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# Report on Predominant Ankara Fabric Designs in Osun State of South-Western Nigeria: Osogbo as Case Study

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## Abstract

Designs on Ankara fabric are usually symbolic, stylized, and colourful, which are chosen according to the tastes of the consumers. Though the process is complex, the ideas are transformed into reality to have effective results. The study of Ankara is vast, but there had not been adequate studies on designs and patterns of Ankara fabrics. Therefore, there is a need to record and collate the predominant designs favoured by the users, taking a snapshot of Osun state for proper analysis and recording in the annals of art history. The study adopts exploratory and descriptive survey research design for gathering the data, using both qualitative and quantitative methods for the analysis. This is for the purpose of discovering the designs that are more favoured by the users in Osun State, using Osogbo State capital as the case study. The findings show that floral design is mostly favoured, and the majority bought the fabric as *aso-ebi* while few purchased it through personal choice in the market.

**KEYWORDS:** *Ankara fabric, design, pattern, consumers, Osogbo, case study*

**SŁOWA KLUCZOWE:** *tkanina ankara, projektowanie, wzornictwo, konsumenci, Osogbo, studium przypadku*

## Introduction

Ankara fabric, usually referred to as African wax prints, is of Indonesian origin. This is a process of technology to prevent dye from spreading to the entire fabric (Adebayo 2015). Wax is used to create patterns on the fabric before dying, the wax remaining on the fabric then creates prints on both sides with interesting designs and striking patterns, resulting in a versatile and beautiful fabric. Olanrewaju (2020) states that Ankara fabric has bold motifs and vibrant colours, which make it more desirable for Africans: hence the given name of 'African wax prints'.

Ankara fabric is known in almost all African countries by different names, such as Kitenge in Kenya, Dutch wax in Ghana, Kanga print in Tanzania, mud cloth in some east African countries, etc. The colours of the fabric are rich, the fabric is distinctive and durable, which is popular throughout the world. Although it is popularly known as Dutch wax, Hollandaise, etc, it is now often called Ankara in Nigeria for its colours and patterns that are of uniquely African heritage. It is sold in either 12-or 6-yard lengths (Kalilu and Adeoti 2022).

Ankara fabric was originally created by the Dutch for the Indonesian markets, but it was adopted by the West African markets due to the tribal-like patterns and vibrant colours applied in the prints. African prints were developed from batik (Akinwumi 2008, 181, Adebowale 2017), but African print is a general term employed by European textile firms in Africa to categorize fabrics which are machine printed using wax resins and dyes in order to accomplish batik effects on both sides of the cloth (Amubode 2009, 247, Guintini 2008, 30, Nielson 1979, 470), and as an expression for those replicating or imitating the wax-type effects. Therefore, the prints are not regarded as authentically African but rather European 'African cloth' (Akinwumi 2008, 179, Hagen-Jurkowsch and Sarlay 2010, 43). Nielson (1979, 478) claims this that wax prints are wax batiks which imitate the genuine Java batiks, which are machine-printed rather than hand-painted. Qingdao Phoenix (2009) believes that wax printing originated from China and spread along the 'Silk Way' to the Malay Islands and Indonesia. The Javanese were influenced by the arrival of new ideas from the cultures of Indians, Chinese and Islamic clerics (Akinwumi 2008, 181), which are manifested in Javanese batik.

Usually, machines create a crackle effect when the wax is cracked and appears as thin and uneven vein-like lines and also white dots, as a result of remnant wax on the fabric. But this thin line effect, resulting from the cracking wax technique, was largely unappreciated by the Javanese, with the term 'imperfection' becoming highly appreciated in West Africa (Sylvanus



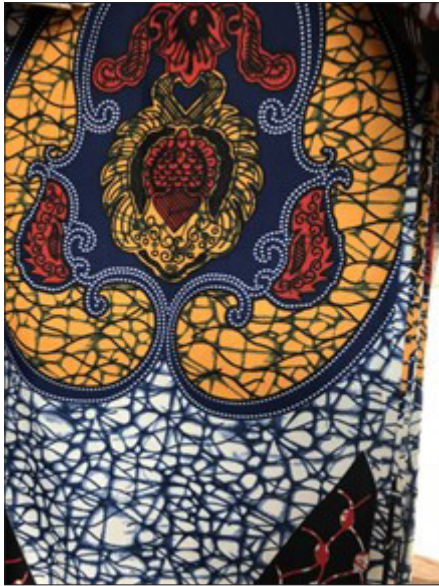


Figure 1: Sample of cracked effect on Ankara fabrics



Figure 2: Sample of Ankara fabrics with overlapping background and cracked effect



Figure 3: Sample of bold motif of Ankara fabrics

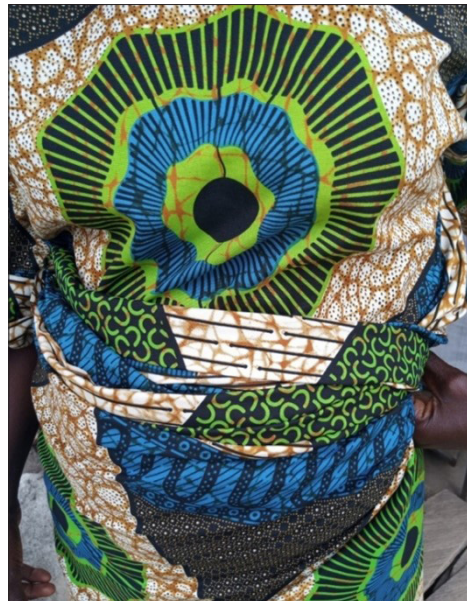


Figure 4: Sample of line effect in Ankara fabrics

2007, 207, Bello 2021, 73). The prints were later exported to the Gold Coast and spread over West Africa to Central Africa (Wendren 2008). Akinwumi (2008, 179) notes that there are also some features that are peculiar to African prints, such as overlapping background colours, bold motifs and line effect.

However, most Ankara fabrics sold in Nigeria today are from China. Designs that are highly favoured are taken to China due to its cheap price of production, but these are mostly of poor quality, like ones produced in Nigeria. Some of the Ankara fabrics produced were not 100% cotton as required, but the price has led to the neglect of the Ankara produced in Nigeria. Though costlier, it is made from very strong and durable fabric. In previous years, Ankara fabric could only be tailored into traditional *iro* and *buba* costumes, but these days, lots of fashion items can be made from it, such as skirts and blouses, gowns, suits, blazers, etc., with lots of accessories, earrings, ties, bags and purses, phone pouches, etc. to complement the attire.

Adeloye, Ogunduyile and Akinbogun (2022, 32–42) reiterates that African print is a term used to describe textiles produced using machines. It is usually categorized by African signs, symbols and motifs used as a means of non-verbal communication in a society where there are morals, spiritual beliefs and cultural integrity (Debeli, Jieyuan, and Jiu 2016). This therefore allows African societies to make use of African prints for political, social and special occasions. Ankara is 100% cotton fabric with vibrant patterns and usually colourful cloth; it is used as *aso-ebi* on different occasions. Ogunduyile (2001, 110) describes African prints as an essential part of African culture that is necessary to clothe the nation in an affordable manner. ‘Aso’ means cloth, while ‘ebi’ means family. Therefore, *aso-ebi* can literally be translated as ‘cloth of the family’. *Aso-ebi* is the uniform cloth worn by family members, relatives, friends and well-wishers as a mark of solidarity in a ceremony which is a tradition that is very common among the Yoruba of south-western Nigeria.

## Design processes on Ankara fabrics

Ankara fabrics in the market bear names such as Real English wax, Veritable Java print, guaranteed Dutch Java, Hollandaise, Uniwax, etc. (Akinwumi 2008, 179, Kalilu and Adeoti 2022). The patterns and designs on Ankara fabrics are mostly symbolic and stylized with stories and meanings surrounding the given designs. The designs are usually made according to the taste of the users. The design process is always very complex (Wilson 2001, 20) because it involves numerous activities. The designers usually communicate





Figure 5: A lady wearing Ankara skirt with hat to complement the dressing



Figure 6: A man wearing Ankara sewn into suit and trousers



Figure 7: A woman wearing commemorative design of Ankara with pictures and inclusion of text

with the appropriate stakeholders (Studd 2015, 47). This process then transforms the ideas of the designers into reality until they have effective results. In the light of this, the design process is exploratory and creative, involving decision making.

Adequate research and regular contact with the clients are the most important steps in the textile design process to create satisfactory and marketable designs. Wilson (2001, 33) reiterates that design – being an exploratory process – should start with research which is an examination of what the customer requires and their expectations after the identification of design needs. He further believes that the process needs to start with a design brief, delivered officially or casually. Regan, Kincade and Sheldon (1997, 44) believe that the design brief should have all the necessary information required to develop the design, but the designer should ask questions about the type of customers, favourite colours, price range and design theme.

Usually, the motifs are peculiar to African prints and mostly from nature like plants, animals and birds drawn in European styles. Akinwumi (2008, 181) states that the designs that are predominant in African prints are cracked effects, overlapping background colours, bold motifs and line effects. The fashion industries in Africa make use of African prints as their major raw materials (Amankwah and Howard 2013, 75). Bello (2021, 73) notes that African prints favour designs that include identifiable European images like televisions, electric fans, automobiles and many more designs that take hidden stories, proverbs and events as inspiration.

## Methodology

Several articles have been written on Ankara fabrics in Nigeria and also in the Diaspora, but there is no adequate study on the designs and patterns preferred by the consumers in Nigeria. Designs made by the producers are favoured differently; hence, some designs sell well in the market because of its preference. The reason for this has yet to be studied to give the producers the insight to favour the preferred designs in various colours.

Osun state in south-western Nigeria is a place where Ankara fabric is found in the wardrobe of all and sundry. Therefore, the study focussed on Osogbo, the state capital. This is because Osogbo has the highest population in Osun state where the inhabitants wear Ankara fabrics for both formal and informal ceremonies. The aim of the study is to capture the designs that are favoured by the consumers, to record the most favoured among the designs in Osun state using Osogbo as a case study and analyse them for proper recording in the annals of art history.

The study is empirical research and adopts exploratory and descriptive survey design for gathering the necessary data using both qualitative and quantitative methods to analyse the data collected in statistical analysis.

In this study, Osogbo city is divided into five different locations to be representative of the whole city. The locations are:

The Oja-Oba axis, from the palace square to Oke-Ayepe / Ita-Olookan road, Isale-Osun road and the road leading to Oke-Baale.

The Orisumbare market axis, from the market to the road leading to Igbona, the station road and the road towards MDS and the road towards Oke-fia.

The Ayetoro axis, taking data from Igbona market towards the road leading to the Ota-Efun/Ikirun road, and the road leading to Sabo area.



The Alekuwodo axis, focussing on the market through the road leading to Oke-Fia, the route to Orita-Olaiya / overhead bridge, and the road leading to Odi-Olowo street.

The Agunbelewo axis, from Lameco junction / roundabout, towards the road leading to Ring road and the road leading to Dele Yes-Sir.

The locations were selected because these routes are heavily used, and there is a market square in each location, which allows heavy movement of people around the axis. The areas are commercial centres within the Osogbo metropolis, thereby allowing the researcher to record accurate data of people using Ankara fabrics of different types without difficulty.

The total number of consumers in each of the five locations was 100, totalling 500 consumers in the whole Osogbo city, which were randomly sampled by the researcher. The focus was on the designs on the Ankara fabrics for all the 500 consumers. Pictures of the consumers wearing the fabric were taken to record the designs on the Ankara fabrics worn. The aim was to record the total number of designs that were most favoured by consumers in Osun state, using Osogbo city as case study, and the designs are therefore grouped into five for proper analysis.

The five groups of the designs are:

Birds / Animals design

Floral design

Geometry / Carpet design

Object design

Commemorative design (pictures with inclusion of text)

## Data Analysis and Result

S/N	Location	Birds / Animals	Floral	Geometry / Carpet	Objects	Commemorative	Total
1.	Oja-Oba	2	49	28	20	1	100
2.	Orisumbare	6	44	26	22	2	100
3.	Ayetoro	1	48	35	15	1	100
4.	Alekuwodo	5	40	37	17	1	100





5.	Agunbelewo	5	48	27	20	-	100
TOTAL		19	227	153	94	7	500

From the above table, there were only two Ankara fabrics that have birds or animals as motifs in Oja-Oba (2) at the time of collecting the data. In the Orisumbare axis, there were only six (6). In the Ayetoro axis, only one (1) user was found; at the Alekuwodo and Agunbelewo axis, five (5) birds / animals' motifs respectively were found. Adding these together, there was a total of 19 in Osogbo city in the month of March 2021.

The consumers with floral patterns of leaves, trees, plants, and flowers are more plentiful. In the Oja-Oba axis, 49 consumers were found; 44 were seen at Orisumbare axis. At Ayetoro, 48 consumers were recorded; 40 consumers were seen at Alekuwodo; at Agunbelewo, 48 consumers were recorded. This means that the total numbers of consumers in Osogbo city having floral designs on their Ankara fabrics was 229 at the time of the data collection.

28 consumers purchased geometrical or carpet designs in the Oja-Oba axis; in the Orisumbare axis, 26 consumers were recorded. In the Ayetoro axis, there were 35 consumers with such designs; at the Alekuwodo axis, 37 were found; at the Agunbelewo axis, 27 consumers had geometrical or carpet designs on their Ankara fabrics at the time of collecting the data. This puts the total number of consumers having a geometrical design in Osogbo city at the time of data collection at 153.

From the table, the Ankara fabrics found having inanimate objects as their motifs at the Oja-Oba axis were 20, while 22 were recorded at the Orisumbare axis. At the Ayetoro axis, 15 consumers were recorded; at the Alekuwodo axis, there were 17 in total; at Agunbelewo axis, 20 of the Ankara fabrics were found using object designs at the time of collecting the data. The total number of consumers having inanimate objects as the designs on their Ankara fabric was 94 at the time of data collection.

The commemorative designs found at the time of data collection were very few in number. The designs included pictures and texts. At the Oja-Oba axis, only one (1) was found; at the Orisumbare axis, two (2) were recorded; at the Ayetoro and Alekuwodo axes, one (1) each was found respectively; at the Agunbelewo axis, none (0) were seen. This brings the total number of commemorative designs recorded to be five (5) altogether.

From the table above, the findings show that floral designs of Ankara fabrics were highly favoured by the people of Osun state, with a total number of 229 out of 500 designs collated. It was discovered from the unstructured



questions the researcher asked the consumers that the majority of the fabrics were purchased as *aso-ebi* and used for different ceremonies. Some of the consumers bought their Ankara from the retailers out of love for the designs, making floral designs the most favoured Ankara fabrics design in Osun state, using Osogbo state capital as case study.

Geometrical or carpet designs closely followed among the Ankara fabric designs mostly used in Osun state using Osogbo as case study is geometry or carpet design with 153 out of the 500 designs recorded, Some consumers interviewed did not want Ankara fabrics that are figurative in design; therefore, they chose the carpet design as it is non-figurative, and some also bought it as *aso-ebi* while others bought it in the market as their chosen Ankara fabric.

The consumers having inanimate objects as patterns or motifs on their Ankara fabrics were 94 out of 500 designs recorded at the time of collecting the data. It was discovered that the majority of consumers bought them as *aso-ebi*. Some of them claimed that they had put on the fabric because they had it in their wardrobe, while others bought the fabric for the love of the design and its colour combination.

Birds or animal designs were rare as the total number found during the data collection was 19 out of 500 designs sampled. Some of the consumers bought them as *aso-ebi*, while others have a passionate love for the design, and its arrangement on Ankara fabric was the reason the fabric was purchased.

In the case of commemorative design type of Ankara fabric with pictures and inclusion of texts, obviously, the Ankara fabrics were used as *aso-ebi* in one ceremony or the other. The consumers have it in their wardrobe and they confessed they were part of the ceremonies that used the Ankara fabrics. Though the number of the consumers were very few, only five (5) of them were captured out of 500 designs seen at the time of the data collection.

## Conclusion

Ankara is versatile and very beautiful to tailor for different styles or accessories one wishes to make it into, and there are an infinite catalogue of striking styles a designer can create with the fabric. The uniqueness of Ankara prints cannot be ignored; this is why a seasoned fashion designer would always want to create unique styles out of the fabric. This great fabric has found a home in Africa, but its origins could not be claimed by Africans. But the creativity and versatility of the fabric of the fashion designers in Africa have made the fabric more distinctive in Africa.



Ankara fabric is unique and could be used for any occasion, either formal or informal. Most of the consumers interviewed used the fabric worn as *aso-ebi*. They stated that the fabric is cool on the body, which is best for the climate in Nigeria. It was also found that the majority of consumers make critical notes on the designs and colours on the Ankara fabric before making a purchase either for *aso-ebi* or personal choice in the market. This demonstrated that the choice of floral designs is predominant in Osun state using Osogbo as case study.

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