultural production is the source of innovation and change. Therefore, in the case of this study, I am interested in “how the designers are combining the influence of the global fashion with the local culture to produce aesthetic cosmopolitan fashion”

## **1.3 Relevance of Study**

The recent conversation on the surge in Africa’s economic, social and political spheres throws light on the miraculous recovery after more than two decades of stagnation and possible deterioration. Most works on the African economic recovery concentrates on the service industry (banking and telecommunication), the use of technology for business and to some extent, agriculture (Robertson, Mhango and Moran, 2012). Non-traditional economic sector like the art industry has been largely ignored in the conversation. However, some studies show the diversifying nature of the recent economic development, extending progress beyond the

traditional natural resource economy (The Nielsen Company, 2011; Africa Economic Outlook, 2015). Fashion is a striving force that is gradually boosting the economy of some countries while fashioning a new cosmopolitan identity for the people. While we are quick to acknowledge the impact of growth in traditional economic indicators, little is known about how growth in non-traditional economic activities such as fashion can significantly contribute to the growth of contemporary society. Therefore, studying aesthetic cosmopolitanism fashion helps to gain insight into the role of fashion in the social production of change.

Engaging in systematic empirical analysis of the developments of the fashion industry adds impetus to the body of knowledge surrounding the current interlocutor on Africa rising. The fashion industry brings forth both an economic and cultural dimension to the conversation and how both features can directly influence each other in the development of a country. The study is an act of knowledge production which will produce scientific knowledge on fashion, social change and cosmopolitanism therefore, it will serve as an academic reference for future works on the impact of aesthetics and cultural development in developing cities in the fast merging global cities and the implications of cultural openness for both local and foreign consumption.

#### **1.4 Area of Study**

Lagos, a state in Nigeria is the area of this study. Lagos is the biggest economic city as well as one of the most populous cities in Nigeria. The country has over the years been known for its oil rich resource, which has been their main economic resource. However, recent studies show expansion and diversification as “over the last decade, Nigeria’s significant GDP growth has mainly been due to manufacturing, agriculture, and services” (The Nielsen Company, 2011). The 2015 African Economic outlook indicates that “Nigeria’s growth of 6.3% came mainly from non-oil sectors showing that the economy is diversifying” (Africa Economic Outlook, 2015). This diversification of the economy has found recourse in the fashion industry. Azieb-Pool (2016) marks Lagos as one of the prominent fashion cities on the continent among others such as Nairobi and Marrakech.

The Nigerian fashion industry is offering a lot to both the African and international fashion platforms in recent years. In 2012, the industry is said to have contributed 45% of the earnings generated from the nation’s creative industries, surpassing other industries like music and film (LFDW, 2016:6). Such records and more led Lagos to be adjudged as the world’s fourth largest fashion city by the February 2014 edition of Highlife (Obeng-Odoom, 2014). Designers such

as Bayo Adegbe and Duro Oluwo are among renowned Nigerian designers whose works are being celebrated world over (Weaver, 2012). The hybridity of local concepts with international trendy designs gives their work a unique African origin as well as international appeal, which reflects the taste of the Nigerian middle class. The Lagos Fashion Week is one of the biggest fashion events on the continent, drawing spectators and fashion lovers from all over the world. Weaver shares the sentiments of Victoria Rovine, who witnessed the Lagos Fashion Week and “compares the exuberant audiences at Nigerian fashion shows to spectators at sport events” (Weaver, 2012:22). The display of creativity at the event leaves the audience in awe.

The current display of fashion is not a sudden event but the manifestation of a deep rooted cultural and social phenomenon among the Yoruba inhabitants of Lagos. One fundamental expression of a person’s social status in Lagos and to a larger extent Nigeria, is through clothing. Nigeria is noted for its rich clothe culture; clothes have always played a crucial role in society structure and value system. Ponyor’s (1980) study of the use of textiles among the Owo people of Nigeria revealed that “traditional dress and textiles in Owo, Nigeria, are significant for their roles as markers of social and political rank, indicators of ritual importance, and as symbols of wealth and prestige” (Poynor, 1980:47). In the Nigerian society, premium is placed on a person’s appearance, his or her adornment, as they believe that one’s appearance defines his or her personality. This is expressed in a Yoruba adage “*aso la nki, ki a to ki eniyan*” meaning “it is the cloth we should greet before greeting the wearer” and “*eniyan lasoo mi*” that is, “people are my cloth” (Idowu, 2010:35). Cloth is personified; the person embodying the cloth is represented by the cloth. One is addressed per his or her appearance therefore, your appearance will determine how people will treat you. This social value and other contemporary exposure to continental and international fashion events have opened the city of Lagos to a broader spectrum of fashion creativity which is the fundamental interest of this study. Therefore, Lagos has the cultural and social background that helps to understand fashion and the current development sweeping across the industry on the African continent.

The city of Lagos has witnessed the emergence of contemporary designers whose craft and innovation are putting the city on the global platform of fashion (Azieb-Pool, 2017). Lagos is marked as one of the prominent fashion cities in Africa, an achievement driven purposely by contemporary designers. These designers form the core respondents of this study and a chapter of the analyses is dedicated to identifying them as the cultural producers of fashion.



## CHAPTER TWO

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### 2.0 Introduction

African fashion (clothes and styles) has largely been described from a Eurocentric perspective. Beginning with discourse on its primitiveness or backwardness, it was later celebrated as an exotic inspiration to the West and in more recent times, the East. Thus, from the “lost theory” (Rovine, 2010) of Africans’ rejection of their own for the adoption of the ‘civilising’ fashions of the West, it was at best perceived as “exotic” inspiration to designers in both mimetic or reproductive terms (Eitcher, 1995; Loughran, 2009; Rovine 2009). The latter part of the 1990s and early twenty-first century has witnessed a remarkable change in Africa’s fashion presence on the global market. African fashion is gaining prominence as an industry, emerging from international obscurity to global prominence (Rovine, 2010; Jennings 2011). New African designers have been identified as the key propellers of the current fashion developments (Mendy-Ongoundou, 2002; Jennings 2011; Austin, 2012; Menks, 2012). These new designers are believed to be different from the first generation of African designers as well as the traditional seamstresses and tailors who have been behind fashion production since the introduction of sewing into Africa by Europeans (Loughran, 2009; Jennings, 2011). The new designers and their works are changing the global pessimistic discourse on African fashion (Rovine, 2009; Rovine, 2010) and the downgrading of fashion production on the continent (Langevang and Gough, 2012; Ogunduyeli et al., 2017) that has marred African fashion for years. Emerging in the era of late modernity where social order is characterised by cosmopolitanism, the designers are capitalising on the connectedness of countries and cultures, fusing the global with the local to produce works which reflect aesthetic cosmopolitanism (Regev, 2007).

Fashion in Africa has been under attack on many fronts. African fashion has been reviled as either ‘primitive’ (used synonymously with traditional, and static,) or a ‘loss’ in global fashion. Describing African fashion as traditional or primitive is to position it as the “other” to Western clothing and fashion which is deemed modern. Fashion as pertains in the West has “one of its greatest characteristics [as] change(s). No sooner is something 'in fashion' than it is 'out of fashion' again” (Seeling, 1999 cited in Rovine, 2009: 50). Thus, change is constant and rapid in fashion. Juxtaposing this to the account presented by Lyndsey on Orma girls, who “grow up wearing flip-flops, not heels. Their fashion is the same every season: colourful robes that billow

with the breeze and shield virtually every bit of flesh” (Lacey, 2003: para.6), it portrays African clothes and styles as far removed from fashion and rather as costumes (Loughran, 2009). Neissen (2003), on the other hand, believes determining something as fashion is politically motivated. Thus, “who has, and who does not have fashion is politically determined, a function of power relations.” (Neissen, 2003: 245). Such power display is inherent in accounts of Africa by Europeans and has been from as far back as the initial contact between the two regions.

## **2.1 African Clothing as Seen Through the Colonial Gaze**

Anthropologically, travellers (explorers and missionaries) and scientific accounts of indigenes in the pre-colonial and colonial periods were largely a project designed to show difference and the inferiority of the periphery as against the metropole. In spite of the fact that the trading relations that preceded colonialism included cloth as a vital commodity (Steiner, 1985), accounts of colonial officials often depicted indigenes in a state of nakedness and linked this unclothed characteristic to their savagery and uncivilised nature. Thus, “nakedness defined the Western encounter with colonial-and potential colonial-spaces” (Levine, 2008:192). British colonies in Africa, became the focal point of discourse on nudity, nakedness and clothing as a basis for measuring civility, morality and to some extent humanity. Thus, Africans were portrayed through anthropometric images as naked savages who lacked morality and had not encountered civility due to their nakedness. According to Levine (2008), this notion was expressed through Christian doctrine and scientific exploration of the time. The “investigation of unclothedness in a British context must, however, begin with Christianity, which has had much to say on the topic of the unclothed body” (Levine, 2008: 191). Accounts of Christian missionaries in Africa highlight the morally corrupted nature of Africans who unashamedly walk about naked without any form of clothing. The missionaries linked their nakedness to paganism and therefore, to ensure their deliverance and subsequent conversion, they must be clothed. This missionary narrative was supported firmly by the central empire which was religiously built on similar principles and in most cases supported the work of the missionaries. Thus, just as colonial education was centred on the three “r”s (reading, writing and arithmetic) so was Christian mission centred on three “c”s; Christianity, civilisation and clothing (Levine, 2008).

In the latter part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the development of physiognomy and phrenology as scientific fields gave impetus to the discourse of the colonial subjects’ nakedness as scientists used naked colonial subjects to further their scientific research on humans. The naked African

was to be a scientific experiment in determining the human nature of the colonial subjects vis a vis the colonial masters. Anthropometric photographs of the locals, it was believed, gave a better image of their being than written descriptions of official accounts. In the case of T. H. Huxley, he ordered for the naked photos of locals from governors of the colonies as basis for his scientific data for a research project in which he was engaged (Levine, 2008). While some governors responded, others were hesitant or refused because the locals would not participate in taking the photos. The locals' refusal was interpreted as further proof of their uncivilised nature which made them unappreciative of the advancement of science. The narrative on nakedness in British colonial territories was a political tool used by officials to validate their exploitation of the locals in the name of civilisation. Pictures of naked locals filled scientific halls and museums as some locals were physically taken to European museums for display, a very good case in point being Sarah Baartman (Levine, 2008). Sarah Baartman was a South African (from the Khoikhoi ethnic group) who was brought to Europe to be exhibited in museums and circuses as an oddity due to her large buttocks.

In the case of colonial Muslim societies where people were mostly clothed, the assumption then became being overly clothed, which again connoted uncivility. Instead of the colonial masters appreciating such societies, which in their narrative would qualify for the civilised and advanced, they were constantly criticised. According to Levine (2008:197) women in "Islamic regions were often more clothed even than the colonisers. In such instances, unclothedness did rather different work, but still resonated with the power of the colonial gaze." Within the colonial gaze, the difference in religion that resulted in being overly clothed underscores their own nakedness narrative. These Muslim societies were still perceived as pagans who needed to be properly clothed through conversion to Christianity. It was presumed that it was only by being Christian and dressing as the European that one could be considered to be civilised and closer to the superior human, the European. Being unclothed put the human closer to the earth and nature and reflected the fact that they were of a lesser category within the human race. Being overly clothed was also problematic. Essentially, it was assumed that both groups needed the intervention of Europeans (Levine, 2008).

Goody and Goody (1996) give a contextual analysis of two groups in the northern part of Ghana, showing the role of clothing in these respective societies. The LoDagaa society use limited cloth in their daily functions while the Gonja are well into clothing and fashion. They further revealed that among the LoDagaa where the use of cloth was limited, there was the use of leaves and other materials as a cover for the private parts of the body such as the genitals.

According to this study, the limited use of cloth within this society did not connote nakedness but rather indicated the existence of a structured system that portrayed sexuality and age differences. Children, before puberty, could roam around naked but from puberty onwards, different clothing were socially prescribed to be worn based on sex and age. In general, one was required to dress neatly by changing the leaf clothing frequently. Cloth, however, featured prominently during funerals where prominent individuals who had died were well adorned in fine clothes to show respect and prestige. Thus, shrouds were used regularly for funeral rites. So, from this study it emerged that though the LoDagaa used limited amounts of cloth for covering, the accumulation of cloth was a marker of wealth. However, in some cases, the wearing of cloth among the LoDagaa for daily functions, especially foreign cloths since they were not weavers, implied “foreign luxury, betrayal of local roots” (Goody and Goody, 1996:73).

The Gonja people, on the other hand, were well exposed to cloth, long before the inception of European trade because they traded with Islamic traders before their subsequent conversion to Islam. As an Islamic state, they would fit into the colonial gaze of overly dressed societies because, as Muslims, their tradition and religion are intertwined. Clothing in Gonja also served the same sexual and transitional purposes as in the LoDagaa society. In a more elaborate and functional form, the Gonjas fashioned their society through wearing of clothes which they wove themselves or acquired through trade with the Southern part of Ghana. The Gonjas wove cloth (Gbanya wadza) and therefore wore cloth before European trade that brought in manufactured cotton cloth (Goody and Goody, 1996). At the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, both the woven cloth and the European manufactured cloth were worn by the Gonja. During their major festive seasons like Damba, individuals displayed their acquired new cloth regardless of social status. Enskinment of chiefs is also marked with the wearing of woven cloth by the incumbent. Among the Gonja, white shrouds are also used in funeral rites as among the LoDagaa. In both societies, Goody and Goody (1996) show the significance of covering the body using cloth or other materials. Nakedness is, therefore, not a constant state of absence of cloth as the British colonial discourse portrayed of their African protectorates but, rather, there is fluidity in contextual interpretation of what is deemed naked or not. The LoDagaa used limited cloth compared to the Gonjas, nonetheless, they were neither naked nor did they lack morality as postulated by European colonial officials. The insistence of nakedness in all its negative postulations was an instrument of the British Empire to validate their colonial enterprise. The

British case is no different from France's relationship with their African colonies in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.

Rovine's (2009) work sheds light on the use of fashion by the French to validate their colonial enterprise. She shows how the French used African fashion to enrich their fashion ventures in Paris, while at the same time claiming that such ventures were designed for the Africans as "measures of cultural advancement in an evolutionary progression from "primitive" to "civilized" status" (Rovine, 2009: 50). The first three decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century witnessed various expositions in Paris in which African cloth, clothes and styles featured prominently as the exotic inspiration. These expos were not limited to France, but the "government-sponsored events, which celebrated national identity and achievement in a wide range of areas, were held in numerous European and North American cities" (Rovine, 2009: 52). The "exoticism" that comes with "traditionality" which is a main feature of African fashion was the fascination of the French (Rovine, 2009). To exhibit their ventures and to bring Parisians closer to their source of inspiration, a separate pavilion was allotted to African cloths, styles and designs from various colonies. As these fashion artefacts were displayed, in addition, "people [were] brought from the colonies to add drama and realism to these temporary African settings" (Rovine, 2009: 52). Though models showcased the African inspired clothes, the featuring of people from the colonies was to give Parisians a better perspective of the colonial venture. As Loughran asserts, "the colonies were seen as a source for aesthetic inspiration and for exotic raw materials like tropical wood and ivory for consumer goods" (2009:248). Thus, "the "Africanisms" in French fashion of the 1920s and 1930s were clearly linked to the colonial enterprise" (Rovine, 2009: 52).

While the French celebrated Africa as a source of inspiration for their designs, they also displayed their influence on the colonies by exhibiting, through art, the disappearance of the same inspirational "exotic" tradition they so cherished as to include in their home fashion. At the 1931 exposition, the French exhibited how they had "modernised" the African person through clothing over the years from:

barely clothed African student before the African teacher; the second display featured the same student, this time wearing a pagne (loincloth) at a French primary school; the third depicted the student wearing a boubou (robe) at a technical training school; and in the fourth and final display, the African pupil

was transformed, dressed in pants and shirt, at a college level technical school”

(Hodier, 2002: 239-240)

This showcase was to buttress the argument for the continued stay of the French in the colonies as their presence was “modernising” the people towards Western civilisation.

The influence of Africa on Western fashion continued from colonial inspired ventures to individual designers. The use of African fabrics and elements for fashion designs and the use of iconic symbols perceived to originate from Africa such as the elephant, ivory, horn, leopard or safari designs have all been used by Europeans and other foreign designers. Rovine (2009) calls the first method of the use of African fabric and elements for fashion as “reproductive” while the use of iconic symbols is “mimetic”. Designers like Paul Poiret of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century engaged both the reproductive and mimetic influence of Africa in his work and this can be seen in one of his major collections in 1920s called “Tanger<sup>2</sup>” which fashioned women’s dress based on the Moroccan men’s cloak called *akhni*. Rodier, a textile firm that operated within the same period is also noted for their use of reproductive and mimetic approaches to the production of their fabrics. At a point, Poiret and Rodier worked together to produce fashion designs which reflected these African influences (Rovine, 2009). Loughran (2009) also recounts some Western designers whose works were African inspired in the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. She records that “One of the first European designers to create an African collection in the 1950s was Madame Carven. She used African textiles to manufacture dresses, bathing suits, and wraps” (Loughran, 2009: 249). Other designers such as Yves Saint Laurent is noted for his love for African inspired clothing. His Landmark African collection of 1967 creating the “Bambara dresses (Loughran, 2009) and the following year’s spring/summer 1968 line called “Africaines” (Rovine, 2010) are among some of the works that speak to Africa as a source of inspiration. Thierry Mugler is also noted for his spring/summer 1987 collection (Waddell, 2016:6).

Later, Asians also weighed in on Africa as their source of fashion inspiration as seen in the work of Kenzo and Junya Watanabe. Kenzo in 1984 designed a flowing “boubou” dress<sup>3</sup> and

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<sup>2</sup> Tangiers, a city at Morocco's northern tip just across the Straits of Gibraltar from Spain (Rovine, 2009)

<sup>3</sup> "Boubous" refer to ample gowns with long sleeves worn by both women and men in many West African nations

in 1990 and 1991, he presented jackets and shirts with inspiration from “bogolan” motives (Loughran, 2009), Waddell (2016) also reports that Junya Watanabe’s spring/summer 2009 collection was inspired by Africa (Waddell, 2016). “Africa” featuring as an exotic place continues to inspire lots of Western and Eastern fashion designers to date. Among the famous designers who continue to use African inspiration in their work are John Galliano and Jean Paul Gaultier (Loughran, 2009).

## **2.2 The Loss Versus The Adaptive Theory of African Fashion**

While the influence of Africa on European fashion has been well celebrated, the reverse has attracted notorious perspectives about the continent and its fashion. African fashion has been beset with the question of “authentication” since Africa’s contact with Europeans and subsequent colonization. The argument has been that in the face of overpowering globalisation, the influence of Western clothing in Africa has led to the ‘loss’ of African authenticity when it comes to fashion. The gradual and intentional re-clothing of Africans has been argued to have resulted in the complete loss of what was authentically African clothing leading Africans now to cling to Western clothes.

Africa’s contact with Europeans started off as trade where cloth was a prominent commodity. Steiner (1985), Gott (2010), Axelson (2012) as well as Gott et al. (2017) are among the many authors who have recounted the introduction of wax-print, a Java batik cloth adopted by the Dutch and British, which was for decades the commodity of trade between West and Central Africa and Europeans. Due to its origin – Java Indonesia – and its initial marketers – Dutch, English and Swiss – the wax-print has been described as non-African (Gott, 2010). However, the production of wax-print cloth introduced by the Dutch and British went through years of transformation and adaptation to suit the “preferences and changing tastes of African consumers” (Gott et al., 2017: 44). It later came to represent African fashion through years of different local appropriation. Some African countries like Ghana after independence endorsed its use by opening local industries that manufactured the wax-print, identified as a national cloth (Manuh, 1999).

When Europeans settled as colonisers, there was the urgent need for the “civilisation” of Africans to conform to Western civility. As a result, most colonial officials and their missionary counterparts embarked on a mission to re-clothe Africa. The “primitive”, “backward” people had to be brought up to date and one salient way to do that was to clothe them. In Kenya, cloth

was used as a reward for conversion as well as a mark of modernity (Hay, 2004). Initially, it was the new converts who were given clothes as an incentive for conversion, but later, indigenes understood the wearing of Western clothes as a sign of civility and a guarantee for easy employment. People who came from West Africa to Kenya were quick to land jobs in the colonial administration because they wore European clothes. Therefore, the people of western Kenya adopted the European clothes of khaki, trousers and boots as everyday wear which had been introduced to them through their contact with West African workers who had been brought in by the colonisers to work on plantations and in the colonial administration. A similar situation is recorded by Byfield (2004) among the people of Abeokuta in Nigeria. Conversion came with European clothing and later, the new Christians were taught how to sew European clothes. Education was more about reading, writing, and acquiring job skills including sewing. Therefore, the elites sewed their dresses and wore European clothes and came to be known as *onikaba* (gown wearers) (Byfield, 2004). Ghanaian elites during the colonial period were also noted for their wearing of European clothes and European fashion accessories as a mark of social class (Manuh, 1999).

In Congo, domestic workers of colonial officials were sometimes paid with the clothes of their masters. This was because colonial masters gained respect among themselves not so much from the number of domestic workers they employed but from the ‘civility’ of their domestic help. Therefore, colonial masters enjoyed giving their clothes out to the helps who in turn deemed it a privilege and a mark of distinction from the other locals. In effect,

houseboys were the first, around 1910, to begin to imitate their European masters.... Some masters did not hesitate to give their used clothing to their houseboys, who showed off their clothes as much to enhance their master's reputation as to increase their own social status in the eyes of other African city dwellers.

(Gondola, 1999: 26)

These domestic workers used the bestowed clothes to assert their new social status in the community by gathering on Saturday nights to display their clothes. This display was further heightened when participation widened following trade with the coastal men of West Africa. Wearing European clothes came to assume social prominence, reflected in the name given to men who dressed ostentatiously in European designer clothes. Such a person was regarded as

a member of 'La Sape'. La Sape - Société des Ambianceurs et des Personnes Élégantes- is a fashion trend among Congolese men (Gondola 1999). It is an association of gentlemen who dress ostentatiously with designer clothes from mostly France and Italy. According to Gondola (1999), the current Sapeurs are the third generation.

The above instances of adoption of European clothes have arguably contributed to the loss argument of African fashion. However, the loss argument has been countered with the adaptive argument of African fashion. According to this latter argument, the embracing of Western clothes in Africa is believed to be not adoptive (wholesale adoption of foreign to the displacement of local elements) but adaptive (the intentional hybridisation of foreign with local elements). There has always been an indigenous influence in the appropriation of these European clothes in African societies. The sewing of wax-print for clothes was fashioned as a hybrid of the European blouse and local wrapper style. It is a "combined local one or two-piece wrappers with a European-inspired tailored blouse—a hybrid ensemble.... In Ghana this...is known as *kaba* and slit, in Côte d'Ivoire as *trois pagnes*, in Senegal as *pagne/marinière*, and in Nigeria as *iro* and *buba*" (Gott et al., 2017: 45). The word *Kaba* is believed to originate from "West Africa as a coastal pidgin trade language as [a] local version of the English word *cover*" (Gott, 2010:13). This three-piece ensemble can all be in the wax-print cloth, however, there are cases where two-pieces of the skirt and cloth are of the wax-print and the blouse is made of European cloth. While the former is common among many African societies like the Yoruba people of Abeokuta (Byfield, 2004) and the Asantes of Ghana (Gott, 2009) as one of many ways of dressing (Byfield, 2004), the latter was adopted as an ethnic apparel by a few other societies such as the Frafra of northern Ghana where women wore European blouses on top of the two-piece wax print ensemble (Cardinall, 1920) and the Nembe people of south west Nigeria among the Ijo ethnic group (Sumberg, 1995).

The Kavirongo youth of Kenya as discussed by Hay (2004) did not copy their colonial masters blindly either but twisted their dressing to give it an indigenous meaning. Martin (1994) reveals that among the Kenyan youth who took to European clothes as a means of accessing European jobs, rather than tuck the shirt in the trousers in European style, these African fashionistas subverted that practice and left the tail of their shirts untucked. To them having the shirt untucked was African while tucking it in was European (Martin, 1994). The Congolese Sape craze took a different turn when the domestic workers discarded the old clothes of their employers and rather saved to buy themselves original designer clothes from the coastal traders. Later, after the First World War, veterans came back with new designer clothes and

continued the culture of meeting once a week to display their fashion. Thus, it was no more about civility of colonial domestic workers; it became a way of life with indigenous meaning (Wrong, 1999).

There are other African societies whose ethnic dresses have been argued to be nothing African because their origin is not Africa. The Kalabari men of Nigeria adapted ethnic cloth sewn with Indian fabric. It is reported that when this attire was shown as the ethnic cloth of the Kalabari, the director of the North American museum in the 1980s rejected it (Eitcher and Erekosima, 1995:139). The rejection was made on the claim that the fabric was not authentically African, so the director refused to acknowledge it as the ethnic dress of the Kalabaris. However, the Kalabari men came to adopt these clothes through their trading with the West and East. The transatlantic trade (trading in salt at New Calabar) and later the slave trade enriched the Kalabari men who displayed their wealth through clothes. All five ethnic men's clothes (etibo, woko, doni, ebu and attigra) of the Kalabari are made from fabrics that are not indigenous to the Kalabari people. They are a combination of woven clothes from neighbouring Yoruba societies and foreign countries such as India, Italy and England. The Kalabari clothes were carefully selected, characterised, incorporated and transformed to represent the identity of the people. Although people have challenged the authenticity of their clothes, the Kalabari remain resolute in their adoption of these foreign clothes as their ethnic clothes.

The ethnic dress of the Herero women of Namibia is also fashioned to resemble medieval European dress and is believed to have been shaped by their contact with Europeans. The exact origin of the dress is contested as some Herero believe it adapted from the British, Germans or Dutch. This dress is, however, sewn with wax-print cloth or locally appropriated cloth. This is what makes it a Herero dress and not an European dress (Durham, 1995).

Eitcher and Erekosima (1995) have argued that adapting foreign clothes or using foreign cloth for ethnic dress does not make the clothing less authentic as is often postulated. They argue that when a foreign culture is adapted into a society, it is authenticated to represent the identity of the receiving society because it has gone through the process of cultural authentication. They explain that, "the construct of cultural authentication applies to specific articles and ensemble of dress identified as ethnic and considered indigenous when the users are not the makers or when the material used is not indigenous in origin" (Eitcher and Erekosima, 1995: 140). This requires four steps of selection, characterisation, incorporation and transformation (Eitcher and Erekosima, 1995: 145). Thus, the discourse on the "loss" of African fashion does not take

account of the dynamism of fashion as it pertains in many countries. The interconnectedness of societies is revealing of a fluidity in consumption and the adaptation of various consumables around the world. What we are experiencing now in terms of foreign adoption and local adaptation is not novel, as it has been shown in the introduction of wax fabrics and dressing among some African societies. Earlier adaptation of European fashion and cloths by Africans will well fit Mustapha's (1998) description of old cosmopolitanism. Cosmopolitanism being the acceptance of foreignness and further incorporation of the foreign into local elements in the creation of innovative products that serve a larger community across local boundaries. Clothing in Africa has through the years witnessed foreign cultural appropriation and adaptation within many societies. Through trade and co-habiting with the East and the West, the clothes of many African societies have been influenced by foreign cultural elements, however, indigenes are cautious not to adopt wholesale but to fuse the foreign with their local cultures. Mustapha's (1998) old cosmopolitanism of African clothing therefore refers to earlier years of foreign appropriation of cloths such as the wax print and clothing such as found among the Kalabaris. Thus, "[I]ndeed, the notion of cosmopolitanism offers better explanation for such processes of creative adoption of external fashion influence than the concept of Change as Loss" (Plankesteiner, 2011: 25).

### **2.3 Introduction of Sewing**

As Jennings (2011) reminds us, "before fashion design was a recognised profession [in Africa], seamstresses and tailors were the ones who fed trends" (pp. 9). Sewing which is the main skill for making clothes locally was introduced by missionaries into Africa. Different accounts have been given in different contexts on the motive for the introduction of sewing; however, the common factor to deduce in the accounts was the need to train people to produce their new Western clothes which would mark their progress of civility and modernisation. In Abeokuta, it was for skill acquisition aside literacy education. Both men and women were trained in sewing their respective clothes. Sewing then became the occupation of the elites in the society, an occupation in which the woman nationalist, Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti, also mother of the famed pioneer of Afrobeat Fela Kuti was among the early trainees (Byfield, 2004). A similar situation existed in Kenya (Hay, 2004).

The introduction of sewing in Botswana was by missionaries' wives who joined their husbands in the last decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. These women felt the need to train Tswana women as fitting wives for their men based on their knowledge of the domestic role of women in the home

as it pertained in the West. Thus, “informal training of women was concerned [with] the provision of Christian “partners” for Batswana men, so that they could provide an atmosphere that was considered to be commensurate with both Christian and civilised principles and practice” (Mafela, 1994:87). In the Tswana community, in addition to conversion and civilisation, sewing was to equip women to be supportive of their husbands at home. To learn skills and to be productive as a wife was a way the missionaries perceived will “uplift” the women of Botswana from a life of toil and drudgery in which they depended solely on their men for livelihood. The case of South Africa is no different as women were trained in sewing because it was deemed as an occupation for their gender and as a means of empowerment (Mthethaw-Sommers, 1999). In Ghana, just as elsewhere, training in sewing started informally with mission training within the extended household by the Basel missionaries. However, when the first formal mission school was established in 1880 by the Basel missionary, sewing instruction became part of the formal curriculum (Gott, 2010).

In most African societies though, training in sewing later became a part of the various vocational skills (carving, blacksmith, basketry etc.) training where skills were transferred through a traditional system of apprenticeship. An apprentice “contracts” a master craftsman to teach him or her the skills of the vocation needed to be self-reliant in the vocation. According to Sonnenberg (2012), the main strengths of traditional apprenticeship are its practical orientation, its self-regulation, and self-financing” (pp. 95). In Ghana, the training takes between three and four years and the apprentice at the beginning of training pays the master craftsman in kind or cash or both to show commitment (Ahadzi, 2003). According to Argenti (2002), “the apprenticeship relation serves to pass on technical knowledge on the one hand and cultural values on the other” (pp 497). That is, the knowledge transferred in apprentice skill training is not an objective element which is devoid of value but “a relationship that is perpetually renegotiated and reinvented during the process of apprenticeship. The relationship offers the apprentice a means of increasing his [or her] participation in a community and of developing a new identity within that community” (Argenti, 2002:499). Apprentice training is more than the transfer of vocational skills; it is the transfer of societal values which situates a person in a better social and economic position in the community.

However, after independence and in subsequent years, vocational skills training plummeted in value in Africa. The post-independence era came with the zeal of producing a ‘scientifically’ literate population who would guide the state agenda of modernisation through industrialisation. Universities were built, educational reforms were made which emphasised

formal literacy and scientific training with the exclusion of vocational training. In effect, “traditional educational and skills transfer systems –the apprenticeship system that catered to the different needs of society prior to pre-independence, independence and post-independence eras– were de-emphasized and tagged unproductive, hence downplayed in the years that followed” (Anokye and Afrane, 2014:130). In subsequent post-independent years, the cost of higher education was raised, therefore, during Africa’s dire economic period of the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, many who could not afford formal education opted for traditional apprenticeship training. Entrance into secondary and tertiary institutions also became highly competitive, leaving many who could not gain admission to find employment in the informal sector which includes traditional apprenticeship training in vocational skills. Opting for vocational training became a matter of survival rather than choice (Anokye and Afrane, 2014). It then came to be perceived as the job of school dropouts. Therefore, according to Takyi-Asiedu (2003), in Sub-Saharan Africa hardly will elite parents allow their children to seek vocational jobs like sewing. Middleton et al. (1993) report that “entry [for vocational training] is for the most part open for anyone who can pay the training fee: minimum education requirements are non-existent, and other necessary qualifications besides ethnic or clan identity are uncommon” (cited in Anokye and Afrane, 2014: 131).

Ogunduyile et al.’s (2017) study on the youth’s interest in tailoring in Abeokuta, Nigeria shows that “though tailors seem to abound almost everywhere due to the inevitability of clothing to the contemporary man, ...[it] appears that the present generation of youths are showing decreasing interest in learning the trade” (pp108). The apparent disinterest in the profession is its loss of credibility and social value. Economically, they found out that “generally, tailors have been accorded low status because most of them could hardly provide adequately for their families” (ibid:109). Similar despair is observed among Ghanaian seamstresses who are kept in the shadows of globalisation in a world that is rapidly converging and accommodating cultures from far and near. While hairdressers are having their fair share of exposure and training that widens their profession, seamstresses are locked down in their reproductive, unchanging skills training through apprenticeship (Langevang and Gough, 2012). Grabski (2010) may not agree with the disinterest and gloomy account of Nigerian and Ghanaian seamstresses because she found Senegalese seamstresses and tailors to be abreast with global fashion trends which they incorporated into their work daily while they allowed their environment to inform them as well.

The apprentice system of skill training itself has also been criticised for its ineffectiveness and low productivity. It is argued that inherent in the master-craftsman-apprentice relationship is a power relation that limits the free flow of knowledge and skill (Argenti, 2002). The training sometimes assumes a master-servant relationship in which the master-craftsman uses his discretion to train and can sometimes withhold information and the apprentice, on the other hand, may not be at liberty to acquire the needed knowledge for the training. Langevang and Gough (2012) argue that the traditional apprentice training that characterise sewing is reproductive and not open to changes making consumers lose interest and thus opt for second-hand clothing and other fashionable Western clothes.

In the immediate post-independence era, Africa had its first crop of fashion designers who were mostly European trained. After independence, they engaged fashion as a means of giving visible meaning to the new identity the continent was assuming. Therefore, “the first generation of recognised fashion designers drew on local fabrics and styles as a means of showing pride in their African identities in the wake of a flurry of independence that swept across Africa in the 1960s” (Jennings, 2011:10). These designers included Alphadi of Niger, Kofi Ansah of Ghana, Shade Thomas of Nigeria and Pathé O of Burkina Faso. Due to their European training, they adopted “Western design techniques, and all were oriented toward Western methods of presentation and marketing of fashion, including runway presentations, urban boutiques, and photographic spreads in fashion magazines” (Rovine 2010:4).

Aligned with their vision as expressed by Jennings (2011) above, these designers adapted indigenous African fabrics like Kente, Bogolanfini, *Adire* and made them into the modernised versions of the African conventional styles or European styles. This became their conventional brand and identity: using indigenous fabrics for their clothes. For instance, “Pathé O focused on modernised bubus and pagnes and [this] has become presidential wear for leaders including Nelson Mandela” (Jennings, 2011: 11). Chris Seydou of Mali is reported to be the first to have turned bogolanfini (mudcloth) into fashion fabric. Thus, “while respecting its ritual significance, he carefully adjusted it to make Western styles” (ibid). The first generation of African fashion designers also introduced prêt-a-porter fashion to Africa, hitherto, seamstress and tailors worked mostly on bespoke basis; they still largely do to date.

For the first time, fashion designs from Africa gained international recognition, resulting from the creative approach in the use of indigenous fabrics and the application of their European training background in producing outfit as well as introducing pret-a-porter, already-made

African clothes into the market. The emphasis on creating African identity through clothing resonated with African liberators and the Pan-African confederate who were eager to fashion an African culture to seal their independence (Allman, 2004). Therefore, the political elites and the high-end members in the society took to the works of these designers (Loughran, 2009). Though a huge step in order for African fashion, the emphasis on using indigenous African fabrics to create designs that are conventionally African in look, plunged their work into the 'primitive' and 'exotic' description that characterised pre and colonial African fashion (Klopper, 2000). This contradicted the modernisation policy being pursued by independent Africa and the world at large (ibid), thus, discrediting the progressive effort of the designers as works continue to express the negative stereotype of "traditionality" that surrounds African clothing and fashion discourse.

The current crop of African designers has been argued to be different from their forebears. Loughran (2009) has observed that "the new generation designers such as... Xuly Bët, Ly Dumas, and Oumou Sy have all successfully connected their cultural heritage with modernity in an urban landscape in Africa and abroad" (pp. 257-258). The creative combination of the indigenous with the consciousness of global developments is their hallmark, filling in the gap of their predecessors and lending them a greater local and international recognition and patronage. They are positioned at the centre of local and global cultures, appreciating the wider cultural spectrum in which current world citizens live daily and thus, incorporating them into their work. New African designers "create garments that make reference to or borrow from local clothing practices, often melding these forms with international influences" (Rovine, 2009: 136). As argued by Appadurai, the increase in migration and the introduction of electronic media has rendered concentration on the local inadequate in defining culture and to some extent consumer taste (Appadurai, 2005; Sulkenen, 2009). Industry producers must acknowledge the current cultural space of consumers which goes beyond national and even regional boundaries. Globalisation with its key features of media, technology and increase in migration is creating different 'ethnoscapes' that have no specific bearing to locality or boundary (Appadurai, 2005). This is the backdrop, though it has not been stated directly, of the work of contemporary African designers fashioning African clothes to reflect the interrelationship between the local and the global in an aesthetic cosmopolitan fashion.

## 2.4 Conclusion

The discourse on clothing and fashion from Africa has gone through a series of negative stereotypes since European contact with Africa. Accounts by missionaries, travellers and colonial officials omitted the earlier trade encounter with the continent in which trade in cloth was an integral commodity. However, to validate their colonial enterprise, narratives of nakedness, primitiveness and backwardness became the focal point of discussion about African fashion. In British colonies, such narratives served their religious, scientific and political purposes of domination. In French colonies, the obvious venture was for colonial validation and settlement, however, cloth and cultural elements from colonial territories supported the fashion lifestyle of the people back home in France. Later on, these colonial cultural elements became a source of inspiration for major fashion houses in France as fashion started to assume a more cosmopolitan outlook.

In correcting the primitiveness and low morality that missionaries and colonial officials linked with unclothedness, missionaries introduced sewing, initially as a skill to help locals produce clothes for covering the body. Later, the skill training of sewing became a vocational course in mission school curricula. As a vocational skill and a source of livelihood, sewing was absorbed into the traditional apprenticeship skill training system. Starting off as a training skill for the upcoming educated elites, sewing profession after independence in many African countries assumed a second-class occupational standard. Its value plummeted as new political regimes strove to produce a more scientific human resource pool to fuel their national modernisation agenda. Sewing, like most other vocations became the alternative skill training for school dropouts.

Coincidentally, the immediate post-independence period witnessed the first generation of African fashion designers who were mostly European trained. These designers returned home to further the liberation agenda of the liberating regimes that sought indigenisation of cultural elements within the tenets of modernisation. Thus, the designers adopted local cloth and fabrics, intertwined with locally inspired elements as the inspiration for their fashion outfits. In many countries, especially Nigeria, nationalism in fashion resonated well with the people who engaged in local fashion for both daily functions and special occasions. This nationalism in clothing was short-lived due to three decades of economic crisis witnessed across the continent. The proliferation of affordable and accessible second-hand clothing substituted for local clothes, served to further undervalue the work of seamstresses and tailors. However, the latter

part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century is witnessing the rise in African fashion. A crop of designers is making major strides in the global fashion industry. Fashion from Africa resounds with innovation and creativity that is attracting the attention of fashion lovers, big global fashion lovers and now academics. Africa is producing fashion cities such as Lagos, Accra, Nairobi and Johannesburg. Fashion emanating from these cities are cosmopolitan, resonating with people within and outside the continent. The careful hybridisation of foreign cultural elements with local cultural elements to produce aesthetic cosmopolitan fashion is the focus of the current study. We are intrigued by the creativity of fashion designers from Africa and how their works have become strong global competitive products in the fashion world. Lagos City provides us with a great starting point to understanding fashion from Africa and the change in contemporary fashion production.



## CHAPTER THREE

### RESEARCH METHOD AND ANALYSIS

#### 3.0 Introduction

At the turn of the twenty-first century, Africa has witnessed economic and political growth after decades of zero to negative growth since the latter part of the 1970s. Politically, countries have embraced democracy amidst some difficulties. However, most of the countries have been able to establish stability and a peaceful environment for trade and business to flourish. The economic indices show diversification from traditional, natural and agricultural resources to include non-traditional areas such as the service industry – banking and telecommunication (Robertson, Mhango and Moran, 2012). Thus, the 2015 African Economic outlook reports that a country such as “Nigeria [with economic] growth of 6.3% came mainly from non-oil sectors showing that the economy is diversifying” (Africa Economic Outlook, 2015). Regarding such economic diversification, Nigeria is experiencing a boost in its artistic industry, reaping benefits and exposure now than ever before. The movie and music industry have enjoyed at least continental patronage for decades and lately, the fashion industry is increasingly putting the country on the global fashion scene. In the Lagos Fashion and Design Week brochure of 2016, it is reported that in “2012 the Nigerian fashion industry contributed 45% of the earnings generated from the nation’s creative industries, surpassing other industries like music and film” (2016: 6). Thus, given the consistent, steady growth of the fashion industry over the years and its wide coverage with great economic and cultural impact, the industry can no longer be ignored. It is on this premise that the study takes the Nigerian fashion industry as its study focus, exploring the current development and changes that have attracted varied attention.

Many factors influenced the researcher’s decision to settle on the Nigerian fashion industry as a phenomenon (Creswell, 2012) by which the concept of aesthetic cosmopolitanism in fashion can be analysed through the lived experiences of stakeholders in the industry. Primarily, I was exposed to Nigerian fashion through my contact with Nigerian colleagues during my undergraduate studies. As a person with fashion interest, I was always intrigued about the fashion sense of Nigerians who were students in my college and more so by those I associated with in my church fellowship. As a member of a church which has its originating roots from Nigeria, we had lots of Nigerians joining the church every academic year. Though these Nigerians were from different ethnic backgrounds, two most important things that distinguished them from Ghanaians were their accent and dressing. Their adornment of clothes,

jewellery, headtie and facial makeup were elements that marked them as different from their Ghanaian colleagues. The designs of their clothes instantly attracted attention and admiration. Thus, I have long been fascinated with Nigerian fashion. What gave more impetus to the fascination was when I decided to turn my passion into an academic enquiry by writing my MPhil thesis on the Ghanaian fashion industry. The study focused on the youth in the Ghanaian fashion industry who are mostly graduates with or without training in fashion and were diversifying the use of African print fabric (wax print and fancy prints) from the conventional clothing styles into fashion accessories such as bags, shoes, clutches, earrings, etc. Through that early study, I realised that these youth entrepreneurs were ambitious to produce items which deviate from conventions and also seek broader market avenues for their products. In their quest to achieve their vision, most of them looked to or took inspiration from the Nigerian fashion industry for designs and market. Ghana and Nigeria have a long-standing cordial relationship as well as many similarities. The colonisation of both countries by the British, independence gained around the same period as well as the adoption of English language as the lingua franca are some of the historical factors that further strengthen the bond of relationship between the two countries. Therefore, though there are two countries between Ghana and Nigeria –Togo and Benin– the former countries share a stronger bond. Respondents of the MPhil study were eager to learn from their Nigerian counterparts, whom they believed were advancing in fashion and they identified Nigeria as one of the renowned fashion countries in West Africa or perhaps Africa. Participants’ constant reference to Nigeria’s creativity, development and market increased my curiosity about the country and its fashion industry. Therefore, when there was an opportunity for personal research studies for my PhD dissertation, I explored the possibility of studying fashion in Nigeria.

Literature on fashion has for many years overlooked Africa in their discussions, dwelling more on the textile trade (Steiner, 1985), “ethnicity and culture of clothing” (Eitcher, 1995), and the “loss theory of African clothes” (Rovine, 2009). The closest Africa has been mentioned to fashion is serving as “source of inspiration to the West” (Loughran 2009; Rovine, 2010). Not until recently, fashion and Africa had been perceived as opposing words as the former connotes constant change in clothing and the latter, traditionality or stagnation tangled in culture (Craik, 1994). However, there is evidence of a shift in argument as more recent scholarly research and fashion authors are acknowledging a change in African fashion and its production in recent years. There is evidence of creative development in the art of fashion in various African cities (Rovine, 2015; Azieb Pool, 2016; Jennings 2016). The name of Nigeria is mentioned among

others such as South Africa (Farber, 2012), Ghana (Bobie, 2017) and Kenya (Azieb Pool, 2016) in explaining the vibrancy and creativity of African fashion. One key article that affirmed my conviction to study Nigerian fashion is an article by Obeng-Odoom “*Africa on The Rise, But to Where*”. In this article, the author mentioned that the “February 2014 edition of Highlife [declared] Lagos as the world’s fourth largest fashion city” (2014: 2). This is a big achievement considering the fact that the traditional global fashion cities have for years been Paris, Milan, New York (in no particular order) and more recently, Tokyo. The closest Africa has come to international fashion recognition is its source of inspiration for renowned designers such as Yves Saint Laurent (Rovine, 2010), Thierry Mugler (Waddell, 2016) and Kenzo (Waddell, 2016). However, fashion from Africa is now recognised as an industry, competitive enough to stand against global fashion industries (Mendy-Ougoundou, 2002). Nigeria, specifically Lagos fashion has become a force in global fashion and a good representative of the innovativeness and creativity from various African cities. Thus, I settled on the Nigerian fashion industry due to its steepness in both culture and contemporary fashion creativity and innovation.

An advantage I perceived in settling for Lagos City is its diversity of people. Lagos, Africa’s most populous and biggest economic city, is home to many internal migrants and external migrants (Onyewuchi and Monye, 2013). Due to its bustling economic activities and being the first capital city of Nigeria, people from different states within the country migrate to Lagos in search of job opportunities. Likewise, people from neighbouring countries and expatriates of multinational companies troop in and out as residents or tourists on a regular basis (ibid). This gives the city a cosmopolitan outlook; a mix of foreigners and indigenes with different cultural backgrounds who find meaning in living as Lagosians<sup>4</sup>. This was a feature that I believed will influence fashion production greatly.

Last but not the least, is the advantage of language. As a Ghanaian researcher with a language background of English, I believed I could communicate better with participants who also have English as their lingua franca, a feature which is important in research data collection. A researcher’s ability to communicate and understand primary information is an advantage in the data collection procedure since it can prevent loss of data in translation in the case of different languages used by participants.

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<sup>4</sup> A slang word that refers to people who live in Lagos.

The only challenge I perceived at this point was my ability to access the field. This research was going to be my first trip to Nigeria, Lagos, and as at the time of the inception of the idea of the study, I had no concrete contact in Nigeria. I had a Nigerian friend who was at the time studying in Ghana and therefore was not going to be available. I had plans of asking colleagues at the Centre for African Studies for contacts of anyone who would be willing to assist a research assistant in Nigeria even for a fee. During this period, I was more worried about this challenge than I was about constructing research questions for the study.

After identifying the study area, Lagos, the next stage was to identify the problem and construct it into a research topic for the study. Reading on Nigeria, Lagos, and recent developments – economic, politics, culture, urbanisation, fashion– introduced me to a new crop of designers termed as “emerging designers” (Jennings, 2011) or contemporary designers (Farber, 2010) who are producing creative and innovative fashion works. The use of the adjective ‘emerging’ or ‘contemporary’ signifies their “newness” in the industry and at the same time, distinguishing them from the old producers of clothes, seamstresses and tailors and perhaps, the first generation of designers (Byfield, 2004; Gott, 2009; Jennings, 2011). While my MPhil dissertation focused on youth diversifying the use of African print cloth into fashion accessories, for this project I was interested in knowing people who produce the current clothes with such creativity that has caught global attention without any social or age category (Alderman, 2012; Menks, 2012). The distinction in the literature of the emerging designers was a point of interest considering the gloomy picture painted about seamstresses and tailors in Africa –low education, reproductive, inefficient skill and unexposed to globalisation (Langevang and Gough, 2012; Ogunduliye et. al., 2017). I was interested in the new designers’ education, skill and exposure, factors that can reflect in their sense of creativity and innovation. These designers represented the current fashion industry, the point of contact for studying the development of the industry.

Coincidentally, there was also literature about a growing middle-class with better purchasing power to engage in luxury spending (Pinkovskiy and Sala-I-Martin 2010; The Nielsen Company, 2011; Onyewuchi and Monye, 2013; Swiss Global Enterprise, 2016). With this evidence of a growing middle-class, I initially assumed that the creativity of the emerging designers was a response to the demand of the middle-class who engage in luxury spending such as fashion to display their social status. Persuaded by the argument of Simmel (1905) that fashion is the reserve of the upper classes in the society, the growth of a middle-class population in cities like Lagos was likely to trigger a fashion lifestyle, a means through which the upper-

classes could assert their social privileges and positions. Thus, the conspicuous consumption of the upper-class in terms of fashion was a way to affirm their social position as well as distinguish themselves from lower classes. Bourdieu's *Distinction* (1984), which seeks to explain lifestyles in French society, argues that one's social background is still influential in their consumption patterns. He believes educational level and social origin influence taste and lifestyle and these two variables can also serve as a basis for class distinction. Bourdieu explained that "to the socially recognized hierarchy of the arts, and within each of them, of genres, schools or periods, corresponds a social hierarchy of the consumers" (1984:1). To be able to consume a particular lifestyle, you need to possess the capacity to understand the social implication of that lifestyle. Such capacity is acquired through the pedigree of culture the person is exposed to which is linked to educational level and social background (which includes social class and economic position). Thus, to engage in a lifestyle such as fashion, one requires the social knowledge that guides the lifestyle as well as the economic power to engage in it.

I assumed that the middle-class cohort in Africa, though a contested concept in this context, form the demand end of the growing fashion industry, therefore, there was the need to find the relationship between the work of the new designers (supply) and the middle-class (demand) aspects of the industry. Thus, the research topic arrived at was to study "The Influence of the Middle-class on Current Developments in the Nigerian Fashion Industry". This question is addressed in two ways: to establish the current developments in the industry with emerging designers at the background and exploring how the middle-class is related to this development. The idea was to contact a few "emerging designers" and rely on them to introduce me to others, forming the basis of the first part of the question, the industry development. Also, I was to rely on the designers to introduce me to their customers who would be the sample for the second part of the question, telling me of their experience of fashion works by the designers and the industry. The sample size of the study was estimated to be 45: 15 designers, each producing 2 customers at least, which will give 30 customer respondents. A semi-structured interview guide of two kinds were drafted: one for the designers, another for the customers. The questions were believed to open up conversation that would help gather enough information for the study. Armed with these assumptions and questions, I set out for the field for the first time between March and May 2017 while the second phase of field work took place in October to November the same year.

### 3.1 Accessing the Field

As mentioned above, the fieldwork was my first-time travel to Nigeria, Lagos, with no immediate contact for assistance. I made few inquiries among my colleagues and was fortunate to find a Nigerian lady with a sister in Lagos who had recently started training at a fashion school. The sister in Lagos, (let us call her Chichi) was to introduce me to the founder of her school who was a designer and that founder would be my first point of contact. I also searched on the internet for contacts of designers. I came across a few with detailed address and phone numbers. I tried making contacts online before leaving, including the Fashion and Design Association of Nigeria, however, none got back to me before I left. Before I left, I was coached by my colleague, Chichi's sister on how to negotiate my way around the city: find a safe guest house (preferably near Chichi so that she can check up on me regularly), always take a bus instead of a taxi, hold on to your bag and valuables when walking or in a car, walk at a fast pace to avoid pick-pocketing and do not stay out after 5pm to avoid traffic and possible theft. I was told Lagos was a big city with two major landmarks: the mainland and the island. I had read that it was the most populous African city with more than twenty million inhabitants (almost the entire population of Ghana) so I was prepared to be shocked by the sheer numbers of people I would encounter on a daily basis. Chichi lived on the mainland and the address of designers I had indicated a mix of mainland and island residents, so I settled on a guesthouse on the mainland near Chichi. I would later move from the guest house due to cost of lodging and difficulty in feeding to live with Chichi whose husband was away on a military mission. This was the best time for me in Lagos; Chichi was kind and open, very supportive and always wore a smile.

I arrived in the first week of March 2017, at 7:20pm GMT on a Thursday. After completing protocol inside the airport, I came out to meet Chichi and a family friend Uche, waiting for my arrival. Chichi and I had exchanged pictures while I was in Switzerland and had kept in touch throughout the journey therefore, it was easy to identify each other when we met. My first shock will come from a guy who provided me with a trolley at the airport and demanded money for the trolley. I would have let it slide and pay him for his help but the amount was too high for just the use of a trolley and even a tip. Uche would not take it, and there ensued an argument of almost an hour between the guy and us. Eventually, we had to go to the appropriate office to pay, then we realised we were being charged more than 500% of what we had to pay. We set off on a journey I was hoping will be short since I was already worn out. However, even at that time of night, it took us almost four hours in dense traffic to get to my guesthouse, a whole

new journey on its own. Then it hit me that even though I had been forewarned about the number of people in Lagos and the traffic situation, I had not fully grasped it. Having lived in Accra, Ghana, with traffic and an everyday increase in population due primarily to internal migration, I thought I could understand the context of Lagos, I was wrong. The traffic is denser, as mentioned earlier, taking us more than three hours to make an approximately 10-mile journey. Along the road were many people who were struggling for transportation on the commercial buses and I was to learn later of individuals who use the private vehicles for commercial purposes during this rush-hour period. When we got to a place called Underbridge, along the Ikeja road, still in traffic, a train pulled over at a stop to let people off. I have seen trains work in Ghana where people board at Kwame Nkrumah Circle, probably the only train plying the route and I have always been shocked by how overloaded it was with some clinging to the poles at the entrance. What I saw in Lagos gave me a whole new perspective. Everywhere around the train with the exception of under it, which is impossible to be, was covered with people. People were sitting on top, hanging around it, be it the window or entrance. It was explained to me that it was normal every day during the rush hours of evening and morning to find the train that packed. As we rode by through the thick traffic, as the time ticked towards midnight, there were people still struggling to catch buses home. The day ended as I walked into my room in the guesthouse, having arranged with Chichi to go with her to meet her school principal the next day and having felt overwhelmed by my first experience of the city of Lagos.

Chichi and I arrived at the school a few minutes to 9am and apparently, she made no prior arrangement to see the principal. The principal, I was made to understand, was very busy since she runs the school along with her clothing business. To catch her, I had to go in early enough before she left to attend to her other businesses. Fortunately for us, we met her, and she was willing to sit through an interview with me. I explained the work to her, gave her an informed consent form to sign which she brushed away saying I can decide to mention her or keep her anonymous at my discretion, so long as the work does not dent her or her establishment's reputation. It was an hour and ten minutes of a really engaging interview, which I recorded with both my phone and a voice recorder. This interview was a good introduction to the context and my study, opening me up to the changes occurring in the fashion industry, as well as enlightening me on the complexity of upper-class as against lower-class clientele when it comes to fashion in Nigeria, especially Lagos. Just when we were rounding up, a visitor was ushered in, the company's public relations officer, and also an employee at a lifestyle magazine.

The principal introduced us and told me how she could be of help since their magazine worked with fashion designers, especially emerging and successful ones. Let us call the PR Tope. Tope would become the anchor of this research. She would put her schedule on hold for three months for me and the work and we would comb through the city of Lagos together. She knew every corner, every street from the mainland to the island. She would stick with me all this while without ever raising the issue of salary, though I catered for our meals and transportation every day and gave her small allowances now and then. Tope exposed me to the love and hospitality of Nigerians. She was older than me but that did not matter as we became friends. With time, she understood my research, she would take me to markets where cloths and clothes were sold, she would introduce me to designers she knew through her work with the media and she always ensured that we were properly acquainted before an interview started. On the very first day we met, Tope took the list of designers I had and strategized with me, informing me the routes to some of them and how we could get there. Out of seventeen fashion houses she marked seven as known places we could start with the following week, Monday and thus my research began in earnest.

My contact with Tope plays a very significant role in the research. As an outsider accessing a new environment, she became my bridge to the society. Research fieldwork comes with its own challenges and in my case where I relied completely on fate (no concrete research assistant contact) to reach my participants, meeting Tope who has experience that is directly linked to my study was a miracle. I cannot come up with any reason why she willingly helped me aside believing it was a genuine altruistic act. Her action could also result from the bond Ghanaians and Nigerians share, something intangible but quite strong because I had other people extending help and being nice just at the hearing of my accent. People could easily identify me as Ghanaian at the mention of a word. This is true with Tope because her first question after greeting her during our introduction was “are you a Ghanaian”? With the many negative stereotype of Nigerians, Tope and Chichi exposed me to the other positive side of Nigerian which is less talked about. As an outsider researcher, Tope’s reception and help diffused, to a large extent (though I was still cautious) the fear I harboured about my area of study due to my knowledge of negative incidents. My contact with Tope gave me an easy transition into the Lagos society.

Having Tope as an informant with her experience of working with a lifestyle magazine that deals directly with some designers had its advantages and challenges. Working with Tope gave me quick access to respondents. She knew few contacts personally after working with them

through the magazine firm and due to the good reputation of the magazine, most of the people she contacted were forthcoming in scheduling for meetings. She became the face of the study: establishing contacts, scheduling interviews and introducing us (the interviewee and I) in our respective careers before handing over the interview to me. Due to her prolific knowledge of the city and its traffic routes, she knew when to step out on which day, where to pass to avoid traffic and the shortest route to any destination. This helped in maximising time and periods of interviews. Indirectly, I learned about some of the social milieus that underpins Lagos society and fashion through my daily interaction with Tope.

The challenge we faced was withholding of information. Since some respondents knew her and the work she does, they were protective of information which they deemed as sensitive to the business or customers. Some respondents thought some information may end up in the media, though we assured them no such thing would happen, some could not divulge information they believed were sensitive.

Accessing a field as an outsider researcher can pose a challenge to the quality of data you acquire. Informants like Tope serve as social and political bridges to navigate the environment and help seek quality data from the appropriate sample. As we will realise in subsequent discussion, the withholding of information by respondents significantly shaped the course of the research.

### **3.2 Selecting the Sample**

We (Tope and I) spent the first 10 working days of our outings making contacts with designers on our list and booking appointments with some while others showed no interest in the study after explaining the project to them. My initial participants listed were selected through purposive sampling (Yin, 2011). This method of sampling is reiterated by Creswell (2012) as an important phenomenological sampling technique. Respondents must be deliberately chosen to reflect the aim of the research. Therefore, in looking for ‘designers’, I was guided first by their fame in the society. When I searched for “designers in Lagos” on the internet, a number of names popped up. However, I had prior knowledge of some and their work through literature, so I quickly put those names down. Then, I was also intentional about picking names of designers I had not come across to prevent interviewing only the “obvious”. I was conscious of the location of participants, not necessarily for equal representation. However, I believed that to present a holistic outlook, I needed to interview designers that worked on both the

Mainland and the Island. The Mainland and Island are separated by the Lagos Lagoon and there is a perception of disparity in the economic and social status of residents on each side. The Island is perceived as a well organised, urban structured community inhabited by the ‘rich’ or socially affluent of Lagos while the Mainland is the reverse. This perception affects the living expenses in both locations and also the lifestyle of the people.

Though the study focuses on contemporary fashion with an operational date from the turn of the twenty-first century, I did not particularly look out for designers with fashion experience within this period. From the knowledge gathered in the literature, I was persuaded to believe the development in African fashion is as current as the twenty-first century and was pushed by emerging designers who established their business within the period. I was hopeful to get more designers within the period; however, I was open to fashion institutions that had existed before the period, dating as far back as the first-generation of African fashion designers, the immediate post-independence period. Yin argues that, in purposive data collection, even though participants should exhibit characteristics that reflect the purpose of the study it is also “of high priority in this regard, these units should include those that might offer contrary evidence or views, especially given the need for testing rival explanations” (2011:88). Thus, I had a few of the designers who established their business before the turn of the century on my list. Aside testing for rival explanations, I wanted to explore the possibility of succession from the first-generation of designers to the current emerging ones; that is, to find out whether the change started just at the turn of the century with its associated factors or whether what we witness today is the result of work started years before.

Situations on the field can be very different from what was planned and therefore, though I had a list of seventeen designers, hoping to interview fifteen at least, I was fully aware that some of the designers may not participate due to unavailability or disinterest in the research. Therefore, I planned to employ the snowball sampling method as well: asking participants of referral contacts of colleagues and most importantly for their customers. Yin explains that, “snowball sampling—selecting new data collection units as an offshoot of existing ones—can be acceptable if the snowballing is purposeful, not done out of convenience” (2011: 89). Participants were to introduce me to other colleagues in the profession and their customers who would be willing to grant an interview.

The second participant in the study came off of my list while the third participant was introduced by my assistant, Tope. The participant was out of the country on a business trip but

granted me an interview through a phone call which I recorded. The fourth and fifth participants were also from my list and I conducted face to face interviews with them. We came across the sixth respondent after our second interview on our visit to the Maryland Mall. She had a retail shop in the mall, where we got the contact of the designer from the salesgirls. After days of persuasions, she finally granted me a face to face interview. On our way for the fourth interview on the Island, Ikoyi, we came across a shop of a designer. I was instantly attracted by her designs. We went in to make enquiries and we took her contact from the shop assistant. She would become my seventh respondent and the interview was conducted face to face. The eighth respondent was introduced to me by Chichi, who had come across the designer through her training with the first participant. After a face to face interview with him, he introduced us to three of his male colleagues who became the ninth, tenth and eleventh participants. They all opted for phone interviews instead of face to face interviews. I had to introduce the possibility of phone interview to my respondents because most of them were too busy to be available physically. Meetings were postponed at the last minute, sometimes on our way to the place and other times, meeting their absence, therefore, phone interview became convenient for respondents.

From this point, participants had the option of phone or face to face interview. The twelfth participant was a lead of my assistant, he opted for a phone interview. He worked in both the fashion design and modelling industry, therefore, his interview was for both purposes. At this point, the interest of the research was changing and focusing more on the developments of the industry itself. The twelfth respondent later sent me the contact of the president of the Fashion and Design Association of Nigeria (FADAN). She would be my thirteenth respondent. Before my trip, I contacted my former MPhil colleague who is a Nigerian and stays in Lagos. She was at the end-stage of her PhD thesis and therefore, could not avail herself to help me much. However, she introduced me to the fourteenth respondent, who also agreed to an interview via phone. The twelfth participant contacted me with the phone number of another colleague who became the fifteenth respondent. I came across the sixteenth respondent during a trip with Chichi for a job interview. Chichi is a mother of one and needed my help with the child, who was too young to leave behind. I made enquiries and scheduled a face to face interview for the following week. The seventeenth respondent was introduced to me also by my Nigerian MPhil colleague. She allowed for a face to face interview. The last designer participant was on my list and we had a face to face interview.

All eighteen interviews were with designers: ten interviews were conducted face to face, while eight were done on the phone. The phone interview has its advantages of convenience; however, poor network reception sometimes distorted the quality of the interviews. Designers who opted for the phone interview were mostly too busy to meet up, however, they gave considerable time for the interviews on phone, an average of 22 minutes per interview. Face to face interviews were longer and more interactive, however, the shortest interview was from face to face interview; 13 minutes. Aside that, the average face to face interview length was 40 minutes. Face to face interviews also had its challenge of constant interruption by employees, customers and phone calls.

The major challenge of the first trip sampling was finding customers who would be the basis of the second part of the thesis. Surprisingly, no designer was willing to introduce me to their customers. Some took our phone numbers (Tope and I) to contact us when they got customers coming around, but after days of asking, they shot the idea down completely. I met some customers during the face to face interviews, but after seeking permission from the designers, customers refused to participate in the study. Most designers explained that introducing their customers or giving their contacts was a breach of privacy and confidence and customers who refused to be interviewed explained that they were simply not interested in any form of publicity even when we convinced them of anonymity.

The good thing was, I was getting a lot of information on the developments in the industry, enough to make an argument about an aspect of the changes that is less talked about. Behind the glamour of the designs of these designers, I was learning the technical and logical ways in which the designs are produced. I was accumulating information on designers' lived experiences with contemporary fashion production. I wanted to pursue it further but not shut down completely the prospect of interacting with the middle-class customers. I realised that the media play a major role in the current development of fashion, especially the print media and there is a ripple effect of other professions that have emerged such as photography, blogging and styling as a response to the growing fashion industry. I wanted to interview people in these professions. It would give a holistic view of the industry. However, my time was limited. As mentioned earlier, my assistant worked with a print media house and she introduced me to their editor whom I interviewed. She brought in two more media houses for interview. I also had the opportunity to make four random individual interviews with people introduced to me by my assistant and Chichi.

The difficulty in accessing customers led me to look for an alternative source of respondents. The difficulty was in how to get respondents who fit the middle-class status. I used variables such as college graduate - not a strict criterion but literature shows a correlation between higher education and better paying jobs (Tarkhnishvili and Tarkhnishvili, 2013; Spronk, 2014), a reputable job (no limit was placed on the assumed amount earned, but jobs recognised socially as economically profitable be it entrepreneurship or public service). Therefore, Chichi introduced me to two women in her church whom I interviewed, and Tope also brought in two women. My last interview for the first trip came from my MPhil colleague. I requested to meet any of her friends for an interview. I assumed she was middle-class based on my acquaintance with her. Schooling in Ghanaian tertiary institutions is expensive as a foreigner, having kids there as well who attended one of the high-profile schools in the city of Accra, living in a prime area, all gave me an idea of her financial and social background. Her friends, I assumed would fall into a similar category. She was a member of a female club which met once every other week and she invited me to their meeting to engage them in a focus group discussion. It was a meeting involving nine women and the discussion was held after their general meeting. Aside the general interviews, I made field notes through observations in church, at a naming ceremony and on the daily walk in town. I visited the two major markets: Oshodi market on the Mainland where fabrics and haberdasheries are sold and Edumata market on the Island where imported clothes and fashion accessories are sold.

I returned to Basel in early June. I started transcribing in Nigeria and continued when I returned. After transcribing, I assembled my data and read through manually, going through each script and finding possible codes and themes. I came up with some themes and decided to describe my data to give me an idea of the kind of information I had to allow me to strategize for the next trip. More details will be provided on the analysis procedure in the following section.

Yin indicates that “as with all plans, the actual practice may evolve and change during the conduct of the study, but at least you will have started with a plan” (2011:97). Thus, after engaging in preliminary analysis, I realised a change in the research interest, leaning more towards the exploration of the fashion industry itself and how the designers are shaping fashion production in contemporary times. The data I have was giving me a pattern of argument which is relevant to the discussion on cosmopolitanism fashion in Africa. I also got to know the structure that is gradually evolving with different professions linked to the industry, what a respondent calls the ecosystem of the industry: a mix of culture and foreignness, diversification and standardisation of the industry. I wanted to know more about the “ecosystem”.

I scheduled my next trip to coincide with the Lagos Fashion and Design Week (LFDW) event of 2017. This event brings together fashion lovers, designers and other professions that work directly or indirectly with fashion. I believed I could get people from the different professions to interview and since there would be exhibitions, customers would be around, and I could engage them for short interviews. Though the middle-class perspective was gradually exiting from my work, interviewing customers was to add to the entire argument of the industry's development and not to find a relationship between the two.

I set off for Lagos, for the second time, a week prior to the Lagos Fashion and Design Week (LFDW). I got to Lagos on a Thursday in hopes of resting before the event started on the following week Wednesday. I was picked up by Chichi and her husband, who at this time had returned from his military mission. I was eleven weeks pregnant then. I am mentioning this because it had a profound impact on the field work. On the Sunday, I started feeling severe pains with bleeding. I was taken to a private hospital where I was injected and asked to be on bed rest for at least two weeks. I was to be admitted but I argued my way out preferring instead to rest in the house. It was also because I knew my research was time bound so I could not afford to take bed rest in a confined space for that long. I came home and through the night to the following morning, the miscarriage was complete. I lost so much blood I became faint. They took me back to the hospital, I was given drugs and again, I refused admission. The LFDW started in two days, I needed to secure a hotel the next day, Tuesday. Tope had already made enquires and had an affordable place close to the venue in mind. I left the hospital with the promise to rest and take my medicines.

I left on the promise that Chichi and her husband would supervise my rest. But I would not rest. My research was time bound and I needed to be at the event on Wednesday. I rested on Tuesday and left for the Island on Wednesday. Chichi insisted the only other way to ensure I did not stress myself was to leave my laptop behind. She had seen how I went through my interviews every day and wrote memos or possibly started transcription after every interview. Therefore, to ensure I did not engage in any of this 'extra' work after interviews, I left my laptop. Another reason was that it felt too heavy carrying it at the time; I had too little strength to carry a small HP laptop. We checked into our hotel (Tope and I) at about 1:00pm. I must have looked pale and sick because Tope insisted I rest for the rest of the day while she went for the event to conduct some interviews. She was aware that I had been pregnant but did not know that I had lost it, she would get to know later in the evening. I was obviously exhausted, but we went together. The programme was to start at night with a runway show.

We could have attended like any ordinary person who comes around to experience the exhibition, but we registered. The registration would allow us to participate in the master-class programmes and I bought a ticket for the first-day runway show. We stayed till the programme started in the evening, making my observation of the set-up and writing notes. The first day show was a success, the crowd was large for a first day. Unfortunately, I could not stay through to the end of night. The show was in two parts and with a break in between, we left after the break. That would be the last time I could attend the night shows. Over the next three days, I was always burnt out by evening and different people who could tell I was not well, offered to take us home whenever I got faint and pale from exhaustion. We could not conduct any interviews on the first day.

The second day started bright and early with an inspiration session for the people registered for the masterclass. My health had not improved but a good night of sleep ensured that I had my strength back in the morning. After the morning session, I interviewed two people selected randomly from the masters-class. Later in the day, I interviewed a photographer and a fashion stylist in addition. Though I recorded every interview with an audio recorder and a phone, I had my notebook where I wrote interesting statements of respondents and after every interview, I would make notes that summed up the interview. I was using this as a backup since I did not have my laptop around. Another reason was that, because of my health, I thought I needed to write them down immediately after the interview to avoid the risk of not remembering the context and other details.

The third day was more intensive for the master-class session. Its time extended into mid-afternoon, after 3:00pm. People were exhausted and famished and could not bring themselves to participate in interviews. There were only four shops open for exhibition and their work started after the masterclass. I took the opportunity to interview two shop keepers, the other shop keepers were not willing to engage in an interview. It was a Friday, and the biggest night of the event. It was the close of the working week and many people trooped to the place. Most people were busy socialising and having fun and I managed to find respondents randomly. I interviewed two fashion bloggers and one individual who came to support a friend exhibiting on the runway. In all these interviews, I was careful to make my notes as backup. The registration fee for the masterclass came with lunch, so our afternoon meal was sorted and this gave me strength to carry on till evening.

As people were rushing to the hall of the runway, I came across a lady who was granting an interview to one of the media stations. She mentioned that she was a garment manufacturer with a factory on the outskirts of Lagos, producing both *Ankara* and what Nigerians call ‘material’ (fabrics with perceived Western origin). I introduced myself to her after her media interview and requested an interview. She was in a hurry to attend the show and suggested I take her number and call her later for an interview on the phone. I liked the idea because I was already exhausted, and Tope had been insisting that I rest. The lady and I were seated, and Tope had gone to get me water. In the event of taking out my second phone and putting in my recorder and the phone for recording, while I turned quickly to take the potential participant’s number, I believe I got robbed of my recorder and phone, in the midst of the crowd. Amazing. I did not notice the theft that evening because right after taking the contact, I put my phone back in my bag and zipped it. A gentleman who had noticed my ill-health approached me, asked if I needed to go home and offered to take us to our residence. Tope came back, and he took us to our hotel. As usual, the moment I get to my hotel, I did not touch my work again, I took my bath and went straight to bed to help me regain strength for the next day. The following day was the closing day, it was to start with and end with a runway show and since I had witnessed just a day of the runway show I was looking forward to it. I had planned the previous day to attend but I woke up exhausted and I felt it would be better to rest for the day and go back to the mainland on Sunday. I wanted to use the day to go through my interviews and match them with my notes. That was when I realised my items were gone.

We went to the event centre to report. Announcements were made but everyone knew I will not find it. The stress of the week and the loss of my data brought back, or perhaps made me more aware of my ill-health. I felt weak and the next thing I remembered was waking up in bed in the hotel.

I have asked myself questions about the need to have undertaken this research under such poor health conditions and later losing the data. Was it worth it? Yes! This period of research was time bound, the event is organised annually and to miss it will drag the study a year longer, time I did not have to spare. There might also be difficulty in obtaining funding for my next trip, therefore there was no better period for the research than when I went. Was the information about the LFDW crucial to my argument? Yes! I was gathering data on the change in the Nigerian fashion industry, a budding structure that takes its likeness with structures as perceived in the West. Fashion shows are new to the African context and little is known about it. The LFDW event is big and it captures this structure succinctly. The bringing together of

designers, trainees, experts of different professional fields directly or indirectly linked to fashion, witnessing the trooping in of international and local media to cover the event as well as local and international observers, speak to the creation of a solid and fascinating sector of the economy which is synced with a global industry. It is new, it is encouraging and fascinating to observe. I may not have been in my best elements to cover the full details of the event, but I witnessed enough to give me a picture of how fashion is evolving in Nigeria. The LFDW is a global event, not just national. It involves designers from around the continent and the West as well. It is focused on showcasing the talents of Africans and training the young to understand the new structure of fashion production. Fashion in Nigeria is no longer a local event but an international brand that is recognised and appreciated by global fashion networks.

The loss of data could not have great implications on my work. First, I had good data from the first phase fieldwork enough to make my arguments and get quotes that will support them. In the worst-case scenario, I would prefer going back to my earlier respondents to attain some clarity on the data I had than to cling to finding new evidence. Writing notes on my observations and interviews also helped greatly in the analysis. My notes gave structure to the field work and communicated to me the ideas I had formed during the period. Notwithstanding, having the actual audio recordings would have enhanced the validity of the work but its absence does not in anyway, undermine it. Observation as a method of data collection is as valid in qualitative research as interviews (Yin, 2011; Creswell, 2012). Fieldnotes is crucial to research work, especially in the qualitative approach since most of the arguments are steeped in the context of the research (Creswell, 2012).

At this period, I had enough information about the social context of fashion in the Lagos society which forms the substructure of the industry. The industry thrives on the complex relationship between culture and cosmopolitanism, local and foreign. Culture is the bedrock on which the local and the foreign interact. I had identified a crop of designers whose education, training and social construction of their profession was significantly different from the traditional tailors and seamstresses and to some extent could be described as the first generation of designers. Their difference is also seen in their individual experience of contemporary fashion production that syncs with both the foreign and the local. We read of “emerging designers” or “new designers” from Africa in literature (Loughran, 2009; Jennings, 2011; Rovine, 2015, Azieb Pool, 2016) but little is known about what makes them new or what differentiates them from the old. These emerging designers are building up something new in fashion production, something “non-traditional” to the African society but a fusion of the local with international

practices, bringing structure into the production process. Therefore, the study seeks to explore this structure through the career experiences of the designers, members of the society's relationship with fashion (individual respondents and FGD), other professionals who work directly or indirectly with the industry (media editors, photographers, blogger stylist and shop owners) and the observation of the researcher.

I spent the rest of my stay partly at the hospital and at home resting to recuperate and gain energy before I travelled. I was able to contact the garment manufacturer later for a phone interview. I took the email address and phone number of the organiser of the LFDW to follow up with an interview after the event. After a few calls she asked me to send her the questions through email, to which she will respond later. I sent it but I never received feedback after several reminders. I also tried contacting some of the earlier designer participants for a follow up of the earlier interviews, but none was ready to engage me. I left for Ghana in the latter part of November. In all, I conducted ten interviews during the second field trip; two bloggers, three trainees who attended the master-class, one photographer, two owners of shops on exhibition, one fashion stylist and one garment manufacturer; adding to the eighteen designers, three editors of lifestyle magazines, four individuals and the FGD group of nine women interviewed during the first field trip.

### **3.3 Analysis of Data**

This stage of the study is guided by the work of both Robert Yin's (2011) first three steps of data analysis: assembling, disassembling, reassembling and Ian Dey's (1993) splitting and splicing method. I saw myself applying both methods at most stages of the work. None is a straightforward procedure as it involves the complex process of going back and forth between the stages and processes. To me, there is little difference between the two approaches as they all involve the 'tearing' of data into bits, finding common themes across data till you achieve a holistic view of the information.

I always prefer to start my coding manually that is, assembling the data, engaging in a holistic understanding of each and all together before the free coding process of disassembling the data (Yin, 2011). It is similar to engaging in splitting of data into bits (Dey, 1993) directly on the transcript document before transferring it into a computer-based software. After research, I read through transcripts and listened to the data recording again; this was a process that I carried out through the entire analysis process. However, at this point, the aim was to understand the

individual representation of the data in the context of the Nigerian fashion industry. Reading it all together also gave a holistic view of the message(s) emerging from the data. After reading through the transcripts, I went over to assign codes, that “abbreviations of categories” (Dey, 1993:137) to lines, phrases and statements (databits), which will later be grouped into categories and then subcategories. According to Dey, to engage in this practice one “can now organize and analyse [the] data in terms of the categories which we have developed. This shift in focus has been described as a ‘recontextualization’ of the data...as it can now be viewed in the context of our own categories rather than in its original context” (1993:137).

Though through the interviews I had developed ideas about the data and some of the issues it addressed, in engaging in the first level of analysis by ‘tearing’ data into bits, I tried to approach data with no preconceptions, to allow for contextual information embedded in the scripts. I later transferred the documents into MaxQDA software with preconceived codes that emanated from the manual process. Transferring it onto the software made the work more organised, however, it did not guarantee a smooth process of analysis. There were lots of back and forth changes in coding and categorisation as new ideas emerged. Thus, I simultaneously grouped some codes into categories while splitting others further into sub-codes. The exercise gave me contextual insights into the study while I positioned myself in the work through my experience on the field. As a phenomenological work, I am mindful of the type of codes to generate, codes that will speak to individual experiences, especially the designers, of the evolving fashion industry of Nigeria. In assigning codes to phrases and statements, some statements would qualify for more than one code and in this case would fit into different categories later.

After the initial codes, I grouped them under subcategories. These sub-categories were further grouped into categories and further into broad themes that would form chapters of the study’s data analysis. These themes are: Social Milieu of Fashion Production, Identification of Professionals, Cosmopolitan Fashion, Diversification of Production and Standardisation of Production Structure. I have provided below a simplified illustration of the data handling process of the study.

The Social Milieu of Fashion Production theme has under it, categories of Appearance, Political Intervention and Economic contingencies. Under Appearance category are the codes of Social Respect and *Aso ebi* culture. These codes discuss the social and cultural elements that guide fashion participation in the Lagos society. The place of fashion in the life of the people is put succinctly by Tina who reiterates one slogan on fashion display, “we learned that

“looking good is a good business” that is Nigeria”. The Political Intervention category discusses government policies since independence that have influenced fashion and clothing. Ego informs us that, the contemporary fashion scene of Lagos can be traced “to the structural adjustment programme Babagida’s time, then Obasanjo’s time promoted the made in Nigeria thing it became more”. Aside policies, we discuss government industrial interventions that have also influenced the availability of cloth, clothes and the rise of fashion in Lagos. The president of Fashion and Designing Association of Nigeria exposes us to the nexus between the government and the industry which is boosting the current developments. She explains that “we are talking to the Federal government about putting up a hub so that things can be mass produced and people can buy ready-to-wear clothes”. The final category, economic contingencies, discusses economic incidence that has impacted on the display fashion since the period of independence. Currently, Shola believes that “now everybody is looking inward now, as you can see the dollar is high now so everybody is looking inward, trying to wear made in Nigeria, they’re indigenous now and it is cheaper than buying it like \$1000”. This chapter sets the context for the analyses as it gives the social, political and economic background to the current development in fashion in Lagos.

The second chapter of the analyses introduces the emerging designers through their education, training skills and their personal identification of their profession. Thus, the broad theme of Aesthetic Cosmopolitan Designer is broken down into three categories of Education, Training Skill and Professional Identification. Under Education are the codes of Tertiary and Secondary. Majority of designer participants (16 out 18) are tertiary graduates while the remaining two are secondary graduates. Respondents’ education set them apart from the traditional seamstress and tailors who are noted to be mostly school dropouts (Langevang and Gough, 2012; Ogundiliye, 2017). In the category of skill training, codes are structured into single training or dual training which are further divided into sub-codes of local, foreign or both. These sub-codes also have subdivisions. The purpose of this category is to describe the training background of the designers as cultural producers of aesthetic cosmopolitanism. According to Regev (2007), cultural producers of aesthetic cosmopolitanism should be positioned at the intersection of cultures to afford them a range for adoption and hybridisation. A good way to analyse designers’ dual position is through training. Almost all respondents, regardless of educational background, had engaged in both local and foreign training. The last category for the chapter is on Professional Identification. This category shows how the designers of this study differentiate themselves from their local competitors while seeking equal recognition

with their international competitors. As emerging professionals from an established industry, respondents believe it is imperative to set a mark that exonerate them from negative stereotypes of the old functionaries while drawing attention to global standard of work. Cultural producers of aesthetic cosmopolitanism seek local validation as well as global upgrade of their production. This chapter shows a transition from the old “malfunctioning” fashion production system to an upgraded, international system of production. Therefore, Gee shows the transition when he says, “I am a tailor before I switched to a designer”.

Chapter six describes the works of the designers using the current Trend of Fabrics and Trend of Design. Under the category of Fabrics, there are the local and foreign codes. Under the local is a sub-code of indigenous and appropriated and under Design are local and foreign designs. This chapter introduces us to the type of work these designers produce and how local or foreign elements influence their work. In a more visual way, we experience the fusion of the foreign with the local in the products. It is observed that, while women’s clothing lean into the use of local fabrics, men’s clothing prefers foreign fabrics. However, in terms of design, we witness a reverse where women’s clothing is designed in western styles while men’s clothing are designed in local designs. Therefore, Eve who uses local fabrics for female clothes explains how to create the cosmopolitan look different from local look, “the looks that they create then I work on that, make it look more modern, more cosmopolitan, where it has this western flavour without it being totally western.”

The next theme is Diversification of Production which is divided into two main categories: Genre of Production and Target Market. Under the Genre of Production are the codes of bespoke, ready-to-wear and mass production. The Target Market category is also divided into Age, Gender, Physique and Socio-economic status codes. These codes are furthered divided into sub-codes. The chapter shows a progressive inclusion of different genre of production from the global scene. The need to meet the fashion needs of cosmopolitan customers has driven local fashion production from the traditional bespoke services to include already-made clothes and even production en masse. However, the culture of uniqueness requires that they are “ready-to-wear but at the same time they are limited-editions”. The category of Target Market also shows specialisation of production for a particular market target. Thus, this theme explores the new dynamics of distribution and marketing of fashion products which reflect elements of global fashion trade and local culture of fashion. Thus, in the case of physique “we design with the African woman in mind so, we take into consideration the shape, the curves, the way we like to look grand”

The last theme is Standardisation of Production. Designers, aside marketing and distribution strategies, have adopted other technologies that aid the practical aspect of producing an outfit. This ranges from intangible expressive technologies to tangible ones on the floor of production. The chapter also discusses the eco-system developing within the industry that supports fashion production with categories such as Brand, Workspace, Labour Resource, Equipment, Visibility, Networking and related professions. This theme gives us an understanding of the groundwork of production and how fashion production is connected to the rising of other professions hitherto not recognised in Lagos. This section will help us realise that “the dynamic and the mechanic about fashion are just about setting in... Now what we have is just like what you will get abroad; we now have the stylist, the illustrators, the drafters, the cutters, the designers themselves, the whole picture is coming together”.

The above explanation is by no means exhaustive of the process; however, it gives an example of the coding process, albeit in its simplest form, and how I arrived at themes that form the chapters of my analysis. The codes as used here can pass for subcategories as most of the codes are split into sub-codes and further subcategories. A code such as media under visibility category has sub codes such as internet, electronic and print media. The internet code is divided further into social media, company website or online shopping site. Likewise, gender code under the category of customer base had the options of male, female or both. Themes, categories and codes are further explained in each chapter comprehensively. Analysis was in summary a back and forth process of forming codes before categories or finding categories and splitting them further into codes and sub-codes. Splicing or reassembling them into categories gave a holistic picture that helped to develop themes emerging from the data. There are lots of codes and categories that after the process I had to let go because they did not fit into the general argument I was developing. The databits given above therefore may not give succinct examples to the codes since the process is not exhaustive but rather an illustration of information that relates to the codes. Some may be ‘typical’ of the situation while others will need additional information for better understanding. In all, I try to present a simplified systematic approach to the organisation or recontextualising of the data gathered.

### **3.4 Interpretation and Organisation of Data**

The analysis of data as illustrated above is divided into five major themes, giving understanding of the social milieu in which current fashion production evolved and thrives and explaining the cosmopolitan position of emerging designers who are behind global and local influences

combination in the production of Nigerian fashion: creating cosmopolitan fashion, diversification of production and standardisation of production. The interpretation flows from the core values that have guided the formulation of the research through to the data collection and the initial analysis stage. After the change of focus in the research following the first phase of fieldwork, the topic and research interest changed. As mentioned above, the focus centred more on the lived experiences of workers in the industry relating to the production of aesthetic cosmopolitan fashion, acknowledging the change in fashion production that provides a picture of the fusion of local culture with foreign practices. This realisation led me to the key concept of the study which will define the topic and question as well as the thesis of the study. The work of Motti Regev (2007) on aesthetic cosmopolitanism in the Indian movie industry gave me an insight on the development perspective emerging in the Nigerian fashion industry (the next section will give a detailed exposition on the key concept –aesthetic cosmopolitanism) where foreign practices and technologies are employed in local context, not to displace but to enhance the cultural production of the aesthetics. Therefore, the study’s research topic is now on “The Role of Emerging Designers in the Production of Aesthetic Cosmopolitanism in the Nigerian Fashion Industry”. I ask the specific question of how these designers are combining the influence of the global with the local culture to produce aesthetic cosmopolitan fashion. This is relevant to knowledge production because studying aesthetic cosmopolitanism in the fashion industry helps to gain insight into the role of fashion in the social production of change. Thus, I claim in the thesis that contemporary innovation in fashion from Africa (Nigeria) is driven by a crop of emerging designers who are responsive to social change and are intentional about incorporating this change into their work. Because the designers live in cosmopolitan cities, their works (process and output) reflect the complexities that come with the integration of the local with the global as well as openness to foreign cultures. The themes are therefore analysed through this lens, providing rival evidence (Yin, 2011) mostly through secondary data and field data for research validation.

The analysis of data starts from the fourth chapter with a discussion on the social context of Lagos fashion culture, the foundation on which most of the changes emerge. Government interventions and economic issues that have further boosted the industry are discussed, giving a contextual background to the study. The fifth chapter introduces us to the emerging designers who, through their high literacy and dual training background, are situated at the intersection of cultures that lend them range of choices of both international and local elements in shaping their ideas and production process. For better appreciation of their difference, I juxtapose the

traditional producers— tailors and seamstresses— to the new designers. The next chapter is on the production of their products. It discusses designers’ choice of fabrics and designs and elements that inform their choices. Thus, the consciousness of producing both indigenous and global trends characterises the products of the designers. There is hybridity of fashion, the merging of foreign fabrics and designs with local cloths and design to produce cosmopolitan fashion. The openness to “foreignness”, fusing it with the local culture of fashion production is expanded in practical terms in the next two chapters of diversification and standardisation. Designers are introducing specialty in production by identifying and serving particular consumer target be it gender, age or physique. The introduction of ready-to-wear clothes and mass production is a new phenomenon that addresses convenience, accessibility and availability of products to consumers. However, they are guided by the fashion culture of uniqueness, exclusivity and flamboyance. The standardisation chapter gives insight into the introduction of structure into the production process, advertising and marketing. That is the adoption of some foreign technological skills in fashion production and the functional relationship between designers and other professionals whose work directly or indirectly relates to fashion. Thus, an ecosystem of network and association that makes the current development holistic. Fashion production in Lagos syncs in many respects with structures of global fashion industry, a paramount reason for its current recognition and appreciation. The last chapter focuses on the discussion and conclusion of the study.

### **3.5 Definition of Fashion**

Fashion for a long time was associated with Western garments which appeared in Paris during the mid-nineteenth century, and then it moved to Milan and then New York. Africa’s position in fashion has long been shadowed, only making appearance as inspiration to the West. According to Rovine (2008), some authors argue that non-western societies do not have fashion but rather costume since their clothes’ styles persist for a longer period while fashion changes rapidly with time. However, Eicher (1995) argues that, indeed fashion is about change and change occurs in every society though not evenly across all societies. Thus, Africans and other non-western societies have had their sense of fashion peculiar to their society. Drawing from these explanations about fashion, the study seeks to adopt the definition provided by Troxell and Judelle (1971:2), that defines fashion as “the prevailing style accepted and used by majority of group at any given time”. From this definition, it is well realized that fashion has always been part of the life of every society even from ancient times. Though fashion in Africa might

not be as pronounced as that of the West, fashion has always been part of the culture and traditions of the people of Africa.

The recent development in the world fashion industry is very significant and there is active participation of African designers in exhibiting profound talents, innovation and creativity in the industry. This is a new epoch which comes with its new designs and styles and Africans are boldly taking their stake in this new development.

### **3.6 Key Concept: Aesthetic Cosmopolitanism**

Cosmopolitanism can be traced to the philosophy of ancient Greek and Roman Stoics who espoused the idea of “*Kosmou politês* or ‘world-citizen’. The Stoics developed the philosophy in reference to a community of the larger humanity race which transcends local boundaries to incorporate everyone under the ‘sun’ (Nussbaum, 1997). In his famous statement that resounds with cosmopolitanism, when Diogenes was asked about his origin [citizenship], he replied “I am a citizen of the world” (Ibid: 5). This implies that he defines himself primarily through the affiliation to wider humanity other than the local community and this was crucial to the principle of Stoicism. They espoused the worth of every human whom they believed possessed reason. Reason is common to all and thus makes all humans equal. Nussbaum discusses in various ways how famous Greco-Roman Stoics like Cicero, Seneca and Marcus Aurelius practised [arguably] Stoic belief of cosmopolitan world during their epoch, though such practices can be vehemently criticised as true cosmopolitan (Nussbaum, 1997).

Stoic philosophy of world citizenship and worth of humans influenced greatly the work of renowned eighteenth-century philosopher Immanuel Kant who is acknowledged as the visionary of modern-day cosmopolitanism (Nussbaum, 1997; Beck, 2008). Thus, “although his own version of cosmopolitanism grows out of a distinctive eighteenth-century tradition, both the tradition itself and Kant’s own approach to it are saturated with the ideas of ancient Greek and especially Roman stoicism” (1997:4). Just like the Stoic, Kant believes all human relations should assume a wider spectrum which extends to all humanity regardless of location because ‘we’ all have equal right to the earth.” Kant argues “we are all members of the same species, we all share the Earth, and we must live in proximity with one another. We all have an equal right to profit by the Earth in common, an equal claim to use its resources” (Kant, 1796 p. 28 cited in Dowdeswell, 2011: 178). The earth is the joint property of all humanity and therefore, no matter the distance and location, all humans are neighbours and are required to live in

harmony. Kant, developing his ideas in the eighteenth century, acknowledged the gradual convergence of world societies, the inter-connectivity of human relations and to some extent world problems that accompanied the industrial revolution. One of his often-quoted cosmopolitan statement sums up the idea in his book *Perpetual Peace* (1903): “the social relations between the various peoples of the world, in narrower or wider circles, have now advanced everywhere so far that a violation of Right in one place of the earth, is felt everywhere” (Kant, 1796:31 cited in Dowdeswell, 2011:176).

Flowing from the Stoic idea of reasoning and human worth, Kant based his Cosmopolitanism “upon universal and fundamental moral principles, the first of which is that all human beings are part of a universal moral community in which each person is equal in dignity and worth” (Dowdeswell, 2011:176). Reasoning, which is believed to be possessed by all humans, overrides social status, race, gender, class distinction and other social and cultural values within a locality. Therefore, Kant builds his political philosophy ideas, on “politics based upon reason rather than patriotism or group sentiments, a politics that was truly universal rather than communitarian, a politics that was active, reformist and optimistic, rather than given to contemplating the horrors, or waiting for the call of Being” (Nussbaum, 1997:3).

In terms of equal right to the earth, Kant argues that all humans have cosmopolitan rights. The “cosmopolitan rights concern the rights of human beings as citizens of the universal state of mankind” (Wonicki, 2009:273). Inherent in this right is the concept of hospitality which Kant believes is a crucial basis of the idea of cosmopolitanism. Hospitality simply connotes kindness or acceptance of strangers into another society. Since we are all citizens of the earth, Kant reiterates that humans have the right to be accepted in any society regardless of their difference and should be treated with kindness in the receiving society. Cosmopolitanism embraces difference and diversity in humans that comes from cultural and social background while acknowledging the common denominator of humanness. Dowdesell (2011) explains the meaning of hospitality further by tracing its roots into the Greek language which reiterates the exact meaning as espoused by Kant. Thus, “we must not allow the definition of 'hospitality' as mere kindness to strangers or an interest in diversity to obscure the deeper meaning of the term, and its origins in the ancient custom of *hospitium*, which involves care and concern in meeting the needs of each person and welcoming them into our community” (Dowdeswell, 2011: 179).

This deeper meaning of hospitality –meeting the needs of persons– as enshrined in cosmopolitanism entreats receiving communities to go beyond acceptance and kindness to

make provision to ensure migrants are positioned for opportunity to make a decent living without obstructions. Migrants should not be extradited to their home countries when such conditions will threaten their human survival in their home country. Hospitality should promote respect for the public rights of every human to the use of earth resources irrespective of location or cultural boundaries and fostering of environment that appreciates the customs of others. For Kant, to promote *Perpetual Peace* (1903), political discourse must be subordinated to morality that permits the existence of humans in societies that promote persons' worth.

However, Kant's cosmopolitan ideas can be criticised as Eurocentric. Postulating ideas of equality and acceptance in the eighteenth century when slave trade and imperialism were crucial merchandise for the European economy was far-fetched. Cosmopolitanism excluded non-European countries that were obviously treated as non-equals by the European imperial masters. Politically, it has been asserted that "such norms as hospitality, reciprocity, and publicity (transparency and free political participation) are Western and Eurocentric in nature, incompatible with cultural pluralism, and lack the justification and legitimacy for the broad-based consensus required for a Cosmopolitan political sphere to emerge among the world's diverse peoples" (Dowdsdeswell, 2011:176).

Cosmopolitanism as envisaged by Kant received little attention over the years. The turn of the era of modernity witnessed the insurgence of different concepts to help understand the further convergence of countries and people in a more inclusive way through economic policies and technological advancements co-existing with the global heightening of difference and divisions. While there was advancement in transportation –airplanes and trains– communication –telephones and telegrams– class and social mobility also clouded arguments in the 1950s and 60s between the Marxist and Weberian schools of thought. Later in the 1970s, feminism came to the fore to explain the gender marginalisation of social processes and social theories (Martell, 2010). In the Postmodern era (Appiah, 2006) or second modernity (Beck, 2009) of the 1980s and 90s, attention was shifted to the heightened economic and media advancement, thriving on the mantra of globalisation (Martell, 2010). Globalisation conceptualises the interconnectivity of world economic system and communication interaction. The advancement in transportation, especially air travel, increased the movement of goods, services and labour across the globe, backed by various inter-state trade policies and world trade organisation polices. The introduction of cable networks, satellites and later the internet has greatly influenced the flow of information across borders.

The era presented speed, free and democratic flow of information incorporating larger societies at far-distance locations. The notion of border-nation is threatened as many argue on the gradual eradication of geographical national boundaries through the process of globalisation (Appadurai, 2005; Sassen, 2005). Thus, the world has been brought closer together politically and economically. Concepts such as ‘economic liberalisation’ or neoliberalism<sup>5</sup>, ‘Simultaneity<sup>6</sup>’ and ‘Time-Space Compression<sup>7</sup>’ are conceptual tools which lend explanations to the transcendence of interaction beyond geographical borders. Jia noticed that “technological progress, especially the Internet, has brought people closer together. International and domestic concerns are becoming increasingly intertwined. Under these circumstances, national borders have lost their previous significance and national sovereignty is becoming anachronistic” (Jia, 2001:32).

The vision of Marshall McLuhan (1964) of a global world village was increasingly being realised in post-modernity. Global village describes how “human beings are increasingly connected by electric (or electronic) technologies which virtually eliminate the effects of space and time so that the globe contracts into one interconnected, metaphorical ‘village’” (Gibson and Murray, 2012: 312). The argument of the novelty or otherwise of globalisation did not shadow the overwhelming evidence of wider participation by diverse cultures and countries as well as the speed of incorporation. McLuhan’s vision depicted inter-state mergers to form regional, continental and hopefully global block in the political, social and economic spheres. However, the rate of globalisation has not been equal across countries or even cities within the same country. Saskia Sassen introduces the concept of global cities. According to Sassen, while there is a “decline in national boundaries resulting from economic and information mobility and liquidity, there is ascendancy of other spatial units and scales which are sub-national” (Sassen, 2005:27). These sub-national interconnectivities, notably cities or regions, are deterritorialised and merged for economic and technological ventures. Notwithstanding, be it global village, global cities or other forms of connectivity, globalisation assumes a process of social change through closer connectivity of the world at both national and sub-national levels.

However, at the turn of the twenty-first century, the globalisation concept had been criticised for its inadequacy to explain other social and cultural events that accompanied economic and

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<sup>5</sup> The economic ideology of free market, laissez-fair economics.

<sup>6</sup> Simply explained by Martell (2010) as “people in lots of places doing the same thing[example] consuming the same make of coffee”

<sup>7</sup> The acceleration of economic activities leads to the destruction of spatial barriers and distances (Harvey, 1989).

political interdependence of the world. There is a recall of cosmopolitanism or better still cosmopolitization as a concept to help aptly define current social processes.

Hannerz (2006) is of the view that globalisation is focused on political and economic at the neglect of cultural factors. However, cosmopolitanism is addressing the cultural together with the political. Thus, cosmopolitanism has two faces: the political and the cultural (Hannerz, 2006). Wonicki differentiates globalisation from cosmopolitanism on ideological basis:

If we accept the fact that globalization, when understood as a political, cultural and social transgression, is an empirical point of reference, then cosmopolitanism will be an ideological answer to globalization. It is an attempt not only to manage such facts as plurality of values and migrations but also to build a new, more “adequate” political vocabulary which would enable us to better describe our national and international reality.

(2009: 272)

The discussion of this paper on cosmopolitanism will dwell more on the ideas of Ulrich Beck. Beck, a frontline advocate of contemporary cosmopolitanism, postulates on the application of the concept of cosmopolitanism in modern societies (Saito, 2011). He premises his argument on a change in social process that has ushered in a different world dispensation different from globalisation (which was characterised by economic and political interdependencies associated with modernity); in the era of second modernity, society is characterised by *risk*. Contemporary societies are risk societies (Beck 1999). Globalisation becomes an obsolete concept when used to justify world happenings, therefore, a better and more efficient concept is required to capture the social change, thus, cosmopolitanism. Beck makes a succinct distinction between globalism or globalisation and his propagation of cosmopolitanism:

Globalism [globalisation] involves the idea of world market, of the virtues of neoliberal capitalist growth, and of the need to move capital, products and people across a relatively borderless world. Cosmopolitization is a much more multidimensional process of change that has irreversibly changed the very nature of the social world and the place of states within that world. Cosmopolitization thus includes the proliferation of multiple cultures (as with cuisines from around the world), the growth of many transnational forms of life, the emergence of various non-state political actors (from Amnesty

International to the World Trade Organization), the paradox generation of global protest movements against globalization, the formation of international or transnational states –like the European Union and the general process of cosmopolitan interdependence and global risk.

(Beck, 2008: 30)

The interrelations of states and to some extent, cities have taken a different turn beyond the economic, political and even technology to incorporate culture and other social values, hitherto overlooked. Acknowledging the root of the concept from Kant's idea, Beck believes the application of the concept of cosmopolitanism is not just philosophical (ism) or normative but rather analytical-empirical cosmopolitization which is a continuous process. With the analytical-empirical version from Beck, he seeks to break free from the philosophical root of Kant's cosmopolitanism to present a more practical version, hopefully sociological version in a form of cosmopolitization. Cosmopolitization is a continuous process instead of an ideology. Therefore, in a risk society where factors such as HIV, nuclear emission, terrorism, SARS and climate change pose global threat, unlike Kant's cosmopolitanism that requires voluntary participation, cosmopolitization in risk society is forced. That is, "one big difference between the classical philosophy debate on cosmopolitanism and sociological cosmopolitization is that the cosmopolitan philosophy is about free choice, the cosmopolitan perspective informs us about a *forced* cosmopolitization" (Beck, 2008:27). In risk society, the various risks act as a force that pulls people together to find solutions, most at times unconsciously. Cosmopolitization is not a conscious or intentional stake, however, the "growing interdependence and interconnection of social actors across national boundaries, more often than (sic) not, are side effects of actions that are not meant to 'cosmopolitan' in normative sense; this is '*real existing cosmopolitanism or 'cosmopolitization of reality'*" (Beck, 2008: 26). Thus, as there is daily global mobility of risk in terms of people, concepts and ideas, cosmopolitization is the by-product of interaction in the bid to find solutions to risks. The "key features of global risks are how they generate a kind of "compulsory cosmopolitanism," a "glue" for diversity and plurality in a world" (Beck, 2009:4). Thus, hospitality in global risk is forced because in "global space of responsibility of global risks, nobody can be excluded from "hospitality" (ibid:5). Everyone [individuals or other social groups and not necessarily the state) is obliged by risks to cooperate with the rest of the world in finding solutions to anticipated catastrophes happening around because failure to cooperate is a danger to all. The

'other' who hitherto was accorded hospitality is now in our midst and therefore, all are forced to live in harmony.

Though Beck uses cosmopolitization to distinguish his ideas from Kant's philosophical Cosmopolitanism, he often, in cases where he need not make an ontological argument of the word, uses cosmopolitanism to term his contemporary cosmopolitan ideas. Other authors who joined the conversation use the cosmopolitanism term to mean the contemporary idea of Beck (Szerszynski and Urry, 2006; Saito, 2011; Regev, 2007). Therefore, in making the argument, this thesis will use cosmopolitanism and where necessary, cosmopolitization to make my points.

Cosmopolitanism recognises diversity and plurality of world citizens but discredits nationalism. The connection and interdependence of people in cosmopolitanism supersede or eradicate national boundaries making them irrelevant. Thus, "cosmopolitanism is not a circle created by a culture diffused from a centre, but instead... centres are everywhere and circumferences nowhere" (Hindess, 2010:8). Beck and some of his contemporaries propagate the idea of individuation in cosmopolitanism. Thus, individual and sub-institutions are the players in cosmopolitanism and not states. Beck abhors methodological nationalism, that is, restricting unit of analysis in social process to nation-states. He calls for methodological cosmopolitanism where units of analysis are not bound by geographical boundaries but traverse boundaries to acknowledge the interdependencies of humans bound together by their exposure to common risk. Corporations with an openness to foreign culture do not occur necessarily on national level but more on micro, individual levels. This is also a mark of difference between Kant's cosmopolitanism and contemporary use of the concept.

Appadurai (2005) provides argument on anthropological viewpoint on methodological cosmopolitanism, though he does not link it directly. The further advancement of media and increased migration has created communities that bond over issues other than geographical locations. He argues that in contemporary societies, "part of what the mass media make possible, is what I have elsewhere called a "community of sentiments", a group that begins to imagine and feel things together" (Appadurai, 2005: 8). Such community of sentiments need not know themselves physically but are connected to each other through products consumption, banking, public issues, politics and other global or regional issues. In this case, Appadurai (2005) acknowledges the deterritorialised nature of global issues and human interaction. In the same vein, in risk societies, people bond over risk issues (which includes issues as stated by

Appadurai) that pose danger to the livelihood or existence with little or no reference to their location. Spatial differences and distances are just not contracted but have been made obsolete in the argument of cosmopolitanism. National borders pose no hindrance in cosmopolitanism as people can connect and create spaces of interaction, learning and borrowing from each other without direct physical contact.

It is on this premise that Beck calls for the cosmopolitization of places which go beyond cosmopolitan places (Beck, 2008). Cosmopolitan places are tied to urban geographical locations that are normally places of cultural reservoirs and resources, exhibiting diversities and complexities of current social order. Various cities across the world such as Lagos, Johannesburg, Tokyo, London, New York, typify this characteristic of cosmopolitan places. They serve as places demarcated for the reserve of cultural diversity and wider human interrelation within a bounded space. People from diverse background co-exist, exhibiting their differences and similarities while negotiating harmony on daily basis, the hallmark of the complexities of cosmopolitan societies. In such contexts “cities are the dream of ‘cosmopolis’, a place where there is acceptance of, connection with, and respect and space for “the stranger” as citizens and migrants work together ‘on matters of common destiny and forging new hybrid cultures” (Sandercock (2003) cited in Yeoh and Soco, 2014:174).

Muller’s work (2011) highlights this phenomenon succinctly on migrants living in cosmopolitan urban Amsterdam and London. Part of the respondents who migrated to these cities will not claim the country as their nationality or identify with their cultures but will claim to be a Londoner or Amsterdamer. These migrants identify more with the city which has built a sub-culture, different from national culture and responsive to diversity and pluralism of people through its hospitality towards migrants. These people have attained ‘urban alchemy’ through ‘urban cosmopolitanism’ by living in these cities (Muller, 2011:3415). Meaning, the discursive social practices of living in a city with diverse people has been managed by these migrants to supersede their national or local identities to transform them into harmonious community of cosmopolitan citizens (Muller, 2011). The diversity and plurality of inhabitants of such cities afford the cities the need to develop social tools of living that appreciate difference as well as promote harmony. Living in urban cosmopolitan places eradicates the “borders between self and city” allowing for a “fluid...emergence of 'imaginary cities' - cosmopolitan citizenship and communities that are based on urban belonging and identity” (Muller, 2011:3426).

However, Beck denotes a difference between cosmopolitan places and cosmopolitization of places in the following respects: the first [cosmopolitan places] is reflexive, the second [cosmopolitization of places] is latent; the first is fixed to urban space, the second is open to many different configuration of ‘places’, the global context of *rural areas*, the global context of *regions*, the global context of *households* and so on” (Beck, 2008:32). Cosmopolitization of places calls for integration at different levels of spaces superseding any geographical definition of locality. It can occur at various places regardless of the geo-political importance of the location. Premised on the above tenets, cosmopolitization can be experienced in the global north or the global south, the periphery and the core, the urban and the rural. That being said, it is noticed that though Beck might have started off his cosmopolitanism ideals from a European perspective or further to include North America, his latter debates expanded the idea to non-Europeans. In his paper on “Varieties of Second Modernity and the Vision Cosmopolitan”, Beck makes exposition on the cosmopolitan case of East Asian countries and how risks in these areas can force cosmopolitization (Beck, 2016).

The urbanisation of cosmopolitan places identifies subjects as ‘elites’ and ‘exposed’ which applies to limited number of people. However, cosmopolitization of places incorporates larger spectrum of people in world integration. The consumption of other cultures takes different forms in different localities, therefore, different localities get to be cosmopolitanized in different ways. Putting it differently but in consonance with the argument of Beck, Saito (2011) identifies two types of subjective ties in cosmopolitanism: elite cosmopolitanism and rooted cosmopolitanism. The elite cosmopolitans “are those who have strong attachments that traverse group boundaries while having only weak attachments with people in countries of residence” (pp.136). These people can be equated to the “global class” of Saskia Sassen (2007). They are people who frequently travel across the world and establish strong ties with people in different countries but maintain weak ties with their fellow nationals in their home countries. On the other hand are the rooted cosmopolitans. Rooted cosmopolitans are unlikely to have strong networks to foreign countries, but they exhibit “strong, moderate, and weak attachments with people both inside and outside of countries of their primary residence” (Saito, 2011:136). The attachment is stronger with people of home residence and moderate to weak with foreigners. While elite cosmopolitanism incorporates fewer people around the world, rooted cosmopolitanism encompasses large number of people who are connected through migration and media technology.

Contemporary cosmopolitanism ideals have been engaged in various studies to demonstrate its practicality in different societies providing different concepts within the cosmopolitan framework to explain various cultural phenomenon. One concept that has received adequate attention in literature pertaining to cultural cosmopolitanism is banal cosmopolitanism. Sociologically, banal cosmopolitanism is defined as “ordinary people who have incorporated foreign cultural idioms and objects into practices of their everyday life” (Siato, 2011:133) thus, “multiple attachments to foreign nonhumans to the extent that their subjective horizons transcend national boundaries” (pp134). It is as basic as “the huge variety of meals, food, restaurants and menus routinely present in nearly every city anywhere in the world [and] also penetrates other spheres of everyday culture” (Beck, 2004:151). Thus, the presence of Chinese, Turkish or Ethiopian bistros in many foreign localities, integrated into the daily lives of the receiving societies serve as a typical example.

Mica (2007) also introduces *Domestic or Vernacular Cosmopolitanism* into the economic and specifically, employment aspect of cosmopolitanism. Domestic or vernacular cosmopolitanism is cosmopolitanism that takes place in the home, neighbourhood or in the family. Yeoh and Soco’s (2011) frame their argument using this concept to demonstrate the need to feminise the application of cosmopolitanism since it has assumed a masculine stance in most discussions and also extend cosmopolitan concept to include domestic work like caregiving, in their case, as found among transnational female workers. Yeoh and Soco’s a study borders on the cosmopolitan lifestyle of Filipino domestic workers in caregiving jobs in Singapore. The crises in social reproduction resulting from decrease in childbirth in some Asian countries have made indigenes unable to reproduce demographically to meet both productive and reproductive demands and therefore rely on migrants for assistance. While the concept of working-class in cosmopolitanism has largely been referred in connection with global upper-class<sup>8</sup>, Yeoh and Soco (2014) draw attention to the eminent integration of global domestic workers in the configuration of a cosmopolitan working-class. Filipino domestic workers in Singapore who were already exposed globally through their connection with relative migrants or the consumption of global products back home in Philippines admit to added impetus to status and

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<sup>8</sup> Working-class cosmopolitanism is different from elite cosmopolitanism as discussed above. Yeoh and Soco provide an apt distinction “Working-class cosmopolitanism differs primarily from elite cosmopolitanism in that it is not so much based on the prior cultural or economic capital of the privileged but rooted in a process of learning that takes place quite intensively in the course of migration as contact zones and cultural exchanges multiply world. Cosmopolitanism among the elite draws on privilege and education and is manifested mainly in the consumption of objects and spaces with an ascribed cultural value” (2014:175).

purpose of cosmopolitanism following their migration to Singapore. Working for people of different origins –Singaporeans, Americans and European migrants– have exposed Filipino workers to diverse cultures through housekeeping, cooking ‘foreign’ meals, traveling across the globe with employers and developing taste for ‘elite’ lifestyle such as learning musical instruments and going to the cinema during their days off from duty. Though they tend to adopt some foreign lifestyles, these domestic workers continue to maintain ties to their home countries through communication with relatives or feed from electronic media. The situation positions them at the intersection of several cultures that transcend national boundaries, embodying cosmopolitanism.

A last concept to consider, which is the key concept for this study, is *Aesthetic Cosmopolitanism*. Motti Regev (2007) introduced this concept in his work which seeks to explain the cosmopolitan nature of the Indian movie industry. He argues that late modernity (Regev, 2007) has produced a society of connectedness and cultural fluidity that allows the fusion of wider cultural influences (beyond ethnic and national boundaries) in the creation of ethno-national cultures of a locality. While he acknowledges the work of forbearers who started the conversation on contemporary cosmopolitanism such as Urry (1995), Cheah and Robbins (1998), Tomlinson (1999), Beck (2000), Hannerz, (2004) and others, his main critique of their works is the dichotomous nature of their arguments. The definition offered by Szerszinski and Urry (2002) on cosmopolitanism as ‘cultural disposition involving an intellectual and aesthetic stance of “openness” towards peoples, places and experiences from different cultures, especially those from different nations” (pp 468), according to Regev over-simplifies the complexities of cosmopolitanism, creating an ‘us’ and ‘other’ stance in the formation of ethno-national cultures. Based on the above definition, culture becomes aesthetic cosmopolitanism only when its source is exterior to the producers. Hence, culture with local or indigenous characteristic is unqualified as aesthetic cosmopolitanism. This explanation produces a rigid boundary between what is considered exterior and the interior which is tied to location. It presumes that, one is recognised as engaging in aesthetic cosmopolitanism when culture is borrowed from the external to influence the local. While this premise is a good starting point (the emphasis on agency that comes with the individual use of the concept and the acknowledgement of the ‘other’ in the local), Regev (2007) argues that contemporary society, which he characterises as late modernity, is more complex and fluid compared to the essentialist, purist stance of the other scholars (Regev, 2007).

He prefers, first, to argue aesthetic cosmopolitanism from an ethno-national level other than individual as others have argued (Beck, 2000; Szerszinski and Urry, 2002). That is, in late modernity, cosmopolitanism should not necessarily be located at the individual level but at the structural level to represent the national cultural uniqueness (Regev, 2007). Thus, the ethnic group or the nation can also engage in cosmopolitanism just as individuals engage it. Therefore, constructing national uniqueness of culture in contemporary societies should not be guided by rigid, essentialist and exclusive quest but rather, an acknowledgement of the relativity and flexibility of current global cultural relations. He states that, “in late modernity.... The orthodox commitment to a rigid form of national culture has been replaced by a fluid conception of ethno-national uniqueness, one that is constantly and consciously willing to implement stylistic innovations in art and culture from different parts of the world” (Regev, 2007: 125).

In other words, contemporary cultural arts that represent ethno-national culture signify the interception of the global or other and the local or us. Contemporary society is constantly negotiating the influence of diverse cultures on the local national culture on daily basis to produce a cosmopolitan society that thrives on diversity in harmony. This interception of the global with the local is not an exception but rather the normal and routine process of cultural production in the cosmopolitan era (Regev, 2007: 126). Thus, national cultural uniqueness is no longer rooted in indigenisation but in the crafting of the local with the global. The onus is on cultural producers to create such hybridity which results in cultural innovation, hence, aesthetic cosmopolitanism (Regev, 2007). Regev then defines aesthetic cosmopolitanism as, “the interplay that arises from this intersection, the global and the local, the ‘imperial’ and the ethno-national converge, and it is from this convergence that aesthetic cosmopolitanism is ultimately produced” (Regev, 2007:129).

Regev (2007) further states that, aesthetic cosmopolitanism occurs when “the condition in which the representation and performance of ethno-national cultural uniqueness are largely based on art forms that are created by contemporary technologies of expression, and whose expressive forms include stylistic elements knowingly drawn from sources exterior to indigenous traditions” (ibid: 126). The acknowledgement of the use of technologies in the creation of hybridised culture indicates the wider spectrum of appropriation as contemporary technologies like the internet affords the share of wider and larger volumes of information within a short space of time. The connectivity of these technologies promotes information fluidity across national boundaries, creating a cultural space that supersedes geographical

location. As argued by Appadurai (2005), as people migrate and media technology advances (electronic media), culture travels and are interspersed with other cultures, likewise, local culture is exposed and influenced by foreign cultures through media and maintaining ties with emigrant relatives. The ‘deterritorialization’ of culture allows culture to assume a broader space of negotiation. Culture operates on the “ethnospace” and not just the local (Appadurai, 2005). Contemporary national culture is therefore the outcome of the complex interplay of diverse foreign cultures space within the local.

According to Regev, aesthetic cosmopolitanism is not just a linear relationship of the adoption of foreign cultural elements which are integrated into the local but also the exposure of local or indigenous cultural elements for global consumption. Local cultural elements are projected on the global, making them available for others’ appropriation. Therefore, “the production of ethnonational cultural uniqueness in late modernity, especially in the sphere of contemporary cultural forms...is in fact a practice of choosing, selecting and extracting elements from the plethora of expressive components available at a global level, including the producers’ own traditions” (Regev, 2007: 125). Thus, while cultures are borrowed from ‘others’, ‘ours’ are also made available to the ‘others’.

The onus is therefore on cultural producers to manage the dialectical nature of this relationship. Notwithstanding, consumers are not left out in the social production of aesthetic cosmopolitanism. Regev (2007) argues that, in the production of aesthetic cosmopolitanism, local cultural producers who have taste for ‘other’ cultures are inspired and influenced by these wider cultures, which they integrate the ‘other’ cultural element into their indigenous culture to form the ethno-national cultural uniqueness. The adoption of sophisticated technological expressions and stylistic elements from foreign cultures (countries or ethnicities) in the production of national cultures by cultural producers add to the cosmopolitan nature of the refined local aesthetic culture. These cultural producers act as cultural agents, simultaneously positioned at the intersection of the global and local fields of cultural production. The dual position affords producers a wider view of cultural interaction which is capitalised in the production of local national culture.

As agents occupying simultaneous positions in the intersection of cultures, producers then have the opportunity not only to adopt from other cultures but also to expose their local culture to the global. It in this vein that Regev believes aesthetic cosmopolitanism embodies complexities of dialectical fluidity of culture. He notes that, aesthetic cosmopolitanism is produced “more

intensively, through the creation and consumption of much of the contemporary locally produced art and culture that are believed to express ethno-national uniqueness” (Regev, 2007:126). He separates two types of cultural producers in a society: orthodox and modern or invigorators. Though all cultural producers adhere to national uniqueness as a form of identification for their work, the two differ in their approach of creating ethno-national culture. While orthodox producers are engaged in preserving traditional canons and rigid evaluation of national authenticity, invigorators, though operating within the canons of local or cultural authenticity, take pride in integrating works of other cultures that produce innovations in national cultural uniqueness. Invigorators are influenced by the global industries of their field of work and take cues on the changes that emanate from the global. However, they are equally guided by their respective national or local culture which serves as a framework for the work that reflects the ethno-national uniqueness (Regev, 2007). Therefore, as in the cases of musicians and film makers, for legitimisation and local authenticity, they are propelled to “incorporate aesthetic idioms, stylistic traditions, genre formats and other expressive elements from their ethno-national heritages” (Regev, 2007:131).

Consumers of locally produced aesthetic cosmopolitanism on the other hand, are involved in the social production of aesthetic cosmopolitanism. Through consumption, they invariably experience the taste of cultures from other countries. According to Regev (2007), consumers do not experience only finished products from other countries but also cosmopolitan products which are an interwoven creation of local arts with foreign elements. Thus, as they consume their local cultural elements, they consume foreign elements that have been integrated in the production of the cultural works of producers.

Regev (2007) thinks there should not be a rigid separation between the production and consumption of aesthetic cosmopolitanism as when practically engaged, both are dialectically involved in the social production of aesthetic cosmopolitanism. However, for analysis it is vital to distinguish between the two for better appreciation of the social production process. As indicated, cultural producers are “agents whose cultural work is structured by the simultaneous position they occupy in at least two fields of cultural production: the global field of the art... and the field of the ethno-national culture in which they are situated” (Regev, 2007:127-128). Therefore, cultural producers tend to expose local consumers to aesthetic cosmopolitanism as the latter experience the artwork of the producers. This does not leave the consumers as passive actors in the social production.

Saito's (2011) Actor-network argument of cosmopolitanism can provide enlightenment on the network relationship between producers and consumers of aesthetic cosmopolitanism, though his analysis is based on the wider relationship in cosmopolitanism. In his openness to foreign non-human analysis, he demonstrates that the strength of network between the first who contacts or adopts foreign cultural elements (producers) and the rest of the group (consumers) of which he belongs will determine the level of acceptance of the 'foreign' among the adopting group. Thus:

Let  $A_1$  and  $a_i$  be a human and a nonhuman belonging to Group A, and  $b_i$  a nonhuman belonging to Group B. Suppose that while an attachment has existed between  $A_1$  and  $a_i$ ,  $b_i$  now enters the situation. If  $A_1$  develops a new attachment to  $b_i$ ,  $A_1$  is open to a foreign nonhuman.... Whether an attachment develops between  $A_1$  and  $b_i$  depends crucially on another member of Group A to whom  $A_1$  is attached. Let  $A_2$  be that human. First,  $A_2$ 's attitude toward  $b_i$  matters. If  $A_1$  dislikes  $b_i$ , on the one hand,  $A_1$  may hesitate to develop an attachment to it. If  $A_2$  is indifferent or positive to  $b_i$ , on the other hand,  $A_1$  is more likely to develop an attachment to it. Second, the strength of  $A_1$ 's attachment to  $A_2$  makes a difference. If  $A_1$ 's attachment to  $A_2$  is moderate,  $A_1$  may develop an attachment to  $b_i$  even if  $A_2$  dislikes it. In turn, if  $A_2$ 's attachment to  $A_1$  is strong, even when  $A_2$  is initially indifferent or negative to  $b_i$ ,  $A_2$  may be influenced by  $A_1$ 's positive attitude toward  $b_i$  and subsequently develop an attachment to it. Thus, whether  $A_1$  gets attached to  $b_i$ , as well as whether  $A_1$ 's attachment to  $b_i$  influences  $A_2$ , depends on the nature of the relationship between the two humans.

(Saito, 2011: 131)

The above demonstration explains succinctly the network between producers and consumers on the acceptance or otherwise of foreign cultural elements integrated in national culture. Here, the relationship is by no means linear as they both work together in the social process of the production of cosmopolitanism. Producers and consumers are equally engaged, providing vital information for each in the adoption or consumption of cultural works. While the role of producers is explicit, that of consumers is implicit, but nonetheless both are impactful in the social production process. The network of trust between producers and consumers results in the acceptance of arts that have foreign cultural element integration; producers are trusted by

consumers with the capacity to develop national arts that reflect national culture as well as incorporating societal changes as society progresses. Producers also take cues from social changes experienced by consumers and incorporate them in their work. Thus, in a fast-paced technological world, consumers who are exposed to the global through media and migration, embody the culture of more than one culture and therefore such should be reflected in the products they consume. The lifestyle of the consumers informs producers on the changes that society is experiencing which becomes a base for creativity in cultural production. Thus, the network relationship between cultural producers and consumers are dialectical: both producers and consumers contribute, directly or indirectly in shaping national cultural elements.

While Regev espoused his concept considering pop music and film making, this study extends the concept into the fashion industry specifically, the Nigerian fashion industry. Fashion in Africa is a cultural art that defines ethnic groups and even countries. In African societies just as in most societies, clothes are a national or ethnic symbol that distinguishes one society from the other. Each society has its unique cultural clothes whether adapted or indigenous. Within the societies, clothes further symbolise social and economic status, differentiates the royals from the non-royals, male from female and young from the old (Dzramedo, 2009; Gott, 2009). Based on the cultural notion of African clothes, clothes produced by Africans or from Africa origin have been classified as 'traditional' and unfashionable, therefore having less or no representation in global fashion. However, there is evidence of change in perception resulting from the creative works of emerging designers from Africa. Austin observed that "significant developments had taken place in African fashion over the last five years. Key among these is perception: African fabrics and fashion are no longer seen by western audiences and buyers solely as "traditional" wear" (Austin, 2012: para.1). The latter part of the 1990s and early twenty-first century have seen a remarkable change in Africa's fashion presence on the global market. African fashion is gaining prominence as an industry, emerging from international obscurity. (Rovine, 2010; Jennings 2011). New African designers have been identified as the key propellers of the current fashion developments (Mendy-Ongoundou, 2002; Jennings 2011; Austin, 2012; Menks, 2012). These new designers are believed to be different from the first generation of African designers as well as the traditional seamstresses and tailors who have been behind fashion production since the introduction of sewing into Africa by Europeans (Loughran, 2009; Jennings, 2011). The new designers and their work are changing the global pessimistic discourse on African fashion (Eitcher, 1995; Rovine, 2009; Rovine, 2010) and the internal (Africa) downgrading of the practice of fashion production (Langevang and Gough,

2012; Ogunduyeli et' al, 2017). Emerging at the heightened era of cosmopolitanism, the designers are capitalising on the connectedness of the countries and cultures, fusing the global with the local to produce works which reflect aesthetic cosmopolitanism (Regev, 2007).

Therefore, understudying the production of contemporary African fashion by emerging fashion designers in Nigeria highlights the social production of the concept aesthetic cosmopolitanism in the African context and more so, an appreciation of the current fashion culture emanating from Africa. The study focuses more on the cultural producers of fashion (emerging designers) and how aesthetic cosmopolitanism is created through their fashion work. As cultural producers, designers' sense of agency and ability to negotiate the simultaneous cultural position they occupy is of focal interest to the study. Also, the practical ways in which designers adopt and integrate foreign expressive technologies and innovations in the production of fashion in Nigeria is an integral of the study. The study also touches on the social milieus underlining the rise in production and consumption of aesthetic cosmopolitan fashion in the Nigerian context. The aim of the study is to use aesthetic cosmopolitanism as a conceptual tool in understanding how fashion can be used to explain societal changes in the African context.



## CHAPTER FOUR

### LOOKING GOOD IS GOOD BUSINESS

#### 4.0 Introduction

“The truth is you are received the way you are dressed, it is just natural, it is a Nigerian thing. We learned that looking good is good business.”

(Stephanie)

This chapter discusses the background to the social, political and economic milieu that underpins contemporary fashion in Nigerian society. The aim is to explain the context in which this study was undertaken to help enlighten us on the culture of fashion among the people, the state policies and government interventions as well as economic conditions that have given boost to changes in the fashion industry. This context analysis focuses more on Lagos society; however, in many respects, it can be related to other societies in Nigeria.

The data for the section is primarily from the focus group discussion and designers though other participants are drawn in when necessary. Discussion with the group of nine women who form a religious association revealed a conventional, unspoken social rules about fashion that guide almost everybody's appearance regardless of class, religion, age and ethnic background. Themes such as appearance, social respect, uniqueness and uniformity characterise the fashion experiences of Lagosians. Taking roots from the Yoruba culture, cosmopolitan city of Lagos has evolved with these cultural tenets in addition to foreign fashion tastes such as brand. The political intervention discussion centres more on government policies over the years, especially from the turn of independence to the current administration. There have been favourable and unfavourable policies that have supported or otherwise, the clothing and fashion industry. Discussion borders on nationalism, indigenisation and foreign intervention feature. The designers and the FGD give us insight on the phenomenon, supported by secondary data. Finally, the designers and FGD continue to help us understand the economic conditions and contingencies that have shaped contemporary fashion production and the love for a cosmopolitan fashion outlook. Phenomenon such as employment/unemployment, currency depreciation and affordability are discussed. This chapter sets the context of our subsequent discussions in the study by providing the background on which the current fashion scene is developing.

#### 4.1 The Social Context of Lagos Fashion

Lagos is inhabited mostly by the Yoruba ethnic group, however, the instatement of the State as the first capital of Nigeria after independence brought about massive internal and external migration by people from different ethnic backgrounds within the country and others from neighbouring countries. Thus, the city has witnessed integration and cultural reconfiguration over the years. However, people have also been socialised to accept some cultures of the Yoruba, especially regarding dressing and fashion. The culture and values of the Yoruba play an important role in the lives of the respondents of this study even with people who are from different ethnic backgrounds but resident in Lagos. I am by no means providing an anthropological or historical account of how clothes have come to attain significance in the society. Rather, I make a contextual analysis of fashion based on respondents' perspectives on fashion in the society and how this informs their fashion decisions as professionals (designers) or members of the society.

Designers and other professionals' (people whose work linked to the fashion industry but are not outfit makers) works are informed by their knowledge of the fashion sense of the Nigerian society. A focus group discussion with a church women's group and interviews with individuals enlighten us on the social milieu that underlies fashion and the important role it plays in the everyday life of the people.

Fashion in Nigerian society is a complex interplay of culture, individual taste, social and/or economic status. Lagosians' fashion does not toe the line of any particular social fashion or lifestyle theory because it is a contextual construct of the local with the foreign to project a lifestyle of indigenous culture amidst a 'modern' global outlook. Sociological theories of Thorstein Veblen (1899), Georg Simmel (1904), and more recently Pierre Bourdieu (1984) have guided discourses on fashion display, diffusion and consumption in the society. Veblen (1899) writes on the conspicuous consumption of the leisure class, which is the highest class in the class structure of the society. For members of the upper class, conspicuous consumption in the society is imperative for impressing their reputability as men of leisure which draws from social and economic position in the social structure. The men of the leisure class engage in the consumption of economically high dietary foods and beverages, sometimes, in their extreme, as an expression of purchasing power which affirm their economic position. The vicarious class have restricted access to such goods due to their lower monetary position. However, when it comes to the conspicuous consumption of other goods, especially household and fashion goods,

the wives of both men of the leisure class and the vicarious class engage in the consumption. Consumption of such goods is to affirm the reputability of the head of the household and it is a conventionality for wives of men of both the leisure and vicarious classes to engage in the wasteful use of these goods to mark their husband's social reputation. Women of both classes engage in ostentatious fashion and other household spending since it is believed that such spending adds to the comfort and the honour of the head of the household and also attracts social respectability for them. In similar regard, Simmel (1904) also believes fashion operates as the "other forms [of social elements] honours especially", a mark of class distinction. It serves the double function of uniformity and distinction by "revolving within a given circle and at the same time emphasizing it as separate from others" (pp133). Thus, fashion emanates from the upper class of the society, by which uniformity is required for members of the class by adhering to what is in vogue, while this uniformity also serves as a mark of distinction of the class from the lower class(es). In situations where the lower-classes adopt the fashion of the upper-class, the latter abandon the adopted fashion to create a new trend since the old trend has been compromised by the lower-classes. Therefore, conventionally, the upper-class is the leader of society's fashion and they are identified through their uniform engagement and display while at the same time distinguishing themselves from the other classes whose clothes are different.

Veblen's (1899) and Simmel's (1904) fashion theories emerged at the early epoch of the 20<sup>th</sup> century to explain class structure and within this perspective, lifestyle was featured as the by-product of class structure and not a basis for class stratification. However, by the 1980s, at the bubbling stage of the consumer capitalism era (Sulkenen, 2009), lifestyle consumption could not be ignored any further. The world witnessed a new social order based on consumerism where consumption drives the economic and social functioning of the society. It is around this epoch that Bourdieu (1985) propounded a theory of social distinction, and for the first time, in a more significant way, lifestyle was a feature of class stratification. Bourdieu (1984) argues on taste as a mark of distinction. To Bourdieu, taste evolves from cultural consumption which is closely tied to a person's social capital (upbringing/social origin and education), a crucial source for class distinction in the society; therefore, taste is a marker of class. Thus, the different social classes exhibit different tastes<sup>9</sup> in their consumption which reflects their level

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<sup>9</sup> Based on the three major classes in society, Bourdieu gave three categories of tastes which reflect the different classes and their consumption taste. The first is the legitimate taste which is among the dominant class, the middle-brow taste for the middle-class and popular taste for the lower-class.

of social capital and economic capital in the society (Bourdieu, 1984:15). Fashion, which is an expression of taste in consumption, became an integral component of mapping out class distinction. People from affluent cultural background acquire taste for high-end products such as fashion and with the necessary economic power, they indulge their taste by engaging in fashion. Here too, Bourdieu also affirm the relationship between taste (fashion) and class structure, where the taste for fashion is exhibited mostly by the affluent who have the economic power and the cultural background –social capital– to consume fashion. The application of these sociological theories to contemporary fashion and more so Nigerian fashion will run into difficulty not because of the time (epoch) differences but also due to Eurocentric context of the analysis and the rigorous, almost neat class distinction of the societies in which they are drawn.

The above three theories subscribe to the top-down approach of fashion diffusion where fashion starts with the upper class and trickle down to the lower classes. Consumerism has expanded the argument on fashion diffusion and consumption as manufacturers respond to consumer demands through fast fashion and technology; this makes information dissemination faster than ever before. There are increasingly complex diffusion patterns along a continuum of top-down, trickle-across, bottom-up, and various permutations in between fashion consumption and diffusion (Tjäder, 2013). What this means for fashion consumption is that people from all social and economic structure are likely to engage in fashion at the same time or the upper adopting to lower class fashion and vice versa. These adoptions are so rapid that most times, the class structure of lead sources of fashion are blurred. This current complexity of fashion consumption and diffusion characterises Lagos fashion milieu.

Historically, clothes served as a marker of class in the Yoruba society of Lagos. Two prominent cloths produced and used by the Yoruba are the *Aso eke* and the *Adire* cloths. Akinbileje (2014) argues that the *Aso eke* cloth was worn mostly by the royals and affluent in the society while *Adire* was accessible to the lower classes (Oyeniya, 2012). However, years of foreign contacts and change in indigenous sartorial traditions have altered significantly class-clothes consumption relationship as the society has progressed towards a more opened social engagement in fashion. Historical factors such as the East trade (Arabs), Transatlantic trade and subsequent colonialism (Europeans) witnessed the adaptation of cloths, clothes and fashion opened to the wider society who have the social capital (Bourdieu, 1984) –converts, traders and civil servants– to engage. The wax print textiles and other foreign fabrics (materials) were adapted as local cloths used for the foreign acquired designs of *iro* (wrapper) and *buba* (blouse) and gowns. Pre and post-independence era awoke the need to build nationhood, a crucial tenet

for liberation and progress. There was a strong nationalism euphoria around fashion where locally produced cloths became the preference for clothes and the wax print cloth was formally adapted as a local cloth. According to Oyeniyi (2012), women, men, youth, old, the upper-class and the lower class, elites, non-elites, all engaged in nationalist fashion. Vlisco, the Dutch produced version of the wax print was deemed costly; therefore, to ensure the engagement of all people regardless of economic status in this nationalist movement, cheaper versions of the wax print were introduced (*Ankara*) (ibid). There have been other antecedents such as the economic crisis of the 1970 through to 1990, the importation of second-hand clothing, trade liberalisation through structural adjustment programme and other nationalist policies on cloth and clothing that have shaped the current sartorial acumen of Lagos. However, there are some traditional conventions that underpin fashion in Lagos which goes beyond the Yoruba traditions to assume traditions that borders on the cosmopolitan city of Lagos. These conventions are a mix of indigenous cultures (Yoruba (majorly) and other ethnic groups residents in Lagos) and foreign elements that span from the continent to the rest of the world. These social and cultural conventions which have become fashion lingual expression among the people will serve as pointers in analysing the social milieu of fashion.

#### **4.1.1 You Are Addressed Based on How You Are Dressed**

The importance of fashion in Yoruba culture is evident in two different adages “*aso la nki, ki a to ki eniyan*, meaning “it is the cloth we should greet before greeting the wearer” and *eniyan lasoo mi*, that is “people are my cloth” (Idowu, 2010: 35). Clothes define one’s personality. Clothing confers respect on the individual. In Lagos society, “you are addressed based on how you are dressed” (Uche). In the Lagos context, appearance seems to determine social respect. The first impression a person is likely to make in any encounter is through clothes; therefore, it is socially necessary to be well dressed always as one cannot perceive the importance of acquaintances made throughout the day. To command respect in the society, paying attention to appearance is important. Appearance is not just in wearing clothes but also making sure the clothes are “fashionable”, that is, “the person dresses according to the trend of that time, she goes with what is in vogue” Stephanie comments. Thus, people are expected to be abreast with the changing patterns in fashion and align their dressing to it. Engaging in what is in vogue creates fashion uniformity among the people. However, this fashion uniformity the individual is required shows personal distinction by “building up her taste, looking good, looking exceptional and looking presentable, looking your best, like when you are there people will know that yes, you are there, being yourself and being beautiful” as expressed by Helen.

Helen has used several adjectives to describe fashionable appearance, however, the underlining idea is to shape your fashion along the social requirement of the period while your individual fashion taste confers uniqueness on your appearance. Being fashionable is essentially, uniqueness in uniformity. One's unique style in the lot is key and they do not shy from expressing this convention, as though they want to move with the trend. Many are quick to express that "what this person is wearing I am not supposed to wear it, they want to look at a trend and convert it and make it their own...[They] need to inject your own signature into whatever look". Though we witness Simmel's (1904) duality fashion theory in this case of fashion display, the reality in this context is not strictly on class basis. Nigerian fashion duality does not apply to just the upper classes in the society as Simmel (1904) argues but it is an implicit requirement for all members of the society regardless of economic background. In Nigeria, uniformity, predominantly, is opened to the entire society not just among social classes (Simmel, 1904) while uniqueness plays out more on an individual level. Fashion trends can emerge from anywhere ranging from international fashion scenes, the internet which is sourced by both fashion producers and consumers, the customer, the tailor or seamstress or the Nigerian designer. The situation is more complex in a cosmopolitan society like Lagos, compared to Simmel's (1904) society where class distinction is almost neat, and fashion is the reserve of the upper classes. The society is fashion conscious and all members engage in fashion.

However, this does not limit the relevance of social and economic influence on fashion consumption in Lagos. Sometimes, the socio-economic status can make significant difference in fashion consumption. It is acknowledged that economic capital can influence fashion greatly, especially during celebrations. At such occasions, economic capital's influence is manifested mostly through the quality of fabric people use for the clothing, rather than outfit designs. Some of the fabrics are expensive and can be purchased mostly by the upper-classes. However, some of these high-end cloths have their cheaper versions which lower-classes patronise. As much as *Ankara* is accounted as the reigning fabric of the moment, there are levels of quality with the different types on the market, even though designs or patterns of the cloth may be same. Vlisco, which is the Dutch produced version of the *Ankara*, is the highest in quality commanding high social respect, used mostly by the economically affluent. However, most of the patterns of Vlisco has been replicated by Chinese producers of *Ankara*, whose cloth are of lesser quality. The same situation applies to lace, George and other fabrics on the market. Therefore, making the distinction with the quality of fabric from afar can be deceptive. The difference can be blurry from afar since patterns and sharpness of designs are almost the same.

However, when it comes to designs of outfits, there is no difference between the lower-class, middle class and the upper class. The class system collapses, giving a horizontal or flat form of participation by anyone who wishes to engage. According to Happiness “everybody [from] the pepper seller, Agege bread seller, fish seller, everybody wears” designs in vogue. Fashion diffusion is explained to mean no formal account but the overwhelming intertwining of all three theories: top-down, bottom-up and the trickle across (Tjäder, 2013). The speed of diffusion is rapid, therefore, hardly can one account for the source of a trend unless it is initiated by a social or political event or personality. Embroidery, which is an integral part of outfit designing in Nigeria and is patronised by all people regardless of class, can sometimes mark class distinction among the people. The more elaborate an embroidery design, the more expensive the cost. If a customer requires stones (blings) or beads all over the outfit, it will be more expensive than the one who requests for a small pattern of embroidery. The study introduced me to the different ways in which the stoning embroidery can be done and how each technique comes at a different cost. There is the iron technique and that is putting the stones on the patterns, covering it with cloth and ironing over the cloth with sprinkled water to make them stick. Then there is the single-hand method by which each stone is carefully placed and glued to stick manually. The final method is the machine method, which is the use of stoning machine by filling machine with the stones and working out a pattern on the outfit. According to designer participant, the durability of the embroidery depends on the technique used and it follows the order I have discussed with the iron method being less durable and the machine method being most durable. Costs are associated with durability. The more elaborate your embroidery, the more attention you receive at functions.

However, I am also told not to be deceived by who can afford and who cannot afford high-end fashion because people of lower income wear expensive fabric sometimes, depending on the occasion. The perceived economic or social status of the hosts of an event can influence the taste of attendants who at this point, might choose outfits and accessories that are not commensurate with their economic status.

Appearing fashionable in Lagos is not restricted to clothes. Fashion accessories such as shoes, bags, headgear, and makeup play vital roles in fashion in the Nigerian society. In Lagos, you “dress to match” (Helene). Dressing to match is the careful blend of colours of the clothing and accessories to sync in a beautiful pattern. The general rule is to avoid using lots of different colours in one outfit, however, you can creatively combine colours to form a unique pattern. The blend of loud and dim colours or the careful blend of loud colours shows the fashion

abilities of a person. The clothing trend may be a long gown with an outstanding bow placed anywhere on the outfit. The colour of the fabric, the careful combination with the colour of shoe, clutch or purse and jewellery speaks a lot about the person's fashion sense even in cases where many are wearing the same design. Therefore, in conforming to current fashion trends, an individual is expected to "dress to match". These accessories must also follow the prevailing trend; even the makeup styles change with time and one must be abreast with current trends. When planning an appearance at a function:

The average Nigerian woman... from the eyelid to the nails, she will just package N10 000 [\$29] for it, just for the nails o, to get a makeup artist to give her the best, now people are making a lot of money out of makeup, it is a good business.... When you [get] into a party setting and you are well packaged, the way they will treat you is different from somebody who just entered anyhow [poorly dressed].

(Tina)

This does not apply to appearances to social events or functions only because on daily basis, the average Nigerian engages in high fashion. What may pertain in some societies as high fashion is the regular fashion display in Lagos, because "even if there is a normal trend abroad, once it enters Nigeria, we take it to the next, next level" Rhoda asserts. Nigerians are flamboyant in their appearance; each appearance must make a fashion statement about the person which they believe affect their daily interactions. Being well dressed and fashionable in Lagos society accrues to the individual significant social status in the society with or without relevant social and economic standing.

#### **4.1.2 We Are *Aso Ebi* People**

Lagosians are very social people. Every stage in life is celebrated in grand style: childbirth, school graduation, employment, marriage, successful career, and death. These celebrations are called *Owambe*. *Owambe* refers to social gatherings in Yoruba. *Owambe* has become more of a Lagos term than a Yoruba term because even non-Yoruba respondents use the term. In Lagos, Rhoda informs me that "every weekend we have parties... every weekend is for parties, *Owambe*". I observed, during my stay in Lagos, that *Owambe* is a common social feature and I even had the opportunity to attend a naming ceremony. It was a naming ceremony for the child of a church member of my host. A naming ceremony is normally on the eighth day after

birth of the child according to the Yoruba culture. Both family members and friends were nicely dressed for the occasion even though it was a weekday. The predominant cloth used for the outfits were lace and *Ankara*. The woman who delivered, together with her husband and some close family members wore lace but it was not uniform lace cloth. Friends wore *Ankara* and the children who attended wore either *Ankara* sewed into dresses or clothes made out of Western fabric. The style of the adults was mostly *iro* and *buba* design (the traditional long sleeve, round neck, loose blouse and wrapper of the fabric for skirt). The *iro* and *buba* style was preferred because it is deemed a traditional outfit and a naming ceremony is a cultural celebration, therefore the cloth and design for the occasion should be traditional. It was explained that it is always not the case to have everyone wear the traditional *iro* and *buba* design but in most cases, people use the local cloths of lace, *Ankara* or *aso eke* for such events. *Ankara* is appropriated wax print (African print), the *Aso eke* is indigenous woven fabric while the lace which is also appropriated local cloth is imported from countries like Switzerland, Austria, Belgium and a few other places. Over the years, Nigerian society has come to accept all these three fabrics as local fabrics. The latter two fabrics are expensive compared to the *Ankara*.

These cloths can be sewn in Western designs, aside the *iro* and *buba* style. Frequency of migration and increased cross-border interrelation have ushered in various forms of foreign adaptation in the use of these local cloths for appropriated designs of neighbouring countries. Nigerians are adopting the *kaba* and *slit* or *trois pagne* design (three pieces clothes of blouse, sewn skirt and third piece for head tie) of Ghana and Cote d'Ivoire respectively and *bubuu* from Senegal. These designs are traditional designs in their respective countries and Nigerian's adaptation of the designs is to use them similarly for traditional purposes. Thus, though Nigerian society is opening up for foreign appropriation of designs, they are mindful of the cultural implications of the borrowed culture on their indigenous culture. Within the traditional sphere, they adopt what is traditional to the borrowed society and fuse it with their cultural elements for traditional purposes. These are also possible designs that can feature at social and cultural occasions. I was made to understand that the ceremony we witnessed was not the standard pageantry of such celebrations; this celebration was low key. These occasions are often highly organised depending on the birth order of the baby or the economic status of the parents. The ceremony we attended was for the fourth child of the couple. First born celebrations are bigger than subsequent ones and thus, expensive clothes are displayed.

One's attention is easily drawn to the many big event centres in the various communities in Lagos city as you journey along the roads. One can count five to ten event centres over a mile stretch of road. Parties spring up every weekend and that could be the case in many societies across the world, however, what makes Nigeria different is the importance they attach to such social events. The events are avenues for the display of wealth, social status, and profound beauty, even at funerals. In all, clothes are the means of expression. Organisers of the events are expected to create a clothing uniform for relatives and guests as a form of identity: *Aso ebi*. According to Zena, people of Lagos "are *Aso ebi* people and you realise that at every event there is *Aso ebi*, people buy fabrics and they share, and everybody has to wear it".

*Aso Ebi* literally means family cloth as *Aso* stands for cloth and *Ebi* family (Orimolade, 2014). There is contestation on the origin of *Aso ebi* as William Bascom (1951) traces it to the age grade of Yoruba where they used uniform cloth to mark fraternal bonds while Ayodeji Olukoju (1992) believes *Aso ebi* started only after World War I when there was unparalleled accumulation that came with the post-war boom which developed the culture of conspicuous consumption (cited in Nwafor, 2011:47). I am informed that the practice of *Aso ebi* has been replicated in almost all Nigerian societies across the country. *Aso ebi* is worn basically to prove alliance with and support for the hosts of an event. Uniformity in fashion (Simmel, 1907) is thus expressed through kinship and friendship ties as the prescribed cloth by the host is worn by their close associates to communicate their love and support for the programme. Oyeniyi (2012) distinguishes between *Aso ebi* and *Aso Egbe Jo'Da*. While *Aso ebi* is prescribed uniform cloth for kinsmen, *Aso Egbe Jo'Da* is prescribed uniform cloth for friends of the host of the event.

Participants use the marriage ceremony to explain these two forms of uniform cloth and how the couple identifies with them. As stated, couple's relatives will be in the *Aso ebi* which is mostly sewn with lace fabric or *Aso eke* cloth or a mix of the two chosen by the couple. *Aso ebi* are expensive because of the lace fabrics and *Aso eke* cloths are more expensive than most other fabrics. The quality of the lace and/or *Aso eke* speaks to the social and economic status of the families of the couple. However, when it comes to weddings and other celebrations, even the low-income earners go all out for quality clothes. It is an avenue for family to affirm their social status and whether they are economically advantaged or not, they use the best of the traditional cloths. *Aso Egbe Jo'Da* are for friends of the couple and the cloth mostly used is *Ankara*. Thus, at the wedding event, the couple can change their outfits three times with the first being their own unique clothes which is not made from the fabric of either the *Aso ebi* or

the *Aso Egbe Jo'Da*. They will later change into clothes made from the fabric of *Aso ebi* and as time goes on, getting to the end of the ceremony, they change into clothes sewn with the cloth of the *Aso Egbe Jo'Da*. This is to acknowledge and appreciate the efforts of family and friends who showed solidarity with them at the event.

Events are so frequent that one can be attending a function every weekend of the year. Invitations come from church members, association members, community members and work colleagues aside family members. According to the women in the focus group, you buy the *Aso ebi* fabric from the hosts and not from the market. The host buys from the market and sells at a higher price than the market price, it could be double the market price. People are aware of the difference in prices, but they believe buying the cloth at a higher price is their financial contribution to the event. As indicated earlier, the uniform cloth is not limited to the close family members of the organisers of an event; it is open to whoever is willing to buy. To be in uniform cloth has its benefits at the event; it sometimes serves as the invitation for the event, people in the *Aso ebi* or *Aso Egbe Jo'Da* are treated with preference at the event in terms of place to sit, serving of food and the sharing of event souvenirs. One's support of an event through the *Aso ebi* or *Aso Egbe Jo'Da* is a guarantee for support from others in the latter's celebrations. Amaka summarises *Aso ebi* and its importance in a profound way:

So, when you are given an invitation for a party, the first thing is that you are given the *Aso ebi*, that is the cloth, even if it is N10 000 [\$28], you have to buy it because it is seen as you are identifying with the people organising the party. So, it goes to translate that when you get to that party setting and you are not wearing the *Aso ebi*, you will be served last, you will be given drinks last, you will be given souvenirs last. Those people that sewed will be treated first and sometimes your *Aso ebi* is your invitation to the party.

*Aso ebi* culture also depicts the duality of fashion (Simmel, 1904) where uniformity and distinction are required. In Simmel's argument, the upper class of society engage in uniform fashion to assert their class and social position as a cohort while at the same time distancing themselves from lower classes. In the Lagos society, kinsmen and friends of host of events distinct themselves from others who share no close connection with the host. Thus, *Aso ebi* and *Aso Egbe Jo'Da* portray social uniformity of fashion during social events. However, even though the *Aso ebi* or *Aso Egbe Jo'Da* is to portray uniformity, the uniformity lies mostly in the same fabric and not the design. It is required that each one sews the fabric in a way that

will make him or her unique and stand out in the crowd. No two or three people sew the same design; everyone's style must be different. Individuals show their distinction in uniformity through designs of their clothes. On the macro level, class distinction in *Aso ebi* can be attained through the quality of fabric used. While the people of lower class will opt for cheaper version of lace and *Ankara* (wax print cloth) for *Aso ebi* and *Aso Egbe Jo'Da* respectively, the upper classes are likely to use *Aso eke* or lace for both or in cases of *Ankara*, they will use the high-end type. High profile events are likely to use lace or *Aso eke*. However, with a fashion-conscious society like Nigeria, respondents made me aware that depending on the type of celebration, example, wedding of first or only daughter, people of lower economic class may also use lace or *Aso eke* for the *Aso ebi* and *Aso Egbe Jo'Da*. Nwafor (2011) discloses "being well dressed played a significant role in the Yoruba class system with much importance being attached to the size, colour, quality and quantity of fabric" (pp 46). While many try to display their wealth at such events, it is difficult to differentiate quality of fabric now due to imitation from China. People thus now use designs to achieve uniqueness. People are ready to pay money for uniqueness regardless of income status.

My observation at the Oshodi market, arguably the biggest fabric market in Lagos, reveals the many big shops that sell fabrics in large quantities. Unlike the usual display of few of the fabrics for advertisement while the bulk is stored at the wholesale for bulk purchase, the bulk of fabrics are displayed in shops to inform customers of their availability for *Aso ebi*. Such shops do not sell the regular pieces of yards of fabrics, they sell in bulk only. Thus, organisers of events go to this market to buy in bulk, be it lace or *Ankara* fabrics, and share it among the people they intend to invite. Asking of the *Aso ebi* cloth is the first question most people are expected to ask the moment they are informed of an upcoming event. If you want to be received and acknowledged at the ceremony you must wear an *Aso ebi* or *Aso Egbe Jo'Da*. Notwithstanding the importance of these fabrics, people can wear their personal clothes to events if they do not mind the neglect they might face. Another feature of *Aso ebi* and *Aso Egbe Jo'Da* is that, be it a local or borrowed design, the outfit must be locally sewn by Nigerians. The individual participants and members of the focus group discussion all unanimously agree that locally sewn clothes are costlier compared to imported clothes if the cost of sewing is added to the cost of buying the fabric. However, they prefer the former to the latter because Nigerian designers or tailors and seamstresses understand the fashion sense of their consumers, designing outfits that add value (economic status) to one's personality. Thus, if you show up at an event in a well-designed outfit in local cloth, your social respect increases.

All participants of the study express preference for local fabrics over Western fabrics for special occasions. They believe imported clothes do not befit such important traditional occasions and therefore should be worn casually for everyday activities irrespective of the price. On special occasions, they would rather be in clothes made from local fabrics and sewn by a Nigerian instead of imported clothes.

These social events also serve as an avenue for picking up the current trends in fashion. Respondents indicated that some of their designs come from observing others at social events. They pick up designs from one event and sew it for another event. The event becomes an avenue for picking styles because it is perceived that everyone puts on their best. At such events, as Helen, a member of the focus group puts it, “Nigerians dress to kill!” The Nigerian fashion culture thrives on a system of flamboyance. The Nigerian must be noticed by his or her appearance wherever s/he goes. This is expressed in the colours of their garments and the designs of their outfits. Though Nigerians follow international fashion trends especially for everyday and work clothes, their taste for high fashion as a daily requirement push the designers to add a lot of accessories such as stones and blinks to embellish outfits. The Nigerian is loud in fashion, seeks attention with his or her appearance and therefore will spend a lot and beyond his or her means to achieve such flamboyance. According to Babs, “the average Nigerian woman wants to enter somewhere [sic] and people will say “ah!” being the jewellery, being the shoe, being it everything”. Such flamboyance is expected more at social gatherings. Nigerians go all out on conspicuous consumption and display of fashion during social events. This, Simmel (1904) argues in his work when he talks about individual distinction in the social class unity when it comes to fashion among the upper classes. He comes up with the concept the “dude” to refer to persons who are fashion forward and always seek to be different, though conforming to the social class. He or she can be a fashion gatekeeper, initiating designs within the scope of uniformity. Among Nigerians, everyone seeks to be a dude at any social gathering. People from all social classes engage in conspicuous consumption of fashion during social events (Veblen, 1899). They must stand out in their outfit, be unique and flamboyant to attract an audience. The phenomenon cuts across age, sex, social class and economic class of the people.



Figure 4.1; Aso ebi at a wedding celebration (source: Instagram@Envogue\_Naija)

Fashion consumption in the society is discussed in terms of preference and expenditure. Women in the FDG acknowledged the revolution of fashion over the years and how their fashion has evolved from wearing imported clothes to locally made clothes. At the meeting, the number of women wearing locally made clothes outnumbered those in imported clothes. The designers also confirmed the gradual shift of the society to the wearing of locally produced clothes even in times perceived as recession. Thus, the locally produced and appropriated fabrics have become the preference of many Nigerians. On a regular day, *Ankara* fabric features

predominantly among women. While at social events, both men and women wear lace, *George* or *aso eke* fabric. As will be discussed in the sixth chapter, men's clothes are preferably sewn with imported fabrics while the designs are local designs. Women are the opposite; they sew their local fabrics in western designs on regular days and men will have their imported fabrics in local designs. During occasions, both men and women make their outfits in the traditional designs. Though participants admit that sometimes imported clothes can be more affordable compared to locally made ones, they still prefer locally made clothes because according to Happiness "it brings out the elegance in women, it brings your shape" and also, "no matter how you look and your shape, if you meet a very good seamstress, the person will package you well, some of them re-package you." Thus, they are willing to spend money to get the value of their fashion taste than to compromise with imported clothes. More on the use of fabrics and creation of designs will be discussed in chapter six.

When it comes to spending on fashion, people's taste and consumption always exceed their income. It is accounted by Amaka that "the average Nigerian woman will rather starve than not look good, they want to create an impression everywhere they go, they want to be seen, it is something about our culture". None of the respondents could give an estimated amount per month or year allocated to spending on fashion. They have not apportioned a specific amount of their income for clothes or fashion accessories. Hardly can anyone, especially women, plan for clothing or fashion within a period because the need for dressing arises spontaneously.

In Nigeria, they live beyond their means. They borrow to meet up their means so, you can't say so, so and so is the apportioned money for fashion, you have to be a very conservative person in Nigeria to be able to achieve that but a typical Nigerian who goes with the trend even borrows. As the occasion calls for it, she will go and borrow it from a shoe seller and will be paying for it just to be part of what is going on.

(Stephanie)

Due to the various events and the *Aso ebi* that comes with it, people are always spending on clothes and other fashion items. Not only do they end up spending a lot of money on clothes and accessories within the month but in some situations, they borrow to meet the fashion demands of the time. Fashion takes the larger portion of respondents' income due to the many obligations to attend functions of friends and relatives. One fashion appearance for an event

can cost a person a minimum of N35, 000 (\$100), taking into account the cost of clothes, headgear, make up, shoe, handbag and even nail polishing. Some respondents stated that they attend at least one event in a month and each event must come with a different outfit and accessories. The repetition of clothes for events is an indictment on their reputation and defeats the feature of uniqueness in fashion in the society. Christmas and Easter are the peak periods for events in Lagos and there could be an occasion every week or every day in the weekend for as long as three to four weeks in a row. In such situations, they borrow fabrics, shoes and other accessories as well as sewing on credit to meet the fashion demands of the time all of which they will pay for in instalments.

The designers acknowledge this phenomenon as well. They reiterated that Nigerians' expenditure on fashion has no reflection on their personal income or the economic situation of the country. This study was conducted in a period when most participants expressed economic hardship in the country due to recession. However, almost all designers admitted their sales had not been affected with some were even recording an increase in sales. Joy noted, “you know Nigerians like high fashion, whether there is recession or not, it will not affect their fashion sense... clothing is like food, clothing and food are on the same level in the Nigerian context.”

Most respondents could not account the portion of their income allotted for clothing and accessories because spending is spontaneous, and it is tied to the various weekly celebrations, *Owambe* and daily regular affairs. As frequent as *Owambe* occurs, Nigerians do not forfeit their *Aso ebi* because *Aso ebi* is what makes *Owambe* and *Owambe* is the oxygen of the culture of the society.

#### **4.1.3 Packaging: Original or Good Copy**

“Dressing to kill” is a form of "packaging". Packaging is a term to describe how a person dresses up for an occasion or to meet an individual. Happiness reiterates “in Nigeria we are so concerned about packaging that sometimes they don't bother about the content but just the packaging, the outward look of any stuff, most especially the fashion industry”. Good “packaging” can serve as a conduit of social mobility, though temporarily. How you dress up can make you gain social respect and get accepted into the circle of the influential and the wealthy without recourse to your actual social or economic background. Therefore, even the poor in the society invest in fashion when they attend functions that require the presence of a high-profile person. At such events, you need to "dress to belong". That is, you do not

necessarily have to socially or economically belong to a particular social class, but your dressing, form of packaging, at the function must accord you the respect of the influential. Dressing to belong can also find expression in the quest for business opportunity or network. If you seek a business contract or acquaintance with a businessman or politician, the utmost way to create a good impression is through dressing. The outfit, shoe, haircut and even watch must create the impression of a sense of responsibility and adequate abilities for the job. You need to “package” yourself well in a way that fits the social, economic or political status of the person you are meeting. You package yourself for a job contract because your acceptance does not depend only on your experience or qualification but also on the impression you create through your dressing. To be trusted or entrusted with responsibility can also be determined on the basis of how neatly or shabbily you appear. This is because according to Stephanie, in Lagos, “people have regard for the way you package yourself”.

This phenomenon of “dressing to belong” has given rise to high taste for brands in the society across all social classes. Consumption of high-end fashion brands like Prada, Gucci and Christian Dior which are common among the wealthiest class, is easily appropriated by everyone regardless of their social class. The Nigerian society’s adaptation to foreignness in fashion is seen through their love for renowned international fashion brands. Nigerians would prefer to be seen in an outfit or accessories that bear the brand name of a top fashion house, be it foreign or local. While people who can afford may want to buy the original products of these designers, it is also common knowledge that most of the high brand accessories or even outfits have their counterfeits from China which most Nigerians patronise. In packaging, the originality matters less compared to the visibility of what is shown: the brand name.

Sonmez, Yang and Fryxell (2013) argue that there are two theories that define consumer relationship with brands: attitude function theory and cultural authority theory. The attitude function theory argues that “attitudes serve social and psychological functions. Consumers' attitude toward brands is a self-expressive function to reflect status and personality” (Sonmez, et al. 2013: 197) while the cultural authority attitude postulates a more social perspective view to consumer relationships with brand names. Therefore, “when social-adjustable attitude dominates, counterfeits with no harmful agents (e.g. handbags) may become a preferred choice.” When value-expressive attitude dominates, consumers may be motivated to emphasise quality and reliability (Sonmez et al. 2013: 197). The Nigerian society depicts a mixture of attitude function and cultural authority function to brand consumption. The upper class may stick to the former theory as they continue, on a daily basis to negotiate their class distinction

from the rest of the population; however, majority of the people operate using a cultural authority function to brand consumption. The society's emphasis on the use of notable brands in fashion has less regard for the originality of the brand. The visible part of the brand, that is, the shape or fineness of the product is acknowledged with less attention to the quality of the product. Amaka discloses that, "women are brand women, they like brand names, they will rather carry a cheap China bag, so long as they know it is branded as a Gucci or a Versace, it is fine. It is something with our mindset, we love brands". This phenomenon is not unique to women. In a society with high fashion sense like Nigeria, men will also revere the use of brands for packaging. All the interviewed designers regardless of the sex of their clientele have brand names for their products which they showcase using labels and tags. This is a new phenomenon in the sewing business in Nigeria where previously most seamstress and tailors did not even register their business, let alone provide visible brand names for their products. Now, almost all designers have registered names which also serve as brand names for their products. Though their branding goes beyond tags and labels, having a brand name is the first step in product identification.

It is realised that the brand name, which is tagged outward overshadows the quality of the product; the counterfeit then becomes "the good copy" of the original. In some cases, the names of original brands are twisted in spelling for the fake brands. However, from the first look, without attention to detail, one will be deceived to believe it is original. Thus, whether fake or original, all that is required is proper packaging, how you are able to 'dress to match' with the outfit and accessories available and then how to carry yourself:

if what you are wearing fits very well and the face that is carrying it, it is us that is talking about upper class and middle class, nobody will see you and know here you belong, they will think you are one of the ministers in Nigeria because it is about carrying well.

(Helen)

The self-expressive branding and social-adjustable branding can overlap in some situations in Nigeria. I was made to understand that due to the society's obsession with brands, even low-income earners strive to own at least one original international or locally revered brand fashion item especially accessories such as bag or shoe as a means of dressing to belong within some social circles, while the upper classes also patronise fake brands sometimes for their regular

daily use. Thus, the use of brands can sometimes be influenced by individual self-expression and other times by social-adjustable perception regardless of social class.

The Nigerian society expresses social conventions that guide fashion consumption. The society demands uniform fashion in vogue while emphasising individual uniqueness. From cultural and social events to the daily routine of the people, fashion features predominantly in the lives of Lagosians. What will pass for high fashion in some contexts is the daily lifestyle. They engage in conspicuous consumption irrespective of social and economic background. At *Owambe*, people are expected to look their best, while daily you are required to dress up as if every day is a day for an important appointment. You never know who you will meet on your way out. The Lagos society has a long-standing culture of fashion, dressing and appearance that is reflected in the daily lives of the people. Among Lagosians, you just do not wear a skirt and a blouse, trouser and shirt or gowns as you personally deem fit; there is an unspoken social convention that guard fashion and dressing. Dressing up to meet the occasion is a sure way of getting through the Nigerian society even on a daily basis. It grants people an extra edge in their interactions and according to the women who participated in the focus group discussion, dressing well can literally create money for the individual through finding jobs and other economic opportunities, thus, the famous slang “looking good is good business”.

#### **4.2 Political Interventions**

The pre-independence struggle witnessed the heightening of nationalism among Nigerians and an important form of expression was through clothing. Political and intellectual elites started wearing locally made or appropriated cloth as a sign of rebellion against colonialism while the youth found renewed interests in indigenous clothes. Market women and local authorities had always stuck with traditions by wearing their local cloth (Byfield, 2004). However, what was deemed traditional at the period of the struggle was a mix of European and traditional cloths as the Euro-Afro trade boomed in many societies (Steiner, 1985; Eitcher and Erekosima, 1995; Sumberg, 1995). The European imported wax print has since been appropriated as local cloth with national significance. The situation continued after independence and according to Oyeniyi (2012), it intensified among women, youth and intellectuals. The sense of nationalism at this period came primarily from the desire to show patriotism and exhibit their new status of liberation that came with independence. Government supported this venture by encouraging foreigners to put up textile manufacturing factories across the nation to meet the demands of the people (Andrae and Beckman, 1998; Oyeniyi, 2012). Lace fabrics from Austria,

Switzerland and Belgium among others were introduced onto the Nigerian market, adding to the fashion of the people (Plankensteiner and Adediran, 2011). Government supported industrialisation of local textiles and encouraged its patronage. While it was perceived that the civil war of 1967 to 1970 would have a severe adverse effect on nationalism and nation building, the contrary was witnessed. There was a renewed sense of nationalism among the people and the government's "nationalist economic policies during and after the war offered new incentives" for manufactures of textiles (Andrae and Beckman, 1998:33). A ban was placed on the importation of textiles, while government supported home-grown industries, including new lace fabric manufacturing companies. Though most of these companies were foreign owned, from cotton cultivators to spinners to weavers, all engaged in greater proportion, in backward-linkage of economic integration through the use of local raw materials, adding value to the economy.

Though consumers did not take kindly to the ban as locally produced fabrics were perceived as expensive compared to imported ones, the indigenisation of fashion was at its height. People wore local cloth for both regular daily activities as well as for ceremonies. Textile production was also at its functional height as production output from 1977 to 1985 was at 75%. According to Muhammed et.al. (2018), though the textile industry was booming after independence through to the civil war period, the country's economic focus shifted from industrial manufacturing economy to depend heavily on the oil economy. Thus, it was just a matter of time before the industry crippled and ceased to supply to meet the demands of the people. Then the economic crisis struck in the mid-1980s with great recession resulting from the plummeting of the global oil economy. Nigeria was greatly affected, and most people could not afford the locally produced textiles. Indigenous cloths in general became expensive and manufacturing declined significantly. Indigenisation of fashion waned as second-hand clothes took over the market, initially as a form of donation by foreign civil societies and humanitarian NGOs and later as a lucrative business. Second-hand clothing was affordable for both the upper-classes and the lower-classes. Another major setback for manufacturing industries was the smuggling in of cloths from neighbouring countries.

Nigerian fashion was at the period characterised by western clothes provided mainly by the second-hand outlets for daily functional activities; however, indigenous cloths were still used for traditional ceremonial activities. Even so, many could not afford the locally produced textiles therefore, an unofficial export of smuggling from neighbouring countries was introduced to provide cheaper alternatives (Andrae and Beckman, 1998; Mohammed et al,

2018). The Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank coupled with consistent military interventions further crippled government interventions to indigenise fashion from the mid-1980s to late 1990s. The neo-liberal policy of trade and commerce enshrined in the principles of SAP allowed for open markets and importation of clothes from other countries. Nigerians, after being exposed to foreign fashion through second-hand clothing, had developed a taste for its consumption. Foreign fashion was associated with modernity and civilisation, notions that resounded well with the youth (Oyeniya, 2012). Military governance, as analysed by Renne (2004), has been associated with non-indigenisation of fashion. Therefore, from the period of Mohammed Buhari to General Babangida (1983 to 1993), indigenous fashion declined significantly. Textile manufacturing companies continued to suffer as imported raw materials as well as manufactured goods flooded the market. From cultivators to spinners to weavers, all suffered from a decline in production. However, the open market policy brought in textiles, especially the wax print and fancy prints (*Ankara*) from China and other countries at a more affordable price. Locally produced fabrics were no more competitive though Andrae and Beckman (1998) report on the gradual rise of the industry from 1990. Mohammed et al. (2018) counter this assertion by arguing that the rise of the textile manufacturing industry had no significant impact on the economy due to government's policy neglect of industries and focus on oil. Still focused on oil trade and revenue, the government did little to mitigate the unofficial exportation of textiles into neighbouring countries. Due to its non-competitiveness on the local market resulting from high cost of production, producers smuggled textiles to neighbouring countries to sell, thus, witnessing an inverse operation of the earlier ban on importation. According to Mohammed et al. (2018), the CFA currency of neighbouring French countries brought in higher revenue than the depreciating Naira.

General Sani Abacha who took over in 1993 after the short-term democratic rule of Ernest Shonekan reinstated the military rule that run continuously for a decade, taking the country back to the period of Khaki (Renne, 2004). Later, in spite of Abacha's quest to retain power after international and local pressure for democratic rule, he embarked on a journey towards democratisation. Renne (2004: 136) argues that a key step to the democratisation process was the change from military clothing to the indigenous Kaftan clothe named locally as *tazarce*, meaning 'continue'. It became the fashion trend especially among men but since then, female Kaftans have also been in vogue. After the death of Abacha in 1998, an interim military leader took over and later handed power democratically to Olusegun Obasanjo. This was the second

coming of Obasanjo, as he was the military head of state from 1976 to 1979. To affirm democratic rule, during this period, Obasanjo put away his military uniform and embraced the agbada clothe of the Yoruba. He is reported to have adopted *Adire* (the local tie and dye cloth) as his official attire at functions (Oyeniya, 2012). Again, this became the fashion trend of the period of his reign. Respondents hint that the political elites have since then influenced fashion, especially among men in Nigeria. Chris, a designer participant, informs us that, “in this country the political class dictates the trends of the traditional clothing, so what the president is wearing and what the people in the political class wear which is defined by their culture”.

During Obasanjo’s tenure the indigenisation of fashion also resonated with women as Mrs. Obasanjo, the first lady, initiated a “wear made in Nigeria” programme and was often seen in indigenous clothes during official functions both at home and abroad. Since the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, respondents attest to the growing response to indigenisation of fashion among Nigerians. However, this change is supported mainly by importation of fabrics from China and other countries. The number of local manufacturing companies has dropped from 175 in 1985 to 16 in 2015 (Mohammed et al, 2018: 43). Therefore, though people are developing a taste for local clothes, the supply of the fabrics is from foreign countries other than local industries. Thus, there is a huge gap between textile manufacturing and textile demands locally. The current government has done little towards improving this situation (ibid). It is the realisation of this gap that motivated Toyosi, a garment manufacturer in Lagos and a respondent of this study, to start her textile industry. Having been in the business for close to a decade, Toyosi has recorded success in her business by manufacturing *Ankara* and non-*Ankara* fabrics for mainly the Nigerian market. They “produce garments for our own labels and [we] also produce for other people’s labels as well. So, we produce for some of the local designers as well as local retailers, we also produce for corporate organisations that have large orders.”

One major current government policy by the Buhari government that is driving indigenisation of fashion is the introduction of the wearing of “made in Nigeria” on Mondays and Wednesdays. As reported in a national newspaper in early 2017, “the Federal Executive Council (FEC), at its meeting on Wednesday, 1st February, 2017, has approved the adoption of Mondays and Wednesdays of every week as Made-in-Nigeria Dress Days as part of measures to uplift the nation’s culture and promote Made-in-Nigeria textile products.”<sup>10</sup> All

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<sup>10</sup> <http://dailypost.ng/2017/04/09/buhari-declares-mondays-wednesdays-made-nigeria-dress-day/>

the *Ankara* clothes were sewn as long gowns with embellishments. This policy, like the Friday African Wear policy of Ghana under President Kuffour (Axelson, 2012), involves both corporate workers and non-corporate workers, government and private workers. Therefore, Toyosi's supply to corporate firms is to provide them with unique wax print designs that suits the company's clothing culture which workers wear on the two set days.

This policy is deemed as a major breakthrough for Nigerian culture and the fashion industry. Some designers who were participants believe this policy has greatly increased sales as many people have taken to wearing local clothes even aside the set days. Nigerians have taken to the wearing of local fabrics both on regular days and for special occasions. It is now a common sight to find people wearing outfits sewn with local cloths at corporate and non-corporate settings. Out of the nine respondents who made up the FGD, five were in *Ankara* cloth while four were in western clothes of trousers and blouse on the day of the discussion.

While this policy is a step in the right direction, the president of the Fashion and Design Association of Nigeria (FADAN) and some other participants believe more needs to be done by the government to support the industry. They made a call to the government to come up with comprehensive structural policies that will guide local fashion production. While they acknowledge the significance of the various interventions made by subsequent governments, especially from the mid-1990s, there are some challenges they face as producers and entrepreneurs which need government response. Crucial is the issue of infrastructure. Infrastructure such as a production hub, where fabrics and haberdashery can be produced locally to support the market and industry is almost non-existent. The FADAN president argues that slow production output and the high cost of production comes from the heavy reliance on importation of most of the raw materials needed for production. She further hinted that the organisation is in talks with the federal government to help establish a production hub, similar to the big factories of China where individual designers can send their work to be mass-produced at a relatively affordable price. Babs, a designer, reports that most of the imported items on the market which are affordable are of low quality and therefore they cannot use them for their high-tech machines to produce the fineness of output they desire. She argues, "even the thread, this machine (pointing to a computerised sewing machine) cannot use the Nigerian thread (that is the average China imported thread on the market), the quality is different, these are some of the challenges, so I have to keep bringing in thread from US and this thread cost N1000 (\$2.9)". Such costs are added to the production costs making their products less competitive compared to the already-made clothes from China. They plead with the

government to introduce measures that will reduce the cost of raw materials and equipment to help subsidise production cost.

Another major challenge is the power crisis. In Lagos, electricity supply is non-existent for at least half a day. This is one of the major shocks I encountered in my stay in Lagos. As a Ghanaian, I had experienced power rationing not long before the field work, from the year 2015 to early 2017. However, the power cuts in Lagos were of a different order. Before I set off from Switzerland, I was told that the neighbourhood in which I would be living had been out of power for three weeks due to a rain storm, but I was assured of light powered by a generator since I would be lodging in a guest house. I quickly learned that generators are not just a substitute for power supply in Lagos but a whole formalised system of electricity generation. Brian Larkin gave a talk on the power crisis of Nigeria and the political economy of generators for the Carl Schlettwein Lecture 2018 of the Centre of African Studies, University of Basel, on Tuesday 8<sup>th</sup> November arguing on the political system that perpetuate power fluctuation in Nigeria.

Throughout my stay, we relied more on generators than on the supply of the Nigerian electricity company popularly referred to as NEPA (An abbreviation of the former name of the company, National Electricity Power Authority, now called The Power Holding Company of Nigeria). In Lagos, it seems almost every household, shop and business centre has a generator as their main source of electricity supply instead of as a backup to the national supply. Maufe argues that in the production industry “a lot of things have been obstacles in the business as in electricity for instance” which does not ensure smooth and calculated production. This is the major challenge of many designers because while the supply is getting worse by the day, the prices of fuel keeps increasing at an alarming rate adding to production costs. Dupe shares her frustration resulting from the absence of constant electricity supply in the following words: This is a “major issue because every day, we spend almost N3000 (\$9) on fuel, if you calculate at the end of the week and your production which you charge as overhead cost... and even though there is no electricity they will still come with a bill of about N20 000 (\$57) a month”. Therefore, for someone like Ken, since “the light problem in Lagos does not permit much work to be done and also makes producing expensive so I have my production sited at the outskirts where I can get light always”. Babs also shares a similar vision of siting her upcoming factory at the outskirts of Lagos to ensure regular supply. While the rationing of electricity may be a national issue, it seems the case of Lagos city is direr compared to the suburban and rural areas. This is understandable considering the population of Lagos city.

Designers also talk about lack of funding from government or institutions to support start-up businesses or to improve production. According to Babs, lack of financial assistance makes it difficult to be competitive, especially with foreign competitors like China. However, the FADAN president stated the many financial avenues made available to members of the association. The Association cooperates with the various government and non-government agencies to provide this financial facility through various banks for the members of FADAN. Many participants may not be aware of the existence of this facility because out of the eighteen designers interviewed, only three, including the president are members of the association, though almost every designer is aware of its existence. According to the president, during her tenure the association has “built a strong relationship with government agencies, with the Federal government and the banks” thus they are “willing to help people who are ready to get loans” to improve their production. The association has been registered under the Chamber of Commerce that provides them with opportunities such as members participating in trade fairs and exhibitions with lower or no charges compared to individuals who are not members. Their registration under the Chamber of Commerce also ensures smooth processes when acquiring visas for foreign shows and exhibitions. The association also has a strong bond with Export Promotion Council which offers them opportunities for foreign exhibitions with government sponsorship. Thus, through their “partner[ship] with the export promotion council, some of our members have been taken to the magic show in Vegas. We’ve been able to also have [a] relationship with the fashion structure in South Africa, we have a couple of shows in South Africa and also in Kenya and also Cotonou”. Thus, amidst the various challenges the industry is facing, report from the FADAN president shows some governmental and institutional steps taken to provide support for growth and exposure. Like most of the participants, the president believes the government can and must do more if the industry is to progress beyond where it is now.

### **4.3 Economic Contingencies**

Most participants argue that the current economic context is a major source of change in fashion production in Nigeria. What is to be perceived as a negative effect on the economy has been to the advantage of local designers in Lagos. A major cry of many in the Lagos city from the markets to the homes has been the continuous increase in prices of goods and services as a result of the depreciation of the Naira vis a vis other major foreign currency. From food to cloth and automobiles, the prices of commodities have soared higher under subsequent government

administrations since the turn of the century. According to Muhammed et al. (2018) the depreciation of the currency was one of the major policies of the SAP under the supervision of the IMF and the World Bank, following years of currency appreciation that resulted from the oil revenue of the 1970s. The high inflation rate added to the steep depreciation of the local currency. Thus, with a dollar to 0.894 Naira in 1985, the rate as at 2015 was a dollar to 189 Naira (Muhammed et al, 2018:48). As at the period of the research in 2017, the 2015 figure had doubled under the Buhari government to a rate of more than 350 Naira to a dollar on the black market.

This phenomenon has created economic crisis as most of the basic consumables including clothes are imported from foreign countries. Thus, many people are turning their attention to local producers who present them with quality at competitive prices. Shola, a designer, makes the observation that the high rate of exchange has led most people to be “looking inward now, as you can see the dollar is high now, so everybody is looking inward, trying to wear made in Nigeria, the indigenous now and it is cheaper than buying it like \$1000.” Chris gives a succinct explanation of the economic situation and how local designers are benefiting from it:

the value of the Naira to the Dollar was about N150 but as at today it is about N400 to a dollar, so if you walk into say a TM Lewin shop, the guys in the high-end class don't buy from made-in-Nigeria shops, they can make traditional outfits in Nigeria but will prefer to buy their shirts and suits abroad, they can spend as much as \$1000 then to buy a suit which was about N150 000 but now it should be about N400 000 and it is not as if your salary has increased, so you have to embrace the locals who are doing a good job. So, I walk into TM Lewin shop and conducted a market research. I found out that their shirt was going for like N19 000. If generally I want to change my wardrobe and I am a salary earner I will buy 10 shirts, that means I will have to spend about 200, 000 and something Naira meanwhile if you have a guy that can do it locally for me for about N8000 or N9000, ten shirts is just N90 000 so if you buy 20 shirts, you are good to go for a long while.

Therefore, the currency depreciation is boosting the local fashion industry, encouraging people who would have otherwise bought imported clothes to buy from local producers at affordable prices. This, coupled with the drive for indigenisation of fashion culture in Nigeria, has led to

many people embracing made-in-Nigeria clothes, be it functional office wear, daily casual wear or occasional wear.

Participants also mentioned the increase in entrepreneurship in recent years especially in the creative industry. It has been suggested in many studies that entrepreneurship is a key driver of development especially in developing countries (Suddles and Hessels, 2007; Hermans et al, 2012). However, there are many factors that drive entrepreneurship on an individual basis. Hessels et al. (2008) group these factors into two categories of push and pull factors or necessity and opportunities factors. Push factors are favourable or unfavourable external factors that force people into entrepreneurial businesses which they may otherwise not have chosen, while pull factors are individual positive motives that drive their entrepreneurial ambitions. Hessels et al. (2008) argue that in developing countries with poor opportunities for formal occupation, the prevailing factors for entrepreneurship are more of the push factors while pull factors dominate in developed economies. However, participants of this study exhibit both traits of factors in their motives for engaging in the fashion business as a profession.

Among the push factors, some participants decided to turn their hobbies into a profitable enterprise after years of unemployment or as a means of survival in harsh economic conditions. Nigeria is facing a high rate of unemployment with a youthful population of 80 million, 64 million of whom are unemployed while 1.6 million are underemployed (Awogbenle and Iwuamadi, 2010:832). Ken, a designer, narrates how he was laid off from his banking job, a profession he had been involved in since the completion of his university education. After his redundancy, he “had some friends, [I] will go to the market buy some clothes for them just for them to look good.... So, I said, let me just take this job seriously and make it a full-time job; that was when I developed the passion and decided to go into full time job”. He initially decided to start it as a hobby while he continued to search for a job, but then orders started trickling in as referrals from friends he was clothing. Initially he had no training in sewing, therefore he was giving his designs to tailors and supervising the output. When he finally decided to take it up as a full-time profession, he enrolled in number of schools both in Nigeria and abroad for training. Chris shares a similar experience where lecturers were on strike “for eight months, I asked myself what I will be doing with my time and I thought fashion was the option, so I went into fashion”. Thus, he took advantage of an unfavourable situation to start his business. He points out that he did not intend to make it a full-time job, but something to keep him occupied during the period of the strike. Like Ken, he started by designing and contracting tailors to sew and this became a side job for him through his university days and afterwards he decided to

establish his business. Thus, respondents were taking advantage of the unfavourable economic condition to fill in opportunity gaps in the fashion industry. The “inward looking” phenomenon is creating a market for not just the fashion designers but also the garment manufacturer who participated in the study.

While some have been motivated by the economic conditions the country faces, others willingly opted for it. Tesse is a trained lawyer at the university, however, when she “came out, [she] had to ran with my passion.” In the beginning, she “ventured into various fashion shows while on campus”. After completing university, she abandoned the law profession and enrolled in a masters’ program in fashion in London. Rhoda shares a similar experience. After helping her mother who was a designer, she was training in sewing and designing in her mother’s school along with her Biochemistry degree at the university. When she completed her degree, she started the fashion business, with no practice in biochemistry. Eji fell in love with fashion when she visited the fashion class in her secondary school. She was a science student but decided to explore another class one day when a teacher did not turn up. The first day in the fashion class was an excursion to the Yaba Technical Institute. To put it metaphorically, it was on that day she got “born again” into her passion for fashion. The decision to abandon science for fashion came with contention from her parents from secondary school through her tertiary education at Yaba Technical Institute. According to Takyi Asiedu (1993), most elite parents in Sub-Saharan Africa will not allow their children to be trained in sewing because the profession is perceived as the occupation of school dropouts. Therefore, Eji’s parents’ objection did not come as a surprise to her. She states though that later her parents came around when they realised she could make a good profession out of fashion.

There seems to be a general social acceptance of the creative industry and specifically fashion as a noble profession in Nigerian society. Zena has observed that “now people are beginning to look at the art industry not just fashion but painting, dancing, music, stage plays...that there is another dimension to life other than academics, which 10, 15 years ago, it wasn’t so, we talked about what qualification do you have? If you are not a doctor, an engineer, a lawyer you are nothing.” The Nigerian society is responding positively to fashion as a profession and a lot of the youth are finding their passion in it. Whereas years back and even in present times the profession of sewing is regarded with derision, as an alternative job for school drop-out and the unintelligent (Ogundiliye et al, 2017), the public are gradually accepting the nobility of the profession. As will be discussed in the next chapter, the industry comprises more educated elites now with some holding masters’ degrees. The youth are joining the industry out of

passion for the job and not as an alternative means of survival (Langenvang and Gough, 2012). According to Shola, the development of the industry lies more with the upcoming youth. Thus, the “major development is that there are a lot of young people now who are trying to go into fashion, trying to be more innovative, more creative, if you see some designs you will marvel, it is a major breakthrough for the industry.”

#### **4.4 Conclusion**

The current Nigerian fashion industry is built on the complex interrelation of culture, social, political and economic factors steeped both in history and contemporary times. What we are witnessing now is a progression of conscious cultural values, government intervention and social response to cosmopolitanism of the era. Though faced with many challenges, the industry is turning these challenges into opportunities, and thriving to serve the growing fashion demands of Nigerian society. Participants’ positive response to negative conditions prepares them for the worst while they produce the best for consumers. The positive energy of Nigerian entrepreneurs amidst the economic crisis is the strength of the fashion industry. In a society where the art of engaging in fashion is the social capital for everyone, Lagos city has developed a fashion culture that accommodates the foreign in the context of the local, a creative hybridization that is the source of contemporary innovation in fashion. It is on this premise and probably more that has given rise to a new crop of fashion producers who ride on the back of contemporary cosmopolitanism of Lagos to produce clothes and accessories that characterises contemporary fashion taste of the people. While they have been variously defined and/or identified by scholars (Jennings, 2011; Loughran, 2012, Azieb-Pool, 2017), the next section discusses these new producers, and how they are positioned through education, training and identity construction to produce aesthetic cosmopolitan fashion.



## CHAPTER FIVE

### FROM THE “MAMA IN THE GARAGE” TO THE DESIGNER

(The Aesthetic Cosmopolitan Designer)

“I was a tailor before I switched to a designer.”

(Gee)

#### 5.0 Introduction

Equipped with the social, political and economic background to the current fashion development in Lagos, this chapter introduces the contemporary designers who are emerging in the Nigerian fashion industry, key participants of this study. The focus of the discussion is to provide background information on the education and skill acquisition training, features that have defined, in significant ways the work and experiences of seamstresses and tailors as well as the first generation of African designer. The aim of the discussion is to provide insight into the knowledge base of the emerging designers and as cultural producers of aesthetic cosmopolitanism, how this background knowledge positions them at the intersection of cultures. Through this, we will engage further in the exercise fishing out the similarities and contrast the current designers have with their traditional counterparts or predecessor designers for better appreciation of their novelty. Thus, emerging out of an already established industry with traditional functionaries, we are also interested in the many ways in which the current designers distinguish themselves and their work from their competitors. Some literature report on the negative stereotypical features associated with African tailoring, (Langevang and Gough, 2012; Ogunduliye, 2017) which has downgraded the significance of the profession over the years. In international spheres of fashion and clothing production, African producers are unacknowledged. However, the recognition and attention current designers are attracting leave room for wondering on their different scale of production. Therefore, the study analysis the ways in which emerging designers are countering local and international negative stereotypes in fashion and clothes production.

Lagos society is going through social, economic and political developments that is shaping lifestyle and livelihood in profound ways. A terrain already set for fashion to thrive, a new crop of designers is taking advantage of the socio-economic and political changes to develop the fashion industry. These individuals behind the current development in fashion production in

Nigeria (Lagos) have not been accurately identified in the ongoing discussion on the rise of fashion in Africa (Alderman, 2012; Menks, 2012). While the study aims at bringing to the fore the creativity of fashion emanating from Africa, this chapter sets the stage by introducing the individuals behind Africa's progress in fashion

Seamstresses and tailors have long been the producers of clothes in African societies since the introduction of sewing by the European missionaries during the colonial era (Gott, 2009; Gott, 2010; Jennings, 2011, Grabski, 2015). Besides these seamstress and tailors, there are early internationally recognised African designers who emerged during post-independent era. Mostly western trained, these designers “drew on local fabrics and styles as a means of showing pride in their African identities in the wake of a flurry of independence that swept across Africa in the 1960s” (Jennings, 2011:11). However, the current producers of contemporary fashion from Africa have been marked as qualitatively different from both the seamstress and the first generation of designers. According to Jennings, their distinction comes from “balancing contemporary fashion's pursuit of the new with an appreciation of the ideals of beauty and adornment that are deeply rooted in Africa's cultural and social consciousness” (2011:8). Loughran (2009) also makes a similar assertion, stating that, the “new generation designers... [they] have all successfully connected their cultural heritage with modernity in an urban landscape in Africa and abroad” (pp 257-258). Faber believes that since the crucial era of crafting national identity during the post-Apartheid and post-independence South Africa, contemporary fashion producers are agents of socio-cultural change who “contribute to the reorganisation of socio-cultural and economic life in this country” (2010:128). While the above assertions hold true for the work the designers produce, this section will begin to analyse their difference in qualification-education and skill training as well as their individual and social identity construction of the professional image of a designer in Nigeria.

Formal education stood out as one key characteristic of these designers, especially acquisition of higher education. What this means to the conversation on fashion producers from Africa is an upgrade in educational image which has assumed a pessimistic stance of the profession of the uneducated. Participants were quick to mention the educational qualification as a means to diffuse negative stereotypes of their profession. Analytically, their education is the first step to show their cosmopolitan stance of exposure to different cultures both within Nigeria and outside Nigeria. Participants' training in designing and sewing depicts a move from the informal apprenticeship programme to a formal institution training in both Nigeria and the West. Participants show a conscious effort of positioning themselves at the intermediary of

cultures through training in both Nigeria and other foreign countries. As we proceed in subsequent chapter such cross-culture training is exhibited in their products, production technics, marketing and distribution processes. As producers of aesthetic cosmopolitanism, majority of participants explained the need to acquire such dual training and merge the training in the production of fashion. The last section of the chapter shows how current designers are constructing professional identities within their locality and on the international level. According to Regev (2007), though cultural producers of aesthetic cosmopolitanism seek to upgrade national culture through the adaption of global elements, they also seek local validation of their products. Therefore, participants seek to present a new front of professionalism by rising above the negative stereotypes of the local competitors while employing global standards that set them on international platform. Thus, as mentioned above, the discussion draws on differentiating the current designers from local seamstresses and tailors and first generation of designers. I set out, not necessarily in the bid to compare but to better understand their position as cultural producers in a ‘cosmopolitan’ society, to discuss some characteristics that set the current producers apart from ‘seamstress and tailors’ as well as first-generation designers in terms of professional identification.

### **5.1 Professional Background**

Every organisation or occupation has its professional characteristics that distinguishes it from other institutions. Members of these organisations define themselves through various variables, being it individual, occupational or social for effective negotiation of public credibility in relation to the job. Thus, professional image which culminates into professional identity is constructed as a tool of distinction as well as base of occupational credibility. A study by Roberts on individual construction of professional image using traditional impression characteristics defines professional image construction as “the process of assessing and shaping perceptions of one's own competence and character” (Roberts, 2005:685). While it can be done on individual level, some characteristics come to assume group characteristics over time, therefore, people found in the group are expected to exhibit such characteristics though there can be cases of exception. On the individual level it has been suggested by Hall (1995) that constructing professional image involves “acquiring a sense of self-esteem and agency (i.e., work competency) is critical to stepping into new identities throughout people's careers (cited in Pratt, Rockmann and Kaufmann, 2006:253). More so, positive construction of professional

image has implications for achieving social approval, power, well-being, and career success (Roberts, 2005).

Therefore, it crucial in a society such as Lagos, when a group of young entrepreneurs are developing occupational distinction, emerging from an already established industry with traditional functionaries to construct a positive professional image of themselves as individuals and as group. The participants (designers) of this study are keen on marking their distinction and establishing level of competence different from, if not superior to, the traditional body of clothes producers in African societies-seamstress and tailors. They are assuming a process of change in fashion production; a change from an old system or more specifically change in the producers of fashion in Nigeria. There is a change from a system of seamstresses and tailors to a new dispensation of fashion producers, designers who are believed to be remarkably different.

Educational and skill training qualification are objective variables that can be analysed to help understand who these new designers are and how they are different from the seamstress and tailors. However, there are other subjective tools which they are employing in defining their work and status in the fashion industry and the Nigerian society. I will begin the discussion with the objective variables that sets the respondents apart from seamstresses and tailors and defines for them a new professional image that is not plunged in negative stereotype of producers of outfits in the Nigerian society.

### **5.1.1 Education**

The discussion in this section is based on data gathered from the eighteen ‘producer’ participants who are part of this study. They form the core of the respondents of the study and especially this section. It is realised that, there is a change in the educational background of fashion producers and this change is creating positive effects for the industry.

Though seamstresses and tailors have been the main producers of local clothes in Africa over years, “dressmaking is still struggling with the image of being a dull occupation for school drop-outs or weak students and has not been able to improve the image of seamstresses and legitimise the profession as a 'proper' business” (Langevang and Gough, 2012:248). The seamstress and tailor profession are perceived so because of the decline in prospects that technical training jobs suffered in post-independence Africa. Post-independence Africa started off with a zeal of modernisation through industrialisation, therefore emphasis was laid on scientific and humanities education in the bid to produce the required labour capital to occupy government and industrial administrative works. Technical vocational and skill training fell off

the agenda of most countries especially those trained through apprenticeship like dressmaking (Anokye and Afrane, 2014). The apparent rise in educational cost, as well as the rise in level of qualification for post-secondary education admission left many who could not obtain the funds as well as those who could not make the level mark after primary and secondary education to fend for themselves in the informal sector. Apprenticeship occupation then became the alternative job for “33 per cent of students who drop out before completing Junior High School and nearly 42 per cent who drop out after completing Senior High School” (Anokye and Afrane, 2014: 130), based on their study in Ghana on apprenticeship skill training. Likewise, studies on tailors in Abeokuta, Nigeria reveal that most tailors are not equipped with formal education because it is an alternative occupation, while training in apprenticeship does not require educational qualification (Ogunduliye et’al, 2017).

The low educational level and the inadequate training seamstresses and tailors receive, led to the perception that their services are unprofessional. This perception of lack of professionalism has further degraded the social significance of sewing occupation to the extent that some workers are unable to make ends-meet (Ogundiliye et’al, 2017). Langevang and Gough (2012) observed that seamstresses are poorly exposed to global trend of designs and modern techniques of sewing and fashion. Low education has the potential of limiting access to technology and subsequently information, therefore, the position of seamstresses and tailors as producers of cosmopolitan products can be hindered through lack of information on other cultures. Literature on the education of older generation of designers is scanty. Information is offered on their training and not formal education<sup>11</sup>. Most of them are European trained and it is suggested they attended formal fashion schools in Europe (Jennings, 2011). Nigerien designer Alphadi is noted to be a Baccalaureate holder in Niger before his further training in Paris as a fashion designer (Loughran, 2009). Their form of training also gave them the needed education for exposure into the global production of fashion. Therefore, as reflected in their works, though few in number, these early designers made a ground-breaking entry into the world of fashion. However, their work has been criticised as conforming to the ‘traditional’ notion and not responsive to global fashion due to their heavy reliance on African originality or authentication (Klopper, 2000).

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<sup>11</sup> Though training and education may mean the same in some contexts, I separate the two; education in this context is used for literary education while training is to indicate technical skill acquisition, in this case designing and sewing.

Participants of this study show high literacy level as sixteen are university graduates. Eji is a young woman who was first exposed to sewing through the work of her grandmother who was a seamstress. Growing up in an elite family where good education and high society careers like law and medicine are greatly revered, Eji's parents invested in good schools with the hope of she becoming a medical doctor. In her secondary education, she attended the prestigious Queens College where she enrolled as a science student. However, she would later have her "born-again" encounter with her passion for fashion at the early period of the first year in school. She recounts how her class teacher was at most times absent from school due to pregnancy complications. This led her to "wonder around", joining different classes to find other interests. It was through one of these visits to different classes she found herself in the clothing and textile class and for her first day in class, they were going on an excursion at the Yaba Technical College, "fashion section, School of fine Arts". She recounts her experience of that day as "you know when people say they get born again, that was it for me, literally". She got born again into the passion of sewing and as a thirteen-year-old girl from an elite family, it was difficult to break the news of change of course to her parents. According to Takyi-Asiedu (1993), most elite parents in sub-Saharan Africa will not permit their children to engage in vocational skills because these professions are regarded as jobs for drop-outs and the unintelligent. Therefore, Eji being aware of this narrative, thought to herself, "how do you say that, after you've been to the best girls' school, you were a science student going on to become a doctor and you are talking about going to an art school and a polytechnic and become what? A designer? Thus, she went through three years of secondary education without informing her parents of her change in course. After secondary education, she applied to Yaba Technical College to study fashion. This time, the parents got to know her decision and were not pleased, however, she believes at that period in life, she was at the "rebellious stage", therefore she stood her grounds and attained four years of education in fashion at Yaba Tech. Eji represents one stream of tertiary education designers among the respondents who found their passion before entering the university and pursued fashion as a course and later established a career. Four other respondents pursued fashion at the tertiary level: three at Yaba Tech, one in the United Kingdom.

There are others, the majority, who pursued different disciplines at the university but went along with their passion after school. Shola since childhood was fascinated with sewing since the mother was a seamstress. She made clothes for her dolls and this caught the attention of her parents. Unlike Eji's parents, Shola's parents decided to give her alternatives to careers by

insisting she goes through tertiary education and also learn the vocation of sewing. At age eleven, she simultaneously enrolled in junior secondary school and fashion, thus “in JSS 1, during our holidays period, my dad took me out to learn from a proper tailoring institute”. She would go to boarding school during the term and come home for the fashion training during vacations at Prince House of Fashion. According to Shola, Prince House of Fashion is a formal fashion school with structured curriculum that is tailored to suit different schedules different from the apprenticeship system of free-style learning, hence her ability to leave for school and return on vacation. This arrangement dragged the period of training from three years to five years. Shola later attended University of Lagos, but instead of pursuing fashion or courses directly related to it, she studied business management. However, she was sewing along with her studies “I was making it for most of the ladies and that is how I built my brand. So, when I finished in 1998, I had a shop close to the school and I was still sewing there”.

Eji and Shola are good examples of the current educational background of contemporary designers in Lagos. Three out of the sixteen graduates have further postgraduate education, one in fashion and the other two in business administration. Aside Shola studying business management, the disciplines of others in her category of tertiary education studied courses ranging from Biochemistry to English Art, Law, Fisheries and Wildlife. Their courses were diverse, but most of them pursued dressmaking or fashion as their hobbies. The remaining two respondents are secondary graduates with no formal education in fashion and/or textile making. Zena comes from a polygamous home with many siblings. The best her father could offer her was secondary education, therefore, after completion, though she “got the admission to study law at the Uni then but unfortunately, it never happened”. Therefore, she decided to do what she enjoys engaging in, clothing. The interesting aspect of Zena’s fashion career is that she never enrolled in any fundamental training in fashion as well. She started her business with no training and employed a seamstress who sews her designs. Gee, the other participant with no tertiary education, on the other hand after secondary school enrolled as an apprentice with his elder brother who was a tailor.

Most of the participants acknowledged that they found their passion in fashion during their secondary through to their university education. Education in general and specifically higher education has been noted to provide a positive life outcome for the individual, their communities and their country (Hout, 2012). Thus, higher education positions individuals for better job opportunities and the ability to convert these opportunities into personal and career success which in turn is benefited by the community (ibid). Though this assertion can be

contested in Africa contexts as various studies have shown. In Ghana, it has been noted that unemployment among the youth increases with the increase in the level of education, thus, the higher one's educational level, the higher the likelihood of being unemployed (Anyidoho, Baidoo and Pupilampu, 2011). However, respondents reveal the positive experience, amidst other negativity in the secondary and tertiary level that has impacted their journey as fashion designers. The impact of higher education on the work of designers who understudied fashion and textiles at the tertiary level seem pretty obvious. The four participants explain that their ability to produce fashion technically is through their tertiary training which serves as their primary knowledge base and treated more as a skill acquisition than as mainstream formal education. Thus, their fundamental training in fashion is immersed in their formal education at the tertiary level. What this means for them is a double win as the skill they acquired (it will be discussed later) is perceived to supersede the traditional apprenticeship system, putting them at a technical advantage over the seamstresses and tailors while the tertiary lifestyle also exposed them to the diverse ethnic and national backgrounds that make up the school population. This diversity exposure and other non-formal aspects of higher education also has indirect impact on participants' businesses.

Participants who offered different disciplines at the tertiary also share positive impacts their education has had on their businesses. According to Ken, "higher education exposes them" to technology and people of different backgrounds and with this they are able to "run further" with the industry. Higher education has helped positioned most of the respondents at advantageous point of cultural exposure considering the knowledge acquired through the formal system of training and the extra-curriculum activities of friendship, associations and clubs. Some courses directly inform the fashion career they have established as a business or expression of art while for others, school served as a platform for finding their passion or even initial customer base for their passion.

Participants who have studied business courses have used their knowledge to grow the business aspect of their work. Rhoda who is the creative director for RM explains how her business suffered at the initial stage of establishment to the extent of closing operations for almost a year. She took the opportunity of the break to enrol in a masters' course in business administration. According to her, she realised her deficiency in the business was marketing, therefore she specialised in marketing. She explains:

everything I learnt... I used my company, you know when you want to do an MBA they will ask you where you work and all that, that is what you will use for your assignments, I used my company as the basis for my MBA. So, everything that I was taught, I was directly applying to my business. That was how I was able to do it.

(Rhoda)

Her studies in business administration boosted her knowledge on how to run the business efficiently; minimising cost and maximising profit because her education has helped her to “run it [the business] like a business, like any serious business establishment”. Thus, discipline such as business administration with its different courses can be helpful in the running of a “supposedly” vocational profession such as fashion production.

There are Others who may not directly apply their courses to the running of their businesses but gain inspiration for fashion ideas and designs from their education course. Here again, the respondents did not study fashion as a discipline during graduate education, however, no matter how remote their course is from fashion, they are still able to relate it to their work especially in designing ideas. Joy who studied fisheries and wildlife explains that, when she is short of ideas with designing, she watches wildlife movies on television for inspiration. She still has love for the course she pursued at the university, however, she had to run with her passion when she graduated. Therefore, she has found a means of relating the two to help her succeed in her business, such that she falls on her “love animals so the lines on the zebra and everything I see inspires me”. Aside that, some major courses under the discipline continue to lend technical skills support to her artistic work in fashion as such as engineering which comes with drawing and ensuring alignment is of great help during the process of pattern drafting, thus she has “eyes for lines, an ecstatic or a wildlife conservationist is close to nature and as a designer also you have to be close to nature to get your inspiration”. Respondents share direct experiences their education have lend to their work in explicit terms of business or technical knowledge in the daily running of their businesses.

Almost all graduate respondents reiterated the indirect advantage they have benefited from graduate education. The most featured is exposure or open-mindedness attitude towards the job and the possible diversity of their customer base. Eji believes her training which doubles as her education merits her the advantage of being acknowledged as a designer just as any other

international designer. The tertiary education exposed her to fashion and textiles not only in Nigeria but in many countries and regions in the world. Thus, she should “never thought of...as a Nigerian designer, [but]... as a Nigerian and a designer, period”. She has studied about fashion in different contexts and one way she brings this to bear in her work is through the use of different fabrics. She sources for fabric across the globe and she designs works that are internationally relatable because to her most contemporary fabrics are cannot be tied to specific geographical location because they are “engineered. I don’t think there is fluid fabric in anybody’s culture, it came over the years” Therefore, no specific people or culture can lay claims to some fabrics. However, even fabrics that are locally produced must be acknowledged for their beauty and used everywhere and not tied to a set of people or culture. Eji’s assertion ties in with Ken’s idea of exposure that comes with higher education, though his is explained in the context of university campus. The exposure he is talking about borders on the ability to understand and appreciate diversity which is acquired through collage formal courses or other extra curriculum activities that comes with collage education settings; relationships and technology use. This exposure is integrated into the life of the people, which is translated into the lifestyle they live. Due to the belief of the added knowledge that comes with ‘exposure’ through college training, in many social contexts, graduates automatically assume the social status of middle-class after completion of university education (Tarkhnishvili and Tarkhnishvili, 2013; Spronk, 2014). Thus, as Ken suggests, the knowledge of exposure by those educated is incorporated into their work which helps these works advance the Nigeria fashion, developing the industry. Speaking with these participants, your attention is instantly drawn to their liberal, open-minded world outlook, the easy incorporation of other ethnic backgrounds, and the generalisation of categories extending beyond social structures such as ethnic and class. The local and global exposure stance demonstrated by Eji and Ken is shared by most of the emerging designers who have learned about and appreciate diverse cultures around the world. The ability of this new crop of designers to turn their knowledge into practical work is what is churning out the creativity experienced in fashion from Nigeria. The exposed educated individual, conscious of human and cultural diversity, is situated at the intersection of cultures, which presents them with myriad options of appropriation that they creatively select to produce innovative designs. This is a strong trait of the producer of aesthetic cosmopolitanism; the ability to know, appreciate and include diversity in the production of cultural elements, and it defines majority of the respondents of the study. Notwithstanding, the two secondary school graduates also show a strong open-mindedness and liberal world-view

in their approach to work. According to them, they follow keenly on the changes in trends and upgrade in skill from different non-formal education avenues.

As Regev (2007) suggests, the openness to foreign culture works at both the local and international level. It includes cultures beyond national borders and foreign ethnic features outside producers' ethnic affiliation within the same national context. In the context of Nigeria, adopting less ethnically represented cultural elements into ethno-national culture such as clothing promotes inclusiveness considering the different multi-cultural and multi-ethnic facets that make up the society. This affords the producers the ability to create national products that incorporates various ethnic representations which hitherto were not adequately represented such as Zena "found one [cloth] in the Rivers State area what they call Kokrobite which is a hand-woven fabric" through her research for cloth in less represented cultures in Nigerian fashion culture. Her quest of knowing about other ethnic groups and their clothing exposed her to one fabric she has come to love working with, found among a small ethnic group in a different state. Thus, education, being formal (school) or informal as Zena's case shows helps the beneficiary uncover knowledge, equips her or him with cultural capital that influences their taste of consumption, sometimes beyond their local culture to appropriate foreign cultural element (Bourdieu, 1984).

The growth of the tertiary education worker in the fashion industry is perceived to be the way forward if the industry will advance and maintain the international prominence it is achieving. Joy is convinced that to sustain and possibly promote the current development in the Nigerian fashion industry, more tertiary graduates must be recruited into the industry. She believes this cohort of labour are advanced in the use of technology and are bold in their work. The industry needs workers who are daring and bold to churn out good and amazing designs. Designers initiate designs, unlike the seamstresses and tailors who work mostly on bespoke orders and also the source of their designs is offered mostly by the customers themselves. A bold and passionate designer can initiate trendy designs that can lead the world runway. Therefore, in her experience as a designer and also as a teacher in fashion, graduate students exhibit such confidence in creation of designs. The phenomenon of training new designers is taken up by other respondents as well (this will be discussed adequately under a different section) to help train people interested in fashion. Most of the designer-teachers expressed their interest in recruiting mostly university graduates in their school, to help build a better workforce and also counter the perception of sewing business as the work for the school drop-out. Thus, in a budding vibrant fashion industry as the witnessed in Nigeria, for further advancement of the

industry, respondents believe more graduates must be employed and allowed to bring their skill to bear on the job. Nene marvels at the future of the industry when she observes the work of her trainees who are college graduates:

I can see what my students can do, you won't believe what they are doing... these young people, because they have been exposed to lot of fashion things, they can apply it to what they are learning. I think in the next 10 years it's going to be a big thing and international kind of.

(Nene)

The excitement in her voice as she makes this statement confirms her believe in the knowledge and skills of the graduate trainees who are to be the future of the industry. Though some participants acknowledged the creativity of the seamstresses and tailors, however, they believe they are limited in skill due to inadequate training of the apprenticeship system which hinders their exposure to global fashion dynamics and techniques. Some respondents such as Joy believe it is “the learned ones going to take over because a lot of the learned people are coming to the realisation that they are creative, and they can do this thing better than the roadside.”

Another indirect advantage that some respondents recount with their university education is building their customer base. Shola while at UNILAG (University of Lagos) was “making things for my [her] schoolmates, I was making it for most of the ladies and that is how I built my brand”. She started her business while in school, therefore, they were able to build a good clientele base for their business which boosted their confidence and prospects. A similar situation is reported by Chris who was an electronic engineering student, took advantage of teachers' strike demonstration to start a clothing business, serving his colleagues and relatives. The university community creates an environment for nurturing dreams and ambitions. Aside the literacy aspect, the community of people from various relational kinships and peers become alternative resource to families while they are outside the family setting (Schnell, 2014). It has been argued that adolescents in school spends more time with their peers than with their family and these peers come to represent strength mechanism on which students can attain integration and future successes (Schnell, 2014). This community of people when properly managed can be a source of business network for years. Some of my informants have taken advantage of this to grow their business. Also, the diversity of college population offers exposure to the many cultures of different people within the campus space. As I recounted in the previous chapter, it

was through my college education that brought me in direct contacts with Nigerians. Likewise, people from different ethnic backgrounds in Nigeria as well as foreigners all share the campus space, therefore, respondents are likely to form bonds and appreciate the diversity in terms of culture. These, some respondents believe helped shaped their views about the integrated nature of fashion across African countries.

The participants in this study have much higher levels of education in general and specialised education in fashion compared to their seamstresses and tailors competitors who have over the years fallen behind fashion production in Nigeria. Having sixteen out of eighteen respondents as university graduate in the Nigerian fashion industry speaks volumes to the gradual acceptance of the profession among the social elites. This change is appreciated by respondents because “now people are beginning to find that, at first when you are a seamstress it means you are a dropout you cannot find anything to do with your life and that is why, and so they are seeing that it is beyond that, it is actually a billion-dollar business” and the creativity produced daily defeats the gloomy perception of the profession being dull. There is now an open conversation about the economic impact fashion can have on the economy of Nigeria as the movie and music industry has been serving for years. Graduates and post-graduates in fashion are changing the cultural and social assumption of people who are in vocational skills in many countries. The case is no different from Ghana where Bobie (2017) in her work on Ghanaian youth in the fashion industry discovered the entrepreneurs behind the diversification of African print into fashion accessories and European designs are mostly university graduates. She calls them the unconventional entrepreneurs as they debunk most of the cultural and social stereotypes of informal entrepreneurship and fashion business in Africa as the occupation of the uneducated (ibid).

Participants have also shown how directly and indirectly their formal education has helped in the growth of their businesses. Their ability to transport knowledge from disciplines diversely related to their fashion business adds value to the importance of higher education to professional competence. The direct and indirect impact of tertiary education on fashion assume an abstract argument of cosmopolitanism bearing on intellectual acquisition represents the borrowing of knowledge from diverse disciplines, fusing it with the knowledge base of fashion designing to produce unique products and thriving business venture: intellectual cosmopolitanism. Thus, we are witnessing an openness in knowledge acquisition and application in the production of national cultural aesthetics. As cultural producers of aesthetic cosmopolitanism, the college campus also provided a platform of exposure to multi-cultural

and multi-ethnic elements that can be incorporated into their work to serve the national community. Not only are they exposed locally but as Nene indicated, they are exposed to fashion trends across the world which is brought to bear in creativity they produce daily.

Producing more educated people in the fashion industry has been noted as one significant feature of ensuring advancement in the industry. Living in a cosmopolitan city like Lagos, fashion addresses the needs of customers from diverse in cultural origin as the millions of population inhabitants. Lagos is the single biggest African city with the highest-class population and is also home to multi-nationals from over the world (Onyewuchi and Monye, 2013). Education therefore, offers producers the tool to negotiate these multi-cultures in the creation of national cultural aesthetic that bears both indigenisation and foreignness-cosmopolitanism.

### **5.1.2 Skills Training**

The training process of the respondents of this study continue to reveal new trends in the professionalisation of the industry. The introduction of sewing by the colonial administration and the missionaries was taught mainly through formal education, in addition to literacy. The aim was to provide occupational skills for new converts, to help the African to make clothes to cover his nakedness, an integral part of the colonial's civilisation agenda (Byfield, 2004), thus, colonising the African bodies (Rovine, 2009). Therefore, sewing was taught in schools, becoming the occupation of the then social elites. Later, sewing training became part of the various traditional vocational and technical skills (carving, blacksmith, basketry etc.). An apprentice "contracts" a master craftsman to teach him or her the skills of the vocation needed to be self-reliant in profession. The training period lasts between three and four years and the apprentice at the beginning of training pays the master craftsman in kind or cash or both to show commitment (Ahadzi, 2003). According to Sonnenberg (2012), the main strengths of traditional apprenticeship are its practical orientation, its self-regulation, and self-financing" (pp. 95). Argenti (2002) who studied apprenticeship of the carving profession in Cameroon indicates that, "the apprenticeship relation serves to pass on technical knowledge on the one hand and cultural values on the other" (pp 497). He further explains that the knowledge transferred in apprentice skill training is not an objective element which is devoid of value but "a relationship that is perpetually renegotiated and reinvented during the process of apprenticeship. The relationship offers the apprentice a means of increasing his [or her] participation in a community and of developing a new identity within that community" (Argenti, 2002:499). Apprentice training is more than the transfer of vocational skills, it is the

transfer of societal values (craftmanship, hard work and economic independence as a youth) which situates a person in a better social and economic position in the community.

However, the apprentice system of skill training itself has also been criticised for its ineffectiveness and low productivity. It is argued that inherent in the master-craftsman-apprentice relationship is a power relation that limits the free flow of knowledge and skill (Argenti, 2002). The training sometimes assumes a master-servant relationship in which the master-craftsman uses his discretion to train and can sometimes withhold information and the apprentice, on the other hand, may not be at liberty to inquire the needed knowledge for the training. Langevang and Gough (2012) argue that the traditional apprentice training that characterise sewing is reproductive and not open to changes, especially global fashion trends, making seamstress and tailors poorly exposed to progress in global fashion business.

The first-generation of internationally recognised African designers, as has been discussed earlier are mostly European trained, that is, pursued fashion designing career in European countries such as France and England, who after independence returned to their home countries with the vision of fashioning Africa to meet up with the tenets of liberation and self-sufficiency that was reiterated during independence.

Participants in this study show a mix of trainings of both the seamstress and the first-generation of designers especially in terms of location (local and foreign training).

As it has been discussed about Eji who attended Yaba Technical and studied fashion and textiles, there are some participants whose education doubles as skill training, therefore, their fundamental skills in designing and training comes from their tertiary education. Six received fundamental training through tertiary education in fashion; four at Yaba Technical college in Lagos, Nigeria and the remaining two outside the continent; United Kingdom. Yaba technical college is the only government institution in Lagos that offers fashion as a discipline. I paid a visit to the college during my fieldwork, unfortunately, school had just resumed, and students were not back from holiday. Administrative staff were busy and could not avail themselves for interviews, however, I got the chance to look through some fabric and designing work done by students before the vacation as their final year projects. I was informed, students are required to produce practical works as academic requirement for completion of the degree course. Normally, there is a dissertation before the practical work, so I requested to look through some of the works however, I was denied, neither was I permitted to take photos of the practical works I saw. However, unlike other respondents with university education but different

discipline from fashion, respondents who studied fashion at the university went straight into the business after completion of school; both from Nigerian universities and foreign universities. Regarding the two fundamentally foreign trained respondents, one studied fashion as a graduate course and the other as a post-graduate course.

There are the likes of Shola who took different disciplines at the tertiary but was learning sewing or designing skills alongside studies or after tertiary education. Shola was training with a fashion school while attending Junior secondary school. The emergence of formal fashion schools in Nigeria is a relatively new phenomenon as the traditional method has been through apprenticeship. Three participants attended formal fashion schools in Nigeria as their main skill training. I believe, establishing formal fashion schools with clear-cut curriculum that combines theory with practical is a response to the perceived poor performance of apprentice training that renders the tailors inefficient in the rapidly changing world of fashion and the need to develop standards in skill acquisition. Fumi with her experience in skill training and years of work believes, formal fashion schools provide ‘proper training’, drawing analogy between the mechanic and the auto engineer “to be properly trained and properly tutored you know there is a difference between a mechanic and auto engineer, the two do different things, the mechanic will just work on something that has already been done but the auto engineer will come up with a whole new set of things”. Considering the developments being experienced in the industry, the need is called for the setting of fashion training schools that will cater for the professional needs of the industry. This formal training being referred to is the inclusion of technical and theory aspects that follows international clothes making standards which the free-hand apprentice system ignores. Therefore, it is not surprising to have six out of the eighteen respondents already running fashion schools. As mentioned above, the omission of theory training in apprenticeship training hinders the efficiency of seamstresses and tailors, among other faults that have been highlighted on the system of apprenticeship. (Argenti, 2002; Ogundiliye et al 2017). I observed the inclusion of theory training in some of the training schools of participants. A class section on a topic starts with theory explanations on the topic which can last for the allotted period of the course of the day or half of the period before the start of the practical section. In one school, the theory section is followed by a video section before the practical section begins. Babs shows me through her classrooms and points to a screen, “you notice that there is a projector there and so you have to show videos [after the theory section] because that is how we studied in India, it was done in Paris so at least they can travel and see in their mind before starting the work”. Thus, participants are integrating their

foreign training into the tutoring process of their schools. As will be discussed soon, almost all respondents have dual training – foreign and local- in clothes production and they are bringing these skills to bear in their work while training young creatives.

Another category of participants is those who did not engage in any fundamental training in fashion but has thrived greatly in the industry. Zena, did not just complete at the secondary level in formal education but she also did not have the opportunity of being trained before she started her business. She borrowed the old machine of her grandmother, employed a seamstress and designed her clothes for the seamstress to sew. She started right off with *prêt a porter* and she recounts her experience that “in the whole of the first year, I keep saying it and people don’t believe it, we sold just one outfit because it was difficult for the people to understand my dreams”. People could not buy the idea of an untrained, secondary school graduate who is introducing a line of production-*prêt a porter*- which was not popular and demands some technicalities that even trained seamstresses failed. Relying on her passion and dexterity in sewing, she decided to set up a fashion business that does not conform to the social precepts of seamstress or tailor but something unique and extra, envisioned herself beyond her locality to enter the global space of fashion. She “was like a non-conformist, I dared to dream it, I dared to do it”, and though it was difficult making sales at the beginning, she has succeeded in many respects. Now a very renowned designer not just in Nigeria but within the international fashion circles as well. She recalls her journey:

the amazing thing, I never really had any formal training, it is kind of self-taught and I am still learning every day. I could say I am one of those people who are naturally blessed, I have got God-given talent, I have this eye for, I know what I want and I never say, I am going to conform to what the society wants I have always set my own trends, set my own ideas and interpreted them as I want, I am still learning.

(Zena)

Modernists or invigorators (Regev, 2007) are daring and bold in their decisions. Their products are likely to extend traditional boundaries of production of national cultures and that is what Zena sought to do from the beginning. Initially, she was heavily criticised by the conservatives and older producers of fashion since her products do not conform to the old pattern of production. Regev argues that such non-conformity or pushing of traditional borders in

production is a strong trait of producers of aesthetic cosmopolitanism. According to Regev (2007), modernists or invigorators suffer acceptance especially at the initial stage and Zena is no exception. She finds it amazing that without any training or even higher education she has succeeded in her career. In an industry where the work of professionally trained is highly criticised, Zena presents a situation which is an exception to the norm but nonetheless effective for building a career: combining her passion with her talent.

There are other three participants who have no fundamental training in designing and sewing adopted Zena's idea of designing and recruiting skilful tailor or seamstress to sew. Though these other three are tertiary graduates with courses which have no direct link to fashion they believe "if you want to come into fashion as a designer or something, one of the global rules is that you come out with your designs then you outsource production". They believe in their dexterity when it comes to designing and together with their passion for fashion, they set off to fulfil their dreams as fashion designers. Thus, most of these designers with no fundamental training learnt on the job through their employed seamstresses and tailors. Though they are all no longer with the seamstress and tailors they started with, they have kept the business running and they can now sew and perform other technical functions through self-taught training on the job and the use of the internet. However, they still maintain the position as designers for the company.

The remaining five respondents underwent their fundamental skill training through traditional apprenticeship. Nene holds first degree in biochemistry and a post-degree in public administration from the University of Lagos. She has always nurtured passion for fashion and clothe making, therefore, after first degree, she enrolled with a master-craftman to learn the skill of sewing as an apprentice. She started "out on a small scale like from the house.... Initially, I started out with children's clothing and supplying to them in Lagos, I was making already-made clothing for children." The business was not lucrative, therefore she left for post-graduate education. She believes the children clothing was not thriving because during that period, sewn children clothes was not in vogue, many parents preferred foreign children clothes. However, she could not let go of her passion to make clothes, therefore, she returned to a local fashion school and after her training, she started to make female clothes. Three other participants' business start-up tell similar story as graduates who after tertiary completion enrolled in apprenticeship training. The fourth person in this category is Gee who is a secondary graduate. He understudied his elder brother after secondary school through apprenticeship.

Their trainings lasted between six months and two years unlike the three to four years requirement argued by Ahadzie (2003). The interesting aspect of their training is that, except for the secondary school graduate, the four university graduates engaged further in formal fashion training by attending accredited fashion school in Nigeria or outside the country to earn them a fashion training certificate. The additional fashion training, they reasoned, was necessary to prepare them for the complexities that was emerging with contemporary fashion trends and sophistication of production which the apprenticeship training does not offer. When asked about the difference in being trained through apprenticeship and the formal fashion school, one of the respondents answered; “I think we will say the difference is in designing, the thing is the tailor on the road is very creative, I must confess most of my designs comes from there but they don’t have the fineness, they don’t have the sophistication to make it work”. Thus, fashion school training looked out for certain standards and technics in designing which they believed traditional apprenticeship could not offer, therefore, they set out to train themselves better to be more competitive; one outside Nigeria and three in fashion schools in Nigeria. Though some participants admit to the creativity of the seamstresses and tailors, however, they believe what makes the designer’s work preferred to the former is how the creativity is materialised into an outfit. The designer is better materialising their creativity into an outfit than the seamstresses and the tailors because, according to the participant, the latter is not well trained in the technicality of sewing their creative idea into reality. Thus, there is a gap between turning theory into practice by seamstresses and tailors. This gap was observed by Ogundiliye et’ al (2017) during their study on tailors in Abeokuta. They report that tailors training lack theories of designing and fashion and this poses serious limitations on their work. Tailors and seamstress find it difficult producing design ideas proposed by customers into an outfit without fault of design, fitting or proper finishing. Designers, per the respondent, possess skills of both creativity (theoretical design ideas) and “fineness” (the technicalities to produce the ideas into the expectations of consumers).

Respondents with schools note that their foremost motivation in opening fashion schools comes from the difficulty they encounter in recruiting skilful labour. As Dupe complains “we moved to this premise in December, the whole of January, February, March, we were interviewing tailors and I got just one and we kept interviewing.” And in a situation where you lay hands on a good one, the reproductive nature of their training sets them in a ‘box’ that does not give room for further training and growth such as experienced by Edith “I had a tailor once, very good tailor, experienced, fantastic tailor, but he will not give you what you want, he wants to

give you what he thinks you should have and that put off most of the customers.” Edith acknowledges the technical skills of this employee; however, he is not open to designs outside his training and he always tries to impose this knowledge on the work and the interest of customers. Edith produces both ready-to-wear and bespoke outfits. In the ready-to-wear genre, the designer most of the time comes up with the designs for the collection. However, in bespoke production, designs are negotiated between customers and designers just as in the seamstresses and tailors’ system (Grabski, 2015). In some cases, customers come up with their personal designers or together with the designer develop a design or they leave the design to the discretion of the designer. In the case of the first scenario, customers expect designers to respect their choice and produce as they expect. Therefore, if the producer tries to force her or his opinion on the customer, ignoring the customer’s opinion, it is seen as disrespect to the customer.

In addition to their fundamental skill training, most of the respondents engaged further in fashion training. The irony is that, most of the locally trained designers; apprentice, fashion school or the university either went to study further courses in European countries or engaged in intensive international short courses that issue certificates for training. And the inverse is observed about the two who had fundamental training broad: engaging in internship with local fashion houses to gain experience in local fashion.

Foreign training was taken in Paris, London, America and India with training lasting between three months to two years. Most participants share Nene’s perspective on why they sought further training in foreign locations. Nene after establishing the female clothing line realised there is some technicalities and skills that comes with designing and sewing which the local training omits. Therefore, if she aims at being an internationally recognised designer, she needs to upgrade her local skills with international knowledge and skill training. Thus, she reasoned that “I had to have my own experience of UK fashion industry, so I did short courses in the London college of fashion and I did a second one in pattern and drafting and I did a third one in draping, that were the short courses I did”. The Nigerian fashion context looks forward to fashion from United Kingdom (UK) especially with clothes. As I gathered through my fieldwork, as much as Nigerians are into brands and most high fashion brands are from France and Italy, Nigerians appreciate UK fashion. It is also the reason why when Maufe and Tese (the two tertiary trained fashion designers aside the four trained at Yaba Technical) opted for their fundamental training in UK. The Nigerian fashion society’s openness to the fashion culture of UK is as Congolese Sape culture to the French (Gondola, 1999), however, the former

is exhibited in a subtle way. And, as in the case of the Congolese, this relationship was developed through the colonial relation; Nigeria being a colony of the British. Therefore, their fashion taste has been fashioned along that of the British especially in clothing style. Nene's statement "to have my own experience of the UK fashion industry", connotes the personal and professional importance of aligning oneself with fashion culture of UK within the Nigerian context. Nene therefore "did short courses in the London college of fashion and... did a second one in pattern and drafting and... a third one in draping". These courses were to help her be "be more creative than" the skill she acquired through her local training.

Nene epitomises the educational and skill training of a producer of aesthetic cosmopolitanism as well as represents the majority of the respondents. She shows professional distinction through educational and skill qualification: a university graduate, trained through apprenticeship while in school, later enrolled in formal fashion school and then established her business. While in the business she recognises the change in fashion trends (the influence of foreign culture) and fashion consumption in her society, therefore, she engages in foreign training to upgrade her skills to stay competitive. She desired to combine the influence of the global with the local work to create a brand that serves a cosmopolitan society who are exposed to global fashion. In so doing, she is selective of the political and cultural impact the British fashion culture has on Nigeria and she negotiate the two spaces creatively.

She mentions some of the courses she took during her short period of training. Emphasising these courses indicates their absence in the apprenticeship and formal fashion school during her time of training in Nigeria. Course like draping, I got to understand from participants with fashion school, is new in the Nigerian system and those who offer it do so at the highest level of training. While some participants who engaged in foreign training did it for acquiring international skills in fashion that helps mostly in designing and techniques of sewing, Babs and few others rather engage in foreign courses to help them gain commercial and technical knowledge on how to run their genre of production. Training in "India I learnt mass production, it is different from fashion, in UK I learnt fashion", thus, she reports on the difference between the two types of training she acquired from the different countries. She states that "in UK I learnt fashion". What Babs is implying by fashion, is the process of producing an outfit in terms of design and sewing. She studied how to produce outfit according to the UK standard (which is basically equivalent to global standards of outfit production), thus, UK designs, styles and sewing techniques which the Nigerian and other African societies appreciate. However, when she wanted technical skills on how to produce in bulk she chose to be trained in India because

India is one of the most outsourced fashion labour for bulk production. Her training in India was for the sole purpose of commercial and technical knowledge of mass production of clothes. Thus, in India she learnt that mass production is “is like an assembly line, one person does not finish garment, so you have to train people like that. But if you are trained to do the cutting and the sewing you will not fit in mass production; you will be wasting time. Mass production is time-bound, the longer it takes you to do it, the more expensive it becomes.” She already had the design and sewing experience from the UK where she was “trained to do the cutting and the sewing”, therefore, to be efficient in her line of production, she needs further training which India provides.

As mentioned earlier, designers who had their fundamental training outside Nigeria later engaged in some form of mentorship or internship training in Nigeria before establishing their business. This was to help them build their customer base, raise money to start their business and experience the Nigerian fashion production, especially customers fashion taste. Maufe, “went to the America college in London to study fashion designing. I obtained a Bachelor of Arts degree in designing”. Upon her return to Nigeria, she needed capital and also an understanding of the local context with regards to running clothing business. Therefore, she “was in partnership with a fashion house called Mahogany at the time. I started off as their sole designer and then I was able to start up mine”. Work with Nigerian based fashion houses prepared them for the Nigerian market which is their first target and seemingly different from the European market. Thus, on their return “they find out there is still the need to understand the African figure, to understand African need. So, we have quite a lot of them still come back to our school to do short courses of some form”. This applies especially to businesses which are structured to produce ready-to-wear line or mass production. The standard measurements used in many western countries may not agree with the African body, therefore, producers need to understand and tailor their production towards their local consumer needs.

One participant who runs a fashion school has noticed this phenomenon and so has adjusted her school curriculum to suit people who train outside and come back to establish their business in Nigeria. The participant made room for such training because she found herself in similar situation after her foreign training. While such training centres are easily accessible now, one respondent remarked that the case was different nine years ago. To gain such knowledge, she had to enrol as an intern with a local fashion house one of the few (if not only as she states it) fashion houses that was producing ready-to-wear line. She “went to Tiffany Amber because she was the only designer doing that at the time, really trying to do that, she was making pieces

that women were just going for, she had three outlets where women could just go and shop”. I do not agree with participant’s use of ‘only’ because it assumes her trainer as the single designer engaged in the ready-to-wear clothing business at that particular period. Her statement adds to the notion of “designer gap” between the first-generation of designers and contemporary designers. According to Jennings (2011), Shade Thomas is the first Nigerian designer, and also the first to introduce ready-to-wear fashion line in Nigeria in the 1960. However, authors have been silence on the continual emergence of other designers who might have ventured into the business on the scale as Shade in the 1970s, 80s and early 90s and the statement of the respondent confirms this vacuum of unproductive fashion production from fashion designers from the continent. Tiffany Amber can well be categorised among contemporary fashion designers since her business was established in 1998, just before the turn of the century.

Literature does not show successive continuation of designers from the period of the first-generation African designers to contemporary ones. Discussions on designers from Africa does not reveal succession of designers emerging but creates the impression of a ‘break’ between older generation and the now younger generation of designers who entered the business mostly at the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Loughran, 2009; Jennings, 2011). However, the experience of one respondent who returned after her training in the UK to start her business thirty-five years ago reveals a middle cohort of designers between the two-extreme generation of designers. Upon her return in the 1980s she took up an internship with a fashion house “called Mahogany at the time. I started off as their sole designer and then I was able to start up mine”. Mahogany fashion house, according to the respondent, was a renowned established fashion house at the time, which produced both bespoke and ready-to-wear clothing, however on her return, there was a vacancy for the fashion designer role, a position she had held for two years before starting her own business. It is safe to argue that the Mahogany fashion house and few of its contemporaries and even the participant who worked as an intern will qualify for the intermediate generation cohort of designers between the first generation and the current generation. I interviewed two other respondents who have been in the fashion business for more than twenty-five years including president of the Fashion and Designer Association of Nigeria, who is the fourth successor of Shade Thomas who founded the organisation. The first generation received recognition for the simple fact that they were the first and their political (independence) timing was crucial to the development agenda of the period. Likewise, the current generation is emerging at a period of political and economic resurgence in Africa and their sheer numbers, creativity, and diversity triggered the interest of global fashion. However,

the intermediate cohort, I presume was obscured in literature as a result of the political and economic unrest on the continent in the three decades; 1970s, 80s and 90s. This period overshadowed lots of developments on the continent, counting these periods as the lost decades of Africa.

Aside the regular trainings, designers report on their daily engagement in skill training through the internet and fashion television stations. Using the internet, some designers use channels such as the Facebook and Youtube where people upload documentaries and lessons on outfit making from designing to final finishing. According to Rhoda “Youtube is the designers’ best friend, you can’t get it wrong with Youtube. Because there is always something to learn, there’s always somebody who knows it better than you do, find the person”. Therefore, for Chris, “when I wake up in the morning, I sit down in front of my tv, watch fashion house channel, so when it is female clothes, I will be looking at it and imagining how I can turn this into male clothing”. The sentiment of using media space to learn skills is shared by most of the respondents because they believe the media provides current information at a faster rate in time; there is virtually an update on information in space of minutes or second each day. Since the internet is set within a global space, videos on training comes from all over the world, connecting people from different backgrounds. Appadurai (2005) argues that within these internet spaces, communities are formed beyond geographical boundaries and these communities become a network or support system for their members without physical encounters. Thus, the likelihood of respondents who frequently use the internet for learning to form internet communities of fashion and to share experiences across borders and regions. There is constant sharing of ideas and exchanging of ideas within such ethno-space (Appadurai, 2005). Therefore, respondents who are regular visitors to social and electronic media sites, you are constantly in updated on global fashion and trends which can be incorporated in the work, because, according to Babs, “it is an on-going process, learning never ends” with fashion business. This update on trends and designs comes from different cultures, thus, affording the designer a wide range of cultural elements to incorporate into their designs. As cultural producer of aesthetics, integration into community of similar producers enhances knowledge and creativity.

In the discussion of skill training, respondents have exhibited the quest to learn skills and designs from other cultures. While many took their fundamental training in Nigerian, almost all respondents have acquired training in western countries to complement their local skills. The inverse has also been the case of those who trained fundamentally in Western countries.

Opening up to foreign training suggests the eagerness of respondents to assimilate foreign elements into their local production. The constant watching of fashion training on the internet and television speaks to the continual willingness to be inspired and influenced by global standards and trends. They express the importance of having “experience of the UK fashion industry” where “UK fashion industry” represents the global outlook of fashion for the respondents. Other countries like France and America have been well patronised by respondents. Respondents’ dual training background speaks to their understanding of the changing social process of cosmopolitanism where the local is receptive of foreign. Their desire is not just train and adopt foreign cultural elements in their work but also seeks representation and recognition for their work in foreign spaces as they incorporate the standards of production from the foreign countries in their work. Thus, they practice Regev’s argument of cultural producers as “agents whose cultural work is structured by the simultaneous position they occupy in at least two fields of cultural production: the global field of the art form in question [fashion], and the field of the ethno-national culture in which they are situated” (Regev, 2007: 127-128). Their dual or more training acquisition establish their role as producers of aesthetic cosmopolitanism. The convincing part is that respondents show awareness of the positive impact exposure to different cultures of fashion production on the development of their business, hence, the strategic choice of different foreign context for training. Most respondents with local training after a couple of years [realised they] have to expose [themselves! more to the way things are done globally. This is because “Nigeria is a fashion-conscious society” that keeps taps on global fashion trends, therefore, producers must match up in pace with the fashion taste of people. The choice of being trained in UK, France America and India is strategic to the style and production genres they pursue. Respondents are aware of the global fashion cultures that influence the Nigerian fashion, therefore, to serve modern, cosmopolitan consumers such as Nigerians, fashion producers must select strategically their foreign cultural elements of influence.

## **5.2 Identity Construction**

This section discusses respondents’ personal construction of their professional identity within the fashion context of Nigeria. It highlights respondents’ subjective construction of their desired professional image of the work they do. Discussion focuses on individual and social construction of a designer among the respondents and the Nigerian society. That is, how they subjectively construct their professional identity as a mark of distinction as well as group

identification. As new entrants into the industry, emerging designers need to construct professional image of themselves and their establishment. Regev calls the new entrants with cosmopolitan outlook entering the artistic industry “invigorators” or “modernizers” “who want to update national culture with whatever cultural innovations happen to appeal to them as worthy of ‘indigenization’” (2007:129). They seek difference from the old established industry through the introduction of new or modernised technics and foreign elements, at the same time seeking authentication of their work as indigenous like the old (Regev, 2007). Unlike filmmakers and pop musicians studied by Regev who introduced new aesthetics into their society through foreign influence, emerging designers in Lagos are not introducing new aesthetics but revamping an old, integrated industry. They are adopting foreign cultural elements into an old institution in their bid to re-construct local production of fashion. Thus, they do not seek just public acceptance “new” products but also an appreciation of their talent and skill as different from old producers in the industry. Rising out of an old institution with traditional functionaries, coupled with negative stereotypes of producers’ professionalism, emerging designers seek public re-orientation of public perception towards the positivity their background and creativity illuminate. They set out to distinguish themselves from the old producers by capitalising on their negativity and turning them into their professionalism. In the subsequent discussion we are led to the ways in which these invigorators distinguish themselves in their line of work from the old folks of the industry.

Participants make their first stance by identifying with the global identification of their profession as opposed to local identification. Who they are in the line of work, emanates from the global standard of who should be identified as a fashion designer. Conventionally, a fashion designer is a person who study or create fashion trends through designing, combining fabrics and supervising the production of the design into outfits or fashion accessories. All participants regardless of their education and training background shows understanding of the basic knowledge of who is a designer. Participants believe that a designer does not necessarily have the skill to sew, it is more of the ability to create designs and supervise its production that defines a person as a designer.

Thus, Gee gives as a good example of how of the local seamstress or tailor can metamorphose into an internationally recognised designer. As discussed above, Gee is a secondary graduate who trained with his brother through the old apprenticeship system. He established his business as a tailor, latter part of the 1990s. In 2007, Gee met a “popular Nigerian designer” who “through him.... helped me [him] switched to a designer”. The “switching” happened when

the mentor advised him that “the fashion industry is experiencing a lot of changes.” Therefore, he should engage in some international courses to upgrade his skills and advised that “since you are a tailor and you are into English wear you can be clothing people for events so through him, I now switched to a designer”. Gee now operates as the designer for his business while he has employed others who do the sewing and other functions in his firm. According to Gee, his function as a designer is to “sits down to think of a design to clothe a celebrity for an event and then he needs to dress properly and to do that is what makes you a designer.” Therefore, when he come up with a design, he supervises the employees to execute the idea.

Gee’s idea of his core function as the designer in terms of developing ideas for clothing styles is shared by Chris who believes “globally now, if you want to come into fashion as a designer or something, one of the global rules is that you come out with your designs then you outsource production” therefore, the entitlement of a “designer” comes from the ability to be creativity in outfit designs and supervising the production of the designs. If you can create designs, you can rely on the seamstress and tailors, with your guidance to produce the designs to your specification. Scribe (2009 cited in Ogunduliye et’al, 2017) argues that fashion is created by fashion designers but the tailor and seamstress in the community are mostly tasked with the work of assembling the pieces into outfit. The designer creates styles while seamstress and tailors follow the lead of the designer to produce clothing. Thus, though Gee started out has a tailor who sewed clothes on customers’ request and sometimes use customers’ designs and instructions, he as a designer does most of the designing by deciding the appropriate clothes for customers and the events they attend. He still sews but he believes his core mandate as a designer is to come up with the idea and supervise its materialisation. Thus, Gee and Chris like most of the respondents adopt their claim to the designer title through their idea of the conventional meaning of designer as a creative person with design ideas and not necessarily training (though as a “global rule” fashion designer must be trained) in the skill of fashion designing. Chris further situates his idea of a designer in the global as an indication of his affiliation to an industry that is not just local but has a global outlook. As a designer from Nigeria, his perspective of who he is as a professional, draws from the global perspective of the profession and not just local. As this is to set him apart from the local seamstresses, it also links him to a global body of professionals.

In situating themselves in the global space of the industry, respondents seek to disassociate themselves from the negative perception local clothe makers-seamstress and tailors-have acquired through unprofessionalism over the years. They are deliberately countering negative

stereotypes that have come to be associated with the old professionals of the industry. According to Roberts “desired professional image is shaped by personal values and societal expectations, and it embodies not only personal identity characteristics but also the characteristics of social identity groups that one wishes for others to ascribe to him or her” (Roberts, 2005:688). Thus, individuals must create the professional image they desire by emphasising some favourable personal attributes and aligning these attributes to societal expectation of the identity of the professional group they belong. Respondents are employing some personal values that coincide with expectations of occupational values of a fashion designer in the Nigerian context. According to Ogundunliye et.al (2017), the Nigerian society has lost interest in the work of seamstress and tailors due to perceived unprofessional trait they have exhibited over the years in respect to services: delay in delivery, wrong fitting, poor finishing. The Nigerian society has an unfavourable professional image of the seamstress and tailor’s occupation which when not managed properly can inhibit the success of emerging designers. Therefore, emerging designers must create new socially accepted standards of behaviour to subvert the negative stereotypes surrounding sewing business in Nigeria. To exhibit their distinction informants of this study have capitalised on the weakness of tailors and seamstress to build positive professional image for their brand and the fashion designer profession.

For the participants, the most important feature in the profession is building personal and occupational integrity. Shola puts it succinctly, “I try as much as possible to work on my integrity and I tell people that my yes is yes”. Truthfulness, a credible feature of integrity and a great attribute in relationship building. To build a lasting working relationship with customers, producers must be reliable in the delivery of their services. Working relationship is a social contract which expects parties to carry out their responsibilities within the frame of the work’s ethical standards. A breach of trust in the relational responsibilities undermines the quality of the relationship and most likely affect the growth of the business. Therefore, respondents are devoted to sustaining the hope of their customers in their brand by delivering as promised. Ensuring your “yes is yes” is fulfilling your end of the bargain in terms of delivery, that is, working up to the expected standards for the occupation and individual customer expectations.

Respondents have witnessed that their local competitors are notorious for their delay in service delivery, one characteristic that has affected their business greatly (Ogundunliye et.al, 2017). As modernisers who are eager to impact change in the national production of fashion, respondents

are keen on meeting customer expectations, thus for Eji if “you want to wear something, Eji will definitely have something that you will wear, you don’t have to think too much like, I have to go in advance like ten days, no, if they want something today, you can go and look round and find something”. With more than three retail shops available, Eji ensures customers who walk into her shops, always find the type of outfit they need for various purposes and occasions. Eji produces from casual to red carpet outfits and ensures each category of outfit is made available to customers at every time. According to her “customers must walk in and not be disappointed”, thus, the trust that customers have in her brand to provide for their fashion needs must not be downplayed by weak delivery service.

Ken believes that “one great way to impress your clients, just make your delivery on time”. Delivery on time is an important trait of a serious and ambitious fashion producer. The Nigerian society’s fashion need is fast, tailored along the various weekly social events that happens in almost every community. Nigerians are sociable and flamboyant celebrants of social, economic and political events that comes up often. Every social or economic or political mark calls for celebration and clothes are essential part of the celebration. This knowledge is integrated in the business plan of some respondents who have built “brand(s) [that] helps you to celebrate whatever; you get a promotion, I celebrate myself, I buy something for myself, I nail a contract, you know”, indicating the various events that can easily trigger celebration among Nigerians.

For bespoke producers, the pressure to make an outfit on time is critical since most seamstress and tailors produce on bespoke basis and are perceived to have failed customers woefully over the years (Ogundiliye et’al, 2017). In order for designers to detach themselves from the wrong perception associated with bespoke services they must deliver on time. The Yoruba tradition of *Aso Ebi* (uniform cloth), which is the use of common cloth for celebrations is now widely practiced in most Nigerian societies. Family and friends of celebrants are expected to dress in the same cloth but different styles to signify their solidarity and association. This *Aso Ebi* comes with almost every celebration, therefore, a person who attends series of events within a stretch of time will participate in the *Aso Ebi* of the various celebrants. Delay in delivery of clothes in such an event will not be taken lightly by customers, as it will deny them the opportunity to show their solidarity which can affect them when it is their turn to celebrate. Wearing the *Aso Ebi* of a relative or friend guarantees the same favour will be extended when you are the celebrant. Thus, knowing the context in which they operate, respondents are ardent in their timely delivery of clothes.

Delivery in outlook is as important to designers and customers as delivery in timing. The perception of ‘the designer’ among Lagosians is a highly skilled tailor who charges (price) high but delivers outfit to customer’s satisfaction. Therefore, customers expect that when they are charged for an outfit, designers must meet their expectations. This is not lost on the designers as Gee takes time to work on customers’ outfit because most of his celebrity customers take the outfit to international events and therefore, good, global standard finishing is important for future patronage. There is a social contract between the designer and the customer therefore, when the customers fulfil their end of the bargain by agreeing to the price of the designer, it is onus on the designer to also fulfil her or his part of the bargain by delivering to the expectation of the customer. To ensure quality of delivery, respondents take their supervisory role as a designer seriously, thus, for Edith “they (workers) can never pack clothes until I have inspected it to know that there is no thread anywhere and I know when a thing will not fit”. Neatness in finishing of an outfit is an indication of professionalism. Making sure the seaming is well made and threads are not hanging around the outfit might seem trivial but the public associate such mistakes with unprofessionalism which is common among seamstresses and tailors. Proper fitting is also important aspect of service delivery. The fashion trend in Nigeria now emphasises fitting clothes, clothes that hugs the body, to accentuate either its masculinity or femininity. This holds for not just females but males who previously would have preferred voluminous clothes to symbolise power and wealth (Renne, 2006), “now men I don’t know how they enter their natives anymore because they sew it so tight, I don’t understand how they wear it sometimes” Rhoda notes.

Well-fitting clothes, according to respondents, boosts the wearer’s confidence, therefore as a designer you must be able to “study... customers and produce things that enhance their best part and conceal the areas they are struggling with,” Eve states. From the perspective of this notion, designers are expected to have professional knowledge of the body sculpture of their customers be it for bespoke or ready-to-wear services. Studying the outline of customers’ bodies, especially in the African context, entails a lot because most African body shapes do not conform to what appear to be established standards of body shapes that characterise fashion, especially in Western countries.

Occupational traits such as shown above by respondents are gradually turning the public’s attention to the professionalism designers attach to their work and how their services best address people’s fashion tastes. Zena believes that gradually, “the time of the seamstress, that

is you go and meet mama who is sitting somewhere in her garage or in her room and she does what you like for you is changing”



Figure 5.1 Picture circulating on social media depicting the difference between the work of a designer and a tailor in Nigerian society

Zena’s comment and the point participants have been making so far in the construction of professional image of their job are depicted in the above picture which is circulating on social media making jokes about the work of a designer and the work of a tailor. The picture on the left is well-known Nigerian television personality whose outfit was made by one designer named Ugo Monye. This design of agbada received lots of attention in the media because of its uniqueness and innovativeness. However, the design on the right is presumed to be a failed attempt by a tailor to replicate Ugo Monye’s design. The circulation of this picture with the caption, the “designer versus the tailor” shows the social perception the Nigerian society has formed about the two professions in the same industry. Designers are perceived to be professionals who are knowledgeable about their work and deliver as expected. This perceived

confidence in the competence of the designer by the public is what respondents are protecting to sustain and grow their business further.

Zena in her comment juxtaposes the two different perceptions that surrounds the operation of seamstress and tailors as against the designer. First, her use of the word “mama” in place of seamstress connotes the femininity as well as motherly perception of a seamstress. The femininity perception surrounding sewing business in Africa is a contesting argument in many social circles. In many African societies, sewing was introduced as a means of helping women acquire economic skills that will empower them to be resourceful to the husbands (Mafela, 1994). Mthethaw-Sommers (1999), argues against the South African educational reforms after independence that continues to include sewing as a course for girls only, implying the gender inequality that cloud the sewing profession even after independence. However, Byfield (2004) reports of male training in sewing when it was introduced in Abeokuta by the missionaries who established formal school, in many African societies, sewing is still deemed as the occupation of females or at least a skill which most females must acquire. Studies such as conducted by Grabski (2010) and Ogunduliye et al. (2017) reveal men in the sewing business in Senegal and Nigeria respectively. In most African societies men in sewing business are refer to as tailors and their presence is visible as much as the female seamstress. Grabski’s work on Senegalese ‘tailors’ feature mostly male and she is marvelled at the creativity of their work as against the gloomy picture painted by Langevang and Gough (2012) of Ghanaian seamstresses who complain of regrets due to negative social stigma of their job. Considering the statement of Zena and the two studies of Grabski (2010) and Langevang and Gough (2012), men in the sewing business have a more favourable professional image than women. The seamstress is viewed through her femininity and social reproductive role before her profession; therefore, she is addressed as a “mama” even though she is a seamstress. “Mama” is not a professional title, rather a social title that indicates social status and age: a mother at a matured age. Thus, her role as a seamstress is concealed by her social status as a mother, which in turn overshadows her competence.

Setting the “mama” in the “garage” suggests the informality attached to the work of the seamstress. Garage in this sense is set in the home, implying the seamstress works from her informal setting of a home, giving impetus to the “mama” character that she already assumes. The “mama” who is a mother is set in the traditional setting of the “garage” in the home, which in the settings of a home, the garage is vacancy for vehicle but in most homes, it can also double as a storeroom for items which are of no or little use in the main house. Setting “mama” in the

“garage” designates the unimportance attached to the operation of her job. Whether “mama works from the “garage” or “her room”, “mama” is still confined to the informal workspace of her home, emphasising the unprofessionalism and non-seriousness stereotype of the seamstress occupation, implicitly set against the professionalism of the designer. The designer will not be found in the “garage” but in a designated workspace setting separated from her or his home of residence. Thus, with the emerging of designers the “mama in the garage” poses as the unrefined, traditional, provider of old fashion which does not fit the current exposed and cosmopolitan society they live.

But, “mama in the garage” “does what you like”. This aspect of the quote can be understood in two ways, first, seamstresses work on demand and they deliver on what customers’ request. This can be positive, as customers are interactive with the seamstress in the production process, expecting a better outcome of their outfit. This can ensure quality delivery because the seamstress is informed on the specifics demand of the customer. On the other hand, the phrases beginning the sentence over-shadows the positivity of the latter phrase of “does what you like”. Thus, interactivity and demanding the nature of the relationship between the seamstress and the customer is, does not guarantee good outcome of the outfit as the picture above shows. The unprofessionalism that surrounds “mama sitting somewhere in her garage or her room” cloud the competency of the work of the seamstress. This perception of unprofessionalism surrounding the work of tailors and seamstresses is expressed by Dupe “people are now more professional with what they are doing, unlike what the tailors have been doing, people bring fabrics and tell them to just sew something for them and they do what they want”. Thus, as much as tailors and seamstresses work are demand driven, taking direct instructions from customers, they end up sewing at their discretion, mostly contrary to what the agreed outcome. Both Zena and Dupe believe the “mama in the garage” system is changing as people (designers) are becoming more professional in the fashion business. The emerging of designers who are professional and serious about the delivery of the work is taking over the “mama in the garage” system. Thus, emerging designers are breaking free from the informality and unprofessional perception that surrounds the “mama in the garage” setting her in the local context with little to no standards, to adhering to standards that they believe is internationally recognised, at least beyond the Nigerian locality.

The ridiculing of the picture shown in Figure 5.1; indicates the Nigerian society’s acknowledgement of the difference between the delivery of the two system of fashion producers. In the picture, the designer is revere and his credibility is appreciated by the society,

whereas the failure of the tailor to produce as expected by the customer confirms the unfavourable stereotype that surrounds the work of seamstress and tailors.

To counteract further the unfavourable stereotype about producers of outfit and create a professional image that upholds integrity, some respondents have incorporated customer relations practices that affirm their commitment to ensuring good service delivery for their customers. According to Roberts (2005), “in a diverse society, all organizational members must learn how to effectively navigate their interactions with people from different cultural backgrounds so that they can build credibility, form high-quality relationships, and generate high performance outcomes” (pp.685). Therefore, respondents have adopted different customer services relations that creates a sense of concern for not just the making of outfit for people but to build lasting relationships that generates confidence and mutual trust. They have realised that the Nigerian is a person who “seek[s] attention, somebody walks in here and she feels she did not get the attention she deserves, it creates a bit of a friction so you have to pay particular attention to different people,” Zena says, therefore, as a designer your relationship with customers must be holistic, building trust and friendship to ensure customer satisfaction. Ready-to-wear and mass producers with retail shops ensure they employ attendants who are relational and open to customers and their needs. Eji admitting to the importance of good customer relations, trains her employees in the skill of customer service relations, ensuring they use the “right language, we are very polite, we are not judgemental, so women are comfortable when they visit”. In some retail shops, I observed customer lounge, fully air-conditioned area with sofas where customers wait or sit while they are attended, that is, customers take a seat and ask attendants to bring them clothes designed for specific occasions that can fit their size and since attendants are conversant with such situations, they are quick about their work. Other gestures such as giving water or soft drinks upon customers’ arrival is quite common in some retail shops of respondents.

Bespoke producers take their customer relation services seriously because they come face-to-face with the customers. Most bespoke dresses contracted to respondents are for special occasions, therefore, respondents are particular about the delivery of such outfits. The time of delivery is crucial if designers are to maintain the trust and confidence of their customers, therefore, Rhoda has adopted mechanisms that inform her customers on their delivery such as “before you come to collect, we would have sent you a text message, ‘your outfit is ready, come for fitting, come for collection’”. Customers then await such messages, and being aware of this, the designer makes sure she delivers “because I have promised that at that price, I have

to deliver”. The use of such customer relation outlets, according to Rhoda is new to the sewing business and it has served as a tool to counter the negative perception about the unreliability of producers. Rhoda, who started as a “mama in the garage”, on the veranda of their home, with fashion school training, was eager to distinguish herself from the “mama” perception even though she was working from the “garage” by adopting good customer service relations through text messages. She furthers that, starting her business, “fashion designing was not a business then, it was more like you are a tailor, so I had to create the fashion designing quote and unquote thing”. Creating the “fashion designing” was to employ service tools that counter the unfavourable stereotype of poor delivery services that come with the business in as much as she was working from the “garage”. Adopting such service delivery is to help nullify negative perceptions of a “mama in the garage”, to elevate her to the level of a designer for the public to acknowledge her competence. The customer relation services have been a major conduit of transition from the image of tailor to the image of a designer for many respondents.

Gee explained to us earlier that his switching to designer is also facilitated by his ability to clothe celebrities. This was the beginning of his transition from a tailor to a designer. His daily application of the skill from the international courses enhanced the delivery of his services, catalysing the transition process further. He however, earned his designer ‘title’, when he started gaining contracts from Nigerian celebrities to produce their outfits. When asked why he thinks he is no more a tailor but a designer, he comments that “I am a guy who now sits down to think of a design to clothe a celebrity for an event and then he needs to dress properly and to do that is what makes you a designer”. What earned him the confidence to take on celebrity customers is his additional foreign training. Similar to other respondents, their foreign training and networks serve as a major stamp of their fashion designing identification. This puts them in the league of other foreign designers who have attained similar training and are internationally recognised. To solidify their stance in the Nigeria society, most respondents use music and movie celebrities as the face of their brand or point of visibility. This is a new concept borrowed from western advertisement. Celebrities are used as product endorsers, brand face or just a period or product advertisement. It is believed that with a wide fan base, celebrities are able to reach wide audience and their endorsement gives credibility to the product. Also, die-hard fans are quick to patronise the advertised products. With a growing music and movie industry (Lobato, 2010), some respondents have adapted this technique of western advertisement to showcase their products.

The Nigerian music and movie industries are two most thriving and well recognised artistic industries in the world. Nollywood actors and actresses are well acknowledged in most African countries as well as movie industries across the world (Lobato, 2010). Nigerian music is equally well-advanced, artists well known across the continent and the world. Inferring from Gee's statement the fashion industry is collaborating with these two already established and advanced industries to create a new professional image for the sewing business. To be contracted to design for celebrities in the movie and music industries is a huge step in the fashion business, considering how the Nigerian public revere their artists especially their fashion sense in the performance of the job, to secure such a contract deal is an automatic validation of one's competence and credibility. To be contacted by a renowned artist means your work is good, of high quality and can be represented at important occasions. In a society where everyone especially renowned personalities are socially expected to make strong fashion statement at each event, to design for an artist is a confirmation of creativity.

Gee, like many other respondents (as will be seen in latter discussions) seeks public validation of their professional image through the clothing of celebrities. As mentioned earlier Nigerian celebrities are engaged in different platforms around the world, therefore, to design for a renowned celebrity ensures a wider exposure of your work across the world. Gee designs for male celebrities and he makes both traditional Nigerian clothes and English suits. He could overlook the importance of making traditional outfits for celebrities to some extent, but he certainly cannot overlook his ability to make English suits for them. For celebrities who can afford an Amani suit and other internationally acclaimed fashion brands that are versed in suits to choose his brand affirms the quality of his work, which places him on a high pedestal, if not the same as the Amani. Though his customers are diverse, from different cultural and occupational background, he believes his market share increased through the validation of celebrities for his brand which translates into public approval of his work as not just a "mama in the garage" but an advanced fashion artist who "sits down to think of a design". It is his duty to decide which cloth and design of outfit is suitable for each event the celebrities attend. His ability to churn out spectacular designs for each occasion adds credibility to his competence as a "designer". The designer is then promoted by the celebrities beyond Nigeria because of the wider global platforms they share; putting Nigerian fashion and the designer's brand on the global market.

It is on this premise and more that respondents believe they have earned their place as designers who should be internationally acknowledged based on merit. They seek world recognition for

their aesthetic works without any subjective inclinations as to culture or geographical location. Eji puts the thoughts of the designers in a succinctly profound statement “so, I always wanted to play on that international level, I never thought of myself as a Nigerian designer, I thought of myself as a Nigerian and I am a designer, period. People are good, regardless of who they are or where they are from”. The discussion so far has centred on how the respondents have used various occupational practices to create a new professional image, distinct from the traditional producers of clothes who over time have attracted unfavourable stereotype. Eji’s statement takes the creation of the professional image further from the local to the global and demands acceptance and recognition just like any world recognised designer. She has “always wanted to play on the international level”, meaning, her ambition as a fashion designer is not limited to her locality or nationality but she envisioned herself as part of the bigger global fashion platform, accepted on the merit of her work. “Playing on the international level” connotes competitiveness as seen in sports and to Eji, if there is any global platform that acknowledges work of artists then she wishes to compete on that level because she believes she is as good as her competitors. While her immediate market may be her locality (Nigeria), she foresees herself beyond the local, competing rather on the global.

The sentence that follows from the international competition “I never thought of myself as a Nigerian designer, I thought of myself as a Nigerian and I am a designer, period” forecloses on the argument of indigenisation of African aesthetics that overshadows creativity from the continent. In various ways arts and aesthetic from Africa been used by western artists as an inspiration for their work whether adopted in reproductive form or mimetic form (Rovine, 2009). However, African arts and artists have been bereted for the production of similar aesthetic works, designated as traditional, ethnic or native, nothing close to fashion. These connotations have foreshadowed African art works in many global platforms, denigrating them as their importance and merits. The fear of confronting similar situations in the new growing fashion industry is the concern of many respondents such as Eji. Clothes produce from Africa are treated with exoticism, indigenisation and shrouded in traditionality, inhibiting its adoption and usage as an aesthetic art other than a symbol of cultural allegiance. Azieb Pool’s (2016) debate on “African fashion” and “fashion from Africa” is in many ways steps to freeing African aesthetic works first, the “traditional” derogatory overtone that mark works from Africa, and second, the lumping together of various works, from different countries into one general location, overshadowing the diversity of the continent and the diversity of works that emanates from the different corridors. In her book “Fashion Cities Africa (Street Style)” she writes “Dear

Fashion, Africa is a continent, not a country. Can you imagine anyone describing a fashion trend as 'European-inspired?' Of course not. It's meaningless." She argues basically that fashion should be admired for its innovativeness and creativity, a merit on its own and not tied to its geographical origin, most of all not to a whole continent. As diverse as the African continent is, so are the aesthetic works that are produced. She then picked four cities from the four regions-north, west, east and south- discussing the fashion works that are produced from these cities. Thus, like Indian movies and pop music studied by Regev (2007), this aesthetics must be acknowledged for their cosmopolitan nature of local context and foreign element. They must not be defined by their locality but be accepted as an aspect of the international industry of movies or pop music.

Likewise, respondents do not seek just local recognition, but global acceptance as well. The dual training background of most of the respondents is an attempt to infuse global standards into their work, to give a hybrid outlook to their work. Respondents demand international recognition based on merit and not from place of origin. They must be acknowledged as "designers" in their own rights, due to the creativity they exhibit in their work. Eji believes that "People are good, regardless of who they are or where they are from", thus the quality of an artist's work is not defined by location but by creativity. Labelling their work as Nigerian fashion is implicitly re-echoing the "ethnic, traditional and indigenous" overtones which they seek to rise above in a cosmopolitan world. Respondents seek broader audience beyond their locality, they believe in the cosmopolitization of the world societies, therefore, they are keen to appeal to not just their local consumers but the global fashion sympathisers who appreciate beauty and quality in fashion works. The production of cultural aesthetics is no more consumed by just the local market due to the infusion of other cultures with local elements, opening ethno-national cultural aesthetics to foreign consumption, especially for the borrowed cultures. The next chapter is dedicated to the discussing the creative aesthetic cosmopolitan fashion that respondents produce. The focus is on the product (outfit), how respondents are creatively combining global influence with the local produce outfit designs that are relatable across cultures.

### **5.3 Conclusion**

This chapter introduced us to the emerging designers behind the current developments in the Lagos fashion industry. As modernizers emerging from an old functioning industry, respondents are expected to show difference in knowledge that takes on new technologies

which are not available in the industry. I analyse this through two objective variables; education and skill training; and their subjective interpretation of their job in relation to both local and international competitors. Designer respondents of this study shows high level of literacy with sixteen out of the eighteen interviewed are degree holders with others pursuing further masters' programmes. The high literacy characteristic counters the illiteracy account of African clothes producers who have for years created negative stereotype about the professionalism of the industry. Seamstress and tailors are reported to be mostly school dropouts who could not gain access to secondary or tertiary institutions (Takyi-Asiedu, 1993: Jennings, 2011: Langevang and Gough, 2012). This low literacy characteristic is accompanied by dysfunctional training system that is stuck in its old ways of apprenticeship with little technological advancement since the introduction of sewing by the colonial missionaries (Gott, 2010: Langevang and Gough, 2012). However, respondents have shown significant changes in training and skill acquisition. While majority received training in Nigeria, their training goes further than apprenticeship training to include formal educational system that trains both theory and practical sewing skills. Respondents who took their fundamental training through apprenticeship further upgraded their skills through formal training schools to acquire the theory base as well as new technical skills that comes with contemporary sewing and designing.

Regev (2007) argues that as cultural producers of aesthetic cosmopolitanism, they (producers) must be positioned at the intersection of two or more cultures that becomes their point of references in the creation of their products. Therefore, artists must look beyond the local environment to appropriate cultures and cultural elements from foreign cultures and merge them into their local culture. In contemporary cosmopolitan societies like Lagos, inhabitants are from different cultural origins both within the country and outside the country. Thus, cultures are hybridized to reflect the diversity as well as the sameness of the inhabitants. It is on this premise of exposure and the need for hybridity that most of the respondents decided to acquire training of designing and sewing from foreign Western countries. With both local (seamstress and tailors) and foreign (multi-national fashion houses) competitors, emerging designers need to position themselves favourably to provide a mix of both tastes to consumers who have grown to love the fusion. Further studies in the United Kingdom, United States of America, France and India together with their local training background are designers' approach to positioning themselves at the intersection of these cultures and offer consumers the taste of cosmopolitanism. Aside training in foreign institutions, respondents are keen on their daily upgrade using technological media such as the television and Youtube. Fashion sites

and channels are helpful avenues for learning trends in vogue and new technologies in the industry and respondents are making good use of them.

Aside education and skill training, the new designers have adopted practices and strategies that qualitatively distinguish them from their competitors especially the local seamstresses and tailors. Seamstresses and tailors in Nigeria have attained notoriety through unprofessional practices such as late delivery, unfitting sewing, poor finishing. These have led to consumer disinterest in contracting local producers for clothes (Ogunduyeli et'al, 2017). Respondents are spinning this negative stereotype around for their gain by adopting positive practices that counter the negativity. Respondents are prompt in delivery, use good equipment, together with their acquired skills provide good finishing and fitting. They reason to pitch their work not just against their local competitors but also foreign designers and their works since they seek to serve customers beyond their local space. Respondents are intentional about their work and they are conscious of their skill as designers (high-end clothes producers) and not local seamstress or tailor. They are conscious about offering more in terms of services and skills to customers who they believe are exposed to the global trends and technicalities of good clothing.

## CHAPTER SIX

### CREATING COSMOPOLITAN FASHION

“Primarily I don’t know so many designers who have the African woman in mind, the African woman is not only situated in Africa, they are all over the world, I believe the world is more cosmopolitan now, we have inter-racial marriages, so we can borrow culture from everywhere, we can inter-weave stuff.”

(Eji, a designer)

#### **6.0 Introduction**

The emerging contemporary designer is further distinguishing him or herself through the creative design of cosmopolitan fashion. Their works do not just portray their local social culture but also syncs with global fashion trends, offering cosmopolitan consumers a taste of the foreign mixed with local aesthetic elements. The agency of designers to consciously or sometimes unconsciously create clothes that reflect hybridity of foreignness and local is discussed in this chapter. Fashion from Africa has attained prominence on international fashion platforms since the turn of the twenty-first century. The creativity and innovation churned out daily in many African cities have drawn the attention of renowned fashion designers and fashion lovers around the world to the continent. Contemporary fashion designers in Africa are fusing their cultural heritage with current global fashion trends to produce outfits that are widely relatable around the world (Jennings, 2011, Rovine, 2015). Emerging designers from Africa are bolder in their fashion dreams, exhibiting talents that produce innovation in the contemporary fashion industry, widening their audience beyond the African continent and the diaspora. This innovation is freeing fashion from Africa from Western assumptions that cloud the minds of many when ‘fashion’ and ‘Africa’ are mentioned in the same sentence. The two are assumed to be opposing ends, thus, fashion is predominantly a Western feature while African clothes are traditional symbols of culture and customs. Fashion from Africa is now acknowledged as not monolithic but varying across regions and countries (Gott and Loughran, 2010), taking on the silhouette of different cultures and spaces around the world. Thus, “there really is no such thing as ‘African’ fashion any more than there is ‘European’ fashion or ‘North American’ fashion. But there are vibrant African cities, each with different influences, aspirations and priorities, all reflected by their own designers” (Azieb Pool, 2016:14). Fashion

from Africa has penetrated the world of fashion, normalising its presence as well as making their distinct mark by referencing their cultural heritage. “African fashion tells stories” (Rovine, 2015) and this time, it is telling the story of cosmopolitanism, the adoption of varied internal and external cultural elements in the creation of national fashion cultures.

Contemporary fashion from Africa tells the story of hybridity; of modernity fused with local culture in vibrant and appealing ways. As Mendy-Ongoundou puts it “African designers, drawing inspiration from their rich cultural heritage, are adapting – each in their own style – ancestral techniques to modern cuts and methods” (2002:55). Designers’ outfits “reveal profound ideas about changing conceptions of traditions, modernity and the balance of these broad categories in contemporary cultures” (Rovine, 2015:7). It communicates the complexities of identities that are erupting in cosmopolitan spaces around the world. Identities are fused, a hybridizing of the local and the global made possible with technology. Thriving on change, a key feature of fashion, emerging African fashion designers are changing the perception of fashion from Africa, opening up their work to adapt and incorporate foreign cultural elements without losing their own cultural stamp. Jean Allman noted that ‘dress is at the very core of African modernity’ (2004: 5) and since clothes are a significant component of dress, clothes are a marker of how Africans are shaping modernity and the clothes produced by the Nigerian fashion industry are no exception.

The Nigerian fashion industry epitomises the vibrancy and creativity of fashion from African cities. The Lagos fashion industry is the hub of the Nigerian fashion industry. In 2014, the Lagos was adjudged the fourth biggest fashion city in the world. The “new generation of Lagos designers continue to push the boundaries by digging into their culture to develop fresh takes on centuries-old crafts and fusing them with outside influence” (Jennings, 2016: 83). Fashion features like the Lagos Fashion and Design Week is increasingly becoming one of the biggest fashion events on the continent and in the world. Fashion in Nigeria and especially among Lagosians as experienced now is not an isolated feature of the city but a central component of women’s identity and to some extent men, one that is borne out of a cultural preference for flamboyance. A brief historical discussion on fashion among the people of Lagos, will give us the base to better understand the art and creativity that underpins contemporary designers’ work.

Lagos is predominantly inhabited by the Yoruba ethnic group, one of the three biggest ethnic groups in Nigeria (the other two are Hausa and Igbo). After independence in 1960 and the

instating of the city as the nation's capital, there was an influx of labour migrants from various states and neighbouring countries into the city. However, amidst the many foreign cultural influences, Lagos has carved a culture for inhabitants that is rooted in Yoruba culture but also opened for appropriation from other ethnic groups and foreign countries. Clothes are an important cultural value and economic commodity in Yoruba societies signifying social status and wealth. Ponyor's (1980) study of the use of textiles among the Owo<sup>12</sup> people of Nigeria revealed that "traditional dress and textiles in Owo, Nigeria, are significant for their roles as markers of social and political rank, indicators of ritual importance, and as symbols of wealth and prestige" (Poynor, 1980:47). In Nigerian society, premium is placed on a person's appearance and his or her adornment, as they believe that one's appearance defines his or her personality. One is addressed per his or her appearance therefore, your appearance will determine how people will treat you.

Clothes are integral to the observance of many cultural events and rituals in Yoruba land. In Yoruba culture, the celebration of cultural events is mostly accompanied with clothes. The culture of *Aso Ebi* and *Aso Egbe Jo'Da*, that is the wearing of clothes to signify relationship and solidarity among celebrants during social events is a well-established phenomenon even in contemporary times (Familusi, 2010; Oyeniya, 2012; Ogbechie and Anetor, 2015). This culture of uniform clothes worn by relatives and friends at events have been adapted in various societies in Nigeria, even in non-Yoruba societies. Aside the *Aso Ebi* culture, Oyeniya's (2012) work traces the changing fashion trends that has characterised Nigerian societies especially in Yoruba land from the 1960s to the year 2000. Emerging from the colonial experience of using clothes as a mark of civility which forced most elites and Christian converts to embrace European clothes and dressing, the struggle for independence and the immediate post-independence era witnessed a growth in nationalism. A key component of the nationalist movement is developing taste for indigenous Nigerian clothes. When Nigeria "declared independence from Great Britain in the 1960s...fashion became the expression of a renewed sense of cultural identity" (Jennings, 2016: 79). The tendency towards indigenous clothes was found among both the elites and non-elites, the young and the old. In the Yoruba lands of Lagos, Ogun, Ondo and Oyo states, the influx of migrants did little in changing the fashion culture of the people but rather influenced migrants to adopt indigenous clothes. The *Aso ke*

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<sup>12</sup> The Owo are Yoruba and are found in Ondo state. During the early settlement of the Yoruba, Owo was the capital city of Yoruba

(with the various types that come with it) and the *Adire* (resist dye cloth) in addition to other cloth like the wax-print and lace, traded by Europeans during the colonial period, were key elements of the struggle for independence, all eventually accepted as indigenous national fabrics (Byfield, 2004). The *Aso ke* and lace fabrics are highly revered cloths that are reserved for special occasion, while the wax-print (*Ankara*) and *Adire* were used for everyday clothes (Oyeniya, 2012).

Clothes designs such as the *iro and buba*, *boubou* (adopted from Senegal) and the feminine conversion of *agbada* were highly patronised by the women. However, Oyeniya (2012) argues that the use of indigenous clothes among men which increased during the independence struggle dramatically declined during the post-independence period. According to him, “this new development was as a result of the introduction of hybrid suit, the Conductor Suit, which became the most fashionable in post-independence period” among men (2012:261). This phenomenon left most of men’s indigenous clothes less patronised than before independence. The educated elites and the youth also took to the indigenisation of clothing on both special occasions and on everyday basis. It was around this period that Shade Thomas, Nigeria’s foremost designer in the post-independence period established her fashion boutiques in Lagos which introduced ready-to-wear indigenous clothes for women. Equipped with a background in English fashion, Shade Thomas embarked on the modernisation of indigenous Nigerian fashion.

However, the enthusiasm for indigenisation of fashion was short-lived as the period of military rule in the 1970s and 1980s presented challenging economic and political instability. The economic hardship incapacitated the middle and lower class making it impossible for them to afford new clothes. They relied instead on second-hand clothing from European and American markets. Big markets were developed for the trade of second-hand clothes in the Lagos city centres of Katangwa, Oshodi and China Town. The establishment of a China town on Victoria Island, a prime area in Lagos attests to the significance and impact of the economic hardship of the time. As Oyeniya states “the relative cheapness, durability and availability of these clothes served as safety-nets for individuals and families who were unable to buy new clothes” (2012:267). The use of second-hand clothes changed Nigerian fashion significantly between the 1980s and 1990s. This period exposed Nigerians to Western fashion tastes and trends which continues to influence contemporary fashion. Wearing second-hand Western clothes came to signify new exposure and civility among youth who were grasping for modern identity within their local spaces. Though designated as the clothes for the ‘poor’ in the society, second-hand

clothing soon assumed the place of the clothes for the ‘hip’ and ‘current’ in international fashion trends. This is a feature that appeals to most youth in African cities as indicated by Azieb Pool (2016) in Nairobi, Amankwah et. al (2012) in Ghana and Hansen (2004) in Zambia.

The military intervention around the same time further eroded the indigenisation of fashion till stable democracy began in 1999. Elisha Renne (2004) has described the influence of the political turmoil of Nigeria on clothing from independence in 1960 to the 1999 democratic rule as from Khaki to Agbada. Khaki signifies military rule as well as bearing characteristics of autocratic rule of colonialism while civilian rule or democracy is marked by Agbada. In addition, military Heads of states are noted for wearing military uniforms while civilian Heads of State mostly wear the indigenous clothing of their ethnic origin. The turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century with stable democratic rule for almost two decades has witnessed a surge in indigenous fashion again but this time fused with the foreign taste that came with exposure to second-hand Western clothing.

Contemporary fashion in Nigeria is borne out of the various influences and complexities of clothing from the pre-independence period till date. The use of the term ‘contemporary’ in this discussion denotes the turn of the twenty-first century. The cultural and global influences that mark current fashion in Nigerian tells the story of a conversation between the past, the present and possibly the future of the society. This section discusses the aesthetics of fashion in contemporary Nigerian society, relying on data from eighteen designers, nine-member focus group discussion participants and four individual participants.

Fashion aesthetics in contemporary Nigeria can be separated into two major trends; fabric trends and design trends which we discuss below. The fabric trends show the fabrics in vogue on the Lagos fashion scene and in the study we realise the rise of the use of indigenous cloths as well as appropriated cloths. I categorise both the indigenous and appropriated cloths as local cloths because the people identify with them as the culturally produced cloths. Indigenous cloths are locally woven cloths, produced in the various societies in Nigeria while the appropriated cloths are foreign produced but have acquired local status due to local adaptation of the fabrics over years. While some of these appropriated cloths were introduced through the trans-Atlantic trade, others were adapted after independence through individual foreign trades. In both cases, the society exhibit long-standing cosmopolitan posture of foreign appropriation of fashionable items. These appropriated cloths are in most regards perceived as authentic Nigerian cloth as the locally woven cloths. Thus, their use by designers is a form of linking

back to the local cultural elements though they seek to project a global upgrade in fashion. The local cloth trend dominates female fashion while the men fashion is dominated by foreign fabrics. Imported fabrics from Europe and Asia are in vogue. The decision to use foreign fabrics is influenced by men global fashion colours and trends. Notwithstanding, there are exception of the use of local fabrics by men and foreign fabrics for women in some in stances. On the strand of designing trends, the reverse is observed. Here we witness the use of the local fabrics for mostly western designs or what Eitcher and Erekosima (1995) call world fashion. While contemporary male fashion designs are influenced by local or traditional styles. We witness the merger of the foreign with the local in the making of clothes for both females and males. This shows that products reflect both the local cultural elements of designers as well as the foreign influence of global fashion trends. Thus, shirts, gowns, trousers, agbada produced by these designers reflect a cosmopolitan outlook to fashion aesthetics in contemporary society of Lagos.

### **6.1 Fabric Trends in Contemporary Lagos Fashion**

Zena, a secondary graduate with no fundamental fashion training decided to venture into prêt a porter designs using local fabrics. There has been the earlier generation of Shade Thomas who started the prêt a porter production line during immediate post-independence. The nationalism and enthusiasm that came with independence greatly supported the Shade's venture. However, subsequent years of financial crisis and hardship crippled many businesses including those related to locally produced clothes. Many indigenes reverted to the services of seamstresses and tailors who work on bespoke basis. However, as the previous chapter shows, their work has suffered from poor professionalism. Therefore, when Zena started out with her business, it was challenging in terms of experience and the acquisition of products. She had no skill in sewing but that was resolved by employing a seamstress to sew her designs. However, her ambition of "using the *Ankara*, and every other fabric we had in Nigeria; the tie and dye, *akwete*, *kente*, *aso eke*" to make already-made female clothes was met with derision. Thus, she had to resort to "telling the society and our people to understand that this is good and funny enough they are easy to wear and not expensive. It took a while for that to happen, for them to appreciate it". Therefore, in her first year of establishing the business, she could sell only one article of clothing. Though these fabrics have been in their locality for long, their use has over the years been relegated to "*iro* and *buba* and it's something like you just wear, equivalent to Kaftan or a day dress that you can just wear and go to the market, it was never anything that

you will like to see outside the market or the bedroom.” She wanted to transform the use of these fabrics from their basic domestic use into “luxury items” that can be worn on special occasions. Despite the low sales made in her first year of business, Zena did not abandon her dream. Rather, she went further to discover and use fabrics from minority ethnic groups and other African countries. Thus, she found “in the Rivers State area what they call Krokrobite which is a hand-woven fabric”; and from Ghana, she uses the Kente cloth as one of the fundamental fabrics for her designs. Though it took a long time for people to accept her idea of using locally produced fabrics for her works, she is now one of the successful designers in Nigeria.

Now, the fabrics in vogue in Nigerian fashion are mostly the local or indigenous fabrics. Joy also started with the vision of giving “that international standard that *Ankara* can have”. The use of indigenous fabrics, especially the *Ankara*, is shared by majority of the respondents. However, this is not exclusively the case for all designers even among the study’s participants. In fact, the use of local as opposed to foreign fabrics depends on the gender of the customers. Zena and most of the female designers with female customers work mostly with local fabrics such as the *aso eke*, *Adire*, *Akwete*, *Ankara* and Lace. Designers who cater for men use mostly foreign fabrics for their work, regardless of the design of the attire they are making, be it foreign or traditional. Though there is a long-standing recognition of the economic and social importance of each of the local fabrics in various societies in Nigeria, contemporary designers are adopting and using even the perceived low-grade local fabrics and fashioning them into luxurious outfits that fit the social status of both the high and middle classes.

While the *aso eke*, *adire*, and *akwete* are the most mentioned indigenous fabrics used by participants, lace and *Ankara* are high on the list of locally appropriated fabrics that have assumed the status of indigenous fabrics. The economic value of these cloths is not the same, however, and this is irrespective of their social status as indigenous or locally appropriated fabrics. The indigenous fabrics of *aso eke* worn by the Yoruba and *akwete* worn by the Igbos are among the most revered indigenous cloths designers use, mostly reserved for ceremonial occasions, as Zena makes us understand that “when you talk about *akwete* and *Aso eke*, they are not everyday kinds of fabric, they are ceremonial fabrics.” These are hand woven fabrics that hold prestigious positions in their respective societies.

The *aso eke* is an age-old fabric from Yoruba land and according to Adepeko (2016), its use was at its peak before the emergence of colonial rule. It is a hand-woven fabric of indigo and

white strips made on a loom and joined together to form a cloth. There are different types of *aso eke* with varying degrees of economic importance: *etu*, *petuje*, *sanyan* and *alaari*. While the Iseyin people of Oyo are central to the weaving of *aso eke*, the *alaari* which is believed to be the most valuable among the *aso eke* cloth fraternity, is made by the Ondo people. The older the fabric, the higher the economic value (Adekpo, 2016). These fabrics were the main cloths for clothing among the Yoruba before foreign trade and subsequent colonisation that brought in other alternatives. The use of *aso eke* for everyday wear among both men and women was replaced by imported wax-print fabrics and Western clothes during the Transatlantic trade period and later colonisation due to the latter's lightness compared to the former. However, *aso eke's* economic and social importance and reverence has been upheld and renewed in contemporary times. It is among the most used celebration cloth among the middle and upper classes in Lagos.

The increase in the use of *aso eke* by designers is rooted in a belief in the need to indigenise Nigerian fashion. Conducting the research in Lagos, a predominantly Yoruba society, I was not surprised most respondents mentioned *aso eke* as the most used indigenous fabric. Though I did not inquire of the ethnic origins of the respondents, I believe the use of *aso eke* is to appeal to their customers who are assumed to be mostly Yoruba or foreigners who have lived long enough within Yoruba society that they have imbibed the culture. Designers also perceive its use as a means of showcasing Nigerian culture to the world. *Aso eke* cloth is perceived among participants as more of a national cloth instead of Yoruba culture. In contemporary use of the cloth, designers are complimenting the traditional fabric with Western embellishments. The Nigerian society has been exposed to glitters in cloth through their appropriation of the lace fabric which initially started off from Austria but now come in from other places such as Dubai and India. The glitters or stones added to these clothes gives them the uniqueness and flamboyance inherent in contemporary Nigerian fashion culture. Therefore, instead of the traditional 'plain' fabric *aso eke* cloth that resonates with the past, designers like Edith "prefer(s) the *aso eke* that I will bead, that I will stone, that I will do all kinds of things with" to give it the modern look. The embellishment of *aso eke* is a very common practice in Nigerian fashion and is patronised by many across different socio-economic groups. As we will see later, Western embellishments is a major component of modern design in Nigeria that feeds into the culture of flamboyance and uniqueness among Nigerians. The *aso eke* cloth is now exported to other countries in Africa and the West, serving both the African and non-African population. Edith recalls her experience at an international fashion event, the maiden edition

of the Lexy Mojo Fashion in France where she showcased her designs made mostly with *aso eke*. She notes, “the ‘White’ people that came bought all my *aso eke* and that time I think it was like N8000 [approximately \$365], they bought everything. In fact, I was the only one that sold all my things”. This goes to show that, though *aso eke* is originally Yoruba cloth, its clothes can be worn by different people from diverse backgrounds. Embellishing the cloth for modern outlook syncs with the current fashion trends locally and internationally as the “modern” implied here depicts society that is in consonant with “world progress” not just local.



Figure 6.1 Embellished or beaded *Aso eke*. Source: Bespokiet

Edith expressed her excitement about the sale of her work as a sign of Nigerian fashion penetrating the global fashion industry even among foreigners who may not know the story behind the use or culture of *aso eke*. According to her, while most competitors’ clothes could

be perceived as Avant Garde fashion, her designs with the *aso eke* cloth were more “practical thing[s]”, fashionable clothes that even foreigners could wear. Participants are conscious of their environment and the nature of the clientele they serve, therefore, in using indigenous cloths, they fashion it such that people from various cultural backgrounds who are in tune with global fashion trends can use. They aim to produce a “cosmopolitan look that can be worn everywhere in the world...you will not look at it as something that came from an African local designer. It can blend into any fashion circle being [be it] international or local” (Eve). The embellishment of the fabric is to give it a modern look, that is bright and vibrant. Other vibrant colours of *aso eke* have been introduced such as orange, red, yellow, blue, green, pink which hitherto was not used. This all feeds into the modification of the indigenous fabric to make it more modern taste by using colourful fabrics that characterise modern fashion. Thus, creating a modern outlook of *aso eke* is the “transformation of ethno-national uniqueness from essentialism to fluidity, a process of cultural change” (Regev, 2007:128) where indigenous cloth is transformed using modern day technics to take on modern look.

Similar assertions can be made about other locally woven fabrics like *akwete*. *Akwete* fabric is the second most used indigenous woven cloth among respondents though the number of respondents using this is very few. *Akwete* cloth is woven by the Ndoki people of Abia state and just as the *aso eke*, it has much economic value and political prestige among the people of Igboland. The Igbos are perceived as very industrious and this feature has propelled most of them to migrate and settle in other parts of the country for commercial purposes. Their population (as one of the largest ethnic groups), industriousness and their significant presence in Lagos may be among the reasons the *akwete* fabric is used by some respondents. The fabric can be traced to the ninth century where it was first created among the people of Igbo-Ukwa. Since then, its use has transcended many generations and it has been a potential source of income for women in Igboland (Ikegwu and Uzuegbu, 2015). The contention over the name - *akwete*- which ties the fabric to the *Akwete* clan of Ndoki does not overshadow its importance among the various Igbo clans who weave and use the cloth for various important occasions. The internal migration through trade before and during the colonial period which was further enhanced after independence witnessed the increasing acceptance of the use of the *akwete* fabric by other ethnic groups. In my research, few designers mentioned their use of the *akwete* fabric compared to the *aso eke*. This is probably because Lagos is a Yoruba state and even though there is inter-ethnic mix, most migrant Igbos are rather influenced by the culture of Lagos. Designers who use the *akwete* cloth see it as an appropriation of other ethnic fabrics

which have been underrepresented in Nigerian fashion. This stems mostly from the context in which they operate, Lagos, where access to the *akwete* is more limited. However, the society is gradually appropriating cloth of neighbouring ethnic groups and treating them as national cultural elements just like the *aso eke* has attained national prominence. Local integration through migration is introducing fabrics of different ethnic groups into the city of Lagos and the use of *akwete* cloth is shows social acceptance and integration of a cosmopolitan society.



Figure 6.2 Akwete cloth in its original state without embellishment. Source: AfriMod

Designers are also modernising the *akwete* cloth. The modernisation comes in the designs as well as embellishment. There are not already embellished *akwete* cloth as there is the *aso eke*, however, designers embellish it while they sew it. The conventional use of the *akwete* fabric has also been expanded to include bed mat, throw pillows, curtains and other upholsteries. Though none of the participants use it other than for clothing, they acknowledged that, the diversification of the use of the cloth is to meet contemporary needs society as well as indigenising of such household elements. The use of curtains, throw-pillows and other upholsteries in the home came through contacts with colonials who used them for home decorations (Adediran, 2010). As the local elites picked up the colonial lifestyle, fabrics like lace was then used for home upholsteries. However, in contemporary Nigeria, the ceremonial *akwete* cloth is now among fabrics that are used for upholstery and household articles for

decoration. Thus, there is a progressive move from the conventional local use, transforming it into everyday regular use which is relatable by people from different societies. Thus, the foreign appropriation of its use ensures the transcendence of the fabric across societies exposing it to international market as a commodity with little or no recourse its local origin in use while maintaining its indigeneity through its woven nature and pattern.

Other indigenous woven fabrics were mentioned such as the Krokrobite among the people of the River State discovered by Zena. Apart from locally produced woven cloth, some participants are taking their search for indigenous fabrics across borders to neighbouring countries like Ghana and Mali where they have found Kente and Bogolanfini respectively. The quest to seek fabrics from other countries is a means of creating a bigger market for the Nigerian fashion industry. They acknowledge the diverse nature of the global fashion market as well as the need for defined identity of one's fashion brand. As much as they are cultivating a national cultural image of fashion, they are aware of society's cosmopolitan nature that embraces diversity. Adopting indigenous fabrics, from both producers' locality and foreign exposes designers' work to a wider consumer market beyond their locality. Designers' attempt to use the cloth "in a modern way" expressed by Zena, is their ability to adopt global standards of fashion trend in the creation of designs, using indigenous fabric to produce aesthetic cosmopolitan fashion.

However, the use of indigenous woven fabrics in a modern way does not delink the cloth and its use from the cultural practices that is associated with the making and maintaining of the cloth. Respondents report contracting local weavers who still use the old loom mechanism and techniques in weaving to make the cloth. For Zena, aside producing designs from these woven fabrics, she goes further to "teach them [customers] how to wash these fabrics, how and when to wear them" staying true to its authentic uses. Thus, interpreting it in a modern way does not overlook its social, cultural and economic importance in the societies in which they originate. Thus, Regev (2007), explains that, no matter the extent aesthetic cosmopolitanism producers go in hybridizing ethno-national culture through foreign openness, they seek local validation of their work by adhering to indigenous cultural element in the production process. The process of fusion, merging or hybridizing of the foreign with the local and not the former displacing the latter. Designers work with woven fabrics for special social and cultural events, they are not made for everyday wear, though there are some designers outside this study who are designing the woven cloths into casual wear. They are mostly ordered on bespoke basis, but some designers are making them in ready-to-wear form. The social significance makes their

use more ideal for festive events instead of for regular wear, though this pattern is gradually changing.

One indigenous fabric, that is not woven and is used for both casual and special occasions is the *adire*, also known as tie and dye. While *adire* is the indigenous name for the fabric, tie and dye is derived from the method of making it. *Adire* is indigo resistant dyed cloth, the production and trade of which was well established by the seventh century in the parts of Yorubaland including Abeokuta, Ibadan, Oyo, Ede and Oshogbo. Initially, its production included cultivators of cotton, spinners, weavers, dyers and traders of the product. Men were farmers who cultivated cotton that was spun into threads by women, their wives. Both men and women were involved in the weaving of the thread into cloth with a difference between the men's loom and the women's loom. Men, wove on horizontal looms while women wove on vertical looms, however, there were no strict rules of segregation (Byfield, 1997). Dyers were women. The dyeing of cotton cloth into *adire* was the occupation of women in Yorubaland. In some cases, the households were the unit of production for *adire* where the husband, the wife and sometimes the children were involved in the cultivating, spinning, weaving and dyeing process of *adire* production (Byfield, 1997). By the middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, *adire* production was well integrated into the economy of Yorubaland.

Trading between Europeans and Africans in the 19<sup>th</sup> century expanded the *adire* business. It started with the purchase of imported thread which substituted the cotton yarns of spinners, leaving most spinners out of a job forcing them to engage in a different trade. Then, the introduction of imported cloth instead of the locally produced cloth. This expanded *adire* production and market to include anyone who could afford the imported cloth. There was also the importation of dye, however, it was not as welcomed as the imported cloth and thread, as it was argued that imported dyes did not last as long as locally produced dyes, making the quality of the cloth low (Byfield, 1997). The *adire* making business flourished as its exportation to neighbouring countries increased and the colonial officials also engaged in its merchandise.

By 1927, "the inter-war economic crisis and the decline in export prices" (Byfield, 1997: 81) plummeted *adire* production and its economic value. Shortages in imported raw materials (cloth) and lack of accessible credit facilities for women engaged in dyeing crippled the business. Its use among indigenes and exportation to neighbouring countries also declined significantly. However, the sense of nationalism that erupted during the struggle for independence witnessed the use of *adire* among political and social elites. This continued after

independence, especially among women, though there is a record of decrease in indigenous clothes among men after independence (Oyeniya, 2012). During the economic crisis of the 1970s to 1990s, imported second hand-clothing became the common clothing patronised due to financial reasons, however, among the intellectual elites, *adire* was still greatly patronised (ibid). Among the public, *adire* was relegated to traditional and religious events while everyday wear was dominated by imported clothes.

Successive governments in the stable democratic era of Nigerian politics have embarked on numerous projects to ensure a resurgence in the production and the use of *adire*. Oyeniya (2012) recounts an intervention of deploying graduate students to production centres to learn the skill. He believes such projects did not just boost *adire* production but also increased its use among the public. However, there has been lack of commitment on the part of government to ensure the success and continuation of the programme. One major challenge is the government's failure to pay trainers their wages after training. This has served as a disincentive for many trainers who have backed out of the training programme (ibid).

Contemporary fashion in Nigeria is witnessing designers' use of the fabric in more creative and innovate ways. A renowned designer such as Maki Oh whose flagship cloth is the *adire* has had her piece won by personalities like Michelle Obama. Maki Oh, after her training in the United Kingdom, came back to Nigeria to start her fashion firm, but first enrolled to be trained in the production of *adire* under the tutelage of Nike Davies, "a legendary textile designer, artist and women's advocate [who] owns the biggest gallery in West Africa" (Jennings, 2016:98).

In this study, most participants use *adire* along with other local fabrics, however, I have one designer who works mostly with *adire*. She started off as a vendor of *adire* cloths, commissioning producers from Abeokuta to make specific products for her which she sold. According to her "initially, the expats or foreigners were my target, but later I realised that the locals were more interested" (Tope), therefore, she started trading with them. Her initial idea was to sell *adire* as an exotic product to foreigners who wanted to own something "African" in their closet or identify with African culture. However, she realised the Nigerians themselves are loving their cloth and some were later requesting for already-made clothes with the *adire* or asking her to sew the cloth they bought. She then enrolled in a fashion school and although after six months she was able to sew basic styles with the *adire*, she stayed for two years to acquire the needed skills to establish her fashion business. Tope's aspiration is "to refine the

idea of *adire* as a dress. I wanted the styles to be modern, unique and classy to serve customers of different social status”. The traditional cloth design for the *adire* has been the *iro* and *buba* design. Tope’s idea of ‘modern’ is to make *adire* into Western dress styles or in situations upon request by customer to make it into *iro* and *buba* but add her modern touch of embellishment to make it unique. Her ready-to-wear line is mostly designed in Western designs of gowns, shorts, blouses, trousers and other fancy but classy designs.

Other participants of this study who use *adire* also design them in Western styles of shirt, gown, skirt, shorts and other red-carpet couture outfits. Some designers also mix *adire* with other fabrics to produce unique designs. This is typical of the work of Eji who enjoys mixing colours and creating designs in her words. For her, designing clothes is about “also matching up stuff, *aso eke*, *Ankara* or tie and dye, three or four fabrics in one outfit and it is for me to create the layers and make it all blend together”. The mixing of fabrics, local and foreign is her way of presenting a unified global look of her work, representing different cultures that can penetrate different markets. Participants are conscious of the cultural significance of the *adire* cloth, their desire to make it into modern designs is not a means of undermining its cultural value, but rather an attempt to broaden the customer base both internally (Nigeria) and externally (global).



Figure 6.3 Varieties of Adire or tie and dye cloth. Source: aninoogunjobi.com

The use of *adire* fabric by emerging designers is causing a resurgence in the patronage of the fabric among people of all social statuses. The economic and social status of respondents’ customers shows the public acceptance of *adire* designed in modern styles as a national cultural

fabric that can be designed to meet customers' fashion needs. As will be seen in another chapter, respondents' customer base spans the social and economic spectrum in Nigeria and most of them use *adire* as one of their main fabrics for their designs. The *adire* cloth is designed for both ceremonial and casual wear. Respondents who focus on ready-made clothes for everyday office or casual wear add *adire* fabrics to their collection. Similarly, for those who make Haute Couture, *adire* can be sewn on its own in an elaborate design or mixed with Western fabrics to make a unique design.

Besides the resurgence in indigenous fabrics as discussed above, two kinds of non-indigenous fabric have been culturally appropriated and become key components of the fashion landscape in Nigeria. These are *Ankara* and Lace. *Ankara* is the general name for wax-print cloth and non-wax print cloth (fancy or roller prints). According to Oyedele and Babatunde (2013) the etymology of the name *Ankara* can be traced to a "girl named *Ankara* and was given to the cheaper version of the Dutch Wax made by the Turks which was within reach of the poor and was considered indigenous due to its vibrant colour and motif" (pp.167). The literature on the history of wax print introduction and trade in Nigeria is not as organised as literature on its development elsewhere, however, with the sparse and scanty records, we can develop a fairly accurate understanding of how *Ankara* came onto the Nigerian market, its use and the current resurgence.

Steiner (1985) traces textile trade between Europeans and Africans to at least the 15<sup>th</sup> century, although it was not until the 17<sup>th</sup> century that the Dutch, English and French formalised their textile merchandise by establishing companies in different West African countries (Steiner, 1985; Gott, 2009; Axelson, 2012). Though the gateway for textile trade in West Africa was the Gold Coast (Axelson, 2012), with time, European manufacturers were "well aware of regional preferences... to which they paid careful attention" (Spencer 1982 cited in Steiner, 1985:92). Therefore, different countries were treated to different colours and designs of textiles that resonated with the indigenes. Wax print trade was not a one-sided relationship where manufacturers decided on their product without the input of the consumers. Steiner's work (1985) shows the dual supply-demand relationship that characterised the Euro-African textile trade and the agency of African consumers in shaping the quality, designs and pricing of these textiles. It is this relationship that grew and has sustained the business of European textile trade and the same relationship that led to adoption of these textiles as African prints.

In terms of quality, African consumers demanded high quality fabrics from the European merchants. Before trading with Europeans in textiles, societies like Yoruba and Igbo as has been discussed earlier were making fabrics from cotton and demanded a certain quality from the fabrics they produced. The Northern part of the country which had received earlier exposure through Eastern trade and Islam conversion to other kinds of fabric already had fabrics that suited their weather and clothes. The quality of the cotton weave, the fastness of the dye and the laundry abilities were key features that African consumers looked out for in European textiles. The need for quality was key if the European merchants were to succeed on the African market and thus, Governor Alfred Malooney of Nigeria is recorded to have written to a Manchester manufacturer in 1885, indicating that “quality, substantiality, and durability” were all "conditions that should weigh heavily with home manufacturers if they aim at replacing this native [weaving] industry" (Johnson 1974:181-82 cited in Steiner, 1985). The two most prominent textile companies were the Dutch Vlisco Company and the English A. Brunnschweiler & Company Ltd (ABC from Manchester). In an effort to meet the African quality and win over the African market of textiles, there ensued about 30 years of trade war between dealers in Manchester cloth and those from the East Indies, the Dutch (Gott, 2009). Gott (2009) citing Nielsen (1979) states that “by the end of this thirty-year period, Manchester’s coarse, dull [colored] linen cloth had been significantly modified to suit West African consumers’ preference for the lighter weight, brightly [colored] East Indian cottons” (pp150). Steiner (1985) also records that the textiles manufactured by the French which the French perceived as of higher quality than the English textiles was mostly traded in French territories. It did not gain much traction in Anglophone West Africa because of the price difference. Generally, the Dutch wax fabric was the favourite in most West African countries.

The amenability and lightness of European cloth were some characteristics that won the West African market over. Consumers checked for the quality and fastness of the dye by sucking on the bottom of the fabric and then rubbing with the fingers. If the dye faded, it meant that the fastness was low and for the strength of the cotton weave, sucking on it would reveal the weakness of the cloth. Another act of agency on the part of Africans in the manufacturing and marketing of the fabric was in design. The manufacturers relied on the fashion taste of consumers in making their products; designs and colours were different from one country to the other. Nielsen identifies eight sources which informed European manufacturers of their designs for the African market “(1) Indian cottons; (2) Javanese batiks; (3) European prints; (4) African indigenous cloth; (5) traditional African objects and symbols; (6) historical events,

current events, political figures and ideas; (7) natural forms; and (8) geometrical designs (Nielsen 1979:482-484). It can be observed that out of the eight most of them are from the Africa context, emanating directly from the consumers' environment. Manufacturers observed that consumers responded better to designs they identified within their context. According to Akinyemi (2006), some popular and prominent cloths were given local names such as 'Alakete', 'Osubamba', 'osupaeleso'. *Igbanlahun*', all which are also names of designs on *Adire* cloths of the Yorubas" (cited in Oyedele and Babatunde, 2013:167).

European wax-prints were easily appropriated into West African culture, attaining a status similar to indigenous fabrics. Thus, the "otherness of the other [foreign cloth]" has been included in the Nigerians' "self-identity and self-definition" (Beck, 2003) of fashion. They were sewn in the traditional two-piece *iro* and *buba* style, that is a loose top with a wrapper for the skirt, while the men started off with a toga style which they later sewed into a two-piece shirt and trouser known as *buba* and *sokoto*. In Nigeria, the Dutch wax-print reigned among the European prints, but it was costly and could only be purchased by mostly the middle class and the upper class. Byfield (2004) reports that social elites before independence preferred European clothes, while market women wore the print cloth and other indigenous cloths. During the struggle for independence, nationalists sought for a redefinition of dress from the European to the indigenous because they believed "the elimination of European dress as a first important step in bringing about a gradual independence from European customs" (Byfield, 2004:34). At this period, wax-print cloth was considered among the 'traditional' cloths that were adopted in protest of European clothes. Oyedele and Babatunde (2013) argue that patronage of European wax at this period was limited to economic elites because of the high price. Both English wax and Dutch wax were beyond the economic reach of most of the people. Therefore, since the cloth has come to reflect the self-identity and self-definition of the Nigerian people, after independence, the government set up wax-print and non-wax print manufacturing companies that brought unto the market cheaper versions, indigenising the cloth further. It was at this period that the name *Ankara* surfaced and was later used for both locally or European and now Chinese textiles.

The cheapness of the cloth relegated its use to informal functions of everyday market wear and for domestic purposes such as strapping babies, making beds for babies and wrappers for domestic chores. Men after independence reverted to wearing foreign clothes but women wore indigenous fabrics. Zena, painted a succinct picture of what *Ankara* cloth meant to many in the society before she started her business in the following words:

well, prior to now, fabrics like *Ankara* was used by the market women who tie it around them, they call it “*iro and buba*” and it’s something like you just wear, equivalent to Kaftan or a day dress that you can just wear and go to the market, it was never anything that you will like to see outside the market or the bedroom. And it was also the fabric that when people give birth their mother-in-law or mothers give them to lay the child on it, so he can pee on it or anything and you just wash it and it’s ok.

The economic recession of the 1970s to 1990s rekindled the use of *Ankara* cloth for religious and some social functions for both men and women. Since traditional, social and religious functions are mostly celebrated with indigenous fabrics, the *Ankara* became a better substitute for people who could not afford woven fabrics (Oyeniya, 2012). This resurgence was given impetus through the ban on importation of textiles in 2003 by President Obasanjo and the use of the fabric by the then First lady for official functions. Ego, one respondent from the FGD commented that the rebirth of the use of the cloth started with “the structural adjustment programme Babangida’s time, then Obasanjo’s time promoted the made in Nigeria thing [and] it became more [prevalent]. People using *Ankara* to make suit and all, it became more acceptable.” Thus, the opening up of the market which was a policy enshrined in the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) of General Babangida’s regime allowed for increased opportunity for the importation of goods by traders and the sourcing for wax-prints from other non-European countries like China. *Ankara* from China was cheaper than European fabrics and very competitive with locally produced fabric. To protect local textile industries from collapsing, Obasanjo implemented a policy that banned the importation of textiles while at the same time promoting the wearing of locally produced wax-prints. This increased patronage; however, its function was still limited to the informal and domestic sphere.

In contemporary Nigeria, however, the use of *Ankara* for clothes is widespread and emerging designers carry the vision of designing the cloth to suit all social classes, especially the middle and the upper classes and appropriate for all social functions. They are reconstructing the social perception of *Ankara* as cheap cloth for the poor, only suitable for casual and domestic use by making luxurious and classy designs that can be worn by the middle and upper classes for special occasions. Some respondents have adopted *Ankara* with other fabrics, as the flagship fabric for their brand in the hope of making it a more socially functionable cloth, since, as Zena noted “it wasn’t a fabric that was up there with the other luxury items...so my idea was to turn

it around”. In turning it around, designers such as Zena are not seeking to make it luxurious through over pricing but to design it to attain a classy look, identified with everybody and to be the choice of many for special occasions.



Figure 6.4 Image of varieties of *Ankara* cloths. Source : <https://zegist.com/t/how-to-spot-fake-ankara-material-from-the-original/5702>

Respondents attest to a change in fabric trends with *Ankara* leading the fad. Almost all customers, both male and female include *Ankara* prints in their outfits. For some, especially those who buy pret a porter clothes, *Ankara* is their predominant fabric of choice. While the likes of Zena started outright with *Ankara* fabrics as one of their principal fabrics for their works, the likes of Maufe, with more than thirty years of working experience has been using different fabrics which gets in vogue at every period. Maufe “started with linen, I started with silk and *aso eke*, you know then people used to feel *Ankara* is busy and now the busier the better and now even the manufacturers came up with vibrant, loud, very colourful designs. That is why a lot of people like *Ankara* now”. Due to the creativity of emerging designers in combining colours and designs, many customers have fallen in love with the use of *Ankara*. Vibrant colours appeal to the fashion aesthetics of many West African societies especially Nigerians. Steiner (1985) observes the misinterpretation and misconceptions about the preferred colours and designs in the West about Africans in some accounts written by travellers

and amateur anthropologists. Quoting Henri LeComte, Steiner records how his Eurocentric lens led to his misunderstanding of the African textile aesthetic, describing them as “loud [colors] and tacky designs satisfy their love of gaudiness, while flattering their vanity” (pp.98). African designs thrive on colour and *Ankara* fabrics feed the African fashion taste. The vibrant colours of the *Ankara* cloth are a main source of attraction for designers in addition to the patterns that are drawn in them. The Nigerian fashion culture of flamboyance and extravagance delights in the use of colours that make the outfits stand out. Designers therefore appreciate the colour patterns of current *Ankara* fabric and how these colours respond to customers’ fashion taste. According to Nene, “If [I] want to make a gown I use the Nigerian *Ankara* fabric, if [I] use this bale or silk fabric to make [it], they don’t come out the same, the Nigerian *Ankara* fabric is based on colours and it really comes out interesting”. According to Ibile, “Nigeria is used to high colours” and *Ankara* fabrics provide such high colours.

Other designers believe that to use *Ankara* for their designs gives them a unique and distinctive brand in fashion that speaks to their cultural background and also puts them on the level of creativity of their foreign competitors. In a cosmopolitan society like Lagos, that showcases some global fashion brands in their big shopping malls, one way of being innovative to attract customers is to design with fabrics and styles they relate to easily. Therefore, some are adopting the *Ankara* as a means of distinction even as their designs match up to foreign designs. According to Joy, just as foreign fabrics have travelled across the oceans to Africa, she wants her *Ankara* designs to travel widely across the globe, putting fashion that speaks to Africa but matches up to international fashion standards on the global fashion map. She says:

We want to have that international standard that *Ankara* can have, because all these my jackets people ask why I don’t use plain fabrics so that they can wear [them] to [the] office but I tell them no, because you can easily get [that] at Adumata (a popular market), I want to do something you can’t get somewhere else, and I don’t want to start competing with China, I want to showcase our fabric.

The aim of these designers is to attain international recognition for their work using locally identified cultural elements like the *Ankara* cloth which is globally associated with Africans. Designers seek the acceptance of the *Ankara* fabric for its beauty that comes from the colours and pattern designs in global spheres just as fabrics like Jeans is used worldwide. Though they seek exclusivity through cultural identification with the fabric, they are also pursuing a course

of global acceptance of the fabric, a fabric that is described and viewed globally as quintessentially African. The irony of the situation today is that most of the *Ankara* fabrics on the Nigerian market are manufactured in China. However, designers feel entitled to the fabric because of years of appropriation regardless of the origin of the print. *Ankara* produced in China for the Nigerian market is more ‘authentically’ Nigerian than the already-made clothes that are imported from China. Fabric used for already-made imported clothes from China is not considered authentic in Nigerian society whereas *Ankara* is because the latter has been transformed to acquire an indigenous, national status through years of foreign-local dialectical production. Its otherness has been absorbed into the social and culture fibres of Nigerian ethno-national culture.

A second type of fabric that has been appropriated to assume local fabric status is industrial cotton embroidered fabric, commonly known as Lace. Among all the local fabrics mentioned, lace is the most recent addition. The name ‘Lace’ for industrial cotton embroidered cloth emanates from Nigeria’s contact with the colonial officials and the missionaries who arrived with lace elements serving as upholstery and decoration articles as well as designs in women’s clothes and undergarments. (Adediran, 2010). However, lace fabric was not among the cloth commodities during the Africa-European trade and was not used by Nigerians during the colonial period.

Unlike the *Ankara* that was introduced to Nigerian society by foreigners, Lace fabric was found by Nigerians themselves who introduced it into the society. In the years leading to the independence and immediate post-independence period, there was a decisive shift from wearing of foreign clothes to the adoption of locally produced and appropriated cloth. According to Plankensteiner (2010) the first commercial contact for ‘Lace’ production to Lustenau in Vorarlberg in Austria was made after the end of the Biafra war in the late 1960s, a period that saw a surge in the wearing of local clothes as a symbol of national pride. This company “apparently offered a product that was ideally suited to the newly interpreted clothing styles” (ibid:30) at the time. Contacts were made to other companies in countries such as Switzerland that started trading in Lace with Nigeria. Adediran (2010) states that the Lace Fabric blended very well into the traditional and cultural scenes in Nigeria, especially among the people of the South. The lightness and airy nature of the cloth won over the middle and the upper class who display their wealth through clothes. The culture of *Aso ebi*, that uniform clothes worn by friends and relatives during celebrations, is a significant feature that catalysed the appropriation of the lace Fabric. Lace holds a prestigious status among other fabrics in

Nigeria. Thus, during festive occasions the middle-class and the upper class are found in Lace *aso ebi*, a sign of their wealth. Lace became part of the culture of the people on occasions such as weddings, funerals and naming ceremonies. Adediran (2010) indicates that one of the few things Lace does not satisfy as a local fabric in Nigerian society is the inability to name them as *Ankara* and *adire* are named.

However, the “reckless use and the outrageous designs that exposed and reveal much of the body” (Adediran, 2010:39) led to a ban on its importation in 1976. At this period, the use of lace had been integrated so much into the culture of the people that some ethnic groups such as the Kalabari had adopted it as their royal cloth. Therefore, the ban was vehemently opposed by many people who argued that the fabric was most suited to the climate of the country. The lightness and the airiness of the cloth were the main arguments of the opposers of the ban. Since it satisfied the fashion sense of the middle-class and upper-class mostly due to its price, they pushed for the withdrawal of the ban. Lace cloth was then smuggled into the country through neighbouring countries like the Republic of Benin. To help protect local production, some local manufacturers were empowered by the government to produce Lace fabric to serve the demand of the market. However, the economic crisis of the 1970s to 1990s crippled most of the manufacturing companies, while the liberalisation policy of the Structural Adjustment Programme opened the market for the importation of Lace.

Switzerland and Austria continue to remain the most revered sources for Lace but there is vast importation from China that has increased accessibility and affordability of the cloth. These days, there are reasonably priced Lace fabrics for people of lower-economic status. No matter how affordable lace has become in Nigeria, it is still used mostly for special occasions such as traditional festive ceremonies, weddings, funerals and naming ceremonies. Hardly do people wear lace as everyday clothes, it is still a revered fabric among both the rich and the poor. Most of the designers who work with lace work on it on a bespoke basis. Some have a number of unsewn lace fabrics that they can introduce to customers to make a choice, but others rely mainly on customers to bring in their fabric of choice to be sewn. Designers who engage in mass production or ready-to-wear production hardly include lace unless it is mixed with other fabrics to make a design. Joy expresses the stress which comes with working on lace as customers who commission Lace clothes are very demanding. “Soon I will stop the bespoke with lace because dealing with customers is difficult”. This is because the fabric, no matter how cheap may be, is still costly when compared to the *Adire* and *Ankara*. It matches in social status with *Aso eke* and they are mostly commissioned for special occasions.



Figure 6.5 Image of Lace fabrics

The majority of designers spoken to incorporate foreign fabrics from neighbouring countries and Western fabrics in their works. Fabrics adopted from neighbouring countries are the ones believed to be indigenous to these countries such as the Kente of Ghana and Bogolanfini from Mali. They are adopted mainly for their cultural value and significance in the history of the borrowing countries or in the case of the Kente, its continental representation in the Western world. There is also the use of fabrics that are perceived as having Western origin but are used in almost all societies around the world. They are popularly called material. They are industrially made fabrics that are produced for all markets across the globe. Participants either sew solely with the material fabrics or they mix them with local fabrics. The choice to use local fabrics or material or mix them depends on the fashion style of the designer, the design of the outfit or the occasion for the outfit. For someone like Eji, she notes “[my] personal gift is with drape, draping so I like my clothes being comfortable, so I can take something stiff and make it seem like it’s fluid.” She thus loves using material fabrics for her designs to achieve such fluidity. Sometimes, she mixes it with the local fabrics as well. Either way, she believes her style still “tells our own African unique story through our clothes over the years but the offering is to reach women around the world”. Therefore, her use of material is to create a global market where these clothes integrate easily with every cosmopolitan culture. Joseph, who specialises

in couture explains that “if you want for red carpet, red carpet girls you add a little touch of print or no touch of print, depending on what you want”. That means, his use of material comes from customer’s request or the specific design, bearing in mind that most couture designs in Nigeria are made on a bespoke basis.

The interesting aspect with the use of indigenous or locally appropriated cloth is that they are used mostly by participants who design for females and children. Female consumers are more receptive of these fabrics than the men. Four participants who have predominantly male customers and participants with both male and female customers use foreign fabric to design for their male customers. The use of foreign fabric for men’s clothing started with the recession of the three last decades in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. As Oyeniyi (2013) reports, men’s use of indigenous fabrics for two piece or three-piece agbadas during the nationalist period leading to independence was not maintained after independence. There was a significant change in men’s clothing in the post-independence period as most, especially the social elites adopted the two-piece conductor suit. However, during the economic recession, most men’s clothing was more indigenous in design, but the fabrics were imported from the neighbouring countries of Mali, Benin, Togo and Senegal. The Damask and Brocade fabrics were used for men’s two piece or three-piece Agbadas. These are plain colour fabrics and they were preferred to the *Ankara* and *adire* at the time. However, fashion trends have changed once again and now, while men’s clothes continue to use fabrics that are not indigenous or locally appropriated, this time they are imported not from the neighbouring countries, but from the West. Edith explains “before we used to have this Mali type, it was all over the place with all kinds of designs on them, now, they are not buying them, you have to look for softer materials to use” and these softer materials are mostly imported from Europe.

Such imported fabrics for men are sold in the open markets. Gee has realised a change in fabric preference in fashion over the years. Unlike female fashion gravitating towards indigenous fabrics, male fabrics have gone further beyond neighbouring fabrics to European and Arab produced fabrics. The Benin and Togo brocade are stiff and dark in colours compared to the vibrant colours of today’s men wear. Thus he is “not using all these *Ankara* fabrics like the olden days, what I use now is Italian fabric or linen or floral material” He reasons that “that people like something they can wear to the office, to meeting, to occasion, so people want something unique, not common...they don’t want fabrics that are everywhere. So, if I am using *Ankara* for native how many people will I get to wear the *Ankara*?” contemporary male fashion I am told prefer plain colours instead of the pattern designed fabric like *Ankara*. Thus, Ibile,

who designs mostly male clothing has in addition to his fashion business established a “material” business where he imports fabrics from Italy and other European countries that can be used to make clothes for males. Some designers buy from shops like Ibile’s where fabrics are finely rolled and sold in yards. There are others who also source their fabrics from ‘okrika’ (second-hand) vendors. Some respondents believe one can get unique fabrics from second-hand bales which cannot be found in the regular fabric shops. Thus, while they patronise shops, they also have second-hand vendors who supply them with fine and unique fabrics. There are still others who source from different countries when they get the opportunity to travel and work. They collect fabrics unique to these societies and use them for their designs. Most participants are open to using fabrics from across the globe if they can lay hands on them but there are some who are keen on using mostly local fabrics for their work.

There is a general upsurge in the wearing of local fabrics both indigenous and appropriated in Nigerian society. Some respondents trace this development to the period of General Babangida’s regime which was further bolstered by Obasanjo. The Buhari government took it further by instituting a policy of “wear made in Nigeria on Mondays and Wednesdays” notes Funmi, a policy which has been well received by the public. This policy covers all citizens, including civil servants and students who are allowed to wear prescribed made in Nigeria to work on the selected days. This policy has been so well integrated that on the said days, people willingly wear made-in-Nigerian clothes. Some respondents attest to an increase in sales since the introduction of this policy. Not only has the everyday wear and casual wear increased but almost all cultural ceremonies are celebrated with the local fabrics. There was unanimous agreement by the female participants in the FGD that they preferred Nigerian clothes to imported clothes for both special and everyday wear. They argue that “even though there are imported clothes, you find out that majority of them are being used for casual wear, no matter the amount [cost]” says Happiness. And Helen notes, however that “when you think of a good occasion, you go for your *Ankara* and build your taste.” Building your taste is in the sense of the design you choose for the cloth and the accompanying accessories you add to the ensemble.

The use of the discussed fabrics shows the renaissance of Nigerian fabrics in the creation of their current fashion culture. The early appropriation and integration of cloth imported from miles away into their clothing culture indicates the society’s long-standing cosmopolitan disposition when it comes to the creation of fashion culture. This phenomenon of cloth appropriation may well fit what Mustapha (1998) calls old cosmopolitanism. The inclusion of imported yarns and threads in the weaving of indigenous cloths, the use of foreign fabrics and

dyes in the case of *adire* and the total integration of the wax-print and lace fabrics indicates Nigeria's openness on the inclusion of foreign cultural elements in the crafting of national or ethnic cultures. Such appropriated cultural elements go through what Eitcher and Erekosima (1995) call cultural authentication. Cultural authentication applies to specific elements of a dress ensemble identified with an ethnic group is considered as indigenous even when the users are not the makers or when materials used are not indigenous to the users. Such elements go through four stages of selection, characterisation, incorporation and transformation and at the end of the day come to be authenticated as part of the people's culture (ibid:145). Therefore, they are culturally authenticated as they get adopted and integrated into the local culture. *Aso eke*, *akwete* and *adire* which can be classified as indigenous are in this case not more appreciated in terms of authenticity than the *Ankara* and the Lace. They all occupy equal social status in the culture of fashion regardless of the origin of the fabric. In their renaissance period, Nigerian fashion designers continue to use Western fabrics for some of their outfits especially the male outfits. The softness and colour preferences are some of the reasons for the use of Western fabrics for some designs. Nigerian fashion for men continues to look outward for adoption in terms of fabric amidst their quest for indigenisation of fashion.

The difference in fabric choice is based on the economic value of each which is reflected in how they are used. *Aso eke*, *akwete* and lace are used predominantly for festive occasions while *adire*, *Ankara*, materials are for regular work and everyday wear. Nonetheless, the latter three fabrics can also be used for special occasions depending on the design. Current fashion designers blur the economic and social segregation of these fabrics. Nigerian sartorial elegance has always been a combination of foreign cultural elements with local cultural elements. This integration leads to a new culture that is authenticated to assume local cultural status. Thus, we cannot help but agree with Toyin Odulata (2009) who succinctly remarked:

It appears Nigeria, and many parts of fashion-savvy Africa, have taken over other people's inventions (fabrics), improved on them and re-presented them to the world[...] My view on all is that Nigerian fashion is not so much about being authentically Nigerian as about improving on other people's ideas and infusing an element of something unique, colourful and sometimes seemingly outrageous and thereby transforming it into proudly Nigerian.

(Cited by Plankensteiner, 2010: 30)

Thus, similar to the start of the film industry in India where Dabasaheb Phalke was inspired by the French film *La Vie Du Christ* and therefore debut the first Indian which was Ramayana, which set the tone for Indian movies that takes on their cultural context but run on the technics acquired through foreign film making process as pertained in France (Regev, 2007). Either locally woven or appropriated fabrics, Nigerians seek global representation of what is indigenous but also globally competitive just as clothes produced anywhere in the world. The above discussion has given us insight into how Nigerians adopt fabrics around the world and the above fabrics mentioned are by no means exhaustive. Specifically, different ethnic groups have different adaptations from different spaces across the globe (Eitcher and Sumberg, 1995; Sumberg, 1995). However, Lagos has come to represent the hub of Nigerian fashion creativity with a national outlook instead of an ethnic outlook. Though most of the fabrics designers use – *aso eke*, *adire*, lace - were originally associated with the Yoruba ethnic group, they are now used by non-Yoruba inhabitants of Lagos. Thus, they are more of Lagos fabrics than they are Yoruba Fabrics. The Igbos have the George fabric which is of Indian origin, but participants rarely spoke about it even though in many traditional and cultural ceremonies George is the preferred cloth. George, like Lace is culturally appropriated. An interesting observation with the women Focus group discussion is that though some were Igbos (including my lead informant), they admitted most social functions in Lagos are attended with Lace. Lace, originally foreign, is perceived not as an ethnic fabric but as a national fabric. As Odotola (2009) informs us, it is not just about the appropriation of foreign elements but the fact that Nigerians have gone further to re-present these fabrics to the world as cosmopolitan elements of fashion with no specific geographical ties. The next section of this chapter discusses how respondents are re-presenting fabrics to the world through creative designs. The fact that Nigerian fashion has taken the global fashion industry by storm indicates the creativity and innovativeness churned out by fashion designers. We explore aesthetic designs; how local cloth is being re-presented by designers from Nigeria and how they fit into the global fashion scene.

## **6.2 Contemporary Aesthetic Fashion Designs**

Before the introduction of sewing into Nigeria by missionaries, cloth was wrapped around the body; men in a toga form and women in two or three pieces (mostly worn by married women to mark their social status) with the third cloth serving as a headtie. With the introduction of sewing and more amenable cloths like the wax-prints, most cloth including the indigenous woven clothes were now sewn. Kings and chiefs sewed the *Aso eke* into *agbada*, *buba* and

*sokoto*, while ordinary men will sew in two-piece *buba* and *sokoto* (Akinbileje, 2014). *Adire* and the wax-print cloth were sewn in similar fashion. Women's clothes were sewn into two- or three-piece outfits called *iro* and *buba*. It consisted of a sewn long sleeve, round neck blouse, a wrapper cloth for skirt (the two pieces) and in some cases, especially among married women a head tie (the three pieces). The period of independence and post-independence saw the use of local fabric for the conventional style increase through nationalism and economic independence. *Agbada*, *buba* and *Sokoto* were no more the reserve of royals but worn by anyone who could afford it. The economic development of women through employment in the public sector and increased internal and external trading afforded women the purchasing power to engage in fashion. Oyeniya (2012) reports women's adoption of trousers and later the female version of the *agbada*, mostly because they could afford to engage in fashion. The heightened sense of nationalism around this period ensured that fashion was rooted in the conservative social culture of dress. Shade Thomas added impetus to the fashion trend of the time when she started making ready-to-wear *iro* and *buba*, *boubou* (which is originally Senegalese but through trade was adopted into Nigerian society). The youth is recorded to have initiated a fashion of a mixture of the local culture with European clothes such as the *buba* (top) with European trouser for men or for the ladies, *buba* with skirt or trousers. Men gradually adopted the conductor suit over time and relegated the wearing of traditional clothes to ceremonial functions.

The economic recession of the 1970s to 1990s greatly altered the fashion sensibilities of the pre-independence to the immediate post-independence era. The influx of second-hand clothing (*Okrika*) with cheaper prices attracted both the young and the old, the rich and the poor all of whom purchased it. Youth and children clothes were mostly European fashion for everyday wear and on special occasions as well. Elderly men and women reserved the sewn local clothes for special occasions. Imported clothes such as jeans trousers and skirts, shirts for office, T-shirts, trousers, skirts and gowns dominated the everyday fashion scene. At the beginning of the Structural Adjustment Programme, traders started importing new already-made clothes from Europe, America and China. While a few renowned international fashion brands could be imported to serve the economic and social status of the elites, lots of traders engaged in importing fake items with a slightly modified name of these renowned fashion brands, what Nigerians call "good copy". Nigerians came to acquire the taste for foreign fashion as found in *okrika* and other imported clothes. However, General Babangida's campaign for the use of local textiles in clothes which was later heightened by Obasanjo's ban on imported textiles and promotion of made-in-Nigeria brands saw the resurgence of the use of local fabrics by fashion

designers. From this period onwards, Nigerian fashion will not be steeped in “traditionality” or “foreignness” but a renewed combination of the traditional with the foreign that speaks to the renaissance of their culture, integrated with their acquired foreign fashion taste.

Coincidentally, it has been identified that around this same period, there was the emergence of a new crop of fashion designers whose work, immersed in creativity and innovation, reflected the contemporary complexity of the global and local cultures, capturing the attention of global fashion watchers (Jennings 2011; Rovine, 2015). Fashion produced by emerging designers from Africa in “many manifestations elucidates broad themes, including the relationship between African and Western fashion worlds (and in some instances the blurring or erasure of the distinction between them)” (Rovine, 2015:7). The Nigerian society, especially Lagos has evolved significantly in terms of fashion, carving a unique culture for itself that appreciates international trends as well as their traditional fashion sensibilities. The growing urban population and their exposure to the Western lifestyle through the establishment of global multinational companies in Africa and visual images consumed daily through electronic media has created a consumer taste that mimics global fashion. Fashion, like any other consumable travels far in this globalised, consumer world (Sulkenen, 2010). The majority of people in Nigeria are increasingly becoming the ‘people of clothes’ due to their functionality and availability. Therefore, designers as cultural producers are developing strategies to bridge the gap between foreign taste and the national culture. Designers have realised that despite the presence of multinational companies with international fashion brands in Lagos, there is an increase in nationalism that is portrayed in the preference for made-in-Nigeria goods. Patronising made-in-Nigeria goods has found more meaning in the artistic industry than in other sectors. This is because the artistic industry connotes aesthetic and cultural values that resonate with the national outlook of the society. Thus, just as the music or the film industry, the importance of the fashion industry is not necessarily determined in market sales but their aesthetic and cultural value (Regev, 2007:128). Thus, Zena believes that, “if you look at Nigerians as a whole now, the one sector that is bringing a positive vibe in the world into Nigeria is the art world in terms of music, in terms of fashion, in terms of our painters”. Though the economic determinants are becoming obvious: the fashion industry has grown over the years; in the 2016 Lagos Fashion and Design Week brochure, it was reported that 45% of the earnings in the creative industry came from the fashion industry and that this surpassed the

movie and music industries which used to be the dominant creative industries.<sup>13</sup> The main drive for acceptance and patronage of contemporary Lagosian is designers' ability to respond to the cosmopolitan society which has developed a taste for international items while still clinging to local cultures that gives a unique identity.

While African cultural elements have been an inspiration to Western fashion for over a century now (Rovine, 2010), fashion from Africa is now competing with Western designs in terms of trends and creativity. Participants' skills that comes from the fusion of the international fashion trends with national cultural elements has been the main source of attraction for fashion in Lagos as argued by Regev "the intersection of two (or more) fields of cultural production [by cultural producers] thus becomes a source of innovation and change" (2007:130). Participants are creating change in the fashion industry through innovative designs that comes from their exposure to other cultures beyond their locality. The work of designers in this study shows the aesthetic creativity of the African fashion industry; mirroring globality amidst indigenisation of fashion trends. While this global-local interaction is observed in the work of most of the designer respondents, just as discussed with fabric use, we observe a gendered difference in customers' influence on design.

Therefore, though Zena has adopted the *Ankara* and other indigenous fabrics as the flagship fabrics for her works, she on the other hand designs these fabrics in "western" styles of gown, skirts, shirts, bump shorts. She realised that in as much as Nigerians are fascinated with global fashion, they "were not representing ourselves well". Therefore, in order to penetrate the market with indigeneity through local cloths, she must be able to balance the introduction of the local with their developed foreign taste. A fine balance between the local and the foreign is a way of modernising the local fabrics as well as indigenising western designs. Modernising local fabrics using western designs was also a way of "turning around" the use of the fabric from domestic setting into "luxury item". Designing the local fabrics is also a form of taking it from the realm of the traditional into the regular function of clothes. Conventionally, fabrics like *aso eke*, *akwetey*, *Ankara* and *adire* were reserved for cultural and social events such as marriage rites, naming ceremony and funerals and in this regard, the outfits are sewn in conventional traditional design. Sewing them in western designs normalises the function of the

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<sup>13</sup> <http://lagosfashionanddesignweek.com/w/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/HKLFDW2016.pdf>

clothes to include casual and other official use. Thus, Joy who produces clothes for women in the corporate industry is steadfast in her decision to use *Ankara* fabrics only for her designs because she “want[s] to do something you can’t get somewhere else, and I don’t want to start competing with China, I want to showcase our fabric”. Similar to the ideology of Zena, the use of *Ankara* for western to designs is to showcase that “*Ankara* too can be elegant”.

Thus, the idea of elevating the use of indigenous fabrics from domestic/traditional realm to public/modern realm resonates with majority of the participants who work with local fabrics. Instead of the conventional designs that has characterised the use of these cloths, participants have chosen to design them in styles that have global appeal and relatedness instead of just the local. While bespoke work can take any style that the customer may suggest, it was observed that most participants with ready-to-wear brands made most of their outfits with the *adire* and *Ankara* fabrics. Though sewing in English style may give the clothes Western outlook, respondents are conscious to maintain the authenticity of its indigenisation through either the fabric-*Ankara* or *adire*- or the silhouette or concept of design which resonate with their culture. This is because “even [as] ‘invigorators’, for all the universalistic avantgarde aura that sometimes characterize their aesthetics, usually wrap their art with justifications about how their cultural works include aspects of national or local authenticity” (Regev, 2007:129). According to Eji, the combination of African concept with western design still has “the African woman in mind, the African woman is not only situated in Africa, they are all over the world, I believe the world is more cosmopolitan now, we have inter-racial marriages, so we can borrow culture from everywhere, we can inter-weave stuff”.

Aside sewing local fabrics in functional western designs, Nigerians with their high taste of fashion go steps further to add flamboyance to the western designs and in the Nigerian context such flamboyance transitions the fabric from domestic product to high-end product. This is expressed succinctly by Nene who notes that, “for the past two years, we have been doing stone making, so, if I have my *Ankara* I take it to a stone maker, by the time they finish the stoning, you see N2000 *Ankara* that everybody is buying, you won’t be able to recognise it. I think Nigerian people are stylish, very, very stylish.” In this situation, the upgraded *Ankara* cloth can be worn for special festive events just as *Aso eke* and Lace fabrics are used.

The indigenous woven fabrics of *aso eke*, *akwete* and the locally appropriated lace are sewn, on many occasions as bespoke items and since they are usually for special traditionally festive occasions, they are sewn in the conventional style of *iro* and *buba*. However, there are cases

where they sew them in the Ghanaian *kaba* and slit, what the Ivorians call *trois pagnes*, the Senegalese *pagnes/marinière*, or the Liberians' *kaba* and slot conventional design: a three-piece outfit of a blouse, skirt and a third piece for head tie or wrap around the waist or folded on the shoulder. The word *Kaba* is believed to have originated from “West Africa as a coastal pidgin trade language as [a] local version of the English word *cover*” (Gott, 2010:13). While participants adopt western designs as a means of traversing the use of local fabrics from the traditional domain, the adoption of designs from neighbouring countries are used in their conventional traditional forms. In this case, respondents are not just appropriating fabrics from neighbouring West African countries, they are also adopting their conventional styles for fabrics they appropriate. The interesting aspect of the adoption of these foreign (neighbouring) designs is how the public and designers still perceive them as traditional clothes because they are indigenous to the adopted cultures. Aside the three-piece designs, the *Ankara*, *adire* and lace are sometimes also designed into the *boubou* style of the Senegalese. While this style is not new with regards to *adire* (it was introduced during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century trade of *adire* across the region), it is a recent phenomenon in terms of the use of lace and *Ankara*. Woven or unwoven local fabrics are also sewn in European gown designs for social events, however, with woven fabrics and the Lace it must come with the consent of the customer.

Due to the perception of the traditionality of these adopted designs from neighbouring countries, they are worn on special occasions that mark rites of passage like weddings, naming ceremonies and funerals. For everyday outfits, the *adire* and *Ankara* are the fabrics of choice and they are designed into European styles of shirts, jackets, gowns, skirts and trousers. The designers with ready-to-wear products sell designs that are made with these two fabrics and other Western fabrics. This is probably because of the affordability of the fabrics which is then reflected in the price of their products. The social value of the different (indigenous woven and Lace versus the printed wax cloth and *adire*) fabrics are blurring due to the designs that producers can make out of them. Oluwatobi Ogundele, a young emerging designer is noted for his brand which uses *Aso eke* for casual wear of shorts, shirts, skirts and gowns. His brand is receiving recognition as he is breaking the social myth of *Aso eke* fabric as only designated for special festive occasions.



Figure 6.6 Couple in *Aso eke*; woman in beaded *aso eke* sewn into *iro* and *buba* and man in *agbada*.  
Source: [https://www.etsy.com/market/aso\\_oke](https://www.etsy.com/market/aso_oke)



Figure 6.7 Lace fabric in contemporary *kaba* and slit design. Source: Pinterest



Figure 6.8 *Aso eke* short gown by Oluwatobi Ogundele



Figure 6.9 Ankara made in short gown for special occasion. Source: [instagram@ejiroamostafiri](#)

While emerging designers are incorporating designs of neighbouring countries into their society, they are mindful of the appropriate social use of these designs in the borrowing culture and they uphold those social and cultural functions. They are designed mainly for social and cultural events.

However, casual and work clothes are designed after global fashion trends that suit those functions. Nigerians are fashion forward and with the help of social media and other applications that come with technology, they are constantly in tune with fashion around the world. International fashion brand competitors also pose as a threat to the market of the designers; therefore, the designer is expected to be in the know on what is trending and produce

them. Designs of casual, regular clothes fit into what is called “world fashion or cosmopolitan fashion”, that is clothes that are found in every society and can be produced anywhere without specific geographical origin (Eitcher and Sumberg 1995). Daily clothes such as jeans denim, trousers, shirts, skirts, gowns, can no longer be classified as European clothes because they can be produced in any society. Emerging designers are appropriating these designs and sewing them with either the local fabrics of *adire* and *Ankara* or the foreign material. As cosmopolitan fashion, the designs of these clothes resonate with people across various societies, worn by people with different cultural backgrounds, producers routinely transpose elements of from one field-specific habitus (western designs) to their actions and practices of different field -local production of fashion- (Regev, 2007). As Eji reiterated “most fabrics used now are industrially made and does not bear geographical origins because they can be made in industries anywhere”. Thus, industrially produced cloths including the *Ankara* and other fabrics like silk has lost their geographical ties and therefore, can be incorporated into any culture. However, just as these clothes may have originated from Europe but now have attained global status, emerging designers look forward to creating a global market that accept designs fashioned in fabrics designated as ‘African’. They are expectant that daily clothes made with *Ankara* and *adire* will be accepted and used for regular functions such as office work, regular parties and get-togethers around the world.

To be successful in the Nigerian fashion industry, one must follow international trends to know styles that are in vogue. At the same time, you are expected to be different and unique. In global fashion, there are fashion gatekeepers who will fit in Simmel’s description of the dude who initiate fashion trends. Every year also comes with fashion articles that run through various designs across the globe. Designs are first introduced through the acclaimed runway shows like the Milan fashion week or the New York fashion. This trend is picked up by various fashion houses and replicated in different colours and designs. The initial designs then become silhouette through which designers release their unique designs. Colours can also be the trend for a season. The trends of silhouette serve as a frame guide to designs and individual designers can be as creative and wild within the framework as they desire, however, veering completely off trends can have implications for the patronage of your products. Eji puts this idea succinctly as follows:

Every designer that intends to make money must do that (follow global trends) so yes....so if everybody is going to wear crop-pants this year and I am busily saying no, I have to make you long simmering pants, I am going to

keep them for myself till it comes on [becomes the rage] maybe [in] ten years' time. So, every commercial designer looking to be successful should follow trends, not trends of designs but trends of basic silhouette.

Following international trend is also a way of transforming the local fashion industry to take on the outlook of global fashion. The international influence the trend while designers use their local cultural elements to create their own uniqueness. In this case, Eve who works predominantly on Kaftans explains that, "when I say we do Kaftans, I am not talking about the regular African Kaftans, we do Kaftans to have a cosmopolitan look that can be worn everywhere in the world...it can blend into any fashion circle being international or local." Borrowing from the Arab world of Kaftans, she creates her unique brand of Kaftans that frees her products from the Arabian look, giving it an international appeal other non-Arabians can wear.

In transposing elements from one field-specific habitus of the western to a different space of Africa, participants are mindful of the cultural and climate difference between the "foreign" and local which are captured in their designs. Thus, "the trend that are followed abroad will still last longer here because of our weather, it's always summer so we don't have a springtime collection or any other". Therefore, another way of infusing uniqueness into their designs is when winter or spring clothes are designed into summer clothes. The country experiences sunny weather for most part of the year. Harmattan season which lasts for almost three months meets the festive season of Christmas and New Year and therefore makes little difference in the design of clothes. Customers will still prefer to appear elegantly in clothes therefore, designs are not made to reflect the harmattan season. Another reason is that such clothes will be worn throughout the year, which is mostly sunny, therefore designs must be able to carry through the year. As cultural change initiators, emerging designers transpose specific types of habitus, in this case climate friendly designs into their cultural space of production (Regev, 2007). Their agency in choosing favourable elements add to their skill as cultural producers of cosmopolitan aesthetics.



Figure 6.10 Kaftan design. Source: field work

Regev argues that, “once they come to perceive themselves as participants in the global field, artist adopt the imperative to keep track and be updated with things that happen at the forefront of their fields” (Regev, 2007:130). Therefore, I observed that respondents maintain links that help them access the global fashion field for updates through the internet. Through the internet, designers are tuned into the global fashion world which serve as a source of design inspiration for their work. They follow big fashion houses on twitter, Instagram and Facebook. Designers attest to the fact that these social media outlets serve as effective sites for gaining knowledge about current trends. Social media and other internet sites are fairly new technological innovation, proficient in information dissemination, adopted by designers to update them on

current innovations in the industry globally. However, as noted above, most designers do not follow trends wholesale but add their touch of uniqueness for the Nigerian fashion taste. Aside the internet, fashion magazines be they local or foreign ones have become handy in the fashion design business of Nigeria. Local electronic and printed magazines have contributed enormously to the growth of the fashion industry in Nigeria through the showcasing of the works of local designers and foreign designers (see more discussion on the media in the chapter on Standardisation). Designers who produce bespoke items still rely on the designs of customers or they initiate designs and seek the consent of customers and customers get most of their designs from these magazines. According to the editor of the People's Magazine, majority of their customers are women who buy the magazines because of the fashion segment which features social events of the week and photographs of fashionable people.

However, there are situations where some designers set the trends themselves. As modernisers, they aspire for cultural change through their work and therefore, can create designs based on their individual experiences. Thus, they produce a collection which is distinctively theirs without drawing on other designs, be it international or local. As producers of cultural elements, they seek to introduce products that are different from the normal trend, which sometimes set the pace for innovation. Some can be vogue, but some can also be a vintage, exclusive collection. Zena, do not adopt western designs wholly, in fact, according to her, she refrains from looking up in the media for designs, she initiates her designs and in some cases can go ahead of the trends, years before they come in vogue. She described her 2009 New York Fashion Week collection:

I remember the first time we did the mullet thing, the style which is shortened [in the] front and long at the back, the first time we presented that was 2009, at the couture fashion week in New York, and how many years down the line, it's like 8 years ago. And now, it's like the craze everywhere.

According to Regev (2007) such bold initiation is typical of new entrants in the field of aesthetics as they seek to "update national culture with whatever cultural innovations happen to appeal to them as worthy of indigenisation" (pp 129). Their passion is in innovation; therefore, they do not always wait for the trend to be set but set trends which later becomes globally recognised. It is not surprise therefore, that Lagos fashion has over the years attain such global prominence in the fashion world; producers are bold and daring. During the period of research, this was one design that was in vogue and was designed by most participants,

though according to Zena, it was her design ten years ago and that she has moved on from that even though that vintage design is still in vogue.

Aside the mullet style, the colded-shoulder design where gowns and tops are sewn with the neck stretched at the shoulder was also in fashion. The majority of participants (with female customer base) mentioned this design as another design that was in vogue and it was styled in various forms that suited the fashion taste of Nigerians. Rhoda explains:

Now when cold shoulder started to reign, that off shoulder dress, Nigerians started to incorporate it into our *Aso ebi*, they started bringing in the flare hand, the embellished flare hands, they started bringing feathers into it, you know, we amplify things. So, even if there is a normal trend abroad, once it enters Nigeria, we take it to the next, next level.

The “next, next level” refers to the designs as well as the embellishments Nigerians add to the clothing designs. Nigerians’ sense of flamboyance in fashion makes them desire blinks and glitters in their outfits. Such decorations make them stand out and be noticed wherever they present themselves. The reigning embellishment at the period of research was the use of stones (glitter) and beads for embroidery on the fabrics to create unique designs. Some embellishments are created uniquely by the designer to reflect a recognisable object or something abstract, and there are others that are shaped along the patterns of the fabric. The craftsmanship in embellishment is another skill on its own. I realised in many establishments, there is an employee skilled in the craft. However, in most cases, the designer comes up with the design for each cloth or a collection of clothes.

Designs by participants are always different and unique even when they are following designs in vogue. In other cases, as Zena puts it they are intentional not to “conform to what the society wants I have always set my own trends, set my own ideas and interpreted them as I want”. Therefore, there are some respondents who though advertise through the internet, do not source their designs from there, neither do they keep magazines or even photos of their previous work. This is to help make unique pieces every time. Adopting this strategy has enabled Zena to exert control mostly over her ready-to-wear collections but for the bespoke designs, styles are sometimes proposed by the customer. Some designs proposed by customers can sometimes become the basis for her next collection. In some cases, designers initiate designs that attract customers and as many people wear it, it spreads among the public. These designs may be exclusive to the designer, however, when they are able to get a celebrity to wear the outfit to a

popular event, it can soon become the style in vogue, taking on different variations. Participants believe that as a designer, they have the responsibility of churning out creative designs that are unique to their brand and less popular among the public. Due to the trust customers have in the creative abilities of their designers, customers are more likely to accept designs initiated by them and also because such designs turn out to be unique. The designer also serves as the main market strategist for the brand therefore, when they initiate a new design and “even if people do not request for it, as the marketer [I] will like to convince them” says Ibile.

Either with the internet/fashion magazines as sources of inspiration or personal creativity, participants note that there are times when a trend emanate from their locality. Customers can introduce designs to the designers which are well advanced in the streets before they become aware of it. The many requests from customers will alert designers of the popularity of the style. This happens mostly among bespoke producers. With this knowledge, they can now put together a ready-to-wear collection or start introducing other customers to it through bespoke orders. In a cultural context with long standing traditional producers whom consumers are most familiar with such as Lagos, participants admit that sometimes seamstresses and tailors can initiate designs which become popular in the streets before they as fashion designers adopt it. According to Rhoda, before you realise a design is in vogue in the streets, it means tailors at Yaba have been the ones producing for the public, “the boys at Yaba are actually making more than all of us sitting down in imposing beautiful shops. Because the boys in Yaba are the ones producing everything on the street”. Aside tailors having majority of the clientele base (an issue which is discussed in the chapter of Industry Diversification) they often initiate designs which indirectly are initiated by the customers because tailors interact a lot with customers in terms of clothing designs. The tailors also introduce designs from posters or calendars full of designs sold on the streets. These calendars or posters are local designs worn by people at functions or retrieved from the internet which are sold to seamstresses and tailors and sometimes customers who are interested in the styles. There is wide dissemination of these posters and per each period, there is a reigning poster among a section of consumers before they become popular with the entire society. However, in situations where the design is already widespread among the public, customers rely on the creative ability of the designer to distinguish his or her designs from the masses by making theirs unique. Customers expect a higher standard of performance from ‘designers’ based on the standards both society and the designers have set for themselves. Therefore, even when a style is in vogue, they are expected to produce theirs as uniquely different from the tailors and seamstresses. Participants who produce bespoke items sometimes

follow the design offered by the customer. However, designers must show creativity and professionalism in the making of the design; or in cases where customers ask them to use their discretion, they still communicate with customers on the chosen design before they proceed to make them.

No matter where participants' source for design inspiration, they are conscious of the exposure of customers to the world of fashion and therefore their products must satisfy customers' fashion taste. The world of fashion is closely knit now through the availability of the internet such that as collections hit the runway on various platforms across the globe, they are watched simultaneously by everyone, regardless of geographical location. The Nigerian woman does not care whether the design is from Fendi or Christian Dior, so long as they have seen and love it, they expect their designers to make something similar for an upcoming occasion. The public and designers are all influenced by global fashion, however, they all also have a sense of nationalism towards their culture, therefore, as customers are expecting a Gucci design, they are aware of the cultural nature of the weddings they are attending and so will expect the designer to fashion the Gucci design out of the lace fabric for *aso ebi*. For everyday wear, customers prefer functional outfits that fit their work routine. Although in the past, these were designed by foreigners and imported to Nigeria, with the general renaissance of indigenisation thanks to a national policy that entreats the public to wear made-in-Nigeria clothes at least twice a week, there is the need for such functional clothes to be made in local fabrics. Designers are cashing in on this to produce such functional clothes in 'Western designs' with local fabrics to satisfy customers' simultaneous need for functionality and nationalism.

As I mentioned at the beginning, the design of women's outfits is different from the design of men's outfit. In the section on fabrics, we made the point that while foreign fabrics are used for men's outfits, women opt for local fabrics. While the discussion above on design focuses more on women customers, it is not exclusive to them especially in terms of source of inspiration for design. That section can apply to designers who produce for predominantly men or women. However, this section seeks to point out the difference in male designs as explained by participants who work with predominantly male customers.

As female customers prefer the use of local cloths for foreign designs, the inverse is the case for male customers. Fabrics for male clothes was initially the local fabrics until the 1970s when the economic hardship brought in cheaper fabrics from the neighbouring countries of Senegal, Mali and Benin. The trend has now changed, and the preference is for using European or

Western cloths made in one colour; plain colours. Similar to women fashion, men fashion also experiences rapid change, especially in contemporary times. Participants admit changing in colour, fabric and designs over the years. Therefore, at a point the Malian and Benin fabrics did not satisfy the fashion craze of the time and designers started looking beyond the borders of Africa for softer, vibrant fabrics. The spectrum for adoption is wide, therefore fabrics come from as diverse places as from Dubai, America, Italy, India and China. These foreign fabrics are used mainly for traditional outfits, what they call native wear.

Thus, while Ibile talks about male fabrics moving away from the indigenous and embracing the western fabric, designs are moving from western styles to the native or local styles. This is because current male fashion demands “soft fabrics” that are more malleable than the locally produced *aso eke*, *adire* and even *Ankara*. At best, they mix the local with the foreign fabrics, thus, hardly do they sew solely local fabric clothes. According to Ibile “plain fabrics are in vogue everywhere” for men fashion therefore the Nigerian fashion trend must reflect the global trend. However, the fabrics are adapted to sew their local designs which are now in vogue. Thus, they express that, within the borrowing of culture, there should still be legitimate expression of nationhood (Regev, 2007). Participants have observed the increase in local fashion designs among men who wear these clothes not just for ceremonial events but also on a daily basis. The two-piece *buba* and *Sokoto* design is in vogue as daily wear for men while traditional ceremonies will require other native designs of the customer’s ethnic background or most popularly the three-piece *agbada*. In Lagos, regardless of one’s ethnic background, most males wear the two or three-piece *agbada*. The *Agbada* outfit has penetrated the culture of many non-Yoruba societies and is now seen as a national outfit rather than an ethnic Yoruba piece.

Aside the native wear, respondents make ‘cosmopolitan fashion’ (Eitcher and Sumberg, 1995), that is, they make “traditional outfit, and English wears like suits and trousers, and I also do shirts” (Chris). Both native and ‘English’ outfits are made from various foreign fabrics that are imported either through second-hand clothing or new cloth shops. Native clothes and the English suits are mostly commissioned by customers who according to respondents leave the design to their discretion. Some participants believe that working with male customers is easier compared to female because the men give room for creativity and trust the skills of the designer as compared to female customers who are more likely to be intimately involved in the conceptualisation of the design. They explain that, when women “place the style, tomorrow they will say it is too much, they have increased in size, so just because of the shape issue, I

decided to specialise 85% men, anything concerning men whether agbada, African attire, shirt, suit, I do mostly for men”.

Participants report that the native wear of today is significantly different from the native wear of years back, not just in terms of the volume of cloth used but also the design. The styles have evolved, and the quantity of fabric needed to make them has reduced. Gee explains that “the native we are doing now is not like the old days native, now things are like unique natives, simple designs”. Customers demand simplicity in their outfits especially those worn on a daily basis. Kandioura Coulibaly of Mali, a renowned foremost designer who will well fit the first generation of African designers explains that his designs, which represents African fashion is sewn using a lot of fabric. According to him, African fashion does not frame the body as European fashion, a designer is to make ample use of fabric to make the clothes big and free. Thus, if a designer is to develop the ‘African look’ in fashion, clothes should not accentuate the body as European clothes, the volume of fabric signifies strength and power (Goldner, 2010). Contemporary native clothes among Nigerians, however, are produced to fit the body. Rhoda observed that;

now men I don’t know how they enter their natives anymore because they sew it so tight, I don’t understand how they wear it sometimes. Now they have glamourized the agbada, it is no more as big and ugly looking as it used to be, now, men do colours with natives, you see them do agbada in pink, navy blue, mix it up.

Like the cosmopolitan fashion they produce, native wear is designed to accentuate the bodies of men, giving them a good fit. Slim fit, as they call it, appears to be the reigning fashion design for men across the globe. Therefore, they create designs to reflect such a silhouette while maintaining the significance of local culture. Respondents did not mention the use of local fabrics for their cosmopolitan fashion clothes such as *Ankara* or *adire* for men’s wear.



Figure 6.11 A mix of native two-piece agbada with English suit vest piece on it. Source [instagram@g\\_bespoke](https://www.instagram.com/g_bespoke)

During the period of the research, the native wear in vogue was the agbada. This is not so much because agbada is a Yoruba outfit and the original inhabitants of Lagos are Yoruba. Respondents explain that the ruling class at any point in time influences the fashion trend of the men. As reported by Renne (2004) in his work “From Khaki to Agbada: Dress and Political Transition in Nigeria” the changing climate of Nigeria’s politics have since independence influenced fashion significantly in regard to the perceived civilian or military rule. While the political climate has been described using clothes to describe the democratic or autocratic nature of the government, this has in turn influenced the public’s fashion trend over time. Though Renne’s (2004) analysis stops with the emergence of the stable democratic era of Obasanjo’s regime, the influence of the political class continues to affect male fashion in Nigeria. Chris confirms that:

well, in this country the political class dictates the trends of the traditional clothing, so what the president is wearing and what the people in the political class wear which is defined by their culture. For instance, when president Jonathan was in power, when everyone wants traditional clothe it was his style, we used to call it Niger-Delta, so everyone was going for it.... Now it is Buhari who is in power so everyone wants to wear his style, so, it is the political class that determines the trend which is influenced by their culture.

Men’s fashion in Nigeria portray a unified cultural front in every point in time, emanating from the ruling president’s ethnic culture and adopted by most people irrespective of their ethnic disposition. This gives the opportunity for non-dominant ethnic cultures to be acknowledged in situations where their member becomes the president. Their ethnic outfit automatically assumes a national prominence and set the trend for fashion among the men. Designers then pick on this cue as they infuse other cultural element to construct a national fashion culture. A respondent noted how the Niger-Delta style was adopted by presidents and politicians of neighbouring countries such as Ghana during the tenure of Goodluck Jonathan. Buhari, who is from the northern part of the country wears the baba riga, a three-piece men’s cloth of top, trouser and a big embroidered over-cover that is worn over the shirt and trouser. Coincidentally, the baba riga has its replica in the Yoruba culture called agbada, therefore, the fashion has increased and been widespread in the Lagos society since the inception of Buhari’s regime. Agbada is a long-standing cultural piece of the Yoruba community, and it is worn mostly for ceremonial purposes due to the regal nature that comes with the over-cover third piece. The

*buba* and *sokoto* which is the two-piece form worn under the over-cover is worn on a daily basis and for regular functions. According to participants, because they are aware of the history of the political effect on men's fashion, they switch designs the moment there is a change of government. They believe the people are expectant of the change and therefore the change in fashion is accepted easily.

As has been discussed earlier, in the adoption of the fashion of the political class, there are modifications that come with the period of fashion that syncs with international fashion. The agbada is modified to suit the fashion sensibilities of the time. The above picture of a man in a mix of native and foreign clothes is an example of designers' incorporation of the global in the local. The designer of the outfit, a respondent of the study is intentional in designing a cosmopolitan clothe which represent diversity of the foreign and the indigenous by combining *Sokoto* and *buba* with English suit vest. The designers are also expected to add their personal uniqueness that can be traced to his or her brand or their creative abilities. However, while there may be changes in the style or fit of the current fashion, there are some customers who will prefer the old design. One respondent made the important point that, not everyone follows fashion completely by changing the design and how it is sewn. There are some customers who are willing to follow the trend by adapting to agbada but will continue to stick to the old style of sewing. Edith explains that "not everyone wants to change completely, even now some people want to make agbada with deep pockets, olden style, they are still doing it. [A] particular customer that I have, [a] very wealthy man you have to put the pockets, the trouser the toilet hole still has to be there, old pattern". This shows that even when a style is in vogue, individuals have their personal preferences to the trend and sometimes can invoke an old style within the new one.

### **6.3 Conclusion**

Fashion in Nigeria has had a long history of openness to foreign adaptations and influence and through it they are able to create a fashion sensibility that is unique as well as widely relatable. From the appropriation of cloth to the re-presenting of the cloth in ways that shows their cultural authenticity as Nigerian, fashion in Nigeria has always assumed a cosmopolitan disposition. The society's ability to integrate foreign cultural elements into their local culture of arts and yet not lose their cultural authenticity has widened their audience and admirer base. Nigerian culture travels far, their sheer numbers and presence around the world and their enthusiasm towards nationalism has led to the acceptance of their music, paintings, movies and

now fashion in corridors which hitherto would have been difficult. Their love for culture and readiness to know and incorporate cultures around them have witnessed an increase in the patronage of Nigerian fashion culture in many neighbouring countries such as Ghana (agbada designs for men during weddings and women use of gele -headtie- made with brocade, damask or *aso eke* fabrics). Nigerian fashion is creating a dialogue between the African and the West, between tradition and modernity and a fusion of us with the other. Fashion in Nigeria depicts Canclini's observation (1995) that "Cross-cultural practices are thus positioned as resources in which there is not only 'fusion, cohesion, osmosis, but confrontation and dialogue' (cited in Faber, 2010:131). Nigerian fashion is confronting the notion of authenticity, traditionality and Eurocentrism that surrounds fashion creating a cosmopolitan stance that bridges cultures and ideas.

In Africa, Nigeria, Morocco, Ghana, Kenya and South Africa are the most thriving fashion countries and their mark is highly acknowledged by everyone. The use of local fabrics for foreign designs and the use of foreign fabrics for local designs is an indication of the society's conscious effort to integrate the global into the local and vice versa. Respondents in this study seek global recognition and patronage, therefore, the adoption of designs and fabrics that are visible in all societies is to make their presence in different markets possible. As Chris puts it "in order for us to go global, we have to understand a number of markets, every market has its own peculiarities, one product can't fit all". Participants target to be present in different societies is their reason for adopting designs and fabrics from abroad, reaching out to the many who can relate to the products. Thus, fashion designs from Lagos in its complicated structure tells the cosmopolitan nature of the industry and how this feeds into the ideas of producing fashion.

CHAPTER SEVEN  
MEETING THE COSMOPOLITAN CONSUMERS' NEEDS:  
DIVERSIFICATION OF FASHION PRODUCTION

“You don't have to think too much like, I have to go in advance like ten days, no. if they want something today, they can go and look round and find something and when they really want something, they can order it”

(Eji)

**7.0 Introduction**

Emerging designers are not just creating aesthetic cosmopolitan fashion in terms of clothes, but they are going further by adopting techniques and services that reach out to consumers through more accessible and convenient channels as pertains in the West. The world of fashion production is absorbed into the global consumerist economy where individual agency in choice and taste supersede economic and class consumption in contemporary world. Creating a fusion of the foreign with the local therefore goes beyond fabrics and designs as discussed in the previous chapter. It includes understanding of contemporary consumer's behaviour which informs producers on service delivery, leading to consumer satisfaction in a competitive industry. Regev notes that as the field of artistic culture expands, “there is the possibility of the transformation of internal structures through *multiplicity of structures* or the *transposability of schemas*” (Italics from original text, Regev, 2007:129). Thus, intersectional position of producers at various cultures afford them the opportunity to constantly or routinely transpose elements from field-specific habitus to their cultural field in a bid to re-organise the structure of production that comes with creative expansion. The use of global standards of fashion delivery such as opening of retail shops, serving specific target groups and incorporating formal and informal sales service are fashion “schemas” transposed from the global industry into the current production and delivery of fashion in the Lagos fashion industry.

The discussion on the social context of fashion in the chapter four introduced us to the relation of fashion to the class dynamics of Lagos. In a fast-rising cosmopolitan city like Lagos, the presence of vast middle class who liaise between the upper and the lower-classes in many ways blur the classic sociological and economic class system of the society. A heightened consumerist economic order further obscures the clarity of the relationship between

consumption and class status. However, manufacturers are navigating through this confusion by focusing more on consumer agency in product choice which borders on lifestyle and taste rather than structured class system. Fashion designers who form a cohort of respondents of this study, and mark their professional distinction from traditional producers by the adoption of modern technological and artistic expressive element, are intuitive of the socio-economic dynamics of product manufacturing and consumption in contemporary times and therefore, are diversifying production to meet the needs of consumers. While they are aware of the influence social and economic classes can have on fashion consumption, they are equally aware of the change in lifestyle consumption and the high fashion sense of their immediate target, a feature that comes from the cultural context of Lagos fashion. Therefore, they are diversifying the production of fashion through the combination of contemporary consumerist economic order; convenience, accessibility, agency; and the culture of fashion of Nigerians; individuality, uniqueness, flamboyance and cosmopolitanism.

For better understanding of designers' need for diversification of product and services to meet contemporary consumer demand, a brief discussion on the changing dynamics of class structure and consumer needs over the years is provided. Lagos is one of the biggest cities in Africa in terms space and population. It is also the city with the largest number of middle-class populations in Africa (Onyewuchi and Monye, 2013). Therefore, the significance of the influence of middle class on trade and consumption in Lagos cannot be overlooked. Middle-class characteristics such as higher purchasing power, surplus income for luxury spending are likely factors that can influence producers' supply strategies. As will be discussed later, majority of designer-participants make reference, directly or indirectly to the influence of the growth of middle-class population on the consumption of fashion items, though the society's response to fashion is not necessarily based on social or economic class. However, participants, especially designers have adopted some marketing and distribution strategies in global market that respond to growing middle class and their consumption patterns. While the data will be discussed in the light of these new strategies, the next section introduces us to the middle-class cohort and some consumer changes that has emerged globally since their social and political recognition.

### **7.1 Changing Dynamics of Class Structure and Consumer Demands**

Two major classical sociologists whose works have fundamentally shaped thinking on social class are Karl Marx and Max Weber. Karl Marx premised his entire evolution of society on

class struggle over the economic distribution of resources. Two classes emerge at every economic epoch in history; the dominant and exploitative class as against the dominated and exploited masses. Marx witnessed the adverse effect of the introduction of mechanical devices in factories of production and the exploitation of workers by the owners of these factories during the period of the industrial revolution. Marx, a structuralist, believed that society is a system made up of parts which are called structures, with two major levels; sub-structure and the superstructure (Haralambos and Holbon, 2000). These structures define and direct the activities of the people of the society.

Max Weber, on the other hand, writes on class, status group and party as determinants of social stratification over economic distribution in the market. In explaining class, Weber argued that:

We may speak of a "class" when (1) a number of people have in common a specific causal component of their life chances, in so far as (2) this component is represented exclusively by economic interests in the possession of goods and opportunities for income, and (3) is represented under the conditions of the commodity or labor markets.

(cited in Gerth and Mills, 1944: 272)

That is, people who share similar relations to market exchange opportunities form a class. Opportunities here is the “description of the feasible set individuals face, the trade-offs they encounter in deciding what to do” (Wright, 2003:5). Weber shares with Marx the central idea that classes should be defined in terms of the social relations that link people to the central resources that are economically relevant to production, which means, they share the same operational criteria for class structure while they differ in the theoretical elaboration and specification of the criteria (Wright, 2003:9).

These two theories have guided sociological analysis of social stratification, giving a dual class structure (though Weber is more flexible in his approach compared to Marx’s stringent bourgeois and proletariat classes) of a propertied and non-propertied class at the detriment of possible classes that can emerge. According to Tarkhnishvili and Tarkhnishvili (2013), this structured thinking has denied the acknowledgement of a vibrant middle class that has been ever present and has contributed enormously to the evolutionary history of society. A case in point is Easterly’s (2001) argument about the role of the middle-class mercantilists who propelled the English Industrial revolution. Easterly discusses Landes’ view on England’s

industrial revolution which was the first to occur in the world. To Landes, the revolution was successful due to the “great English middle class” (Easterly, 2001). The middle-class population was formed at the beginning of the revolution period as a result of the mercantilism that came with colonialism. The mercantilists, who dwelled in the towns (“burgess” or “bourgeoises” meaning town dwellers), were different from the nobles and the peasants (two social classes of the time) who dwelled in the countryside (Tarkhnishvili and Tarkhnishvili, 2013).

Though the middle-class has been ever present in the society, their significance in contemporary class analysis was acknowledged after World War I with the rise of capitalism and the advent of the managerial working class (white collar) who do not own the means of production (as in the case of Marx) and also cannot be classified as a proletariat or status group. The economic system in the post-war era created a middle range of job opportunities which allowed people to earn an income that could afford them a decent living. The middle-class account for a huge part of the economic success experienced in the West during the post-war period. “They are considered fundamental for sustained economic growth, democracy and good political institutions” (Furness, Scholz and Guarin, 2012:1). Thus, sociologists revised their habits of theoretical thought when the new middle class was emerging as the dominant group in the social structure, at the same time as when the consumer society was coming of age (Sulkenen, 2009:29).

One key feature of the consumer society is the significance of lifestyle as a basis of class stratification. In classical sociology, lifestyle consumption was relegated to the informal, local status and tied to the class position of the consumer. Thus, when Veblen (1899) attempted to explain the conspicuous consumption of women in the industrial revolution, he explained their participation in fashion through the class position of the rich husbands. Simmel (1904) also theorises on fashion as the reserve of the upper classes, a means of class identification and distinction and a class structured society. Lifestyle was the by-product of class structure and not a basis for class stratification. By the 1980s, at the bubbling stage of the consumer capitalism era (Sulkenen, 2009), lifestyle consumption could not be ignored any further. Bourdieu (1985) propounded a theory of social distinction, and for the first time, in a more significant way, lifestyle was a feature of class stratification. However, lifestyle consumption was based on the social and economic capital of the consumer. The educational and economic background continued to be the basis for one’s capacity for lifestyle consumption.

Consumption comes with the capital 'gaze', the ability to understand and enjoy a particular lifestyle is based on one's social and economic capacity.

However, in a full-fledged consumer capitalist society as exists in some parts of the world today, lifestyle is no longer inevitably determined by one's position in the class system, "lifestyle today are structured by ethnic, religious or otherwise traditional identities, or they stem from apparently arbitrary moral convictions that seem to have no obvious basis in what might be conceived of as objective social structure" (Sulkenen, 2009: 29). Sulkenen (2009) argues that in consumer society, the class system collapses because the advancement of capitalism has multiplied the choices of consumption, giving range and availability to many. Therefore, positions in the division of labour and positions in the division of consumption do not overlap (Sulkenen, 2009: 31).

Lifestyle is now a matter of choice. The agency of the consumer is emphasized in the decision to engage in a lifestyle or not. Manufacturing and service industries have increased the choices of consumers, bringing products to the doorstep of consumers. Technological advancement through transportation and media has made available goods and services to people at various corners of the globe. The availability and accessibility of goods and services has turned lifestyle into voluntary choices.

Like most manufacturing industries, the fashion industry has evolved over the years to position itself to meet the needs of consumers in a consumer capitalist economic order. Fashion theorists have observed a change in fashion distribution and therefore have propounded theories to explain the current phenomenon. Classical theorists such as Veblen (1899) and Simmel (1904) are among the early sociological writers on fashion who made the link between social class and fashion as mentioned earlier. According to them, fashion is initiated by the upper class and then trickles down to the masses who form the lower class, that is the trickle-down theory of fashion. Though the class structure system that guided this theory is largely seen as inapplicable in contemporary societies, the trickle-down theory still permeates explanations of luxury fashion diffusion (Tjäder, 2013). However, economic growth and market evolution that comes with modernisation such as consumer capitalism and the increase in the middle-class population has caused fashion scholars to acknowledge the inadequacy of the trickle-down theory. Theories such as the trickle-across and trickle-up theories have been developed to capture the complex nature of current fashion diffusion and how the fashion industry is serving all classes directly. The trickle-across theory states that fashion can emanate and diffuse horizontally within class

structure while with the trickle-up theory, fashion, such as street fashion is initiated by the lower class and diffuses to the upper classes. These two models were developed in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, indicating their strong tie to modernisation (Tjäder, 2013).

The development of the two theories is in response to the current market of multiplicity of choices and further division of class structure in modern society. The introduction of fast fashion has bridged the fashion gap between the upper class and the lower class as well as created opportunities for middle ground consumption. Fast fashion is a system that “combines quick response production capabilities with enhanced product design capabilities to both design “hot” products that capture the latest consumer trends and exploit minimal production lead times to match supply with uncertain demand” (Cachon and Swinney, 2012:778). Fast fashion products ideally serve all social classes as it is of high quality, relatively affordable with subsequent sales of products with the passing of seasons: designs change rapidly with the changing seasons. Thus, while initial seasonal release can be high priced, middle- and lower-class consumers look forward to sale percentages of these items as the season progresses. At the end of the season, everyone with the desire to engage in the fashion trend will have a choice to purchase. Fashion firms such as Zara, Mango, H&M, Benetton, Forever 21 have embraced the fast fashion concept of retailing and are serving large markets in both developed and developing countries (Cachon and Swinney, 2012).

As Sulkenen (1997: 4) puts it, “luxuries have always travelled far, and this is even more true now than in earlier epochs. The difference is one of scale. Now mass-produced goods have international markets.” This aptly describes the industry of fast fashion. Some fast fashion firms have established outlets in many African cities. The relative affordability of the products and periodic sales allow consumers of different levels of income to purchase products. The only disadvantage with fast fashion is the limited production to avoid a pile of stock when the design is outdated. Thus, by the sales period some products may not be available. However, these foreign fashion houses have become strong competitors of fashion producers in Africa. Their trendy styles that follows global fashion trends, availability, accessibility and seeming affordability gives them an edge over local fashion producers in Africa. However, this study recognises a gradual shift by local designers in fashion production that is aligned with the principles of choice, availability and accessibility as provided by foreign fashion houses. Rising from the background of solely commissioned production, emerging designers are diversifying fashion production in Nigeria to meet the consumer needs of their customers, which was previously satisfied by international fashion houses. This phenomenon may not be novel as

there are accounts of Shade Thomas, the first renowned Nigerian designer's effort to produce beyond commissioning and to give choice and accessibility to consumers through the introduction of ready-to-wear clothes as far back as 1960s. However, the current phenomenon's novelty rests on the scale of producers and the response of consumers to this diversification. The growing middle-class population in Lagos, with high taste and disposable income, have responded favourably to the works of contemporary designers. Though the engagement of fashion among Lagosians blurs class boundaries, the study shows the demand for contemporary high fashion is driven mostly by the middle and upper classes.

Data for the analysis of this chapter comes mainly from the designers, however, data from the focus group discussion and other participants who work indirectly in the industry also feature.

Marketing and distribution strategies such as specialisation in production genre and target market are some of the response designers have adopted from global fashion trade to service the Lagos society.

In terms of production line, there is a gradual move from the bespoke production practices to already-made and mass production. Some participants produce two or more lines to serve different target markets. The market targets are also specialised in terms of gender, age, body size, social and economic status. Some participants are clear about their target markets while others produce for more than one but are dominant in one section. Some are modelling their sales strategies along the global sale strategy of using show rooms and retail shops for marketing. However, these global strategies are not adopted whole but are merged with local cultural fashion consumption characteristics such as uniqueness. Thus, this chapter shows us how designers go beyond aesthetic cosmopolitanism in designing to adopting other expressive elements in the production chain of fashion as a means of upgrading ethno-national culture from the local to the global.

## **7.2 Diversification of Production Lines**

Emerging designers as cultural producers of national aesthetics situated at the intersection of cultures, they experience what Toynbee describes as "radius of creativity", that is, space of creative possibilities available to the artist (Regev, 2007: 130). It is within this radius of possibilities the artist makes choices of preferred schemas to be included in their artistic work which also syncs with current upgrade in the global field of their products. In picking up creative elements within the wide radius of the global field, artists as "actors in their respective

fields of national culture... are propelled to create works whose form, content and meaning arguably represent ethno-national uniqueness, singularity and distinction” (Regev, 2007:131). Therefore, as they are borrowing from the global field, the need for local authentication entreats them to adapt the global schemas to ethno-national culture and are therefore careful in their quest of transposition and as will be discussed, their cultural setting feature greatly in the diversification of production genre. As cultural producers of fashion who are abreast with the fashion perspective and needs of the local population, emerging designers are careful not to adopt wholesale, foreign cultural elements but to provide a hybrid of the foreign with the local. Thus, they engage in the “practice of choosing, selecting and extracting elements from the plethora of expressive components available at a global level, including the producers’ own traditions” (Regev, 2007:125) and presenting these elements to consumers as services that improve their shopping experiences.

Participants understand some local marketing expressive schemas that underlie fashion consumption in Nigeria and though they are open to adopt foreign cultural elements, some of such local expressive elements are still integral to the work they produce. One of such local expressive elements is flamboyance. The use of bright colours, beads, blinks and elaborate designs are some local features that defines clothes in Lagos. A Lagos consumer’ first point of attraction to clothes is its flamboyance. How the clothes commands attention, radiates elegance and in some cases addresses the social and economic status of the wearer are key features of fashion clothes. As discussed in earlier chapters, the accessories and elements that projects flamboyance are graded in economic terms, however, the distinction is blur from afar. Inherent in the feature of flamboyance is the tenet of uniqueness. Designs are individual, different and unique to single clothe. Designs are not produced in mass, each consumer’s clothe is different from another even if it is coming from one designer. To lose sight of this local feature of fashion is to lose your creative credibility and subsequently, your market niche. This feature of uniqueness cuts across all social and economic statuses. These features are the main marketing strategy that has sustained bespoke businesses of local seamstresses and tailors. Uniqueness makes expansion of production difficult because a collection of clothes must represent individual unique and flamboyant designs.

In this section, we discuss participants’ expansion of production to include foreign characteristics like ready-to-wear line and production en masse. In this expansion we will see how designers maintain the local culture of flamboyance and uniqueness even in the face of global marketing influences. This is what makes fashion production in Lagos uniquely a

contextual construction, representing ethno-national uniqueness, while making products available to international consumers.

In a growing cosmopolitan society like Lagos, coupled with its consumer capitalist nature, service producers and manufacturing companies need to adjust their operations to suit the needs of their customers. The bespoke nature of traditional tailoring coupled with the negative professional characteristics developed by seamstresses and tailors such as poor time delivery, producing ill-fitting clothes are negatively affecting customer satisfaction, drawing negativity to the profession. Bobie's (2015) study of youth in the Ghanaian industry shows a growing crop of consumers of fashion whose choice of seeking service of a particular producer is based on their product availability and accessibility at all times. The schedule and nature of their work does not allow for a bespoke option, especially since a seamstress or tailor may turn out to be unreliable. In a fast-moving society, there are a number of "people who do not have enough time on their hands.... They think they are too busy to get certain things, but they want certain things, so now you sit back, do all the working for them" (Bobie, 2015: 84). Thus, emerging designers who served as the participants of this study are adopting production and sales techniques that provide customers with choices, availability and accessibility of fashion services just as being witnessed in Western countries.

Participants of this study show an understanding and appreciation of the changing consumption order and therefore are diversifying their production to reflect the change. In order to meet the consumers' needs in contemporary society of Nigeria where time is of essence but at the same time people want unique pieces of clothing that defines their lifestyle, Eji produces two lines of clothing. After her training at the university, she understood the competitiveness of the fashion world as well as the cosmopolitanism of the city of Lagos, thus instead of producing on a bespoke basis, she sought to make ready-made clothes. However, during the time "retail was not all heavy in Nigeria, that is why I went to Tiffany Amber because she was the only designer doing that at the time, really trying to do that, she was making pieces where women were just going for, she had three outlets where women could just go and shop, so that kind of model". She under studied Tiffany to understand the dynamics of production and retailing of already-made clothes. However, she was mindful as a new entrant to land softly into the business than to jump in head-on. Thus, she has "two productions [lines]; we run a bespoke, [and] a ready-to-wear factory". While she is sticking to the bespoke line to serve couture pieces, the ready-to-wear line serves the regular functional wears. Her reason for diversifying production from just bespoke production to include a ready-to-wear line is to provide

convenience for customers and to ensure that they have accessibility to clothing at any point in time that they want to purchase. As will be discussed later, according to her, she serves a high social and economic clientele as well as adults, who have peculiar needs but at the same time want convenience and accessibility. Therefore, her production offers these qualities, thus, consumers “don’t have to think too much like, I have to go in advance like ten days, no. if they want something today, they can go and look round and find something”. Customers are therefore relieved of the process of making clothes as it pertains in the traditional sewing setting: purchasing fabric, providing design, ensuring it is sewn in time and going over to take it, not to talk of the various forms of disappointments that can crop up in between the process from wrong designing to poor and delayed delivery. An already made line absorbs most of the inconveniences by doing the “thinking” and delivering them in shops in advance before purchase. To make this system work better, Eji has acquired shops at different advantageous locations and also stock at other concept shops giving customers greater access to their products. She notes that “now we have three physical shops, we have several retail partners in Nigeria, across the globe”. Eji is imbibing in the global sale strategies of fashion distribution and marketing by moving beyond the production site, which has for years also served as the point of sale for most seamstresses and tailors. Grabski (2015) observes that in Senegal most people have to travel miles to Niayes Thioker to sew clothes because tailors are stationed at a place and they do not have retail shops. Contemporary designers like Eji are expanding the sales and marketing strategies of local fashion by adopting international marketing strategies of opening retail shops and stocking in other concept stores in their national boundaries and beyond.

Babs takes the diversification further to include mass production. She also run two clothing lines; ready-to-wear line and mass production. Similar to Eji’s sentiments, Babs believes that “people are tired of tailors, you don’t want to wait forever and then you get an outfit that is not your fit, so people want to walk in, pick up the clothes and are ready-to-wear. Thus, the solution to help meet the consumer’s need is to provide the clothes in advance. Therefore, her mass production line provides the service of producing ready-to-wear clothes for other designers or retail shops that sell locally produced clothes. According to Babs the “ready-to wear market has boomed with the number... there are a lot of top designers out there, we are the ones that make their clothes”. Thus, while the ready-to-wear is their personal clothing line, they produce en masse for other designers where they will “draft the pattern, make the clothes, put your logo on it and you go to sell it”

Fashion as a cultural aesthetic demands careful measures when producers begin to respond to social changes that are deemed as foreign but must be imprinted with local elements to give consumers the cosmopolitan balance they desire. In Nigeria, consumer capitalism coincided with the liberalisation policy of the Structural Adjustment Programme of the late 1980s which opened most city dwellers to foreign tastes in fashion. It started with second-hand clothing as a means of economic relief, then the importation of affordable new clothing from China. The turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century has witnessed the rise of a middle-class who have gained purchasing power to engage in what was perceived as luxury lifestyle such as high-end fashion (Onyewuchi and Monye, 2013). This phenomenon has led to the springing up of big shopping malls with stores owned by foreign companies that offer the lifestyle of the Western middle-class to the African society. Fashion houses such as TM Lewin, H&M, Gap have all found their way into these shopping malls. Providing similar services like these foreign companies in a fashion-forward society like Lagos is imperative to sustain competition.

As modernizers of local enterprise, who want to update the national culture of fashion by adopting elements from the global field which are deemed as improvement of the old system they function, they are also conscious to appeal to the elements of indigenization as well (Regev, 2007: 129). Emerging from an already established traditional system of making clothes, most designers try to guarantee customer satisfaction by combining foreign elements of accessibility and affordability with the culture of uniqueness and flamboyance.

Ready-to-wear lines produced by participants are not couture outfits, they are high fashion. They are not the regular statement pieces made for couture customers; they are high fashion clothes that are worn even on regular days. Nigerian fashion is high fashion which thrives on flamboyance. The Nigerian society's sense of fashion demands that clothing is a little over the top. As Rhoda puts it, "in Nigeria, we amplify things. So, even if there is a normal trend abroad, once it enters Nigeria, we take it to the next, next level". The reason why they add lots of embellishment and embroidery to turn simple styles into high fashion. Therefore, what is perceived as high fashion in some contexts will pass for regular outfits in Nigeria. As cultural producers who seek local authentication for the products, participants are mindful of this feature in their production after years of working in the industry, which they incorporate in their work- hence the amplification of designs. Participants who produce a ready-to-wear line which demands producing a number of collections at a time must do so fully cognizant of the culture of individuality and uniqueness that guides fashion in Nigeria. Thus, they term their ready-to-wear lines limited-editions.

The limited-edition ready-to-wear production is also a way of ensuring many people or customers are not seen in the same design. Some explain they have “personal attachment to my clothing(s), I don’t want that poof, it is everywhere, I call them limited-edition, I can have a piece in 10 or 12 and that is it” (Zena). Unlike H&M, Zara, Mango and other fast fashion houses where clothes are produced in bulk across sizes in same fabrics in different countries, creating the possibility of meeting people wearing similar outfits everywhere, designers in Nigeria seek to ensure that their pieces are not worn everywhere by everyone. They believe this is to provide a unique service to their customers who want to achieve individuality. In competition with these foreign fashion houses, local designers must provide services that informs customers of their culture even in the face of the adoption of foreign cultural elements. This is a way of staying competitive in the Nigerian fashion industry; designers’ ability to produce unique individual styles for each customer even when produced in bulk. Producing a limited quantity per collection, can be for “unit of say 20 per set, 20 per style, 20 per fabric” (Joy). Therefore, a collection may have a fabric theme where one fabric will be used for different styles or a collection could have the same design made with different fabrics.



Figure 7.1 Stock of ready-to-wear clothes displayed on a rack. Source: A. Bobie

In the above picture, we see one fabric used for two or three designs at a time. This ensures that many styles do not clash in terms of fabric or vice versa. Customers expect to see new and unique things whenever they visit, therefore, designers are careful not to produce a lot at a time. As noted by Maufe, “I come up with different designs every week. I churn out a lot of things for them [customers] and then they are very stylish too”. This is imperative in staying competitive because “Nigerians are like what this person is wearing I am not supposed to wear it but they want to look at a trend and convert it and make it their own.” Designers, while gradually introducing diversification in production and marketing of fashion in Nigeria, try to sustain the cultural underpinnings of fashion as it pertains to their local cultural system of aesthetics.

Participants are creating a system of choice, accessibility and availability through the diversification of production. Aside Eji and Babs, there are eleven more (making thirteen) who are showing diversification in production lines. Ten out of the thirteen produce both bespoke and ready-to wear lines. All participants are females with predominantly female customers. Their bespoke line functions as the process discussed above: creating unique one-time pieces for customers which requires more effort and time. They engage customers who commission clothes based on personal specification or who work with the designer to arrive at a specific style. Couture clothes or outfits meant for special occasions like weddings are mostly contracted as bespoke items. As has been discussed in earlier chapters, the *Aso ebi* culture demands the sewing of outfits for each occasion. Since cloth for the occasion is determined by celebrants, an outfit meant for such occasions cannot be pre-sewn. However, due to their predominantly female customer base, the ready-to-wear lines serve mainly women but will take men’s orders for bespoke items. According to participants, even on a bespoke basis, customers often trust them to provide the style that best suits the occasion or their personality. This is developed out of years of working together and trust built through credible delivery of services. Thus, as reported by Zena “I love the fact that somebody walks in here, most of my clients just walk in and ok, Zena just sketch something for me, I take paper and pen, depending on the fabric, where they are going and what the occasion is and I sketch it for them on the spot and we go with it”. It is based on this confidence in their work by customers and years of interaction that informs producers of the fashion taste of customers, encouraging them to introduce ready-to-wear lines. They operate both productions concurrently to ensure customer satisfaction through availability, convenience, choice and accessibility.

The establishment of a ready-to-wear line is to bring convenience of shopping to customers and also provide them with choices whenever they desire to buy clothes. As has been noted in a previous chapter, the fabric in vogue for contemporary fashion in Nigeria is the local fabric, specifically the *Ankara* which is also called the African print in some African contexts. Gott et al. (2017) argues that “African-print fashion, in particular, is rarely purchased off-the-rack. Unlike many parts of the highly industrialized world where new styles are produced as ready-to-wear—conventionally developed through a complex and often lengthy chain of design, production, and distribution—the creation of African-print fashion in Africa is an ever-changing, grassroots phenomenon” (Gott, et al. 2017:46). However, emerging designers are changing this narrative and overcoming the challenges of producing ready-made clothes in African societies. Participants’ decision to provide ready-to-wear services for their customers similar to major foreign fashion houses is a step further in fashion production in Nigeria. The convenience of walking into their shop any time without prior engagement and being assured of a suitable outfit like any other fashion shop is their competitive leverage. Most participants have been in the industry for more than ten years and have developed a good relationship with customers to know what they prefer at any point in time. The designers are also abreast with international designs produced by foreign fast fashion houses and incorporate them into their designs.

Participants who produce ready-to-wear clothes target students (mostly university students), school proprietors, the self-employed or entrepreneurs, businesswomen and men as well as company managers. Clothes from ready-to-wear lines are worn for regular social functions like business meetings, office work, school functions and church activities. However, they can also be purchased for low key social celebrations such as “you get a promotion, I celebrate myself, I buy something for myself, I nail a contract, you know, when a woman is on the upward drive, that upward moment like you’ve finished with school, you have a job, you are a mum, you are a go getter, you know, you like to pamper yourself, we help you to do that” (Eji).

Two other participants, in addition to Babs have gone further in transposing production en masse as done by big fashion houses through their outsourced factories in India and Bangladesh. However, instead of outsourcing production to other countries with cheaper labour as it pertains in the West, participants have built factories in their localities and employed locals for the job. Just as designers with ready-made line, participants into mass production are producing along with other production lines discussed above. One designer combines bespoke with mass production, another, limited-edition ready-to-wear clothes with the mass production,

while the last respondent combines bespoke, limited-edition ready-to-wear clothes and mass production. They reason that, the market for the innovations in mass production is small as people are now warming up to the idea of non-bespoke production. Therefore, they try to engage the customers on more personal levels of bespoke and limited-edition ready-to-wear choices to help establish contacts. They maintain the personal approaches while serving the needs of churches, fashion boutiques, schools and other organisations who contract them in mass. For Edith who deals in bespoke and mass production, mass production comes in mostly as contracts from across the globe such as “there was a time I had a contract in South Africa, and it was very good. Right now, we can make choir robes, one for England, we are making 100 pieces”. Edith’s contracts can be in large volumes, more than the 100 pieces of robe, such as taking contracts from schools to make uniforms for a population of thousand and above, a medium volume like the choir robes cited above. Edith’s bespoke work can also take the form of small contracts such as the *Aso ebi* of family members who are organising a wedding. At the time of the interview, she had halted contracts and even bespoke production because she had been contracted to sew *Aso ebi* for a family member’s wedding that involved about thirty or more people. While contracts like choir robes and school uniforms are usually the same designs made in different sizes or sometimes similar sizes, a contract of *Aso ebi* is more difficult to manoeuvre. Though all family members will use the same fabric, everyone’s clothing will be made on a bespoke basis. The design and size of each person is different from the other making the work tedious and time consuming. Therefore, on such contracts, she charges as she would charge for a bespoke item.

Designers are still careful in the number and designs they make even amidst the mass production. The culture of uniqueness is infused in mass production which Babs explains;

the main thing is the demand in unique, one of a kind pieces, Nigerian women are very fashionable, even men, they want that uniqueness to their outfit, they don’t want to buy from Zara or Next and they go to a function and people are wearing it, they want “it was made for me”, they like that, so that is one”.

This idea of uniqueness continues to guide mass production because within their cultural space, it speaks of the authenticity of the work and the capability of the designer as a professional. Having boutiques and fashion houses as the main customers for the mass production, she explains that the “ready-to wear market has boomed with time the [in] number, as I said we produce for other designers, there are a lot of top designers out there, we are the ones that make

their clothes.” Thus, in satisfying her customers, she is still guided by the principle of exclusivity, individuality and uniqueness. In some circumstances, depending on the type and volume of the order, they can produce similar designs with the same fabric for a number of clothes. At the time of the interview, she had a contract for male clothes and female jackets from Woodin which had them producing hundreds of them to be distributed in various outlets in different countries. In such situations, they produce several of one design with limited number of same fabric and/or different fabrics since they will be at different locations even across countries. A particular fabric can serve about hundred clothes which will be distributed to the six countries where Woodin shops are located in Africa; Ghana, Nigerian, Cote D’Ivoire, Togo, Benin and Kenya. In each country, there are several stores. Thus, each store will have limited number of production for each design. Designs are developed through close deliberations between the designer and the management of Woodin. The designer is afforded freedom to add her twists to designs within an approved framework. Therefore, during the time of interview, Babs had been contracted to make jackets and she had decided to make reversible jackets as one of the designs where the jacket can be worn both inside and out. She states that such design is her idea and the management of Woodin loved it when she presented it to them. Her contract was to make jackets as part of Woodin’s collection for the year and within that framework, she is allowed to present her creative ideas on designs.

The last participant engages in all three types of production. The bespoke line caters to clients needing an outfit for a special occasion while the ready-to-wear line is for regular outfits for everyday functions. The mass production line caters to institutions that contract the respondent for specific jobs. Funmi, has a big factory, probably the biggest factory among the respondents and employs the highest number of employees; more than fifty workers. Her production line serves all social and economic categories of people in addition to serving as a production site for designers who have limited resources.

Thus, with an opportunity of wide creative radius in which modernisers choose their creative sources, emerging designers are borrowing the culture of production diversification as a means of offering consumers accessibility and convenience in consumption. The decision to offer consumers different ways of fashion engagement is to give choices and rely on their agency to make choices that meet contemporary consumer needs regarding fashion. As mentioned earlier, ready-to-wear production is not entirely new to the Nigerian society. Shade Thomas, Nigeria’s foremost designer introduced already-made clothes in her boutiques in Lagos, however, her line served mostly the political elites and the socially affluent (Jennings, 2011). Though nothing

is recorded in literature concerning the continuation of a similar venture by other designers. This may be due to the approximately three decades of economic and political crisis that overshadowed many developments and caused the exile of many elites in Nigeria. The current phenomenon discussed in this section is important just based on the sheer number of designers involved in diversified production. Thirteen out of the eighteen designers in this study engage in ready-to-wear production, indicating the rise of new entrants who are modernising fashion production, adopting strategies of marketing and delivery from the global field into the Lagos society.

Notwithstanding, this innovation is not without difficulties. The major challenge designers report in the ready-to-wear or mass production business is the potential of a stockpile of products. There are times when the sale of a collection may not go as anticipated and therefore becomes a cost to the producer. One participant lamented how sometimes one might run at a loss with ready-to-wear production. In Chris' words, "at the end of the day you will have this stock piling up and not getting people to buy and when you get people to buy, they are not negotiating for the right price." One way of mitigating this loss is to produce a few items at a time, a strategy enshrined in the limited-edition concept. While production in small quantities promotes the culture of exclusivity and individuality, it also protects the producer from production losses. For Eji,

"Sometimes [we] do a whole collection and we find out from our retail shops that sell through our stores, what do we think the customers wanted so we start releasing them in phases" as a test to the market to observe customers' patronage. When they receive negative feedback, they learn from [our] mistakes, we try to [re]strategize".

Another challenge which has hindered the venture of already-made clothes over years and it is still a challenge to overcome developing standard measurements. Due to the perception of the type of clothes preferred by Africans and more importantly, the African physique, tailoring has been on a bespoke basis to avoid dissatisfaction by consumers. Designers argue that the African body is different from the physique of many females and males across the world and therefore does not fit accurately with the standard measurements developed in many Western countries. The generous breasts, hips and buttocks, which come in different measurements even among relations makes it challenging to develop a measurement that can fit a range of people. Contrary to the fashion world's portrayal of models and icons as thin and slender, most African women

are fuller “with hips and a healthy posterior” (Klopper, 2000: 223). Thus, an African lady who walks into a Western clothing shop may fit in different sizes of clothes for different parts of the body. A size twelve shirt may fit perfectly but can only be worn with a size sixteen skirt of the same shirt or vice versa. Klopper (2000) argues that, in most African societies like South Africa, there is an intimate relationship between physical size and social standing. She quotes a renowned South African actress Busi Zokulfa who says “if an African woman is big, you are strong, bold and can tackle anything. If you don’t put on weight, there is something wrong with you” (Klopper, 2000: 224). An appreciation of weight in the African society requires women to put on weight when they are going through some rites of passage. Some societies will demand weight gain before marriage rite while in others the woman is to gain weight after birth, an indication of her welfare that informs the public of the responsible nature of the husband. Busi, emphasized society’s equation of men’s responsibility towards their wives in the weight of the wife as she states, “If a man has a skinny wife, he’s maltreating her” (Klopper, 2000:225). Therefore, in many cases, women’s weight fluctuates as they go through life cycles and this weight gain reflects on different body parts. Thus, Ken, a designer commented that he finds it challenging working with women because “with the ladies, they will place the style, tomorrow they will say it is too much, they have increased in size, so just because of the shape issue, I decided to specialise 85% men”.

The social perception of relating bigness to social standing has led to the idea of creating designs that are voluminous for Africans. West African outfits such as the bubuu, baba riga or Agbada, are clothes that use up a generous amount of fabrics for their creation. According to Klopper (2000), the use of voluminous fabric is “linked to the ... the active rejection of Western practice of highlighting the shape of the body” (pp. 223). Some African designers believe African fashion thrives on voluminous use of fabric, a tendency to communicate the social, economic and political status of the wearer. According to Kandjouura Coulibali, a Malian designer, African fashion does not frame the body as European fashions, a designer is to make ample use of fabric to make the clothes big and free. Thus, if a designer is to develop the ‘African look’ in fashion, clothes should not accentuate the body as European clothes, volume of fabric signifies strength and importance (Goldner, 2010). Aside the volume of fabric used for the clothing affirming the social status of the wearer, it also ensures the free flow of air into the clothes to help with the hot weather of the continent, making the wearer comfortable (ibid). Fred Eboka, another renowned Nigerian designer living in South Africa, seconds the argument of Coulibali on the use of ample fabric for African designs. He believes that the combination

of bold colours and stark geometric patterns found on many of the fabrics conceived by African producers is so powerful that it alters one's perception of the person, always creating the impression that the wearer is large and consequently, physically powerful (Goldner, 2010).



Figure 7.2 Plus size model in Makioba dress. Source: [instagram@makiobaofficial](https://www.instagram.com/makiobaofficial)

In contemporary African fashion, emerging designers are working to affirm these social and cultural beliefs in African physique and African fashion. Klopper describes designers in South Africa who have “taken to promoting bigness” (2000:224). A Nigerian designer I follow online, Instagram, Makioba fashion specialises solely in plus size women’s outfits. Most designers are embracing the femininity of the heavy physique of African women and they are making outfits that suit their consumers. The Lagos fashion and Design Week runway show featured a

significant number of plus size models who wore the outfit of designers who either specialised in plus sizes or had a section of their production for plus size.

Another change in the industry as noticed on the field, and extensively discussed in the chapter on Cosmopolitan Fashion is the designing of outfits that accentuate the African body. Consumers exposure to foreign fashion trends directs producers' attention to the changing trends of fashion which they apply to producing traditional clothes. Producers use less volume of fabrics for most clothes compared to the older generation. Both men and women have developed a taste for fitting clothes and therefore, emerging designers are cutting down on the use of ample fabrics for both local and Western designs.

Emerging designers' ready-to-wear and mass production lines show courage and great effort towards creating fashion that is of global standards, as well as not overlooking the peculiarities, in terms of body sizes, that comes with producing for their immediate market. Each respondent has uniquely developed their standard measurement to serve their clients which does not necessarily follow any international measurement convention. So, for Babs her "own clothing line is for the African woman who is a size 8 but still has hips, boobs, you know we are curvy so our pattern is tailored towards that". For most of the participants who have worked for long as bespoke producers before adding ready-to-wear lines, their measurement comes from years of experience. Working with different customers with different shapes over a long period of time, they have collated and developed standards of measurement. While some clothes can perfectly fit customers, some will need little adjustments for good fitting. In this case, someone like Shola continue to allow fitting for her ready-to-wear clothes in her retail shop, thus, "anytime they come to buy I make sure they wear it, even when they are asking for price I tell them to go and wear before we price, if it is not their size I will adjust it to fit them." In the retail shop of another participant is a sewing section where customers who may not find their size in the clothes available can order for a similar style to be sewed or when clothes do not fit properly, it can be adjusted.

There are others who have studied the European and American sizes and use them either individually or merge the two to strike a difference. According to Nene who trained as a designer in the United Kingdom, she uses mostly UK measurements, sometimes with adjustments. When customers request for designs they see online no "need [for] the measurement of the person, you just ask which size are you?" then she will sew per the customer's UK measurement. The customer is allowed to provide inputs on the difference

between perhaps her lower and upper body when using the UK standard. Dupe, believes the UK standard measure is a little tight for the African body while the United States (US) measurement is more loose, therefore, “between both UK and US size, we now streamline in between as you know US is big, UK is small so I just kind of do in between because we are in between”. They also study different measurements as it pertains in different Western countries other than the UK and US. This gives them an idea of other body shapes which can be applied to the African context. Designers who produce en masse ask their contractors about the kind of measurements they prefer. Due to the contractual nature of mass production, most of them use the measurements requested by their contractors which is mostly Western standards.

Participants are putting in efforts to offer customers convenience and choices in shopping for fashion. Though the effort is not yet as perfected as in other developed contexts, designers are determined to find a semblance of global standards in the work they do. In a budding fashion industry like Nigeria, challenges such as developing standard measurement might take more effort and time, however, emerging designers are resilient in their effort to provide aesthetic cosmopolitan fashion within their local fashion culture.

Though majority of respondents show the feature of diversification, the five remaining respondents continue to engage in the traditional bespoke process of producing fashion. Though they share the desire to start a ready-to-wear line, they are careful not to push it much because they believe the society needs to understand and accept their work and be able to relate to the billowing changes in fashion production before they introduce what is new to the society. Though some of them can produce en masse when contracted, they do not engage in producing beyond what they are commissioned. Joseph explains that when you want an outfit from him, “it will be bespoke [we] are able to do the ready-to-wear for people but not on the large scale because we are trying to build our brand”. Common characteristics among these five participants is that they are all males, four have predominantly male customers and the last one produces for mostly women. Their products are high-end couture. Four have all been in the fashion industry for less than twelve years while one has been sewing since the latter part of the 1990s. The latter describes himself as initially a tailor because his first training was through apprenticeship which offered him a traditional tailoring job until he engaged in further training to upgrade his skills and start producing high fashion for male celebrities and the socially affluent. The four who have predominant male customers also produce both local designs what they term as native wear and foreign clothes, English suits. Joseph, who has female customers also uses both local and foreign fabrics in fashioning Western designs for customers. As has

been discussed in the chapter on cosmopolitan fashion, all the clothes for males whether it be for native or foreign wear are made with imported fabrics while female outfits are made mostly with local fabrics, either indigenous or appropriated.



Figure 7.3 Bespoke three-piece suit by a respondent. Source: Instagram. Aborishade Bespoke Agbolahan (@g\_bespoke)

The participants' focus on solely bespoke products is a means of establishing themselves in the industry and gaining the trust of their customers. Regev (2007) acknowledges the difficulty for new entrants with modern or 'different' ideas in an already established cultural production to engage fully in aesthetic cosmopolitanism. As he puts it, "new entrants to the field struggle to gain recognition for new works, products and genres as legitimate expression of nationhood" (ibid, 129). Though some acknowledged the need to build a stable brand for public credibility

as new entrants at the initial stages of their production, some participants' decision to maintain bespoke production line goes beyond public acceptance or system difficulty to include personal decision to maintain an old system of production. Some participants are intentionally avoiding production expansion and may remain bespoke as a means of firm branding. They want their brand to be known for custom made clothes. Thus modernisers do not necessarily, always expand their business to accommodate foreign expressives as Regev argues, they can maintain old systems and improve it through personal acquired skills. The five participants maintain the old system of bespoke, however, the quality of their work marks them as distinctive modernisers.

The Nigerian society's fashion taste thrives on uniqueness and individuality and the bespoke clothing industry has served this purpose for a long time. Being able to commission a style which is unique to you even when following the trend of the time adds to the social status of the customer. A producer's ability to make a one of a kind outfit for the customer also adds to the credibility of the producer. Therefore, these five designers' decisions to produce only bespoke clothing is to serve the purpose of the culture of uniqueness in Nigerian fashion. They want their customers to enjoy their individuality, agency and uniqueness when they wear their piece. Another reason for their bespoke production is the customers they are targeting. Joseph, the only one with female customers, targets celebrities in the movie and music industry. Making outfits for these people takes time and effort. Joseph explains "because of their styles it takes about two weeks or so to finish an outfit, because they want to wear a piece that will make a statement." In such situations, one can hardly produce more than needed at a time. It will take lots of hands (employees) if you are to produce many over a two-week period which explains why Joseph limits himself to bespoke production. While the rest with male customers do not take two weeks to produce one outfit, making statement pieces of native wear and English suits does nonetheless take time. Their customers range from church pastors, to senior managers, political elites and the socially affluent. These customers, even on regular days, engage in high fashion and therefore demand outfits that are unique. According to Gee, making outfits for his customers "is like tailoring to measure. When I am making native for you and I bring it for the first time I don't say it must be ok, if there's any concern we need to fix it".

Thus, bespoke designers who form part of this study distinguish themselves from the traditional tailors and seamstresses based on the customer base and the detail of their work. Tailors and seamstresses produce for all customers, regardless of economic or social background, sometimes across gender and age (Gott, 2010). However, designers in this study are careful in

their target market. They have set a standard for their products by producing for the affluent in the society and producing work that meets the global standard of quality. They do not produce for everyone who walks into their shop, they have structured their product along gender, economic and social status and possibly age limits.

### **7.3 Diversification in Target Market**

The industry is not just experiencing an expansion in production, the expansion comes with specialisation in a particular target market. Another detail in global fashion marketing which is adopted by designers who make up respondents of the study is diversification in terms of market target. Tailors in Africa are noted for their skill in sewing both men and women's clothes while seamstresses are better with women's clothes (Gott, 2010). These tailors and seamstresses also sew for customers across all ages with no specialisation in any area. Depending on their skill and creativity, their customers can also cut across all social and economic spheres of life. Grabski (2010) described customers of tailors interviewed who travelled from far off locations for the services of tailors at Niayes Thioker who were perceived as creative and up to date with current trends.

Emerging designers in cosmopolitan Lagos are specialising in production for a target market. However, some hold on to old features such as specialisation based on gender. Four participants serve predominantly male customers and like traditional tailors, all four designers are men. Ken, who works on mostly male outfits is willing to sometimes work with women but that is in limited number. He explains that "I do 15% to 20% of ladies, though I have decided to add more, but even with this percentage there is stress unlike men you get the fabric to produce and there is no fault. But with the ladies, they will place the style, tomorrow they will say it is too much, they have increased in size". Ken expresses the rationale for why most of his male counterparts choose to produce mainly for men.

A common feature among the four designers is their bespoke production nature. Perhaps, the challenge of working with women comes most often with bespoke works and not necessarily with the gender of customers, because, Joy, with predominantly female customers complained about the difficulty with bespoke production. The difficulty led her to express that "very soon I want to stop the bespoke because it is very tasking and concentrate on the ready-to-wear". Thus, I will not conclude if this challenge is peculiar to the female customers, though most of the designers with male customers complained less about their customers. Male clothes are

made in both native wear and English men's wear. Among these designers, none produce ready-to-wear or on the mass level.

Eight designers produce for females only. Seven are women designers, while the remainder is a male designer. Some designers reason that, it is the African Designer who will understand the African woman better because they live within the same context and appreciate the culture that moulds their fashion taste. Thus, female designers "design with the African woman in mind so, we take into consideration the shape, the curves, the way we like to look grand. The African woman does not like minimalism.... Primarily I don't know so many designers who has the African woman in mind" (Eji). It is an effort to fashion outfits that suits the nature and shape of the African body. Another reason, quite an obvious one for deciding on female customers is that, it is perceived women engage more in fashion than men. Heath's (1992) exposition on *sanse* among Senegambian women emphasis the role clothes and fashion play in the lives of women through life transitions. Gott (2009) observed similar phenomenon among Ashanti women of Ghana. Oyeniyi (2012) in tracing changes of dress in Yorubaland from the period of Independence to contemporary times, women have always been at the forefront of fashion. The Nigerian fashion culture of flamboyance resonates more with women than men. As Amaka, a member of the women's focus group discussion succinctly puts it "another thing is that the average Nigerian woman will rather starve than not look good, they want to create an impression everywhere they go". Women are the major customers of fashion and are likely to engage more in impulse fashion shopping than men, hence the ready-to-wear lines focussing more on women. Women's fashion needs are insatiable as every occasion, being big or small is celebrated through clothing. Thus, designers' decision to produce for women comes from their experience with the gender-based demand of fashion in their society.

Six of the respondents produce for both male and female customers. Here also, male clothing is mostly commissioned on bespoke or contracted mass production while female clothes can be either on bespoke, or mass production and more significantly form the main customer base for their ready-to-wear line. Zena is the only designer in this category who sometimes, on an irregular basis, produces shirts for men on ready-to-wear basis. Babs talked about a current contract she was working on during the interview when I asked about the gender of the customers for the production. She answered "yes, this is on request, the shirts, we did 200 pieces and it's for men". Aside on contracts such as this, her regular clothing line is for women. The production of male clothes along with female clothes is designers' way of reaching out to the society as a whole. The introduction of male ready-to-wear by some designers is to afford

men the same convenience and accessibility to fashion choices as women are receiving from local producers. Local men fashion is growing as consumers are appreciating the quality of contemporary works by designers, therefore, designers are increasing production to meet market demands.



Figure 7.4 Stock of women clothes on rack with men ready-to-wear shirt on mannequin. Source: A. Bobie

What is observed here is the continued maintenance of binary gender-based production of clothes. Male designers are more comfortable producing male clothes and the inverse works for females. Not many of the designers have crossed this binary section. Dupe who makes for both genders, admit that she has a male tailor who sew the male clothes after she has designed, her specialty is with female clothes. This is the case of many of the respondents. Based on the industry's experience, designers do this to maintain customers' trust of their skill since it is perceived that tailors are better with male clothes while seamstresses are with females. However, as has been discussed there are few who are crossing the bridge and many more will follow considering the discussions I had with respondents.

A second target market is based on the age of customers they serve. Traditional tailors and seamstresses do not set age limits for their services, they sew for whoever walks into their shop; be it elderly or young (Gott, 2010). Though children are often not seen in locally sewn clothes, when the order is placed with a tailor, the child will be measured, and the outfit will be sewn. However, participants of this study set limits on the age of their customers. Most designers argue that their products target people they consider as youth and above. The patronage of local tailors and seamstresses by youth in Nigeria took a downturn during the three decades of recession that ended the 20<sup>th</sup> century. According to Oyeniyi (2012), the youth joined the nationalism euphoria that engulfed the nation after independence and even after the civil war that saw the rise in the wearing of locally made clothes. However, the recession that started in the late 1970s dwindled the purchasing power of most people including the youth who took to foreign fashion that was made available through second-hand clothing, relegating local clothes to traditional functions only. On a regular day, most youth preferred Western clothes of jeans, T-shirts, skirts, trousers. Subsequent liberalisation policy witnessed the rise in importation of cheaper foreign clothes from China and other countries. Wearing foreign clothes became the new form of modernity and civilisation among the youth as they developed an acquired taste for this (Oyeniyi, 2012). However, the trend is gradually changing as contemporary youth are developing an interest in wearing indigenous and locally made clothes.

Thus, there are some participants who capitalised on this renewed interest of the youth in indigenous clothes to build their fashion brands. Rhoda started off her business with the youth as her market target. She reiterates, that “the small girls [university girls], because it was their parents who were paying, it was easy to have them as customers and they didn’t have so much stress”. Therefore, she built on them, though once a while she had referral from her mother who was a designer too to make clothes for elderly customers. As a young girl with university background, Rhoda felt she could relate better with her peers and understand their fashion needs better. She was conscious of the youth’s unwillingness to wear locally made clothes, therefore, to win them over, she had to create the “the fashion designing quote and unquote thing” which appealed to the youth. Shola similarly started her business from university and built her customers on the campus, especially among the students. When she completed school, she acquired a shop close to the campus to maintain the university clientele.

Later, designers are able to build the customer base to include the old and the affluent, but they still maintain a good relationship with the youth customers. In some cases, as the business grows, some tend to operate like Nene. Nene runs both a bespoke and ready-to-wear

production. While she reserves the ready-to-wear line for women above twenty-five years (with the assumption that they have completed university education and are working and therefore can afford to purchase off-the-rack from their own income), she is open to the idea of sewing bespoke for teenage customers and people in their early twenties who walk in to seek her services. However, none of these twelve participants who make up this category sew for children.

Three respondents stated categorically that their customers are mostly above forty years old. Wearing indigenous clothes has always been a social marker of maturity. Elderly women and men are conventionally expected to wear local cloth fashioned in traditional styles. It adds respect to their social status. Thus, it is socially expected of a young married woman or man in the African society to own traditional clothes and wear them during the rite of passage to signify their new social status and sense of maturity (Heath, 1992; Gott, 2010). Therefore, participants' decision to cater for the older population, I believe follows their perception of the conventional social wearers of local cloth. However, a similar characteristic of the customers of these three participants is the link between customers' age and their social and economic status. As Joseph puts it succinctly, "we cater for people like 45 years... we cater for celebrities most times". Though there are celebrities who are below the age of forty-five, Joseph targets older celebrities. Maufe also notes that her customers are mostly older, influential members of the society, and hence her unwillingness to give me information about customers or offer me a contact of a customer for an interview. The business has grown with some of these customers, maintaining a good relationship with start-up customers over her two decades of establishment while some have joined along the journey, but she has maintained a mature clientele since she started her business. Thus, she is obliged as their service provider to ensure confidentiality of their personal information.

Participants with customers above the age of forty seem to be very protective of their customers, though I realised such a trait with all participants. I believe it is more so with this category because of the social, political and economic status that comes with the age of the customers. Working with such a clientele requires a personal service delivery that is tailored to suit the schedule and taste of the customers, hence their involvement in bespoke production. Edith reports that with some customers they "deliver to them, they test it in their house if there is any issue we send it back".

Only one of the designers I interviewed specialised in children's clothing. Dupe sews children's clothes using *Ankara* fabrics. Another interesting aspect is that, she produces on ready-to-wear basis. Children in Nigeria or African society for that matter do not get engaged in the euphoria of nationalism shown through clothing (Heath, 1992; Oyeniya, 2012). Children have been reported to wear mostly Western clothes and only on rare occasions will parents sew something in traditional fabric for their children (Oyeniya, 2012). Even on occasions that require *Aso ebi*, children are mostly excluded from the uniform cloth, unless in a situation where he or she is very close to the host of the event. Socially, not much is required of children in terms of fashion in Nigerian society. However, a well-dressed child is a reflection of the parent's responsibility and social and economic status. With respect to children's locally sewn clothes, Dupe argues that people perceive it as unimportant and therefore "clothing for [kids] using our fabrics people have the idea, oh just sew anything and anyhow, they can wear it". Tailors and seamstresses do not put in the same effort as they would with adult clothes when making outfits for children. Moreover, the society has developed a taste for foreign clothing when it comes to children such that some parents object to their children wearing locally made clothes. Dupe, when she decided to enter into clothing production full time was indecisive on her target market. She was a new mother and had grown very fond of children. At the time she did not know of anyone or shop that sell locally already-made clothes. She recalls that "two weeks after starting I went to a mall and I stumbled on a shop that was making African prints kids wear and I was shocked because I didn't know people were doing it because it wasn't common as today, as that time I believe it was just the two of us, apart from the tailors who will be ordered to sew by parents". It was not an easy start up for her as she recounts that when she started her business, some parents she approached would vehemently object to the idea of their children wearing her clothes, she was often told, "ah, my child will not wear this, can only wear imported clothes."

However, gradually the perception is changing, people are accepting and appreciating the beauty of children's locally made clothes. Now, she makes clothes "for child dedication, for the baby, who will buy *Ankara* for a baby dedication on a normal day? They will buy white nice dress from Next [international fashion brand] but this person wanted something unique so came here". Current children's fashion as produced by Dupe also follows the culture of uniqueness and exclusivity. Though she produces on ready-to-wear basis, each outfit must have a unique design and she tries not to recycle designs. Customers must walk in to see something different every week. Making children's clothes, she explains can be more challenging than

adult clothes especially with fabric colours and patterns. The “sourcing [of] fabric is very important; I don’t just buy...thinking what exactly will be needed for the [kids]” (Dupe). Fabrics that can be used for adults may not fit the playful nature of children, therefore she is careful about how she combines patterns and colours. Dupe produces for both girls and boys aged between three months and ten years. For children above ten years, she explains “if you come in and you see a design you want for your thirteen-year-old we prefer to take the measurement because from that age group some of them wear adult dresses.” Thus, she is willing to make bespoke clothing for children aged above ten years. She also hinted that she has plans of including adult ready-to-wear clothing in the future.



Figure 7.5 showroom of Dupe; boy’s clothes on a dummy. Source: A. Bobie

The third aspect of diversification in target market is social status. As producers of aesthetic cosmopolitanism are important in its social production, so are the consumers. According to Regev, early modern consumer cosmopolitanism were mainly upper middle-class groupings, mostly in the West (2007:127). While he argues that their engagement will not be described as engaging in aesthetic cosmopolitanism because their purpose was demonstrating taste in exotic, late modern consumers engage in the consumption of otherness within their ethno-national

culture and this is not the privilege of only the upper classes. Every member of the society can engage in the consumption of aesthetic cosmopolitanism since the production is within the society and the composition is a hybridized global and local product. However, the consumption of current fashion production in Lagos may differ from Regev's late modernity consumption argument.



Figure 7.6 showroom of Dupe; dress for a girl of seven years. Source: A. Bobie

The tagline often used by many service providers is “we cater for everyone” which suggests that their products serve everyone in the society do not apply to many participants in this study. According to Eji, it is “silly” to try to serve everyone. However, to avoid the tag of social discrimination even in the face of obvious factors that can prevent some group of people from patronizing products, most producers prefer an open market target. This is quite unlike most participants of this study. They have a clear sense of the social status of their target market. Fashion produced by these respondents is high fashion that picks on the regular and ordinary in the society and fashion it into high, luxurious outfit designs. Unlike the seamstresses and tailors, they have taken the designing of the cloth from its conventional realm into creating “luxury items” as explained by Zena. Thus, as with Nene, “if I have my *Ankara* I take it to a stone maker, by the time they finish the stoning, you see N2000 *Ankara* that everybody is

buying, you won't be able to recognise it." After investing time and effort into the designing, most participants do not mince words on the value of their outfits and the specific cohort of people in the society they seek to serve.

When Eji was asked if she follows the cliché of her products targeting the entire consumer market, she replied:

I am a businesswoman, excuse me, I didn't say that. What do you mean by I do for all classes, it is not possible. No, I make clothes for upwardly mobile women." And who is this upwardly mobile women? "Mostly entrepreneurs, a lot of my top clients are female entrepreneurs, top bosses...when a woman is on the upward drive, that upward moment like you've finished with school, you have a job, you are a mum, you are a go getter, you know, you like to pamper yourself.

Her explanation serves as the rationale for many respondents' target market and vision for their product patronage. They believe the quality of their work demands a clientele of a certain social standard quite different from the "classless" structure of seamstresses and tailors' customers. The upwardly mobile customer does not start from the bottom of the social ladder, they are already in social ascendancy and their starting point is a socially recognised and revered position. Being upwardly mobile implies continuous movement up the social ladder and with each move up the social ladder, you are expected to mark the achievement with an outfit that you will purchase from the designer who clothed you back in the university.

Babs states it clearly that "as the growth sprout now in fashion...the middle class is driving it". Their increase in purchasing power and engagement in luxury lifestyle (Spronk, 2014) have increased the demand for high fashion of which designers are responding. The social and economic position of the middle-class makes them accessible for such high-end fashion products. Just as middle-class consumers are scaling up in housing, creating estate neighbourhoods (Krocher, 2014), cars (Ndletyana, 2014) and consumption of western foods (Onyewuchi and Monye, 2013), so are their fashion taste. Participants identify them in different sectors ranging from entrepreneurs with thriving companies, politicians, corporate managers, pastors, celebrities form most of the participants' customers. Most participants started off business with the deliberate intent to serve a specific clientele, while others developed their customers over time. Participant like Joseph started off making outfits for celebrities because he was already working with some through his modelling agency and has maintained that social

level till date. Similarly, Eji started her business with an already laid out plan of how to recruit her target market who she met mostly through her internship with another renowned designer. On the other hand, others like Tese, grew her clientele base over time. Starting with free trial sewing for people in her family and neighbourhood, she decided to “comb my [her] market”. Thus, she started charging and raising her prices, because she “wanted to attend to a set of people that can pay my bills... I wasn’t looking for top notch businessmen, I was looking for those who will pay the bills and I will say we have them.” As mentioned earlier, in most societies, economic status is intimately linked with social status (Tarkhnishvili and Tarkhnishvili, 2013), therefore, finding people who can pay her bills implied finding economically well-positioned people with good social standing as customers. Chris, on the other hand, works with “corporate people...they occupy certain level of position in the company like management level, like the general manager of a bank or a manger, so these are the kind of people that have disposable income that can afford the kind of quality I am offering”. Chris’ first customer target were his university colleagues, family and friends but later with further training to upgrade his skills, he recruited customers from the corporate world. In a nutshell, most of the customers are found in socially respected professions and positions that may have direct link to their economic status. However, in Lagos, one is careful not to dismiss the possible patronage of people of the lower-class who seek momentary upward mobility in gatherings and therefore can spend on high fashion clothes as already discussed in a previous section.

All participants admit to a high-class clientele base regardless of the other target market specialisation discussed above. Whether male or female, young or old, the different body sizes they produce for, the underlining customer base of participants are the middle and to some extent the upper classes. The middle and upper classes of the society are their target market taking us back to the early modernity days discussed by Regev (2007). The only difference is the location of production, where the early modernity consumers purchase their goods from foreign countries while contemporary (late modernity) consumers purchase aesthetic cosmopolitanism products within their locality. Babs explains that, “the high taste for cosmopolitan products, coupled with increase in dollar” has propelled the middle-class to look inward for their fashion products instead of importing. Thus, the growth of the fashion industry is fuelled by the demands of the middle-class and the upper classes who have a taste for high fashion, even though the economy limits their spending on foreign brands. Emerging designers are offering them the high taste and equal quality of foreign products. Though designers who

participated in this study argued that their clothes are relatively affordable compared to foreign brands, their products are not affordable to the lower-classes and some of those in the middle class. Tarkhnishvili and Tarkhnishvili, (2013) argue that there are three levels of the middle-class cohort: lower-middle-class, middle-middle-class and the upper-middle-class. In a country where the minimum wage of university graduates is pegged at N18000 (\$51), most of the outfits of participants can hardly be purchased by graduates due to the costs, even among respondents with youthful clientele. Though a graduate will be considered as middle-class based on academic qualification and occupation, they may fall in the category of lower-middle-class based on earnings and therefore will find the clothes made by these designers as out of their reach.

The lowest price items reported by respondents are scarf and bump shorts which go for a minimum of N3000 (\$9.53). The designer for children clothing has the most moderate price of all the participants; a minimum of N4000 (\$12.71) and a maximum of N8000 (25.42). Women’s clothing designers have a price range of N15000 (\$47.66) (mostly for people who bring their own fabric) to as high as N300, 000 (\$953.14). Three designers declined on calling their highest prices, justifying it as confidential. On the average, the most basic women’s clothing pieces that use *Ankara* or *Ankara* mixed with foreign fabric, in a Western style will cost N30 000 (\$95.31). The average price for haute couture dresses for special occasions like a red-carpet event is N70 000 (\$222.41) and can go beyond hundred thousand of Naira. For male English wear, prices range between N30 000 (\$95.31) and N70 000 (\$222.41). On average, one will spend N40 000 (\$127.09) on a suit. Traditional wear is not so far in price from the Western designs. In fact, traditional wear especially the Malian type requires more fabric than Western designs and, in some cases, even if not much fabric is used, the unit cost of the fabric such as some Shada fabric for men can be quite high. If a designer uses lace or *Aso eke* for the traditional wear, the price is even more expensive. Male traditional wear on the average is N40, 000 (\$127.09) and female is N30 000 (\$95.31).

	Traditional (average)	Simple (casual or office) Max-mini	Suit (mini-maxi)	Couture
Women	\$95	\$48- \$95		\$222- \$500 plus
Men	\$127		\$95- \$222	
Children		\$13-\$ 25.		

Table 7.1 average prices of clothes among designers of the study. Source: fieldwork A. Bobie

The prices of the respondents are higher compared to the prices of seamstresses and tailors. The latter, I learnt, charges between N2000 (\$6.35) to N10 000 (\$31.77), without the fabric, and this depends on the complicated nature of the design. They will only call for higher prices when they must buy the fabric themselves. It is the norm in Nigeria for customers of seamstresses and tailors to go with their fabrics, therefore it is only on exceptional occasions that they are required to buy the fabric.

The fashion bloggers I interviewed, many of whom had university degrees could not purchase the products of most of the designers they blogged about because their prices are way above their purchasing power. Similarly, Ego, a participant in the focus group discussion commented that for most people then when “the people that go to these designers wear something for an occasion then [you] copy it” then give it “to my own tailor, seamstress and they will do it well”. However, Stephanie, another member of the FGD noted that “but those people who use designers do not compromise their standard”. Thus, although these respondents did not patronise designers regularly because they could not afford them, they were well aware of the high quality of designers and the fact that if one can afford it, one should stick with a designer rather than to contract a seamstress or a tailor.

Regev (2007) argues that aesthetic cosmopolitanism on national level ensures the openness of dominant cultures to minority cultures that are less represented in the ethno-national culture. This implies the “cosmopolitisation” (Becks, 2000) of minority groups into the larger national culture, ensuring wider inclusion and participation of these groups in national cultural aesthetics. However, the prices of participants’ products exclude majority of the population, especially the lower-class and as discussed above part of the middle class. Thus, aesthetic cosmopolitanism may accommodate minority groups in its production, ensuring wider representation of the national culture, the consumption of these products are limited to the economic affluent in the society. In Lagos, the production of aesthetic cosmopolitanism fashion comes at a higher cost, affecting the sales price of products, therefore limiting the consumption of national aesthetics to few people who possess the economic capital to engage.

#### **7.4 Conclusion**

The contemporary world is marked by close interaction of people in different countries through various media that provides us with a fairly homogenous fashion sensibility. All of this is made possible due to advances in technology and transportation. Now, we are experiencing a world

that is more cosmopolitan in nature than has ever been experienced before (Beck, 2000). Centres of excellence are no more concentrated in the metropolises leaving the periphery to suck on the leftovers. With cosmopolitanism, such centres are everywhere, and the periphery is nowhere (Regev, 2007). Therefore, in the creation of national cultural aesthetics, cultural producers are open to foreign incorporation, which is fused with local elements to produce aesthetics that are cosmopolitan. Adopting technologies and techniques from foreign cultures to enhance local cultural production, “such cultural products and art works become themselves part of the global repertoire available as inspiration and influence anyone interested” (Regev, 2007:125). Thus, the aim of most emerging designers in Nigeria is to adopt global fashion technologies that enhances fashion production locally, as well as exposing their work for global patronage through a more convenient system. Aside cosmopolitanism as a mark of cultural, political and economic order of contemporary societies, society is also driven by consumerism; the agency of individuals to make economic choices for products, sometimes irrespective of the economic viability (Sulkenen, 2009). Choice in consumption has been increased and factors such as accessibility, variability, availability, convenience are very influential in consumption.

Fashion, a lifestyle perceived previously as luxury and the reserve of the upper-classes has been normalised with the proliferation of fast fashion houses whose products serve clientele from a wide range of social classes. Renowned high-end fashion houses are coming up with medium and lower range lines that serve the lower classes and are also making a presence in countries otherwise perceived as developing countries. The presence of fast fashion houses in countries like Nigeria has challenged local fashion producers to incorporate some global fashion services that hitherto were not employed in the fashion business. Most fashion production in Africa is built on the back of bespoke tailoring where customers commission seamstresses and tailors for outfits and wait for a period to receive. While this system persists, emerging designers are diversifying the fashion production industry by introducing the consumerist principles of choice, convenience and accessibility in local fashion production to help stay competitive vis a vis foreign companies and also offer better services to customers. Majority of participants in this study are producing ready-to-wear fashion lines where customers can walk in every time to shop for clothes without prior notice. There are also cases of mass production where clothes can be produced in bulk for other designers, organisation and institution. In so doing, designers are mindful to incorporate the fashion culture of exclusivity and individuality that guides fashion sensibilities in Nigeria. Thus, amidst the mass production, designers make each product unique so as to satisfy customers’ desire to wear exclusive pieces. The phenomenon of already-

made clothes also speaks to the triumph of African outfit producers with regards the challenge of working with standard measurements that fit the African physique.

Not only is the production system being diversified, the target market is also experiencing diversification. Unlike the traditional seamstresses and tailors' system who caters to every customer that walks into their shop, emerging designers are specialising in one or more target markets. Customers are differentiated based on gender, age, social status and sometimes body shape. Some participants have solely male customers or female customers. Others have an age limit to their clientele. Finally, due to the quality and expressive designs of participants, their products come highly priced and therefore are likely to only be patronised by people in the upper economic classes. Nonetheless, Nigerians' love for quality and brands compels people within the lower-class to purchase from designers for special occasions in an effort to "dress to belong." Participants are creating a fashion market for the upwardly mobile of the society and this upward mobility can be achieved through economic and social statuses or an individual's desire to engage in the culture of quality, exclusivity and love for high brands that undergirds Nigerian fashion sensibilities regardless of social or economic background.



## CHAPTER EIGHT

### PUTTING IN THE MECHANICS: STANDARDISATION AND STRUCTURE IN FASHION PRODUCTION

“Right now, a whole lot is happening, the dynamic and the mechanics about fashion are just about setting in...now what we have is just like what you will get abroad; we now have the stylist, the illustrators, the drafters, the cutters, the designers themselves, the whole picture is coming together.”

(Zena)

#### **8.0 Introduction**

The previous chapters have set the ground for understanding the context in which current developments are thriving, the new set of professionals behind the progress, the creative and innovative aesthetic cosmopolitan products designers are churning out and some services adopted to meet the demands of contemporary consumers. This chapter takes us further into the practical changes at the ground level of production from the workshop to the retail shop. The changes reported are foregrounded by intentional practical changes that emerging designers have put in place to elicit efficiency and quality production of fashion. The chapter delves into some structural and marketing changes of fashion production among respondents. From the immediate previous chapter, we discussed contemporary era as designated by some as the late modernity era or high modernity (Sulkenen, 2009) which is marked by high consumption of goods and services across the globe. Goods and services from distant societies travel far and wide into societies which hitherto considered indigenisation as a key national cultural element. Migration and technological innovation have increased global interaction and promoted the integration of cultures across boundaries. This explains how some fashion houses have moved beyond their local context to attain global recognition. Thus, we have moved from a previously perceived European or Western clothes to a “world fashion” or “cosmopolitan fashion” context (Eitcher and Sumberg, 1995). Consumption of fashion, like most other goods, is attaining global semblance such that what is considered as “typical indigenous” clothes is now hybridised with foreign cultural elements that speaks to the diversity, yet, coherent nature of the cosmopolitan society. As Regev (2007: 125) puts it, “in late modernity..., the cultural uniqueness of nations and ethnic groups is no longer characterized by such a quest for

exclusive, relatively isolated spaces of cultural content and aesthetic form.” The concept of world fashion or cosmopolitan fashion as used by Eitcher and Sumberg (1995), postulates the inaccuracy of tying certain fashion items to specific political or geographical locations. In an ever-increasing cosmopolitan world, goods and services are standardised in production across societies with producers in each context mindful to infuse local cultural elements amidst the global expectation to produce what Regev (2007) calls aesthetic cosmopolitanism.

Fashion, a cultural aesthetic of every society, is no longer completely indigenous in production due to the locals’ exposure through media and migration as well as producers’ awareness of the fluid outlook of consumer tastes and preferences. The particularity of arts for aesthetic cosmopolitanism resides in the fact that these art forms are defined by sophisticated technologies of expressions used in producing them (Regev, 2007). In implementing the expressive technologies is the inclusion of “otherness” within the ethno-national uniqueness. Thus, fashion production in Lagos is a combination of borrowed technological expressions from global field, integrated with local cultural elements of fashion production.

Eitcher and Sumberg’s (1995) cosmopolitan fashion may differ from cosmopolitan fashion aesthetic in Regev’s sense on the grounds of production. Eitcher and Sumberg (1999) believe some fashion items have grown beyond local production to assume a global production status. Thus, what is perceived to be Western clothes are now produced in various societies in both the West and the East without recourse to a particular location. Clothes like shirts, jeans denim, trousers, suits are produced and consumed around the world in various societies, independent of their Western sources. These clothes have penetrated several societies and have become the dominant clothing among both the upper-classes and the lower-classes. According to Suga (1999), such clothing has become the most widely consumed clothes in Japanese society, such that Japanese indigenous clothes have now turned into exotic aesthetic culture. Thus, the exotic Western clothes of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century is now the normal preferred functional clothes while the Japanese cultural clothing is now perceived as exotic culture. However, Regev (2007) believes that in the adoption of foreign cultural elements into local societies, the former does not totally displace the latter, but are fused together creatively to form an innovative ethno-national aesthetic. Therefore, while these clothes have assumed world fashion, there is local content in production in every locality.

In contemporary cosmopolitan society, national aesthetics are created by “consciously willing to implement stylistic innovations in art and culture from different parts of the world (Regev,

2007: 125). While producers do not rigidly hold on to indigenous national culture, they neither totally displace them with foreign elements. Thus, in creating national cultural aesthetics like fashion, producers adopt “contemporary technologies of expression, and whose expressive forms include stylistic elements knowingly drawn from sources exterior to indigenous traditions (Regev, 2007: 126). These technologies of expression help in producing aesthetics which can be identified by various people across different borders who then become co-consumers with local national consumers. Therefore, while the technological media expose locals to foreign taste in consumption, “at the same time, their local products become available to cultural producers and artists in other parts of the world” (Regev, 2007: 126). Thus, aesthetic cosmopolitanism produced fashion is not resistant to global fashion culture but constitutive of global fashion.

There is transposition of global field schemas into the local field which aid the cosmopolitanism interaction of aesthetic production. The growth and expansion of the industry demands new additions to the canons of production, and this is justifiable as they emanate from the creative possibilities hidden in newly developed technologies. Such developed technologies are continually adopted by emerging designers who are in tune with global field upgrades. A form of global standardisation (schema) is infused in the production of these cultural aesthetics which makes it possible for people across the world to access and consume ethno-national cultural elements. Farber (2010) observes the use of Western techniques and strategies in the production of contemporary South African fashion, that claims both indigenous and global elements.

In various ways, the creation of aesthetic cosmopolitan fashion in African societies have led to specialisation of production. Clark believes that “craft specialisation is a defining feature of complex societies and is viewed as a key factor in the development of the political economy” which is “closely linked to the standardisation of material culture” (Clark, 2007:289). Thus, in a cosmopolitan society like Lagos where lifestyle has become a marker of urban living, thus encouraging multinational companies to establish branches in various urban cities in many developing countries, national cultural producers are positioned to create products that are both locally and globally competitive. According to Zukin, this new

emphasis on urban consumption also heightens competition between cities that serve as 'branch' nodes for the international distribution of the same standardised, mass-produced, consumer goods - such as clothing and movies

– as well as the same generalised 'aesthetic' products, such as art works and 'historic' buildings.

(Zukin, 1998: 826)

Modernisers of Lagos' aesthetic cosmopolitan fashion, designers of this have seen the need to adopt global production techniques that is aiding in the standardisation of production as used by foreign multinational competitors, while offering more through their knowledge of local cultural elements. Therefore, instead of insisting on the bespoke, tied-to-location production style of traditional tailors and seamstresses of Lagos, emerging designers are (re)structuring fashion production to include global production of labour training standards, marketing and advertising techniques as used by foreign producers. This is to help meet contemporary urban consumption which is tied to “new, complex, retail strategies, combining advertising, sales, real estate development and entertainment” (Zukin, 1998:825), as a means of attaining customer satisfaction and business competitiveness. Participant designers have observed the consumption pattern of their immediate target market, especially through their exposure to global fashion houses and are therefore putting in effective structures to produce the quality, convenience and global standard of fashion to serve their customers both nationally and internationally. This chapter focuses on the production techniques and strategies adopted by designers to bring standardisation to fashion production in Nigeria. Designers are adopting the feature of branding as a means of giving identity to the product and firm. To ensure effective delivery and efficiency other features such as labour division, separation of workspaces, use of high-tech equipment, and the scaling up of advertisement tools that puts fashion from Lagos directly into the global space of fashion. The latter section of the chapter also discusses the development of different sectors that are directly or indirectly linked to the fashion industry, creating an ecosystem that sustains the fashion industry and its developments. Thus, this chapter shows the application of practical knowledge acquired by designers through foreign training, not just at the individual level of the firms but on the industrial level as well. We witness a budding industry with standardised structures fashioned along global convention of fashion production, combined with local knowledge of production.

Babs started out her fashion business in 2007. Before then, she worked for a Foundation and one day had a dream to start clothing business and also to teach others. She woke up from the dream with the resolution to quit her job and start the business. Therefore, she enrolled in “fashion school, first of all in Nigeria, I finished.... And then I won a year of scholarship in the

US and I went to Miami to study fashion.... I went to the UK to learn fashion and marketing”. She furthered her local training with international training because she realised that her target market, which is the “Nigeria women are very fashionable, they want quality, they want standard”. Thus, to offer them these features she had to be trained and inculcate the training into her practice in order to meet Nigerians’ fashion needs. Babs started business with a limited-edition ready-to-wear clothing line, which still remains the main production line for her business. However, with time, she has expanded this to include a mass production line, which serves other designers and clothing shops around the world. To help her improve on her skill and acquire knowledge on the economic productivity of mass production, Babs enrolled in a course in India. She explains that in “India, I learnt mass production is different from fashion, in UK I learnt fashion”. When asked what she means by “India, I learnt mass production” she explains that producing en masse is different from producing on bespoke and limited-edition ready-to-wear basis. Mass production “is like an assembly line, one person does not finish garment, so you have to train people like that. But if you are trained to do the cutting and the sewing you will not fit in mass production.... Mass production is time-bound, the longer it takes you to do it, the more expensive it becomes”. Thus, she learnt about the process and the economics that guide mass production.

These forms of training, from the local to the three international forms of training is witnessed at the production workshop of Babs. Since her immediate market is Nigerians, she believes her local training was vital because she needed “to understand the African figure, to understand the African need”. Therefore, in making clothes, she understands that “the African woman who is a size 8 but still has hips, boobs, you know we are curvy, so our pattern is tailored towards that”. Her international training broadens her knowledge further to understand that, to make clothes, you start by illustrating your design in a sketch book, engage in pattern drafting and use the draft to cut out the fabric before the pieces are sewn together. Babs has employed different people who work at the different stages of making the clothes. Though she is the main designer, due to the large size of her production, she has a number of workers who help with designing and illustration while others help with the other functionalities. Babs has one of the biggest establishments in this study with over twenty workers. The factory is equipped with high technological and sophisticated machines that has different functions. She walked us through the factory, showing us different machines and their functions, for instance “this machine here is for making boxers (male under pants), we produce everything (see figure 8.4) .... All the machines here are computerised, it sews more advance, it is faster”. Her reason for

investing in these equipment is that, her “outfits should meet the standard of imported outfit”. Thus, she aims at delivering quality outfits that meet global standards, pitching her products competitively against clothes around the world.

Babs is not just practicing what she studied but has set up a school that trains people interested in clothing production business. She believes one of the major challenges of the fashion industry is “skilled labour, getting people to understand what you mean”. Therefore, the training school is to aid in training people to appreciate and use the required global standards in fashion production. Her curriculum reflects a combination of her training background, perhaps with the exception of mass production techniques. The courses are structured in three levels and each level is holistic training of a complete skill which is employable. Therefore, the furtherance of courses from lower level to upper levels is at the discretion of the trainee. Babs seeks change and standardisation in Nigerian fashion production. She argues that, in competing with global brands, the Nigerian designer must be conscious of global tenets that underscores clothing production while knowledge of local preference and culture should be added advantage. Thus, people “need to be trained properly so that they can do things the standard way, not the Nigerian way”. Doing things the standard way is a form of branding your business to compete with global brands. Therefore, emerging designers need to take “branding” seriously, while she calls for “cheaper media for [that can help in] branding Nigerian fashion”. Branding takes many forms from giving a name to your product to projecting fashion or societal ideologies through your clothes. Therefore, we begin discussion of the emerging structures in contemporary fashion production in Lagos with branding.

### **8.1 Branding**

The concept of brand is a very crucial feature when it comes to fashion consumption. Nigerians are ‘brand people’, therefore, all designers start off by adopting names that serve as a brand identity for their businesses. Nigerian society is fashioned more along the cultural authority function theory of consumer relationship with brands, though we can also trace attitude function authority feature among the people (Sonmez et al., 2013). The society, as discussed in chapter four, is obsessed with brands, therefore a vital step to stake market approval for a product is to build company brand. The idea of building a brand is not something we can associate with many businesses in Africa much less the fashion industry. Seamstresses and tailors often operated informally and do not register their businesses. At best, they tend to name their shops after themselves and do not use the name as a marketing tool. However, designers

in this study pay particular attention to the company name which invariably serves as brand names. They project a more national or global market instead of seamstresses and tailors' community approach and therefore they consciously build business brands that can go beyond community patronage. With the help of the media and other national platforms, they are turning their businesses into national brands.

As new entrants into an old established industry, adopting a name for your business is the first step to brand building. The names adopted range from owner's names to names that reflect the vision of the business or the kind of product on offer or a combination of these three. Babs believes brand name should speak to the services they offer in a fashion heightened society like Nigeria, thus the acronym "OSC Fashion [which] stands for One Stop Celebration" that depicts the concept on which the company is built: to offer outfits that are show-stoppers and are celebrated wherever the wearer goes. In another vein, Gee attaches the line of production to the initial of his name to form the business' brand name "G Bespoke, that is my brand name" tells you of the service he offers. There are others, who like the seamstresses and the tailors use just their full name as the brand name without such as "Ejiro Amos Tafiri". This is her full name that serves as the brand name for her business. Aside the names used, most respondents fashion their brand names into logos that is unique to the specific brand. These logos are used as tags or labels on the products of the designer. The dominant visible application of the brand names by designers is to make them into tags and labels in their clothes. This is to communicate to customers the genuineness of the product they are buying.

The idea of brand goes beyond name of company or even company logo and designers are aware of the demand to build a comprehensive business brand. For that, designers move further to include other strategies that make them stand out in the Nigerian society as well as the international market. It is market language, a form of business communication about the product (Schutte, 1969). According to Cayla and Arnould (2008), however a brand is perceived, there is a cultural factor of context that influences its establishment. Therefore, in talking about brand, this culture should be acknowledged. Thus, "to talk of brands as cultural forms is to acknowledge that branding is a specific form of communication, which tells stories in the context of products and services, addresses people as consumers, and promises to fulfil unmet desires and needs" (Cayla and Arnould, 2008:86). Some brands have attained national recognition while others have global recognition. National brands are companies that have national coverage in their home countries (Schutte, 1969), while global brands are brands "found in multiple countries but marketed in a centrally coordinated or as a brand with at least

20 % of its sales in each of three regions—North America, Asia and Europe” (Sonmez et al., 2013). Supposed global brands are not independent or universal brands that do not have roots in any specific culture. According to Cayla and Arnould (2008), global brands such as Coca Cola or Nike developed out of a local culture before it attained global prominence. Nigerian designers are aiming for a global market niche and therefore are developing themselves for the challenge. On this premise, having a brand name and sticking it out as logos and tags is the first step they are taking to put themselves out in the public with the hope of building themselves into national international brands. Chris has observed that, even though there are good fashion works in Lagos, acknowledged globally, the city or perhaps the Nigerian country does not have national brands that is easily associated with the country. In his experience as a fashion designer, he has realised that:

there is no national brand in Nigeria. When you go to France for instance there are standard bearing national brands like Louis Vuitton, Hermes, when you go to the US we talk of Ralph Lauren, Levi Strauss, Wrangler, these are national brands, so with Italy’s Georgios Armani, Versace, these are brands that has conquered their local economy and are looking for other territories to conquer, but in Africa it is not same, some have not even conquered their state, some brands are not known, in their small spaces.

(Chris)

He believes as invigorators producing contemporary fashion, there is the need to consciously build lasting brands that can be associated with the country on the global platform. This zeal to build lasting national brands is foregrounded by the knowledge that “we have not had a business in this part of the world that has lived for 100 years even in Nigeria”. Businesses spring up and fold up with time either through bad management or the demise of the owner. Therefore, there is the need to build lasting brands that does not necessarily revolve around just the owner.

Moving from brand names to incorporate non-material elements, thus, building business that goes beyond the owner, other designers’ brand is built on business philosophy. Respondents with this background, report on communicating this philosophy through their services or using them as slogans for their business. Zena believes that in a competitive market like Lagos, you need to offer a balance of quality and affordability to customers therefore, she operates on the

principle of “trying to project our way of clothing to the world in a very wearable and cosmopolitan way. And...making people look good without actually breaking the bank”. This reflects in her designs where she uses indigenous fabrics to make global relatable designs at affordable prices. She believes this is the brand she is building, and that it has over the years resonated with her customers, who have come to appreciate her products. According to Zena, her prices are relatively moderate, and that her products can therefore be purchased by people across different social and economic classes. Thus, she says even when

Mrs. Babangida, bless her soul was alive I used to cater for her and you know you get people saying, `oh you must be charging her millions` I said no, I wish I could, but because she is who she is doesn't mean I will charge her different, she pays what everybody else pays.

Thus, in keeping with her philosophy of “looking good without breaking the bank” she sets her prices such that the wives of Presidents and the President’s aide can afford it.

Designers are conscious of putting the Nigerian fashion on the global map therefore, they aim at, as Eji stated, “always wanted to play on that international level, I never thought of myself as a Nigerian designer, I thought of myself as a Nigerian and I am a designer, period”. Reibstein (2005) states that “for a global brand to be a true global brand, it must also be consistent, not just in name, but in position and what it offer[s]” (p. 176 cited in Cayla and Arnould, 2008:93). Therefore, designers are striving to build enduring local brands that can compete on the global market. What is needed is consistency and determination from the designers to continue building because providing consistent brand messages is likely to increase the clarity and credibility of a brand in the minds of consumers (Somnez et al., 2013).

Using the definition of Cayla and Arnould (2008) on the cultural form of brand, I weigh the work of the designers against the three tenets identified; stories of product context, addressing people as consumers and fulfilling unmet desire. First, respondents use the products to tell stories of their context by using local fabrics. Babs and most of the respondents use *Ankara* print or other locally appropriated fabrics or indigenous Nigerian and African fabrics to make their clothes. For her main line, the ready-to-wear, she uses mostly locally identified fabrics like *Ankara*, lace, *aso eke*, George. Her current project during the interview was a mass order of “reversible jacket, you can wear it inside out, inside is tie and dye and the outside is *Ankara*”. Designers’ choice to use mostly local fabrics for their designs is to distinguish themselves from their international competitors who may not have access to these fabrics. Accordingly, she

would not “want to do something you can’t get somewhere else, and I don’t want to start competing with China, I want to showcase our fabric. I am a Nigerian”. These designers challenge themselves to build an international reputation for their business and in so doing they believe one way of distinguishing their products from the many on the global market is to stay true to their context. Thus, though designers are transforming ethno-national uniqueness from its essentialism to fluidity, a process of cultural change that moves product from the local to the global and vice versa, they are also committed to the notion of uniqueness that comes from national or local authenticity of products (Regev, 2007). They want their brands to attain global prominence like some Western brands, however, they believe some of these big brands still hold on to their national uniqueness, therefore, they should not lose their local identity. Nigerian designers are building brands that reflect their local culture while striving to give it a global appeal as well.

In addressing people as consumers, designers are aware of the importance of consumers to their business. In the social production of aesthetic cosmopolitanism, producers are as important as consumers, because just as producers are exposed to adopt or integrate foreign culture into ethno-national culture, consumers through the consumption of aesthetic cosmopolitanism arts are inadvertently open to experience from other cultures (Regev, 2007:126). Consumers’ acceptance of the new ethno-national culture is crucial to the continued production of aesthetics. Thus, between the producer and the consumer, there is a dialectical social production of aesthetic cosmopolitanism. Designers in the study acknowledge the importance of consumers to their brand and therefore address the society as consumers, making them central to all their business decisions. In their daily routine of work, respondents report on how they value the input of customers and see them as the foundation on which their business is built. Tenets such as customer satisfaction and feedback are key to their growth plans. They perceive the public as their general customer base though many of them have a target market for their products. They believe that to maintain market share, an entrepreneur must maintain a good relationship with the public regardless of one’s target market. Zena reports:

I rely heavily on how I relate with my clients and I can tell you I have had clients that have been with me for 10 years, 5 years, it is more like a family base. There are some I have seen their kids from this high [indicating with her hand], they ran around the clothes and do hide and seek and they are now in secondary and universities and things like that and so it is more like a family.

Therefore, participants ensure their brand continue to deliver the products and services which consumers identify and possibly improve on them for better service. With a brand conscious society as Lagos, participants believe the relevance of their business among consumers lies heavily on the “branding-end” of the business, as Babs puts it.

Explaining the third tenet of fulfilling unmet desires, that is one characteristics of aesthetic cosmopolitanism producers. Invigorators of ethno-national uniqueness pick on inspiration from foreign cultures to meet the desires of their society. Aside upgrading national culture with technological expressions from other cultures, this upgrade must meet contemporary cultural desires of society. Therefore, designers’ brands are taking advantage of marketing gaps in the Nigerian fashion industry to meet consumers’ needs. One of these marketing gaps is diversification of production as discussed in previous chapter. Fashion designers have a target market unlike the tailors and seamstresses. Seamstresses and tailors serve a wide range of customers of females and males respectively or sometimes both. Everyone who walks into a seamstress’ shop gets a bespoke dress in days; their customers cut across age, economic and social status. However, the products of the respondents as have been discussed in the previous chapter serve a specific section of the population which they define by their occupation, social class, size or age group. Babs focuses on size, therefore, her brand is noted for the size 8 and above African woman while Eji focuses more on social and economic status, for “the upwardly mobile. The working-class woman Dupe’s target is on age, children below thirteen years. The concentration on a specific group creates an environment of reliability and convenience for the customers. Another gap, the more important one as producers of aesthetic cosmopolitanism is the production of clothes which is a hybridised form of the global and the local using indigenous cloth for western designs and vice versa. Thus, presenting consumers with a taste of foreignness and indigenisation.

Brand building is important in business establishment. While old producers of fashion downplayed its importance in negotiating their market value locally, not to mention globally, the new modernisers of fashion in Lagos attest to the importance of building a strong national brand that will represent the country on international platforms.

## **8.2 Labour Resource**

The traditional system of tailoring in Nigeria and most African societies is structured around the seamstress or the tailor. The master-craftsman, being the tailor or seamstress is mostly the

only trained professional in the business with a number of apprentices who are under their tutelage. These apprentices pay either in cash or kind to be employed by the master-craftsman who will teach them the skill of sewing over three to four years (Ahadzie, 2003). In most cases, the master-craftsman does everything concerning the sewing of outfits from measuring to cutting and sewing. While apprentices are trained, they are trained in the various steps till they acquire all the needed knowledge before they sew a full outfit. Sewing an outfit is a single individual job. One person usually works on an outfit from beginning to the end. Division of labour in the traditional tailoring system is not well defined. As apprentices learn a particular skill, she or he is made to practice with brown sheets to perfect their skill before applying on customer outfits. In many cases, until an apprentice can fully sew an entire outfit, she or he will keep practicing with sheets of paper. According to Gott (2010) works from these sheets of paper are sometimes displayed for advertisement when it is well done. The master-craftsman is immersed in the sewing of every outfit because the reputation of the finished product rests solely on them. Since most of the workers are not qualified professionals to work on their own, they cannot be left in charge of the sewing. Even with the situation of a qualified apprentice, the master-craftsman must still supervise and inspect the quality of work before giving it to the customer.

The form of skill training in traditional tailoring is called the free-hand method of clothing construction. That is “they don’t use patterns in cutting and constructing a garment but rely on their tape measure and expertise to ensure that the garment will be a success” (Gott, 2010: 23). There are no laid down procedures or methods for teaching apprentices on sewing or designing. This method of training can limit effective training in sewing skills. Langevang and Gough (2012) observed that, sewing training has over the years not gone through much upgrade to match up to changing global trends and techniques. The training system has remained reproductive of the old skills that has been informally handed down from generation to generation. Thus, seamstresses and tailors are poorly exposed to current sewing trends that deviate from the old patterns and skills (ibid). Argenti (2002) also argues that the master-servant relationship embedded in apprenticeship training can deprive some apprentices from gaining the expected knowledge from their training. Training is at the sole discretion of the master-craftsman and therefore not bound by curriculum or sometimes time for training. Some apprentices will take longer years than others in completion since training is also done at different times. Apprentices join at different times, therefore there is no structure of training as different people are at different training stages within the same shop.

To incorporate structure and professionalism, in Ghana,

GNTDA [Ghana National Association of Tailors and Dressmakers] ...has introduced a common registration form, a syllabus which includes some theoretical aspects and a common exam for apprentices. However, the teaching and the exam are still focused on reproducing long standing practical free-hand cutting and sewing skills. During the exam the apprentices have to make a dress based on a paper drawing but there is no testing of theoretical or entrepreneurial skills.

(Langevang and Gough, 2012: 247)

Ogunduliye et al. (2017) report that in Abeokuta, Nigeria, apprentice training of tailors and seamstresses is not regulated by any governing body but is at the discretion of the master-craftsman. However, with qualified trainees “certificate will also be awarded at the end of the training” (ibid) which does not come from any external institution but from the master-craftsman. Thus, apprenticeship training comes with no standardised curriculum or training and in most cases involves no dynamism or change that reflects the changing times. Emerging designers who seek professionalism and set their work against foreign competitors are introducing structure that standardises their work and ensures quality delivery of services.

Emanating from this background, most respondents, similar to Babs’ vision want to introduce structure and professionalism into the cloth making business by adopting some foreign production techniques they acquired through training. Their first step in bringing order into production is to segregate functions and employ different individuals for different function; division of labour in making outfits. Though some designers are still involved in the old way of production that involves one person making a dress from start to finish, a significant proportion of the respondents employ a clear-cut division of labour, where one person or a group of people work on a limited aspect of production, pass it on to another person or group of people to do another aspect and the process goes on. Designers have come to understand and appreciate the need to divide labour and seek for skill for a particular task in production. Hitherto, there was no mention of an illustrator, a pattern drafter, pattern cutters, a machinist, and the like. Fifteen of the eighteen designers interviewed have a business set-up that employs different people for different tasks. The remaining three do everything else except for sewing which they have employed people to do.

Designers understand the complexity of the job and the need for standardisation which is a professional requirement of the contemporary Nigerian fashion industry and so most have structured their businesses to deliver such. This situation is not limited to designers engaged in either limited-edition ready-to-wear or mass production, some of those who produce on bespoke basis also employ the division of labour practice. Typical of this is Gee who does mainly men's bespoke clothing but has employees who do different aspects of the production. "I am the one that creates the design and the CEO too and look for clients too. I have workers because only one person can't do all the work, so I already have the pattern so their work is to use the pattern to cut this and that and making sure it comes out perfectly then we deliver."

To have a labour force involving employees that cover all the partitioned skills in the business also depends on the founder's personal fashion skills and/or the size of the business. Three of the four designers who have no training in fashion depend on employees who have skills in these areas to create an outfit. Even though they are involved in the design of an outfit, they have employed one or more "fashion designers" who assist them to come up with designs. These designers can be employed on contract basis or as full-time employees in the business. Edith, has over the years used contracted designers in cases where she is overwhelmed with workload or need different ideas for her work, therefore, she has "some people who call themselves designers, I use them on contract basis, they come in here, they draw, I buy some or all of their designs." Other participants have permanent staff or a team of designers including those who are trained designers. The employment of people with various skills also depends on the type of production which in turn affects the size of the production team. Considering the large size of Babs' production, she reports on having "a team, we have designers" who support her though she is a trained designer. In the case where a designer has a big business, he or she relies on these different people with different skills to ensure efficiency in production.

The typical factory setting of ready-to-wear producers and mass producers have a division of labour structure that includes at least a designer, a cutter, a machinist, people who make accessories. Big businesses include illustrators and pattern drafters separately but sometimes, the designer combines the role of a designer and illustrator as well as pattern drafter. Illustration, mostly enshrined in the duties of a designer, helps bring the idea of an outfit's design alive, and also makes it easier for the pattern drafters to have a holistic idea of the outfit. Pattern drafters transfer the image of the outfit into technical measurements, mostly on a sheet indicating how each part of the outfit must be cut and shaped. Their work becomes the blueprint for the original outfit. Cutters, then use this blueprint to cut out the fabrics for sewing. Pattern

drafting ensures accuracy in measurement especially when outfits are produced in bulk. The cut-out fabric is then given to machinists who sew the pieces together to make the outfit.

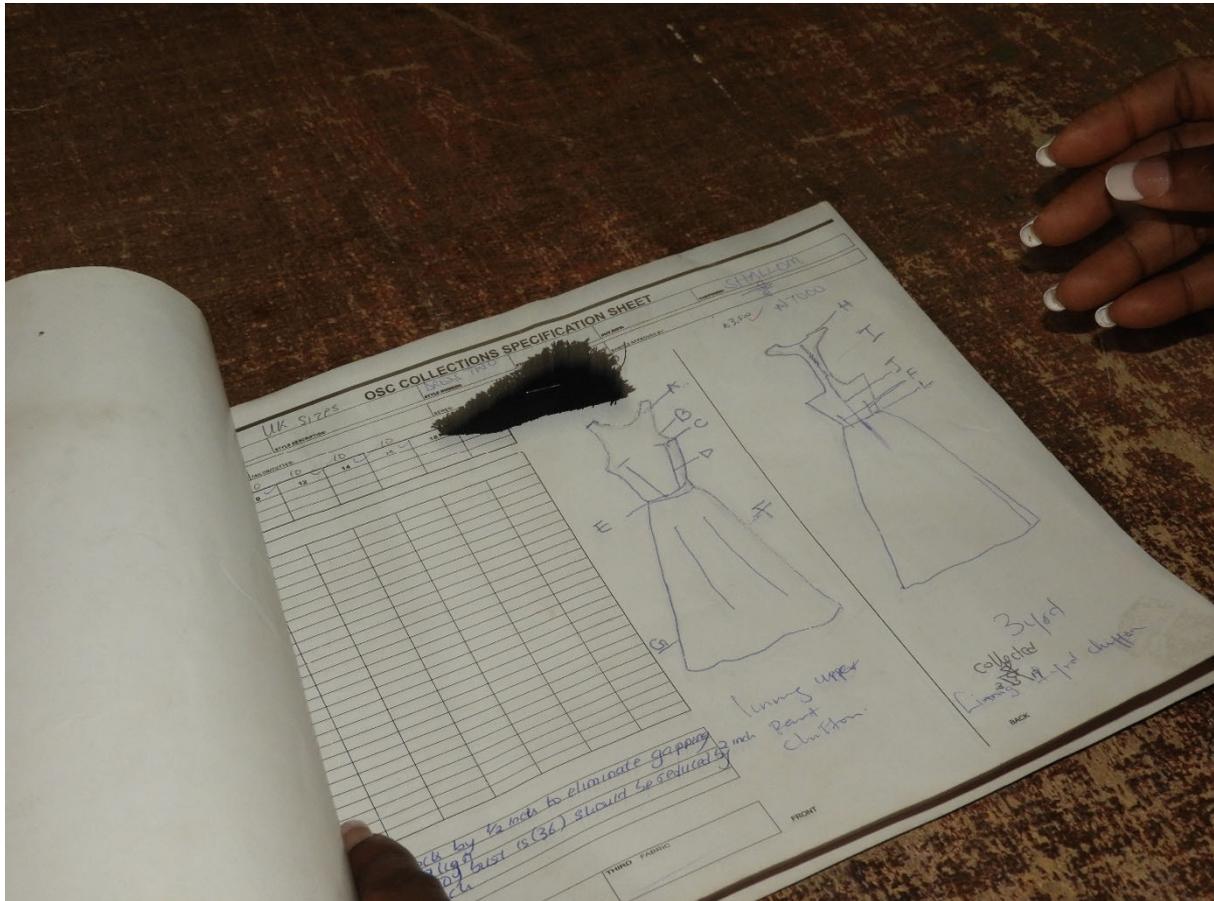


Figure 8.1 Illustration of design by the respondent. Source: A. Bobie

In the case where the founder is well trained to do all tasks, the size of the business will not permit them to work alone or in the case of a small business, they employ skilled machinists (people who sew pieces together). The two designers who are more involved in sewing from start to finish by themselves, sometimes including sewing, employ machinists. They give similar reasons for their involvement as they are particular about the output of their work, therefore, they make sure they give customers what they requested. Until they can trust the skill of their employees, they will not delegate much to them. Therefore, they are training some while they have plans to recruit others when their business gets bigger or when they expand their production line to include ready-to wear or mass production. Notwithstanding, they both have employees who can also make outfits independently in case of overload or can assist them in sewing every outfit.



Figure 8.2 Drafted patterns for an outfit. Source; fieldwork

Another interesting feature of the division of labour in the emerging fashion industry is the employment of administrative and marketing staff. Every designer has a receptionist at his or her office, some even have personal assistants. In bigger businesses such as Babs', the division of labour is highly structured with supervisors and managers. During the interview I was introduced to some of the staff, such as "this is production manager (a man looking like in his late 40s walked by to give instructions to the workers) .... This is Rose, she is the supervisor". These staff are also skilled in one aspect of production or versed in all aspects. This is so because to be a manager or supervisor in a fashion firm involves being able to help in improving the quality of the production through expertise. Some designers also have marketers who go out looking for customers for the company. Joy has structured her business production to include "administrator, we have head of production, the admin combines a lot of functions, she handles our site, she handles sales and marketing." The latter position can also be an added job for the designers. The import of this designers' appreciation of sharing work overload is to improve efficiency in delivery. Such administrative positions improve customer interaction and satisfaction as they are the front liners, or the face of the company. This is a reason why some

designers prefer to take on the administrative jobs themselves, because a hitch in delivery can greatly affect the quality of work and the reputation of the business.

There is a clear sense of the need to get skilled personnel for each task and the appreciation of the importance of their work to the production of outfits. Respondents employ already trained personnel compared to the apprenticeship structure of tailors and seamstresses. This is resulting in structured skill training of upcoming fashion producers. Now, people can be trained in one or two specific tasks rather than the whole process of making outfits as pertains in the traditional apprenticeship system. This also explains the various levels of training in modern fashion schools proliferating in the city of Lagos. It is not compulsory to finish all levels; therefore, each level is charged separately. In case a trainee does not see the need for a particular skill set, he or she can skip it or stop the rest of the training. Since each skill is now employable, one does not need to know all about making an outfit from start to finish to get a job. Thus, one important structural change that is emerging is the establishment of formal fashion training schools. The system of skill training has also witnessed improvement. As discussed in a previous section most of the respondents either have formal education in fashion or attended a private fashion school which is significantly different from the traditional apprenticeship in terms of mode of teaching and curriculum. There are a number of them springing up now to meet the demand for professionalism in the fashion industry and some respondents have responded to the call of training current and future fashion producers of Nigeria.

After witnessing the need to standardise production through developing quality resource labour, six respondents have established fashion training schools. The aim is to train people on the appropriate (global) standard and processes involved in making outfits. This is a standard which they believe is different from the free-hand process of tailors and seamstresses. Most of designers during the interviews complained of the work of traditionally trained employees they have employed as sub-standard to their skills they require, and this is mainly because of poor training of the apprenticeship system. As Dupe put it,

skilled labour for both men and women wear, the quality I want, to get people to do it well, it is very difficult. We moved to this premise in December, the whole of January, February, March, we were interviewing tailors and I got just one and we kept interviewing.

In establishing their own training schools, they intend to impart the knowledge and experience they have acquired from their own formal local and international trainings to the students. This is to assist in improving efficiency and standardization in the fashion industry. With the developments already taking place, the industry needs people with the appropriate and required skills to sustain and further develop the industry and the apprenticeship system seems not to be up for the task. Therefore, like some participants, trained designers are offering formal training to interested people as a way of ensuring quality in service delivery just as foreign competitors. The oldest school among respondents is 10 years old while the newest is a year old.

Their curriculum for teaching has similarities and a few differences reflecting the proprietor's training backgrounds. Three out of the six have formal school foreign training-the UK or/and America- while the other three are Nigerian trained but with top-up Western training. The common skills taught in all schools include designing, pattern drafting, illustration, cutting, sewing, draping. The difference is that the foreign trained designers' schools have more levels of training and their curriculum includes training in draping as a separate course compared to the other three trained in Nigeria. Babs, trained in the UK, America and India, gives a summarised breakdown of her school curriculum:

we have seven levels: level one is N100 000 (\$286), level two is N250 000 (\$714) and each level shows the skill you have acquired. Level one is a simple course, sewing machine approach, you can sew practically everything that is cut and given to you. Level two is pattern makers, so if you want to know how to cut and sew then you have to do level one and two, but if you are a specialist, I just want to be a pattern drafter, then you do level two. If you just want to sew and work for somebody, then you do level one. Then level three is for internship, where we post them to different fashion centres to learn, if they are not satisfied with their skills they can come back for level four, that is advanced pattern drafting, the more intricate designs. We do more like couture dresses, those are the ones who want to be designers. Then level five is area of specialisation, you specialise in an area you select like casual wear, evening wear etc. Level six computer aided design, that is where they teach computer made designs and computer illustration and where you use the software to design. And level seven is draping, draping of mannequin.

Only the participant above talked about putting students in internship programmes as part of their curriculum. However, the other respondents noted that they take interns who most times come from their own school.

The most frequent reason for setting up fashion training schools comes from their difficulty in finding skilled employees who understand and appreciate the technicalities involved in contemporary outfit making. When you happen to find one, retaining them over a long period is difficult because soon they will either leave and establish their own or they will be poached by another designer. This phenomenon is reported by almost all designers. In Shola's words, "to maintain tailors is one of the major challenges we have now in this industry. They can just decide to leave you at any time... you will be disappointed." However, if more people are trained and made to understand that every single skill well developed can make a living for the individual, retention of employees may become easier. Thus, unlike the apprenticeship system where employees are trainees, respondents employ mostly already trained employees in specific skills to handle specific tasks. Unless a trainee is qualified, he or she is not employed by designers. Even interns, as discussed above are qualified trainees in the basic sewing skills as pertains before they are employed.

The qualified age range presented by respondents for enrolment in the fashion schools is between 5 years and 45 years, though the one who takes from 5 years is yet to admit anyone below 15 years within 5 years of establishing. Most designers prefer admitting fresh graduates or working graduates who want side jobs or housewives. The training sessions make room for weekend as well as evening classes for students who cannot attend regular day classes. The basic qualification for enrolment in these schools is polytechnic or university education. Respondents believe that attaining higher education puts the trainee at a better advantage of understanding and appreciating the new standards introduced into the fashion production system. For someone like Joy, she is not willing to even admit apprentice trained people who want to upgrade their skills further. She explains that:

The difference between them [apprentice trained and graduate student] is that learned ones [higher educated students] are open to new things, new ideas where the artisans are like this is what I was taught and even after ten years, they still live by what they are taught but the designer keeps updating themselves and to me there is no limit to fashion in Nigeria.

This reinforces the idea of designers as different from seamstresses. Many of the latter do not have tertiary education, while the former are highly educated. With higher education comes broader knowledge and open mindedness which are good features for understanding the fashion needs of people in present times. Therefore, respondents with schools prefer admitting students with higher education and subsequently employing such students in their companies. The training period for respondents with schools range from three months to two years. Most levels take three months for completion if the trainee is full-time. Part-time students take longer to complete each level.

The size of a business and its productivity level determine the number of employees in the business. The minimum number of employees (excluding the designer who is also the owner) in this study is two. The maximum is over 50 workers. On the average, designers employ 8 to 10 workers and this includes machinists, drafters, and even administrative staff. Some designers also outsource sewing to seamstresses when there is the need for more hands. Edith keeps five permanent workers who are cutters and machinists. She keeps designers and illustrators as contract workers and in the case of an increased workload, she “fall[s] on contract workers instead of keeping them in the hope that some work will come”. These contract workers are mostly seamstresses and tailors who use the pattern draft of her permanent employees, thus serving as basically machinists who sew her designs together. Edith falls on these contract workers only when she is contracted to produce en masse. Contracting workers in times of increased workload is better in managing production costs of the businesses because in the case of Edith such contracts are not permanent; to keep the worker permanently is a cost to the business. However, respondents like Tese, Babs and Funmi keep a high number of employees: 16, more than 20 and more than 50 respectively. Tese produces bespoke and ready-to-wear clothes, Babs has both ready-to-wear and mass-production lines while Funmi produces across all three types.

Division of labour in production is a new phenomenon in Nigerian fashion production. Emerging designers appreciate the need for quality control and efficiency and therefore have structured production to elicit such qualities in their business. Employing different individuals for different tasks with high skill training ensures standardisation of production and efficiency in service delivery. To ensure these qualities are well established and developed, some designers have established training schools with defined curriculum that trains students in different skills effectively. Due to the division of labour in production, each trained skill is employable, regardless of the level of training. In maintaining professionalism and high

standard of delivery, most designers prefer admitting university graduates in their schools and subsequently in their companies. They argue that high education comes with better appreciation of the standards they intend to promote in the industry.



Figure 8.3 Part of the workshop of Babs who has more than twenty workers. Source: A. Bobie

### 8.3 Workspaces

Aesthetic cosmopolitanism starts with the taste for cultures of other countries different from one's own and these culture during production influences the work of the producer (Regev, 2007:126). Producers transpose cultural elements from cultures foreign to theirs and fuse it with their own culture as a means of upgrading the local culture to be active part of the global field (Regev, 2007). Emerging designers are adopting the culture of separating workshop or factory sites of production from retail shops of products by putting up separate building or multipurpose building in which the two sites are physically separated. Previously, the workspaces of seamstresses and tailors are normally rented or owned wooden or metal kiosks situated away from their houses or in their compounds. Hardly do seamstresses and tailors put up a building for the sole purpose of running their clothing business (Ogunduyile et al., 2017).

However, it is observed that most designers in this study occupy a whole building that serves as ‘factory’ and/or retail shop either owned or rented. Except for two designers, the rest use their buildings as both a retail and workshop. Maufe after few years of working, decided to get a building that will serve as both a workshop and a retail shop. She “built fully the House of Maufechi about 20 years ago but I started 35 years ago”. Initially, for lack of funds to rent or build a spacious facility for separate service delivery of production and sales, she was forced to operate as the local seamstresses. After fifteen years of working, the business was expanding, and having been United Kingdom trained in fashion, she decided to implement some of the structural organisation in production and delivery, therefore, she built the house in which she currently operates. I visited her and had my first-hand experience of how she uses the place. It is a two-storey building. The ground floor serves as a lobby area with a receptionist and a spacious retail shop that includes dressing rooms. The retail shop is brightly decorated with colours and fabrics, chairs and mirrors. Clothes are stacked neatly on racks in rolls according to designs or fabric colours. Through our conversation, I discovered the second floor serves as the production area while the last floor serves the dual purpose of store area and production. I found similar arrangement with Eji, who also operates from a one-storey building: ground floor for lobby and retail and the second floor for production. She had an out-house that serves as a training school. Maufe and Eji informed me they own the houses in which they operate. There are others such as Tese who operate from a three storey but is renting. The building serves as retail, production site as well as training school with other detached houses serving as hostels. Growth of business compelled Tese to move from her garage space in her house to rent a three-storey building for both production and retailing. Others who are renting are in the process of building their own personal space which they believe is cost efficient and the growth of the business demands a bigger space. Although Babs occupies a two storey-building, she believes the business has outgrown the space, therefore, she is “about to open a semi-automated machine factory, we are moving to a bigger factory, purpose built, solar panels, it’s automated so that we can really do our mass production as well as meet our international market demand.” Operating out of one’s own premises cuts down overhead costs, not just with production sites but also with retail shops and other subsidiary businesses such as the training school. In most cases, the production site also serves as retail shops for many designers, however, some rent additional retail shops either in Lagos or outside Lagos. Four designers have retail shops outside Lagos in addition to their main retail shops in Lagos. Training schools are also often sited on the same premise as the workshop, however, there are two respondents who have separate buildings for the training school. Some respondents have sited their production

facilities separate from their retail shop. A case in point is Ken who has his workshop on the outskirts of the city for easy access to electricity for production. His retail shop is, however, in the city of Lagos.

Opening of retail shops in various locations in one city or different cities is a means of offering accessibility and convenience of shopping to customers. There is also the use of courier services to transport clothes to customers who cannot access their shops. Similar to the operations of most multinational fashion companies, participants are detaching clothing production from clothing sales, that is, having different premises for production and retail. Separate retail business is relatively new as it goes beyond the traditional system of sewing that is tied to one location, forcing customers who want access to service to travel far and near to the production location. Retail shops work mostly for producers of ready-to-wear and mass production. However, bespoke producers also have retail shops at their production site, well defined and separate from the workshop. They showcase finished clothes of customers for advertisement and also serve as the service delivery area. Chris, who runs a bespoke line but has a well-designed retail shop attached to his production site explains that, “I am a service organisation not just a fashion designer in a clothing company so one thing is to deliver on time, accessibility and delivery and I believe these are my advantages.” Designers believe the separation of these two sites of service is a progressive way of offering better accessible services to customers. The backstage of production (factory production) is obscured from consumers unlike the traditional system. Consumers are preview to the finished product which in most cases meet their satisfaction. Some designers even offer home services like Edith who says “there are clients who have never stepped here at all, I go to them, they give me their fabric, I do it for them and I take it back to them, about five of them.” Thus, though customers can be integral in the production of their clothes through feedback and suggestions, their presence is limited at the production unit unlike the traditional system where the production process is easily accessible to customers. Therefore, just as you can walk into an H&M shop and buy clothes without foreknowledge of the process involved in the production, so do designers of these services offer their customers the convenience of clothes shopping in Nigeria.

In Nigeria, customers’ opinions and feedback significantly shape the production process. This has been the hallmark of the relationship between seamstresses and their customers. Thus, though emerging designers are adopting foreign strategies to meet the contemporary consumer’s need for convenience and accessibility through establishing retail shops, this

culture continues to guide their customer relationship. In retail shops, designers are intentional in providing personal, conducive and comfortable services to customers when they patronise the shop. All respondents with retail shops provide air-conditioners with comfortable chairs for customers. Retail shops we visited are spacious with a lobby for waiting. At the retail shops, there are demarcated fitting areas where customers can try on their clothes before buying. As has been mentioned earlier, all designers operate from large buildings. To have such facilities to serve customers is their main motivation for opting for such space. At two interviews, we were served water as we waited for the participant to be interviewed. According to the designers, these services add to the reputation of the business; it creates an impression of convenience, respect for customers and seriousness. Sales staff interact politely with customers to elicit feedback on services which are conveyed to the designers for review.

Some participants have taken retailing beyond the borders of Nigeria to include neighbouring African countries, Europe and America. They partner with agents in foreign countries to sell their products. These agents may own a shop or sell through personal contacts in their countries of residence. They request production in bulk which is delivered through courier services or the agent comes personally to Nigeria to make orders and take along. Three designers have this arrangement. Maufe speaks of how she has “somebody who sells my outfits in Chicago”. Dupe’s arrangement is a little different she does not “know if I should call her a stockist in the UK, she gets from us and she advertises her own there for people in UK.” Others, like Edith work for a number of individuals abroad and not necessarily through agents or stockists, thus, “there are some in Orlando, almost all of them now, they will gather cloth together, they will mail it to me, I can get about 20 or 30 at a time and I will mail it back to them.” The cost of mailing back is normally added to the charge for the making of the outfit. There are others who send it through their relations or friends. For Ibile, aside the mailing when “somebody comes to Nigeria by the time I finish the job, the person might help to get it back to the owner.” African designers are making their stake in the global space by marketing across continents. They are taking advantage of technology and modern transport systems to market goods worldwide. A similar case was revealed about young fashion entrepreneurs in Ghana who have shops and agents in foreign countries (Bobie, 2017).

Participants have demarcated their workspaces to reflect contemporary sales and marketing strategies in the fashion industry. The workshop is usually in the back while the retail shops which showcase the finished products are in the front. Unlike the traditional system, customers are not exposed to the practical aspect of outfit making, they are shielded from the skill and

individuals behind their products and are only exposed to the final products. Though this arrangement denies customers' integral involvement in their outfit making, a hallmark of the traditional system, it makes production and presentation easier. Customers rely on the producers' credibility and skill though they cannot see the process. Designers, on the other hand, use a customer feedback mechanism in the retail shops to maintain a semblance of the traditional system of producer-customer relations.

#### **8.4 Equipment**

The transposition of expressive technologies from foreign cultures by cultural producers of aesthetic cosmopolitanism can take the form of both tangible and intangible elements. Though the above discovered "schemas" may fall under intangible elements of the fashion culture, this section talks about the adoption of equipment-tangible element. As shown in the immediate picture above, participants have upgraded from using manual sewing machines to industrial, automated sewing machines. Though some started their businesses with manual machines, they have replaced them with the industrial machines as the business grows and demand for quality increases. The number and sophistication of equipment used depends on the size of the business and type of production. Designers who make solely bespoke dresses use fewer numbers of sewing machines and accessories equipment. The three mass production businesses have the highest number of machines and most sophisticated equipment for cutting, embellishing, and sewing. Some of their equipment are computerised with high-tech operations.

Using industrial machines is beneficial in producing neat quality work that helps to stay competitive on the international market. Some computerised machines like the immediate one above can "sew every material, you can adjust the setting to suit every material, the speed, the fineness, and all" says Babs. Different machines are used for different purposes and designers understand the need to get the right machine for the appropriate job. Their aim is to build a global competitive brand and therefore, they are particular about the quality of their output. They assert that these machines can cost twice as much as the manual sewing machine, however, investment in sophisticated sewing machines ensure proper finishing of work. The machines sew faster though they consume high electricity adding to the cost of production. There are vendors who sell these sophisticated machines on the Nigerian market although some respondents buy from either Europe or America.

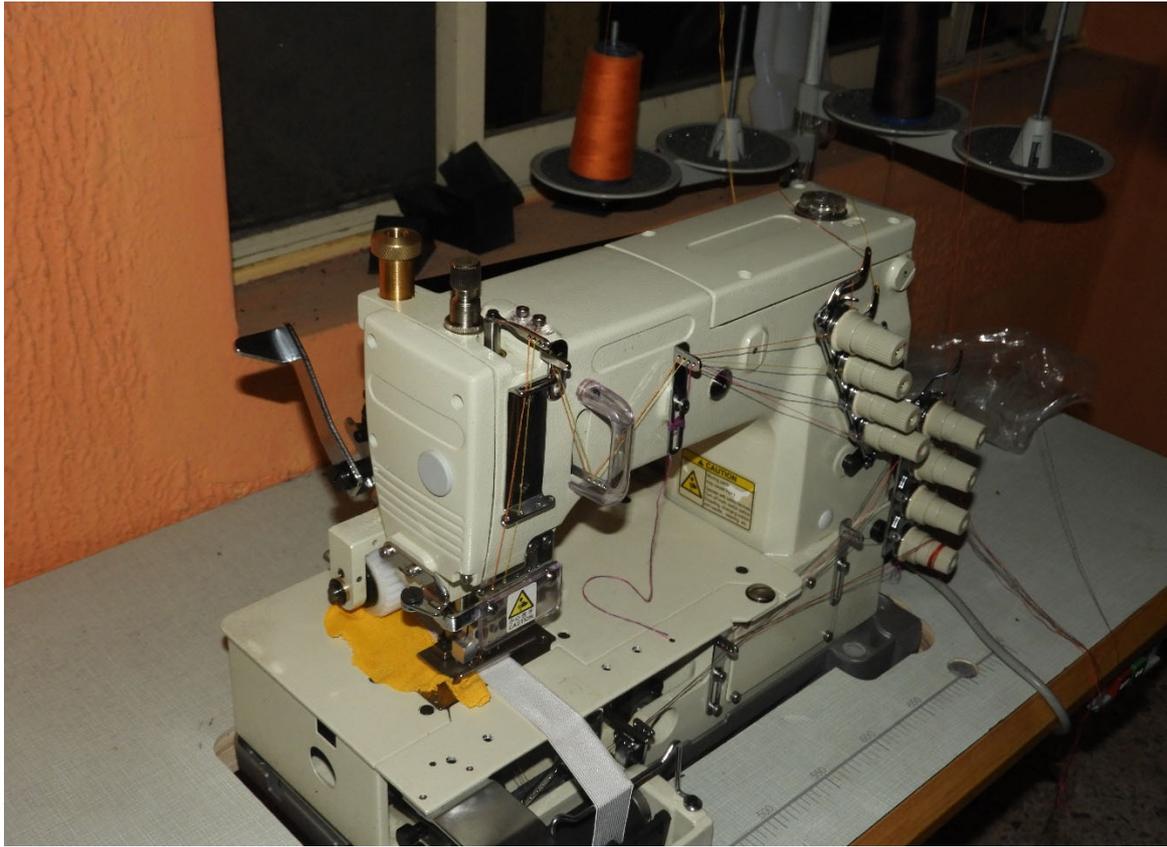


Figure: 8.4 A machine for making boxers. Source: A. Bobie



Figure: 8.5 Adjustable computerised machine. Source: A. Bobie

Just as there are machines for sewing various types of outfits, there are other upgraded machines used for embroidery. Embroidery making is integral to Nigerian fashion and within the traditional system of clothing production, embroidering is a skill quite separate from that of sewing. Clothes are sent from tailors and seamstresses with specific instruction on design or sometimes designs are left to the discretion of the embroider. Embroiders also follow trends in shaping their patterns and designs, though the study did not focus much on this group of skilled workers. The reigning embroidery designs is the use of stones (blinks) and bead. Instead of using an outsourced embroider, most respondents employ embroiders permanently in their business who either manually make the embroidery design or as observed in big businesses operate the embroidery machine. The use of beads and stones for designing is called embellishing, instead of embroidery since they use embroidery mostly for thread designs. Agbada and sometimes kaftans are embroiled with threads as designs. When beads or stones are used, it is termed embellishment. Below is a picture of the embellishment machine use for stones and bead embroidery.



Figure:8.6 Embellishing machine, it operates better with high quality accessories. Source: A. Bobie

Using these high-tech, sophisticated machines affects the cost of outfits. The higher the sophistication of equipment used, the higher the consumption of energy to power it. In a country like Nigeria where state supply of electricity is not guaranteed, every designer generates their power using generators. Fuelling the generator is more expensive than using state provided electricity. Also, these machines can only take "authentic" or high-grade accessories; thus, designers cannot use just any ordinary accessory on the market. All of this adds to the cost of the final product.

The use of these equipment also requires highly skilled personnel who can operate them. This is another reason for skill training which is more detailed and comprehensive at each level of tuition compared to the apprenticeship system. The current production of high fashion by contemporary designers is ensuring the development of highly structured production systems. The presence of highly educated professionals in the fashion industry has seen the development of professionalism and standardisation in the industry. As actual production processes have been enhanced, there are other interrelated changes which have been affected and the next sections will analyse them.

### **8.5 Advertising**

Babs stated succinctly that, for better branding of local fashion producers, there is the need to develop "cheaper media for branding", which will help market products to consumers both home and abroad. Designers of the study are adopting global fashion commercial ideas in advertising and selling their products in their society and across countries. Advertising is a strong feature of marketing in any business, and fashion is no exception. Little is known about advertising in the traditional fashion industry aside the use of word-of-mouth and sometimes signboards and signposts. While participants acknowledge the effectiveness of these old strategies especially at the beginning of business, they also admit that society has changed tremendously in the last two decades, and business entities are changing their marketing strategies to meet the demands of society. The issue of visibility or advertisement of products revealed intriguing perspectives on the work of designers. With the introduction and wild spread of internet, the major tool used for advertisement in the Nigerian fashion industry is social media; Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, and WhatsApp. These social media platforms serve as online communities of people with various interests of which consumption plays a major role. It has been attested that "online communities offer an opportunity for organisations to have a better customer relationship management system" (Hajli, 2014: 389). Therefore,

businesses are using more personal, interactive marketing approaches that helps them deal directly with customers and also get feedback about their products.

Aside upgrading their skill through Youtube channels, most respondents talk of how they are taking advantage of social media technology and other internet services to make their products visible to the public. All designers except for one does not use social media as a means of advertisement. What respondents who use social media do is to take pictures of made outfits on mannequins or customers in their outfits and put it up on their social media pages and according to them this is an easy way to elicit quick response on sale or criticism or appraisal of their work from audience all over the world. Tese is “so happy with technology, social media and the whole internet. It is helping our work to get better you don’t need to own a showroom to sell your brand.” Respondents are quick to refer you to their social media pages when you ask for some of their works. Thus, when I asked Gee if I could get pictures of his finished works, he quickly asked, “are you on Instagram? When I answered in affirmative, he replied “then look for my page, you will see a lot of clothing.” Another respondent does not just advertise but communicates about her collections to customers through social media and therefore customers look out for announcements of new collection through social media. So, as Eve puts it, to know if she “creates new things, you can check on my Instagram page.” Rhoda whose customers are mainly students, believes the sure way of reaching them is through the internet. She adds: “the students, the website, the Instagram handle, everything work hand in hand. How to get our students is majorly through the internet, the advert that goes on and you know one thing about the internet is believability.” She explains believability as a means of building trust of your brand such that customers will believe what is displayed because when they order for it, they receive as displayed. Building trust through consistency in showcase and delivery adds credence to the business. It is argued that the consistency of brand messages increases the clarity and credibility of a brand in the minds of consumers (Cayla and Arnould, 2008) and to Rhoda, this can be achieved through the consistent display of works on social media. Therefore, to maintain customers, you must take the products to where the customers can see and she believes in this day the internet has become a big platform for showcasing, advertising and selling of products and services.

The introduction of technology into business management has brought in a whole new dimension to trading called electronic commerce (e-commerce), which simply means buying and selling via internet. Today’s consumers have access to many different sources of information and experiences, which have been facilitated by other customers’ information and

recommendations (Hajli, 2014: 388). The internet provides a global platform for trading where individuals can trade across countries and continents at ease. Therefore, to advertise through the internet ensures a wide range of business coverage and possible patronage of products. The further introduction of Web 2.0 has transformed the internet into a social environment in which consumers interact with themselves and with businesses (ibid). Thus, “by utilising the social aspect of the web, social media marketing is able to connect and interact on a much more personalised and dynamic level than through traditional marketing” (Naidoo, 2011:3). Hajli (2018) identifies the various benefits of social media trade to firms as enhanced brand popularity, facilitating word-of-mouth communication, increasing sales, sharing information in a business context and generating social support for consumers (pp 388).

Some designers acknowledge the importance of internet early in their business and therefore, created business websites. They attest to the benefits they have received in terms of trading and exposure. In trading, some have received orders for sales from people who came across their websites and live either in Nigeria or outside the country. Babs’ mass production unit gets orders mostly through internet, through their website and social media platforms as “people see our clothes online, contact us” she reports. In terms of exposure, Eji’s account gives a succinct perspective on the benefits of online presence for business, especially in the initial stages:

My first international trip I got my fashion program in Mauritius, I got it online within first nine months of starting. That was because they were looking for designers to represent Nigeria and they saw my website and they liked my stuff and decided to contact me, so, at that time it was all about website and I really went all out with my website so when I got that deal, I was like, yes! Goal!

The usefulness of the internet for their business cannot be overemphasized. It has broadened their client base and coverage. Because the internet has no geographical boundary, designers’ work can be accessed across the world and most of their foreign based customers deal with them via the internet. Most of the images in this thesis were also obtained from respondents’ websites or social media pages. During fieldwork, most respondents referred me to the social media handles whenever I asked to take pictures of their work. Therefore, while writing, I downloaded pictures from their pages, sent them a message for permission to use specific pictures and got approval from all of them. The pictures downloaded are of much higher quality

than those I took so the fact that these designers use social media is of great advantage not just to them but to me as a researcher as well.

A second effective medium of advertisement mentioned by respondents is fashion events. It can be fashion events organised at a local, national or international level. Fashion events are great avenues for exposure because it brings together fashion lovers from all over the world. Fashion events are either organised on an individual basis or as a part of a regional or national show. Though almost all respondents have taken part in at least one national fashion event since the set-up of their business, many have withdrawn from participation because of the cost involved and disorganisation of the event, they report. They therefore organise their own exhibitions and fashion shows on their work premises. Zena has “over the years, every year I [she] have been having my own shows”. Eve has also adopted the same strategy where she “do[es] my own work, call my clients to come and view and to buy.” This saves them the stress of planning to participate in a national event and the cost that comes with it. Ibile, shares how the prohibitive fees cost him participation in a show the year before in the following words: “hmm, I do not engage in fashion shows, last year when we wanted to engage in a fashion show they were requesting about N100 000 and before we realised it was late”. Participation in fashion shows, especially runways, requires the use of models, which according to some respondents makes the event even more expensive and therefore dampens their interests. It also comes with the pressure of making many outfits for the show that can slow down business production to customers since all efforts are channelled into preparing for the event. These factors and more were reasons why some designers expressed their displeasure in participating in national fashion programmes in Nigeria.

However, to others, these shows, and events are the backbone of the Nigerian fashion industry. The international attention and exposure the industry enjoys results from the platform presented by these national fashion shows to showcase the work of designers, either old or upcoming talents. Eji acknowledges the efforts of organisers of these events and how they are shaping the international discourse on fashion from Africa in contemporary times. She states her pleasure by giving “kudos to people who are organising a lot of fashion events, that really helped upcoming designers so, people like LDFW (Lagos Designers and Fashion Week), African Fashion Week, Nigeria, I am trying to get the right acronym because there is African fashion week in SA (South Africa).” Babs is present at almost every fashion show in Nigeria, and though she acknowledges that it can be stressful and sometimes not profitable, she believes that as new entrants into the global fashion space, such shows are great platforms for exposure.

These fashion events are not limited to Nigeria. Some respondents have had the opportunity to participate in foreign international shows, Eji cited that, “we’ve shown our collections in fashion shows around the world. Lagos fashion week in Nigeria, Malawi fashion week, in Cote d’Ivoire, Senegal. Others have also taken [been to] shows in European and American countries.” Many believe that such international exposure has greatly impacted their professional image and business. London Fashion Week, Milan Fashion Week, Paris Fashion Week and the New York Fashion Week are the most notable fashion events in the world. They bring together the renowned fashion designers across the world to showcase their products. To be invited to such functions adds immensely to the credibility of the designer. Respondents like Babs, Zena, Eji, Edith, Ken, Joseph and many more have had the opportunity to participate in these renowned fashion shows.

Some respondents have had the opportunity to participate in these renowned international fashion events for close to ten years. One of them, Zena shares her experience as follows, “I remember the first time we did the mullet thing, the style which is shortened front and long at the back, the first time we presented that was 2009 at the couture fashion week in New York, and how many years down the line, it’s like 8 years ago” Zena. According to her, she introduced a trend at the event which has now become the craze of fashion around the world. She had a few more global interactive fashion programmes lined up on her calendar during the time of the research:

Since last year I have been fortunate to have quite a few attentions, I got an email from the council of designers from America, they wanted to rate my work, I got other offers to come for various fashion weeks as in London fashion week. I had the option of London, America or Paris, each of the fashion weeks.

Two designers added that they have had the opportunity to join the organising team of fashion events in Europe, a step further for international networking and exposure. Tese recounts that she has “even joined in organising some of the fashion shows in UK” and these events exposed her brand to international consumers. Designers who have not had such experience express plans of getting themselves onto the international fashion scene in the coming years.

Designers disclosed that their participation in these international fashion events is based on individual merit. They get an invitation mostly after organisers notice their work on the internet. In interviewing the President of the Fashion and Design Association of Nigeria, she

noted the association's initiative of creating such international opportunities for their members and sponsoring their trips. They usually have such openings in China and other African countries and since they are an organised body, they are able to liaise with other national bodies for such opportunities for their members. Engaging in such international fashion events also afford designers the opportunity to "play at the international level" (Eji) being globally competitive and putting their ethno-national culture on the global field.

Since the beginning of the last decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, there has been the organisation of well-known fashion events on the African continent. We can talk of Carnival of Dakar, Fédération Africaine des Créateurs, Festival International de la Mode Africaine (FIMA) (Jennings, 2011) and quite recently the Africa fashion Week in South Africa and the Lagos Design and Fashion Week. All these are in an effort to showcase the creativity and innovativeness emerging on the continent and also to bring together African fashion designers. This will help the continent put up a strong showing on the global fashion market, where the works of designers can be acknowledged.

Another marketing strategy designers rely heavily on is the use of family and friends as free "models" for their outfits, especially in the initial stages of the business. The old marketing strategy of word-of-mouth advertising is still relevant in the Nigerian fashion industry. Respondents report making clothes for family and friends for social events such as church weddings, naming ceremonies often for free. This becomes a form of advertisement where friends and relations refer potential customers who show interest in their outfit. Some designers also use customers; thus, they charge them less and arrange for commission per each customer they bring. These customers can be "strangers" who walked in to get an outfit for the first time or regular customers. Similar arrangements can be made with friends and relatives as well. Almost all designers interviewed did this "relations and friends" advertisement once at a point during the start-up of the business. They explained that adopting this type of advertisement is not necessarily lack of money to invest in other media, however, the use of this medium gets potential clients close to the reality of what to expect when they patronise your service. For Tese, she "needed to show them [customers] what I do but I didn't want to take money from them, so, what I did was like a free sewing bonanza. People came in, I picked not more than two fabrics from those that came, and I made it for free. So, it was like a catching point". Thus, relying on social media and models at fashion shows, especially at the initial stage of the business, may seem far removed from customers and abstract, compared to when a potential

customer meets an actual customer, it reinforces the capability of the designer in the minds of the potential customer.

The less used but very effective medium is clothing celebrities. This marketing strategy is very effective in Western countries where celebrities are endorsed by companies, becoming the face of their product and brand image. Four designers in this study make clothes for celebrities in the movie and music industries in Nigeria. They believe that to dress a celebrity for an important public event is an endorsement of the quality of product and the skill of the designer behind the outfit. Though none of the participants report on the use of a particular celebrity as brand image, they have consistent celebrity customers they serve. Local and in some cases international celebrities' patronage of designers' products is great exposure for designers and the industry. Celebrities in the entertainment industry are the most used as fashion icons for designers' brands because these people pull crowd from around the world, taking advantage of the international recognition Nigerian movie and music industries are enjoying. Recently in May 2018, Chimamanda Ngozi launched her "wear made in Nigeria" campaign on the internet where henceforth (though she started before the month of May) she will appear in public in outfits made by Nigerian designers. Often these celebrities are clothed for free but the commercial benefit that comes with clothing them outweighs the cost of the dress.

Tese attests to the commercial and financial benefit of celebrity advertisement and therefore goes further to sign contracts between six months and two years with celebrities where she caters for all their clothing needs for public events and sometimes casual outfits as well. That is:

We clothe people, do wardrobe for people, we do yearly contracts, sometimes we do quarterly, even two to three years contracts. About 20 people we clothe for two years and they pay you before you even start the job. So, we have got to that point where you don't really tell or know that our customers are in the movie industry or are more of the celebrities or more of xyz but more in the entertainment industry.

Aside the four who make clothing for celebrities on a regular basis, almost all the other designers have at one point or the other made clothes for a celebrity. Making clothes for celebrities is normally on request basis as designers request to sponsor a celebrity for an occasion.

Designers believe clothing celebrities give a boost to their integrity. Though respondents believe the idea of getting a model to do a photoshoot for their internet page or other media forum is a good idea, only one designer who runs a modelling business uses models frequently. All the others decline their use, reasoning that the cost is relatively expensive. Gee, has turned himself into a model, organises photoshoots using himself and puts it up as an advertisement. He explains that “the money models are charging is expensive, so I just decided to use myself. I am just trying to be a model (laughing), God has beautified me with good looks, slim and tall”.

Respondents are combining traditional methods of advertising – clothing friends for referrals - with modern technology to advertise and market their products. They are also incorporating Western models of advertising such as fashion shows. Respondents’ ambition to reach customers across the world and build a reputable, competitive local fashion industry has led to the adoption of old and new fashion marketing strategies by respondents.

### **8.6 Building An Ecosystem of Fashion Industry**

When the respondent who gave opening quote started that “the dynamic and the mechanics about fashion are just about setting in” she meant far more than just adopting direct production techniques and cultural element of fashion into the local space. The dynamics and mechanisms, as we have seen includes marketing and sale strategies aside the practical production. There is the other side of building an interrelated and connected industry that includes other professions that are directly or indirectly related to social production of cultural elements of fashion. The success of business depends largely on the interconnections and networking between companies in the field and effective partnership with other business within the economic environment and how they utilise this network to promote themselves. The rise in high fashion production by emerging designers has created or expanded businesses which were previously regarded as nonessential or independent of the fashion industry in Nigerian society. Designers expressed how the fashion industry has created other streams of income within the economy. Per the observations of two designers, the springing up of fashion centres due to the global fashion consciousness and that of Nigeria in particular has led to springing up of businesses such as modelling, photography, make-up artist and stylists who work closely with designers. These professions except for photography are relatively new on the Nigerian market. Even with photography, they explained further that there is a surge of professionalism and high standard in their job as the quality of their work reflects the beauty of designers' work. Though, still

relatively fragmented, the industry is experiencing an ecosystem cohesion that brings together stakeholders of fashion from the producer to the consumer. In between this range are different professions that work with producers and consumers to promote the marketing and distribution of products. Chris has realised that “for fashion industry to grow in any part of the world, it should partner with other stakeholders like the traditional, financial industry and government. Fashion industry is not I have a machine and some workers but what are we contributing to the economic system”. Thus, many respondents are noticing the coming together of the network system that connect designers to each other as well as other professions that work directly or indirectly with the fashion industry. I start the discussion with internal network between the designers, then I put forth the work of other professionals in some of the newer trades that have become stakeholders in fashion production.

### **8.6.1 Business Networking**

Schonsheck (2000:897) argues that, “the practice of "networking" is the developing of relationships with other people for business advantage.” He further explains that while this advantage is mostly expected to be mutual between the parties involved, there is a more cynical way of understanding it to be to the advantage for each one’s own business (ibid). Various studies have indicated the usefulness of network formation in building a business as often it is perceived to be a solution where everyone benefits, that is a win-win for parties involved. There are various forms or avenues for networking, such as through clubs, business associations, alumni associations, church groups and community organisation. This study is interested in business associations between designers and other non-designer professionals in the fashion industry.

Most entrepreneurs build associations and networks from which their members benefit greatly. Murphy (2002) in his study of networks in Tanzania argues that network formation serves as social capital for the members which when exploited can lead to innovation for individual firms. Robson et al. (2009) also note that membership in business networks can provide the entrepreneur access to information s/he would otherwise not have. In this study, on an individual level, it was realised that every designer is connected to at least another designer with whom they share ideas on collection creation or fall on when workload exceeds their capacity. They are mostly people who designers worked with or worked for and therefore developed a relationship. Edith has “about three of them. They left here and started their own, one left for the mall. When I am overwhelmed, I send my stuff to them. But they are people I already know.” Eji’s relationship with two other designers resulted from her internship

programme with them after her fashion training. She is also the only person who had a direct relationship with another respondent in this study.

While almost every designer admits to having a business relationship with another designer with whom they share ideas, they are also protective of their designs and ideas against other designers. Some complain of poaching of employees by other designers and the ‘stealing’ of designs as well. Edith complains that, “when they hear about your tailor as good, they will come and offer double. It doesn’t auger well for the industry.” Eji, also suggests that “the issue of people copying other people’s work, there should be protection for people’s work” as a means of incentive for creativity and motivation for other designers. In this sense, networking can prove to be negative for the business of one party or a group of the people involved.

On the international level, three designers mentioned their connection with top global designers whom they have worked with and still maintain a relationship. They would not mention names of designers they work with or the organisation, but they stated there is such. Tese, commented “I even had [an] offer from somebody that they want to have a collaboration with me in London.” Thus, she has a designer in London who has offered a collaboration between them and she is considering the offer. She continues and speaks about when she “worked with designers in Paris and UK, these are the only two major places I have worked with designers.” Working with internationally renowned designers did not bring commercial benefits. The benefit was purely social: bringing them closer to the international fashion industry. Some respondents are not necessarily connected with other foreign designers but rather suppliers of fabrics and sewing accessories whom they relate with directly. Others talked about having lost old contacts due to their inability to keep up with contacts established through their participation in international fashion events.

The study also probed into respondents’ involvement in national or regional associations. Organising businesses into one collective association has proven to be of benefit to a country’s economy as well as the members of the association. According to Hirschman (1968:28), for a country to move “from import-substitution industrialisation to a more competitive export orientation depended on business influence: only a cohesive, vocal, and highly influential national bourgeoisie is likely to carry industrialisation beyond relatively safe import-substitution export-oriented” (cited in Bräutigam, 2002:519-520). There is a need for an association of business firms who are ready to push the economy of the country. Though Bräutigam’s (2002) study suggests difficulty in building business growth coalition between

businesses and government that will help both the businesses and the country's economy due to governments' reliance on raw minerals other than manufacturing, this phenomenon is now changing. A country like Nigeria which relies heavily on oil in 2015 achieved 6.3% growth mainly from non-oil sectors of the economy (Africa Economic Outlook, 2015). African economies are opening up and diversifying to appreciate the current demand from other non-traditional sectors of the economy.

On the benefits of associations to businesses, Bennett (2000) postulates two benefits; the logic service benefits and the logic of collective activity benefits. The logic of service benefit implies that an association exists to provide services for its members. Each member provides a specific service which benefits another member, or the association was established to provide specific business services for its members. The logic of collective benefit is the formation of associations into a collective whole that seeks to push for the agenda of the business sector or the collective needs of the members. Thus, "the logic of services means that associations have to respond to member's individual and specific needs and demands.... In contrast the logic of collective activity focuses the role of an association to act on behalf of all, or at least the majority, or its members' interests" (Bennett, 2000:18). He further argued that "sectors composed mainly of individuals or small firms will rely to a greater extent on intermediary organisations for collective purposes (Bennett, 2000:23). Therefore, in the case of Nigerian designers, it is expected to find high patronage of the national association as a means of networking as well as presenting a united front to push for policies that favour the industry. As Bräutigam argues "the more representative an association is, encompassing a wide range of businesses, the more likely it will support policies that are generally good for economic stability rather than narrower, rent-seeking goals" (2002:522).

While most of the respondents are aware of the benefits of joining an association in their field, only two are members of the Fashion and Designers Association of Nigeria. One has been in the association for over thirty years while the other joined quite recently. One designer used to be part of the association and even had an executive position, but she pulled out because she "wasn't happy with the way the organisation was being ran, there's no accountability". Seven designers are aware of the association's existence but have never joined. They gave various reasons such as that offered by Shola "the work is so stressful I don't have time to go out", Edith, "I don't like group things, I like to do things individually". One other respondent, Rhoda believes the association is an exclusive organisation that does not open up to all fashion designers as they proscribe, it is "like a Cabal kind of thing, you have a selected set of people

as top designers quote and unquote.” Others just showed lack of interest in finding out if there is an association in the first place, much less join.

The Fashion and Designers Association of Nigeria (FADAN) was established over thirty years ago as a means of bringing "designers" together, though there were few that could be termed as designers then. The membership now is over 200 and are found in six states. It was founded by Mrs. Shade Thomas who is the foremost renowned designer with the brand name Shade boutique. The current president is the fourth successive president. The organisation has its headquarters in Lagos with branches in six other states and during the interview period they were planning on establishing a branch in the seventh state. The structure of the organisation starts from the top with the national executives which is made up of the president, vice president, secretary and the vice, head of publicity, finance and treasurer. Aside these national executives are regional coordinators for the other states who serve as mediators between the national executive and their state. The Executive body is not set up in the other states, though the members are permitted to bring themselves together and appoint people to lead them, but they will not be recognised at the national level. The state coordinator is added to the chat group formed by the national executives on WhatsApp through which they relay their plans and problems to the national executives and vice versa. Members at the state level also form a WhatsApp group chat with the coordinator as administrator through which they discuss individual needs and suggestions which the coordinator will then forward to the national executives.

To present a different and a more professional image of their profession, the association, though not strict on educational qualification, believe higher education of members gives them an advantage in creativity and so will prefer members with such qualification. However, such cannot solely define a person's skill as some people are naturally talented and therefore membership is open to everyone who does creative work and adheres to high ethical standards. Thus, being artistic goes beyond one's education and sometimes training. The definition of a designer qualified to be a member of FADAN is quite liberal and open, referring to any person with a registered business in fashion whose works are creative to attract public attention. The President defines a designer in quite a loose form, finding it difficult to give a clear-cut definition in terms of education, training and personal creativity:

I am not talking about people who do tailoring, I am talking about people who have things that already structured like the designer, you have illustrators, you

have people who are marketers who are going to market your things for you, so we are not talking about people learning on the street though it is possible to get people who are on the street and grow on the street, if you are gifted and you have passion, sometimes you don't have to go through school, individual knowledge of what you want to go into.

After giving this definition for designer and as the requisite criteria for membership, there seems to be no clear check as to whether people who join meet the criteria or not. Interested persons can download a form from their website, fill and send it over to the office or you can walk to the office and pick a form. There is no initial investigation into the incoming member and his or her business, per the president; whoever needs to join a professional body can come for a membership form. At best, a coordinator is later sent to check on the member when their brand and products starts to be recognised by the public. This may affirm the complaint of one respondent who left the association because she “wasn't happy with the way the organisation was being ran, there's no accountability so I decided to focus on my business till such a time when people may be ready for change.”

Notwithstanding, joining the association can be beneficial for the members both in the service logic and collective logic benefits as stipulated by Bennett (2000). The organisation assists members with activities and facilities that can grow their business. They provide training and exposure that add value to members' businesses. There is also the master class which gives top up training to designers who want to learn new ways or standard ways of doing things. One main activity of FADAN is to encourage members to participate in government trade fairs which provides exhibition space for their products and connects them to each other or to other sectors of the economy. Their main annual programme is the FADAN runway show which comes off every November. It highlights the works of their members on a national platform. They collaborate with the fashion industries of neighbouring countries (Benin and Cameroon) as well as South Africa.

Other benefits enjoyed as a member is easy access to a loan facility from a bank as the organisation has such arrangements with banks and financial institutions. In the instance of attending a fashion programme outside Nigeria, members enjoy free visa as well as subsidy in expenses because of the organisation's connection with the Ministry of Commerce. The runway FADAN provides a big platform for members to exhibit their products at little cost. Not every member gets to participate in the event; participants must show creativity and consistency in

building their brand over the year to earn a slot at the event. It is those who participate on the national level that get to be selected to represent the country outside. In the above instances we can relate activities of the association to providing service benefits for their member businesses.

The collective benefit derived by members has been the influence of the association on policies and business opportunities that promote their businesses. Since its establishment, the organisation has forged several relationships which has been beneficial to its members and the Nigerian fashion industry. First, is their close relationship with government, not a particular government but all successive governments. It is argued that the relationship between government and business associations can be mutually beneficial as “government action can stimulate associability, and vice versa, to the mutual benefit of the firms involved (Bennett, 2000:19).

The collaboration between FADAN and the government has resulted in policies like Wednesday and Mondays set aside for made-in-Nigeria clothes days. Talks have begun with the government to broaden or increase its efforts in pushing buying and wearing made in Nigeria products. It is their initial talks that yielded the Monday and Wednesday made-in-Nigeria wear policy but the President of FADAN believes the government can do more. Another plan is to get the government to open a production hub in Nigeria that will provide designers with fashion haberdasheries and fabrics at affordable prices and a factory where designers can take their designs and get them sewn at a very affordable price. Importation of fashion accessories and fabrics are contributory factors to the high price of made in Nigeria clothes and if the government can subsidise or put up factories to produce for the Nigerian market it will help bring production cost down. Last but not the least, the organisation is also talking to potential private investors to inject money and skills into the industry to provide members with training and also help in promoting members' products in and outside Nigeria. The organisation is also involved in charity works by distributing free clothing and other services to the less privileged in deprived areas of the country.

Another coalition they seek is between association and other business sectors. Their partnership with the export promotion council and the chamber of commerce has created opportunities for participation and exhibition of members' products on international platforms in different countries such as China. The relationship with embassies ensures a hustle-free visa application process for members who get the opportunity to represent Nigeria outside the country. Sometimes, the chamber of commerce sponsors such ventures. The organisation is also in close

relationship with similar national fashion organisations in Benin, Kenya, Cameroon, and South Africa. They collaborate in organising fashion shows and exhibitions in their respective countries.

The establishment of business association is vital to the growth of business and a country's economic and social structure. Lucas (1997) argues that "the rise of associations contributes to the pluralization of the institutional environment, and thus has implications for class formation, patterns of representation, and the nature of the state" (pp71). Discussion with the head of the association shows the necessity of such an organisation for the promotion of the fashion industry through trade and commerce. Though respondents are reluctant to join mostly because most of them have not enjoyed direct benefits as members, the organisation needs to reach out by engaging in promotional activities that highlights its existence and membership benefits. In order to be vocal and present a force that pushes favourable policies, having a membership that represents as many of the professionals in the industry as possible is key. Therefore, the association must organise and frame its vision and prospects to make it more attractive to businesses in the industry.

The fashion industry is opening up to encompass many other professionals who are not outfit makers. The next section discusses the work of other professionals who are not designers but work directly or indirectly with the industry, a feature that has contributed immensely to the current growth.

### **8.6.2 Media**

The role of the media in the rise of contemporary high fashion in Nigeria cannot be underestimated. The role of media was repeatedly reiterated by all respondents and therefore, threads through all aspects of the industry, however, it will be treated here as an entity on its own. Designers' information on the media and that of the information from the FGD directed my attention to its importance and I therefore got to interview three lifestyle magazine firms to help bring insights from the media players themselves.

In the latter part of the 1990s, there was a rise in the Nigerian show business, the movie and music industry. Accompanied with this was the sense of fashion of the entertainers. Two out of the three magazines were set up during that period to "mirror the lifestyle of these celebrities, what they eat, what they wear and all that and we have been able to contribute our portion to the development of fashion, beauty and lifestyle." It was not just fashion that was on the rise but beauty in general; these artistes started influencing the society with their fashion and sense

of beauty. The two magazines realised the commercial benefits of the by-product of showbiz in the society and took advantage of it. A lot of lifestyle magazines sprung up at the time and they featured the artiste, their houses, cars, routines, fashion etc. Aside following the artiste, they noticed their use of Nigerian designers for their clothing so sometimes they wrote a story on a designer to reflect his or her work on an artiste. One respondent Eji does not mince words when she delves into praising the media, especially the print media then:

kudos to all those people who have been talking about fashion and fashion journalists as well, blogs, I think those people started talking about fashion so much so that people started noticing it and all the magazines, Genevive Magazines and stuff like that, they had to do covers and they actually had to use designers' clothes, some had fashion pages inside them and all.

Initially, it was mainly the print media. They extended their coverage to popular social events. One respondent for Gallery magazine recalls that “fashion was an integral part of what men and women do. We cover parties a lot; chieftaincy, naming, burial; and we realised women loved to know what is trending and we capture also what they wear.” They pick a high-profile event within the week and cover it, taking pictures of well-dressed guests and publishing them the week after. This created excitement among people as everyone would want to be featured in the magazine. Rhoda, a designer, recounts the beginning of this craze telling us how “it started with this top sell magazines, people go to events and take pictures and so every woman wanted to be inside one magazine or the other”. The Nigerian fashion society thrives on the approval of a person's fashion sense and one's ability to make a public statement through their appearance is the goal of dressing. Therefore, to be captured on camera means you ‘dressed to belong’ and that serves as a stamp of one's social status. According to the magazines, they are not always invited to these events but whether they get invited or not, they will negotiate to cover it for free because people were waiting the next week to know the latest fashion trend and that is what gives them money. According to an editor of one magazine, people from other countries will come to Nigeria just to buy these fashion catalogues and send to their countries. Some magazines have vendors in Benin, Togo and Ghana whom they supply with each issue.

Aside taking pictures at events on fashion, these magazines also collaborate with fashion designers to organise programmes. They grant them one-on-one interviews, create columns for fashion adverts in their magazines and also work together for events. The editor for one magazine explains “when we realise that you are doing something unique, basically people

who are doing well in that sector, we pick them and interview them.” Almost all the designers I interviewed had received at least one award from a lifestyle magazine. Two of the magazines organise annual awards for designers who dressed up celebrities and people of high society the most within the year. They have different categories of awards to honour these designers. These awards also encouraged designers who had been recognised for their hard work. Zena attested to receiving awards from fashion magazines every year and it affirmed the relevance of her work and how she keeps striving to bring out her best “hey keep coming in so some of them have broken up because of one thing or the other but it is of those things you look at and you say, well, hard work pays.” Such close work with designers encouraged the CEO of one of the magazines interviewed to start a fashion business. With no experience in fashion or sewing, she was influenced by the designers they work with, enough to build the passion for owning her own fashion brand.

The third magazine was started just three years ago and their aim was to be a business magazine but upon surveying the market, they realised fashion is a segment that can pull customers and get them accepted by the society, so they reviewed their vision to include a fashion and beauty segment. They acknowledge this has increased their client base and has brought them closer to the ordinary Nigerian who would not have spared money on a business magazine. They stated their main customers are fashionable women. Though the magazines are affordable, they appeal to people of the middle class and the upper class because of the programmes they cover and the sort of fashion trends they cover. This leaves me to wonder if customers buy the magazine for finding fashion or beauty trends or it is because they can relate to the events or the people organising the event they cover. They all publish weekly issues.

According to respondents, there used to be a lot of lifestyle magazines at the latter part of the 1990s and beginning of the 2000s, however, with the proliferation of social media and internet, many of such magazines have folded up. Though some print houses are trying to stay relevant, the three I interviewed admitted there has been a significant loss of patronage since the introduction of social media. One magazine house interviewed has added an online magazine to their print magazine to meet the needs of the many who have trooped to social media. Social media has added a significant boost to the fashion industry in Nigeria.

First is the free publicity it gives designers. Except for one designer, all respondents have internet presence, especially social media; Instagram and Facebook. The wide range of internet users offers designers a larger platform compared to print media to showcase their products.

One also does not need to be a ‘top’ designer to be acknowledged on social media, it is free publicity for everyone. It has offered the upcoming designers the platform to be noticed and they can access clients around the world. It has given designers the confidence to step out of the confines of Nigeria to make bold designs which represent their ethno-national uniqueness and re-present it to the world. Some respondents report that they have customers who found them through social media. Those who have customers abroad attest that their customers communicate with them through social media; exchanging fashion ideas, making orders and any other information needed for their services. Some designers also pointed out that it was through the internet that they were first recognised internationally and invited to participate in their first international fashion event. The social media exposes designers and their works to the outside world.

As they get exposed to the outside world, the outside world informs them as well which they incorporate into their work. One outlet that affords designers the privilege of interacting with cultures beyond their local boundaries is the internet. The wide coverage of the internet insert audience at the intersection of cultures and thus cultural producers are constantly aware of foreign cultures which influences their local works. Some of the respondents get their designs from social media. It makes it easier for them to follow international fashion trends and apply their own originality to it. Lots of international top designers can also be found on social media; it makes it possible for indirect mentoring. According to one designer, having access to top designers’ work on social media motivates her to upgrade the quality of her work and also pitch herself with them in terms of detail delivery. One other way is the opportunity to know local trends as well. They can also see each other’s work even though they may not interact physically to give them a sense of how some designs have been appropriated in Nigerian society. Youtube is mentioned by some designers as their avenue for continuous learning of fashion technicalities. There is always one new skill coming and Youtube is one place to learn these new skills and fashion trends. Designers feel a part of the global fashion platform due to the contact they have with the outside world through social media. They feel that they belong to the global fashion community because of the proximity social media offers to other designers around the world. Social media gives everyone an equal chance to be successful. It depends on how much you can sell yourself and your products out there and designers are taking advantage of themselves to develop their brands.

### 8.6.3 Related Professions

The photography industry in Africa began largely as the work of academics (sociologists, historians and anthropologists) who explained fashion in Africa through photographs of colonials and indigenes without too much attention paid fashion. At best, some of these pictures explained clothing in Africa in its primitive form and the progressive efforts of colonial officials in their quest to civilise their subjects (Rovine, 2009). This does not mean that Africans were not taking photographs. They were, but it is only recently that these photographs have been recognised for what they represented. Recently, Gott, Loughran, Quick and Rabine (2017) wrote an article they developed through the Fowler Museum at UCLA exhibition themed African-Print Fashion Now! using pictures taken both at the exhibition and ones collected through the works of renowned African photographers such as Mory Bamba, Oumar Ly, Njideka Akunyili Crosby. These old photographers took pictures of people who wore African prints either in their homes or in photographers' studios. Older photographers were contracted by individuals or families to take personal pictures in their best dressed moments or for ceremonial record of events. The aim was not for archival purposes or exhibition but a means of affording lifestyle luxury and memories to customers. However, such photographs have become relevant for understanding the historical social milieu and fashion trends, a basis for understanding current changes or continuation of fashion.

The current fashion industry in Nigeria is developing a photography industry that is solely focused on highlighting the fashion producers and not just the consumers. Though as discussed under media, the print media started off with a focus on entertainers, who are consumers, they later incorporated the producers of the outfit of these entertainers. Now, there are photographers who specialise mainly in fashion photography, that is taking photos of fashion models and works of designers for various purposes such as magazine production, exhibition, advertisement and business records. Obi is a photographer I met during the Lagos Fashion and Design Week of 2017. Although Obi studied a different discipline in the university, he enrolled in a short course on photography right after school. His love for colours and vibrancy encouraged him to concentrate on fashion photography. The rise of the use of *Ankara* fabric with great patterns and vibrant colours has been his motivation for waking up in the morning and taking pictures of models and works of designers. He is contracted by designers and modelling agencies to take pictures, while he also sometimes organises personal photoshoots for his advertisement. At the fashion week event, there were many photographers who stayed for the week-long programme, taking pictures of various activities, especially the runway

shows. Photographers present came not just from Nigeria but other African countries and Western countries.

Another related profession in this industry is fashion blogging. Blogging is a new profession where people write up on activities in the society or about lifestyle, sharing knowledge and other such topics. It could be writing about personal lifestyle online or about people or activities. These online write ups serve as an information hub on personal issues or social activities. Since it is an internet write up forum, basically found on different social media platforms, blogging is a relatively new phenomenon, tied to the introduction of social media. Blogging does not guarantee a regular source of income; however, the number of followers, reviewers and viewers of a blog can generate allowances from web providers. Blogging normally starts off as a hobby by a blogger writing and discussing things of personal and social interests. On the whole, blogging is shaping conversations and perspectives on social, political, economic, environmental and lifestyle issues. It is in this vein, that some people find themselves blogging on fashion. Fashion bloggers, I was told by my respondents, write on fashion trends, events, ethics and conventions surrounding fashion within a particular context. In this study, I interviewed people with two separate fashion blogs: two people operating one blog and another operated by one person. The former is run by two ladies, who started off blogging a few years ago, separately, one in the United Kingdom and the other in Nigeria. Later the lady from the UK joined the Nigerian to run the blog together. They follow fashion events such as the fashion weeks, music events, individual designer exhibitions, writing on celebrity fashion style and mentoring on fashion ethics and trends. Blogging is their main job, they do not have any regular profession aside it, therefore they put in more effort to give their viewers good content. The other blogger is a doctor by profession who blogs on fashion as a hobby. She was at the fashion event to cover the show and also gather content on her favourite designers who would be showcasing on the runway. The content of their blogs is not only local but also takes on international fashion perspectives. They follow international fashion events and activities and write on them for their followers. Most of what bloggers do is for the love and passion for the content and not necessarily for money. They derive satisfaction from followers who look up their posts daily and give reviews. Followers of fashion blogs are fashion enthusiasts who are eager for information. Followers are as diverse as the many different people that make up the world.

An interesting and also new profession we encountered on the field is fashion stylists. During the interview of the designers, Tese, a fashion designer hinted that she had a second job as a

fashion stylist. According to her, the fashion consultation and styling segment of her business is booming and taking most of her time, a reason why she has to employ more hands for designing, illustration and drafting though she has the skill. Tese takes on contracts from customers from the corporate and entertainment industry who her business provides clothes for various occasions within a contracted time. Contracts run from six months to two years and they are renewable. Stylists choose clothes and accessories for customers for the different occasions on their calendar, basically managing a customers' wardrobe. Thus, a stylist makes available all the dress ensemble needed by customers, sometimes with customers' prior approval or at their discretion. At the fashion week event, I met another stylist, Ejiro who had travelled all the way from Abuja for the event. Her primary aim was to observe trends by designers, however, she was hopeful to sign contracts with some customers while socialising with guests.

Ejiro describes herself as not a high-end stylist like people who are already established. She started in 2016 after her contract with DFID came to an end. She had always loved styling her colleagues, relatives and friends while she was with DFID, therefore after the contract she decided to go into fashion styling full time. She styles mostly corporate workers and "ordinary individuals" who are interested in looking good. Her slogan is "looking good without breaking the bank" therefore, she sources for affordable, unique but trending designs for her customers. Many people in the corporate, entertainment and other busy professions have little time to source for and think through clothing and accessories on a daily basis. Therefore, the work of the stylist is to provide the services of managing their wardrobe and making sure they appear at each event in an appropriate dress.

Other businesses such as garment manufacturing and sales are rising due to designers and customers' appreciation of local fabrics and locally sewn clothes. Some people are taking advantage of the inward-looking fashion experience of Nigerians to put up garment factories that will supply the local market. Other marketers also import fabrics from Western and Eastern countries for sale. One designer imports fabric and haberdasheries, a business he started after realising the boost in the sales from customers' demands. One avenue where all these related professions and the main producers of fashion converge is at the fashion week. The Lagos Fashion and Design Week (LFDW) of 2017 brought together the various components of the fashion ecosystem. The LFDW is a remarkable event that highlights the progress of the Nigerian fashion industry. A chronological narration of the 2017 event as I observed it is provided in Appendix A.

## **8.7 Conclusion**

New entrants into the social production of aesthetic cosmopolitanism such as fashion are aware of the globality as well as the local infusion of cultural elements. Their careful selection of foreign expressive technological elements of production, combining with local cultural elements for consumers who are cosmopolitan in lifestyle is a mark of their creativity (Regev, 2007). They adopt wider conventions of social production beyond their locality, a situation that simultaneously brings structure to the local industry as well as make available their work to other foreign consumers. This is what we are witnessing in the Nigerian fashion industry. Emerging designers are adopting global standards of production ranging from practical production of the outfit to advertising and marketing strategies. They are building a structure that aligns with global standards of quality, convenience, accessibility and visibility. Formal curriculum and level training are producing efficiency through division of labour that promotes effectiveness and good quality control. The use of print media, social media and other formalised outlets for advertisement and marketing is ensuring wider global appreciation and accessibility of goods. Networking among producers and other professionals who are related to the industry ensures the healthy development of a solid ecosystem of support for fashion production. Events like fashion week celebrations that bring together all fashion stakeholders in the industry speaks to the new techniques adopted from foreign cultures which has brought positive dynamism to fashion production in Nigeria.



## CHAPTER NINE

### DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The turn of the twenty-first century has witnessed major economic, political, social and cultural strides in the development of many African countries. Stable democracy, economic diversification of the service industries, technological advancement and increase rate of literacy are major records of developmental achievements (Robertson et al, 2012). Economic diversification has witnessed the development of industries which were hitherto overlooked in terms of their economic benefits to the development of countries. One of such industries is the fashion industry. Sewing, tailoring, cloths and fabrics from Africa have for many years been relegated to the traditional and cultural realm of aesthetics, perceived as lower national economic asset compared to resources such as gold, crude and other natural minerals. The culture made good for tourism, however, its economic capacity is under-explored. However, for the past two decades, fashion has been one of the rising industries which is exposing Africa, its people and culture to the world.

Though this is not the first attempt by fashion producers in Africa to attract global attention to their work, their previous works were underscored by Western perception of the primitiveness and “traditional” nature of African fashion aesthetics, a feature that tied it to second-rated domain rather than a competitive global standard. First, arts, fabrics, symbols from Africa served as inspiration for Western fashion designers either by adapting elements of African dress to Western design, that is "reproductive" inspiration, and when African imagery is depicted through clothing, "mimetic” inspiration (Rovine, 2009: 56). Thus, from the early twentieth century to the third quarter of the century, African aesthetics featured in global fashion through these two representations. The emergence of the first generation of fashion designers in Africa, in the immediate post-independence era of the 1960s did little to change the global image of “traditionalism” that surrounds Africa fashion from Africa. Designers’ enthusiasm to produce clothes that defines and identify their countries’ political and social status by adopting locally produced cloths and designs, re-echoed Western perceptions (Klopper, 2000). In the case of South Africa, gaining independence much latter than many, Klopper argues that, the adaptation and use of fabrics and designs from the local and other African countries by designers at the post-independence, the “display of Africa as a place of exotic and even ‘primitive’ beauty through fashion works after independence seem to contradict with the modernised notion of African renaissance as preached by Mbeki”. Thus, in the bid to redefine Africa’s new identity,

fashion produced by foremost designers run counter to the modernisation policies of the countries as well as the world. The challenge is for designers to negotiate between the spheres of local and modern and produce what is contemporary and cosmopolitan.

Contemporary designers from Africa have been noted for their change in style and production, the creativity and innovation of their products have attracted global fashion industry. Authors and observers believe there is a significant change in the production of fashion from Africa, led by new crop of emerging designers whose work is significantly different from the traditional producers (seamstress and tailors) and the foremost designers. According to Rovine “recently, the long history of clothing as a key signifier of a stereotyped African "other" has provided fodder for African fashion designers, who use the same medium to offer a counter-discourse” (Rovine, 2009:61). Technically, designers from Africa have learnt to merge the global with the local, modernisation with indigenisation to produce fashion articles that are locally identifiable and globally competitive. Jennings (2011: 8) states this succinctly;

Today’s generation of talented designers and image-makers are riding the broader wave of interest in Africa’s renaissance and attracting an international clientele by balancing contemporary fashion’s pursuit of the new with an appreciation of the ideals of beauty and adornment that are deeply rooted in Africa’s cultural and social consciousness.

Conceptually, the fusion of local with the global is premised on the cultural, political and economic nature of cosmopolitanism that characterises contemporary society. According to Ulrich Beck (2007), contemporary society is marked by risk. Thus, there are some factors that threaten global security such as terrorism, climate change, tsunamis etc. These factors need to be addressed by regional and global political entities other than individual countries. Maintaining national boundaries undermines the effort to deal with global threats. Therefore, these risks force nations together as one entity fighting common threat. There is no more “us” and “them”, “we” and the “other”, risks in second modernity society force the “us” and “them” together to find probable solutions. National boundaries are erased, replaced by cosmopolitan societies.

Motti Regev (2007) extends the concept of cosmopolitanism into the creation of cultural aesthetics in second modernity or late modernity societies. According to Regev, societies now live beyond modernity period, to what he calls late modernity, similar to Becks’ second modernity. While modernity has been classified by globalisation, late modernity is

characterised by cosmopolitanism. There, in the creation of national aesthetic cultures, producers expand their sources of cultural acquisition from the local to include the foreign. Society is fluid, negotiating constantly between local cultural elements and foreign cultural elements, hybridising both to create unique ethno-national cultures (Regev, 2007). There is constant appropriation and adaption of foreign cultures which is consciously fused with local cultural elements to produce aesthetic cosmopolitan national culture. Thus, while local consumers experience foreign taste in culture, their ethno-national culture is also made available for foreign consumption. While Regev explains the concept in view of film making in India and pop-rock music in Spain, this study examines the development of fashion in Nigeria, Lagos through the lens of aesthetic cosmopolitanism.

In the production of aesthetic cosmopolitanism, there are “dominant positions, consisting of consecrated canonic artists and their works, and corresponding production of meaning positions” (Regev, 2007:128). Therefore, the study set out to identify the “artists” who are the main producers of cultural aesthetics and further analyse their “work” which is the creation of aesthetic cosmopolitanism, then go further to analyse the implication of production meaning of their position as aesthetic cosmopolitanism producers. In studying the “work”, the interest lies not just in the finished output but the also the adoption of technological expressive from the global field into the local culture in the production process of aesthetic cosmopolitanism. The study started off with a topic of finding the role of emerging designers in the production of aesthetic cosmopolitanism fashion in Nigeria. I was interested in finding out how producers are combining global influence with local cultural elements in the production of aesthetic cosmopolitanism fashion. I engaged in two separate fieldworks, the first lasting three month and the second, two months in Lagos. I used semi-structured interview guides to gather information from forty-four individuals including a Focus Group Discussion made up of nine women. Eighteen participants are designers, three editors of magazines, one garment manufacturer, a stylist, a photographer, two fashion bloggers, three fashion trainees, two fashion shop owners and four individuals.

The first chapter of the analysis (chapter four) discusses the social, political and economic milieu that underlines the current fashion development in Nigeria. This chapter is necessary as it informs us on the social, political and economic construction of fashion on which the fashion industry is building the current developments. I believe for aesthetic cosmopolitanism to develop; the society must be receptive of the new upgrade in their culture and lifestyle. Societies have transformed over years and these transformations come from inclusion and

exclusion of social facts, borrowed cultures and adaptation to external global changes. The Lagos society is no different; though some indigenous culture on fashion still underpins their fashion lifestyle, the society has opened up to technological expressive from other countries, incorporated them into the ethno-national culture. Socially, Lagos is a fashion forward society where members are fully engrossed in both local and international fashion. Before the inception of colonisation, through to colonial times, the struggle for independence and its aftermath, Lagos has been the centre for the display of Nigerian fashion culture. Cloth plays an integral part in social events through the *aso ebi* culture of cloth uniform. Every social and spiritual ritual is celebrated with cloth as a symbol of unity and display of wealth. This display of wealth is not limited to the upper classes as lower-class members of the society can attain occasional and momentary social mobility through the display of fashion at social events. Lagos, was originally a Yoruba state. However, it has witnessed massive internal and external migration since its instatement as a national capital in the post-independence era. Though, in contemporary times, the capital has been moved to Abuja, Lagos continues to attract local and foreign citizens due to its commercial viability. In such a cosmopolitan society, fashion, like other cultural aesthetics, has witnessed a wide range of appropriation and adaptation while its players still hold on to indigenisation. Contemporary fashion taste of Lagosians is a blend of the local culture of uniqueness and flamboyance mixed with international fashion trends. Politically, government policies such as the Monday and Wednesday are set aside as days for wearing made-in-Nigeria clothes and this has boosted the local fashion industry. From corporate institutions to individuals, the policy urges everyone to wear clothes made from indigenous or appropriated fabric, which are mostly sewn by Nigerians. The current economic recession has further boosted the local fashion industry. The high exchange rate is discouraging consumers from purchasing clothes imported from foreign countries which are of high cost. Locally produced clothes provide quality and affordable clothes as viable alternatives to foreign clothes. There is also a high interest for the fashion business among the youth who take advantage of the social, political and economic opportunities the system offers.

The fifth chapter focuses on the “artists” themselves. It is argued that the social construction of aesthetic cosmopolitan lies heavily on the intermediary position of the producers (Regev, 2007). Therefore, the professional knowledge and skill background of these producers serve as the first hint of their cosmopolitan position. Emanating from a traditional background industry of sewing, the chapter introduces the emerging designers as a different cohort from the seamstresses and tailors as well as the foremost designers in the post-independence era due to

their conscious effort to distinguish themselves. I discuss the identification of the cultural producers of contemporary fashion, terming them as “emerging designers” (Loughran, 2009; Faber, 2010; Jennings, 2011). Regev (2007) refers to such new entrants with a cosmopolitan outlook as modernisers or invigorators due to their boldness in constantly re-negotiating the global field with local culture. Three main features were identified: education, training and identify construction. It was realised that the majority of designers interviewed have higher educational backgrounds, even up to university level, a characteristic which runs counter to the general perception of the educational background of seamstresses and tailors. Unlike their traditional counterparts, participants of this study have either pursued fashion at the tertiary level or have ventured into fashion after completion of tertiary education in different disciplines. Their passion for fashion could not be undermined by the societal perception of the profession as a job for school dropouts. They believe their educational background gives them the added advantage of cosmopolitanism where they directly interact with people of various ethnic and racial backgrounds, who, most of time, form their initial customer base. Their exposure to advanced technology also affords them the advantage of consuming culture far from their geographical location. Their training gives us the concrete characteristic of cultural producers of aesthetic cosmopolitanism. Participants report of dual training background of local apprenticeship, fashion school or tertiary training with international fashion professional courses or degree courses. Participants realised a trend of global infusion in their local space through other cultural elements such as food and the establishment of multinational clothing companies. Therefore, to remain competitive and attain international standard in fashion production, almost every participant availed themselves for international training in fashion. They discuss their intentionality of acquiring both local and foreign training skills, as the means that affords them the skill of combining global influence with local elements in production. The dual training puts them simultaneously at the centre of two or more cultures, from which they can borrow and fuse cultures to produce innovative fashion (Regev, 2009). Emerging designers’ idea of taking on foreign training is not to seek Western validation of their skills or work but as a means of inserting themselves into the global platform which has long been bias towards fashion production from Africa. The local training of seamstresses and tailors have been criticised as reproductive, lacking innovation and blind to prevailing trends (Langevang and Gough, 2012). Therefore, to rise above such narratives, designers sought to expand their knowledge and skills beyond the local and incorporate the difference in their work. In the subsequent chapters, I show how the dual skills acquisition come to play in the production of fashion in Lagos. The third feature of professional identification is participants’ personal

construction of themselves as fashion producers and how they distinguish themselves as new professionals in the industry. As modernisers pushing for a new order of fashion production, they seek to distance themselves from the old producers by taking advantage of negative stereotypes of the work of the latter and use them to their advantage. Negative stereotypes such as poor quality of work, delay in delivery, poor finishing and general poor customer services associated with the work of seamstresses and tailors are factors most participants work at to gain the trust and confidence of their customers. They clearly state their work as more professionally branded than tailors. Aside local competitiveness, participants pitch themselves and their work against global brands in terms of quality of work. They believe their work is as globally competitive as any other brand on the global market due to their skill and nature of production. Thus, their education, skill acquisition and professional identity construction is a negotiation between the local perception and the international recognition of the fashion profession. Participants look beyond the local in the production and consumption of their work, therefore, they adopt some production schemas from the global field that help in redefining the industry while affording them the creative ability to reconstruct their ethno-national fashion culture.

The local position of emerging designers in Nigeria's aesthetic cosmopolitanism in fashion production is peculiar and different from the cultures reviewed by Regev (2007). Regev's (2007) argument is based on the introduction of an entire new cultural aesthetics into a society through the influence of foreign elements. He argues on the introduction of filmmaking and pop music into the Indian and Spanish societies respectively, however, in Nigeria, designers are re-branding an old-age existing cultural aesthetic which is already deeply integrated through early foreign encounter. While invigorators in India and Spain may face the main challenge of public acceptance of a new cultural aesthetics, invigorators in Nigeria face two main challenges; public recognition of their new position within an old structure and the re-orientation of the public to accept the difference of their work from old production. Emerging designers are "revamping" an already established and integrated industry that has recognised producers. Therefore, the onus lies on them to go beyond introducing new products to seek public recognition of their social and cultural position as new producers with an upgrade in skills and creativity that speaks to a new social, political and economic order of lifestyle. In Nigerian where the old system continues to exist along with the new system, emerging designers must consistently re-echo their social position and seek public acknowledgement and acceptance of their social position and the worth of their creative skills.

Chapter six shows us the work of the artists, the output of their creativity, thus, the products. In a more visual way, we witness the manifestations of participants' innovativeness that comes from the global-local interaction. The clothes they produce are typical aesthetic cosmopolitanism. In an intentional way, designers fuse the global with the local through the combination of designs, styles and fabrics to produce trends in vogue. Participants with predominantly female customer base use mostly locally made or appropriated cloth for their work. Cloth such as *aso eke*, *akwete*, *adire*, *Ankara* (wax print) and lace are preferred for female clothes. While the first three cloths are locally produced, the last two are foreign appropriated cloth that is now identified with the Nigerian fashion culture. However, instead of designing them in the conventional *iro* and *buba* design of Nigerian women, these cloths are now mostly sewn in either western designs or designs acquired from neighbouring countries such as Ghana, Mali and Senegal. Clothes designs from neighbouring countries are mostly the traditional designs of the borrowed culture used by the Nigerians during their traditional festivities. On occasions such as marriage ceremonies, these clothes are the reigning clothes with a mix of local designs of the *iro* and *buba*, *kaba* and slit from Ghana, Cote, D'Ivoire, Senegal and *bubuu* clothes from Benin, Senegal and Togo. For regular days of work and casual occasions, the local cloths are sewn in Western designs of shirts, gowns, trouser, skirt and shorts. In fact, local fabrics sewn in foreign designs is the reigning fashion trends among women in Lagos. They are worn in every space from social events, to religious events, workplaces, including corporate spaces to the market. It was observed that the reverse is the case of men fashion. Fabrics for men's clothes have moved from the use of local fabrics to the use of imported Western and on limited basis, neighbouring countries. While fabrics from neighbouring countries such as Benin and Togo are not new, the current interest in Western fabrics, locally called material for men's wear is relatively new. Participants with male customers argue that, this shift is necessitated by the global interest in soft and more malleable fabrics for men clothing. However, most of these fabrics are not used for foreign designs but for local designs, called the "natives" in Nigeria. Men's fashion trend in Nigeria is mostly initiated by the political elites, especially the president. The clothing culture of the president becomes the fashion trend of the period of his tenure. Other designers also use the foreign fabrics for making English suits. This mix of the local with the foreign in producing the outfit aims at uniqueness. According to Regev (2007:129) in the production of aesthetic cosmopolitanism "the underlying doxa of the field consists of a commitment to the notion of uniqueness. Even 'invigorators', for all the universalistic avant gard aura that sometimes characterize their aesthetics, usually wrap their art with justifications about how their cultural works include aspects of national or local

authenticity”. Thus, in as much as these producers aim at upgrading ethnonational culture to the global field, local authentication of output is very important. They take either local fabric and fashion it into foreign designs or take foreign fabrics and style them in local designs as a means of stamping indigeneity on their work for societal approval.

The fluid use of fabric and designs by emerging designers in Nigeria shows the connectivity and interdependency of global cultural interaction. Whether through cultural appropriation or adaptation, national cultures are global construction. Long before the Trans-Atlantic Trade, African markets had been trading with the West and the East, in different commodities including cloths (Eitcher, 1995). In many ways this trade interaction has shaped the cultures of the parties involved. The one-sided history of influence of economic trade overshadows the agency of both parties and the cultural exchange that created interrelatedness of cultures. This chapter does not only show Nigeria’s aesthetic cosmopolitanism in late modernity but gives historical account predating colonialism. Unlike filmmaking in India and pop-rock in Spain, the cosmopolitanism of Nigerian fashion has a longer history (Adediran, 2010). What we are experiencing today is an extension of an old system of global cultural interaction. However, the novelty lies in the exposure, creativity and innovations of the current producers, drawing the world’s attention to the latency embedded in fashion production in Africa.

The chapter seven goes further to show the adoption of some production strategies of sales and marketing from the global field to serve the needs of local consumers. Similar to some fashion houses in the West, clothes are made for specific target of people in the society, be it socio/economic, age, gender or body size. While emerging designers are diversifying the lines of production, they are also specialising in market target in order to offer service of convenience to their customers. Previous producers of fashion (seamstresses and tailors) are argued to serve a wide range of customers across gender, age, body sizes, social and economic backgrounds. Due to the bespoke nature of their work, they cater for everyone who walks into their shop for their services. However, emerging designers are introducing specialisation in the lines of production as well as consumer target. Though some participants continue to sew basically bespoke clothes, the number of others who have ventured into ready-to-wear and mass production is fast rising. Majority of participants have added ready-to-wear lines to their bespoke business. Now, bespoke production is mostly reserved for couture clothing, while daily functional clothing is mostly sold already-made. Participants argue that, their decision to

venture into already-made clothes is to offer convenience and accessibility for shopping just like most multinational fashion companies. They have witnessed the proliferation of multinational fashion shops in the city of Lagos where these shops offer customers variety, accessibility and convenience in shopping. These features seem to be the global standards for fashion marketing, sales and distribution, therefore, to remain competitive, as local producers, emerging designers need to scale up their services to meet modern demands, thus their diversification into ready-to-made clothing like their competitors. However, participants are not ignorant of the culture of uniqueness of fashion among Lagos inhabitants. Nigerians prefer wearing clothes with limited availability to others, they must be unique in design or fabric. Therefore, designers enshrine this trait in the ready-to wear production, hence producing on limited-edition basis. Producers make sure they produce unique clothes while offering variety, accessibility and convenience. There are few respondents who also produce on mass. This comes basically on contractual basis, where other fashion houses or clothing lines request for already-made clothing on large scale. Their service goes to enhance the already-made business because their customers come from other fashion houses who outsource some of their workload. Organisations and institutions, likewise, contract participants to produce for them. Even with the mass production, participants are cautious about infusing the culture of uniqueness in their production. Thus, those they produce in mass, the mass in on limited-edition basis just as the already-made lines. Aside diversification in genre of production, participants also create their market niche based on gender, age, body size and socio-economic status. Some respondents have mainly male or female customers, while others make for both. Some respondents have an age frame of the customers they serve: adults from 25 years or 40 years, children from a few months old to ten years, youth ranging from their teenage to their mid-thirties. Based on body sizes, some respondents said they catered specifically for plus-size people while others cut across. The socially mobile, people who occupy a high occupational or social pedigree, are the target of most participants. The middle and upper classes of the society form the demand side of the economy of current fashion production in Lagos. In all, the study realised that emerging designers are adopting some production techniques and services from global fashion standards. However, they are not oblivious of the cultural context in which they operate. They offer consumers what international companies offer in addition to the local cultural expectations in delivery. It is observed that consumption of aesthetic cosmopolitanism in Lagos comes with higher price and therefore excludes the participation of majority of the population. Amidst the specialisation and broadening of target market to include the youth and children, through the adoption of foreign marketing and sales schemas, production of aesthetic

cosmopolitanism fashion is expensive, therefore, can be engaged by mostly the economic affluent. According to Regev (2007), the production of aesthetic cosmopolitanism ensures the openness of dominant cultures, invariably dominant groups, to accept minority and excluded cultures in fashioning ethno-national culture. However, the prices of participants' products and their personal admission of the economic and social target market suggest that, though they seek national cultural representation, consumption is limited to few members of the society. Consumption is limited to the upper classes, just as the old cosmopolitanism practiced by early modern consumers (Regev, 2007:127). This counters an important tenet of Regev's late modernity aesthetic cosmopolitanism, a significant point of departure from early proponents of cosmopolitanism. According to Regev (2007), early proponents such as Szerszinski and Urry (2002) and Tomlinson (1999) conceptualised cosmopolitanism on individual level, projecting a dichotomy of "our own" and "others". He argues that aesthetic cosmopolitanism transcends any dichotomy and exclusivity on individual or class levels to project fluidity of national uniqueness and openness of consumption. While Regev's argument can easily hold for the aesthetics of music and film which enjoy wider audience and popularity to thrive, fashion consumption normally starts from a section of society, and later spread to all (Bourdieu, 1985; Veblen, 1910). Therefore, as budding industry, the current development in Nigerian fashion industry may project classist dichotomy in consumption, it is expected to trickle down with time, as recognition and acceptance widens.

The last chapter of the analysis gives further insight into the technological and practical foreign appropriation of fashion production employed by current designers to increase quality and efficiency in production. The theory and technicalities participants have learnt from both the local and international training are brought to bear at the floor level of production. Participants argue on the quest to seek global standards in fashion production in their business, therefore they have adopted some international practices to enhance the practical production of clothes. First, designers brand their business to give it a recognisable identification among competitors. They adopt and register production name which becomes patented logos or labels of their business. These logos or labels are placed on clothes for identification by customers. Other intangible features such as design styles, business vision can also serve as brands that distinguishes products of participants. Second technique adopted is the division of labour in production. Hitherto, seamstresses and tailors are noted to work on outfit from start to finish using the free-hand method of cutting (Gott, 2010). Participants have introduced structure into the labour of production where one task is performed by one person or a group of people,

depending on the size of the firm. Skills such as designing, illustration, drafting, cutting, sewing and accessorising are done by separate individuals with the specific skills. One does not need to have comprehensive training in making an entire outfit to be employed, specific limited skills are now employable. This has led to the development of fashion schools that teach these specific skills at different level with each level being charged different. One can be a designer or illustrator or drafter without necessarily knowing how to sew or accessories. Division of labour ensures quality, efficiency and speed in production. Another feature that adds to quality, efficiency and speed is the use of computerised industrial machines. All participants have abandoned the use of manual sewing machines for computerised industrial machines which they believe give quality sewing finishing and speed up production. The separation of workshop from retail shop is a new phenomenon adopted by designers to serve customers efficiently. Retail shops are opened in different advantageous places in the city which sells the already-made clothes while the production site is shielded from customers. The last strategy adopted by designers to serve both their local and foreign customers is in marketing. Majority of participants are aware of the power of media through learning new skills on Youtube, however, they decided to take it further by using them to market their products. Social media and internet websites are powerful technological tools since their spectrum are wide, transcending local boundaries at a relatively cheaper rate of internet. Another powerful marketing strategy has been printing media, magazines. The hype of designers' work and creativity emanated from the pages of local fashion magazines that dedicated their work to following celebrities' lifestyle and big local events to exhibit the fashion of participants. This brought local designers and their work to the streets where consumers are found. Other marketing strategies such as clothing local celebrities, friends and relatives are likewise effective.

Emerging designers are re-structuring fashion production in Nigerian by adopting global fashion standards that promotes quality and efficiency. Consumers are offered product and services that resonates with their international exposure as well as local fashion taste. Thus, in creating aesthetic cosmopolitanism in fashion "the orthodox commitment to a rigid form of national culture has been replaced by a fluid conception of ethno-national uniqueness, one that is constantly and consciously willing to implement stylistic innovations in art and culture from different parts of the world" (Regev, 2007:124). The constant interaction between the global and the local is shaping fashion production in Nigeria and the whole of Africa. Regev's concept of aesthetic cosmopolitanism gives an inclusive perceptive of how concepts, technology and

tangible elements from foreign fields can be borrowed and merged with local cultural element to produce innovative ethno-national aesthetics. The importance lies in producers' knowledge and diligence in creatively integrating the local with the global, of which fashion producers in Lagos have shown in this study.

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## APPENDIX A

### THE LAGOS FASHION AND DESIGN WEEK, 2017

The Lagos Fashion and Design Week is an annual fashion event organised in Lagos to bring together African fashion designers and fashion enthusiasts to celebrate and appreciate the progress of fashion from Africa. This year's programme was themed "Africa: Future of fashion". The event started on the 25<sup>th</sup> of October at Eko Atlantic, Victoria Island, Lagos. The first day was for organisation and welcoming of participants with an opening show of a runway exhibition at 6:00pm. The paparazzi was everywhere; they had been granted accreditation weeks before the event and anyone with a recorder or camera to interview or take pictures respectively were asked to wear the accreditation tags. Different media interviews were going on, making it difficult to get people to interview because they were waiting for media coverage or they had just finished and want to go and see the runway show. The atmosphere was sparked with excitement and anxiety as people awaited a great opening. The first runway show featured twelve designers with each taking 20 minutes. Designers showed colours, vibrancy and comfort in their designs. I loved the work of Nkwo and Ejiro Amos Tafiri. Nkwo's work speaks to uniqueness, ethnicity, and style. They were practical dresses which were made in simple and elegant designs. The audience was cheerful, and I noticed almost every designer had his or her supporters around to cheer them on.

The second day opened with a seminar for young, upcoming designers and people who had the desire to go into fashion. The seminar was themed "fashion and technology: how to use technology to enhance fashion production and marketing." The first speaker was Mr. Cosmas Moduka, the founder of Coscharis motors. His talk centred mainly on how to build a business from small beginnings to a big brand. Factors such as credibility, determination, hardwork and moving with time (incorporating available technology into your business), he argued was key to the growth of a business. Continual learning and open-mindedness also gave an entrepreneur a broader spectrum to operate.

The next speaker was the global brand designer for Heineken, Mark van Iterson who also spoke on design and technology in business. He discussed how to use design to technology to brand a business to make it stand out, attractive and one that resonates with current trends and people. He made a presentation on the evolution of Heineken in terms of branding since he took over the office to illustrate his points.

The third session was with Sissi Johnson, a professor and brand strategist. She was a former model and therefore shared insights on how the industry can connect the various sectors that relate directly or indirectly to fashion to create a brand that is fierce on the global market. The emphasis was on presenting a face that is recognisable and easily identified, not necessarily ethnic based but internationally appealing as well.

There was a session with TECHNO phones on sourcing in terms of how to develop a brand and partnering with others to outsource some of the processes in order to reduce cost, maximise profit and sell at a cheaper rate. This was delivered by Mode Aderinokun, founder of Studio Mode. The next presentation was on the use of media, especially social media to develop a business and reach a larger audience and the last presentation was on art, culture and technology delivered by Masana Chikeka.

On the third day, there was a business seminar forum organised for the members of the master class. The business seminar was organised in collaboration with African development bank for designers on the theme Fashionomics. The ADB is embarking on a project that promotes fashion on the continent and they had selected five countries, including Nigeria to harness potential and train individuals on turning their fashion skills and business into a profitable venture. The programme was a master class to give insight on how to develop business economically and expand without getting crushed by the economic system. Other topics such as modest fashion, the power of collaboration and style and building a global brand were discussed. All this was in the hopes of helping the participants to develop further their ideas and look for possible partnerships that can help them build a brand that can compete on an international front. While a lot of people are joining the fashion industry, there is a need to strive for collaboration more than competition. Building an international brand does not also mean targeting European or American markets, it could also be the African market they emphasised.

The evening was devoted to another set of runway shows and featured the works of twelve designers including Maybelline, Lisa Folawiyo, Tokyo James and an outstanding presentation to end the night by Mai Tafo. Incredible designs from participants, the audience could not have enough and kept requesting for more at the end of the show.

The final day for the LFDW started off with a continuation of Fashionomics with speakers like Parminder Vir, the CEO of Tony Elumelu Foundation, Sara Maino of Vogue Talent and Tony Elumelu himself. The trainees were also asked to take time and pitch their ideas in three

minutes to a panel of five judges who would then advise them and help streamline their ideas. Three best ideas were selected after the exercise. There was also a fashion talk from Mai Tafo. Other shows went on which required special invitations. The runway event of the day was fun and exciting. The day featured designers like Lamisigo, Meena, Ghana's Christie Brown, Maki Oh and many others. Heineken also showcased African inspired fashion which were mostly Avant-garde but spoke to the sense of creativity and Heineken's interest in fashion in Africa. The African fashion industry resonated their vision of building the future which is what Heineken is about.

The last day which was to start with a bridal runway show. News after the event became the highlight of the entire event with a show stopping performance from Mai Atafo's bridal collection. The week's celebration of fashion was a remarkable event. The strength of the 2017 edition was the various seminar sections organised for upcoming and interested designers. These fora presented both the practical and business aspect of fashion production, two strong features for understanding commercial fashion production. This is a step further in instilling standardisation in the industry as organisers of the celebration acknowledge the global impact that fashion from Nigeria is making. To sustain and possibly improve the current developments of the industry, some standards of operations must be put in place to structure operations along acceptable global standards. Most participants were motivated and acknowledged the enlightenment they had received especially in the business management aspect of production. Running with your passion is one thing, different from turning your passion into a business venture. While many signed up for the event because of their interest in fashion, they were introduced to how they could build their passion to earn a comfortable living while contributing to something bigger in the society; building a solid fashion industry.