

**PRESERVING INDIGENOUS TEXTILE KNOWLEDGE: MOTIF LEXICON
DEVELOPMENT IN AKWA-OCHA HANDWOVEN TEXTILE TRADITION OF
THE ANIOMA DELTA-IGBO, NIGERIA**

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Abstract

Traditional textiles among the Igbo people of south-eastern Nigeria represents rich visual communication expressed through symbolic motifs. The motifs and patterns on the textile reflect the world view, life view, social reality, customs and traditions of the people since ancient times. The creativity in motifs and patterns creates a valuable cultural heritage to the Igbo people. However, despite the cultural significance of this motifs, systematic documentation and interpretation of their design vocabulary remains confined. This study investigates the motif system of *Akwa-ocha*, which is the type of traditional fabric produced by the Anioma, Delta-Igbo with the aim of developing a structured lexicon of its motifs through creative textile production and analytical documentation. The research adopts a practiced-based methodology, combining textile studio experimentation with qualitative ethnographic design. Motifs identified from woven samples were systematically classified and analysed according to their formal characteristics, symbolic meanings and socio-cultural significance. Result reveals that *Akwa-ocha* motifs encode narratives of social status, cosmology, communal values, and historical memory within the Igbo cultural landscape. The study further demonstrates that the development of a structured *Akwa-ocha* motifs lexicon has the capacity for preserving and retaining Igbo identity, creativity and culture. The study concludes that the codification of indigenous textile motifs offers a viable strategy for safeguarding intangible cultural heritage while promoting scholarly engagement and creative revitalization within modern textile design practice.

Keywords: *Akwa-ocha*; Weaving; Motif; indigenous Design Knowledge

Introduction

Textiles are one of the basic needs of man. Its vital side, clothing, makes life endurable and without it, human existence would be very uncomfortable. More importantly, the textile of a particular ethnic society aids in their identification and distinction from other ethnicities. Thus, the culture of a people is partially portrayed through the clothing they put on and/or the textiles they produce. Akenoo in Adom and Baah (2016) concurs that, aside from textiles giving identity to an ethnic society or nation, clothing helps in understanding the beliefs, ideologies, and accepted norms governing the lives of a group of people. Textiles also advance and enhance the image of a people. Clothing plays a very important role in the development and transmission of any culture in the world.

Among the Igbo of South-Eastern Nigeria, the art of weaving is an age-long tradition and its origin dates back to pre-colonial times. The pre-colonial Igbo plant their cotton, process and spin it into yarn for fabric construction. This fact was attested to by the Igbo-Ukwu finds

which contains several ancient Igbo textiles dating back to the 9th century AD (Shaw, 1970). The analysis of the specimen suggests that the procedures of such textile fabrics possess a high degree of textile weaving skills. Another record of the textile industry in pre-colonial Igboland appears in *The Interesting Narratives of the Life of Olaudah Equiano or Gustavus Vassa the African*, (Equiano, 1789).

The Igbo textile culture began to experience transformation when it came into contact with the colonial masters and more significantly the missionaries in the 1850s (Ekechi, 1971 and Chudi-Duru, 2021). Then, the open market experienced an influx of diverse textile fabrics resulting from Europe's industrial revolution. A typical example was the importation and sale of fairly used clothes known as *Okrika* further corrupted to “bend-down-boutique” also known to the Yoruba as *aso-oyibo* (white man cloth) among others have a negative impact on the psyche, patronage, and use by a few people to the detriment of our cherished indigenous fabrics like *Akwa-ocha* and *Akwete* to mention but a few. In view of the above, Ntagu (2015) revealed:

Little did we realise that the British policy in Nigeria from 1886 was designed to knock down Nigeria's home industries in order to guarantee continuing importation of British-made goods to Nigeria and other colonies of hers? The above policy during the colonial era starting from the time of Lugard was implemented in Nigeria to the letter. (p.21)

The issue of westernization and the declining impetus of the people's cultural heritage have constituted great problems and uncertainties to both the immediate past and present Igbo societies. These problems have manifested in the increasing loss of identity and cultural values, undermining the development and sustainability of traditional fabric production, patronage, and usage

Akwa-Ocha, which literally means “white cloth”, is basically an indigenous hand-woven cloth that is produced by the Anioma people of Delta state, Nigeria (Esogbue, 2020). He further remarks that:

The Anioma are Igbo-speaking people geographically located in Delta State of Nigeria, South-South Geo-political Zone of Nigeria. They comprise the sub-groups of Aniocha, Oshimili, Ika and Ukwuani/Ndokwa and are for administrative purposes classified as Delta North Senatorial District in Delta State. Since 1991, they have come to occupy 9 (nine) local government areas in the state.

The production of *Akwa-ocha* has been an ancient weaving culture passed on from one generation to another. Traditional *Akwa-ocha* textiles have a central function concerning usability and the mentality of the Anioma people. The motifs and patterns on the textiles reflect the traditions, beliefs, and livelihood of the people since ancient times. The creativity in motifs and pattern design creates a valuable cultural heritage to Anioma people that seriously needs to be preserved and promoted. However, it is perturbing that these motifs have been overtaken by foreign ones that are irrelevant to the people’s way of life thereby exposing *Akwa-ocha* to cultural erosion.

This study therefore examines the development of motifs lexicon as a targeted strategy for preserving indigenous textile knowledge within the *Akwa-ocha* weaving tradition.

The specific objectives of this study are to:

Identify and document the various motifs used in *Akwa-ocha* traditional handwoven textiles among the Anioma people of Delta State Examine the visual structures and design characteristics of *Akwa-ocha* motifs, including their patterns, forms, and compositional arrangements.

Interpret the symbolic meanings, cultural significance, and indigenous knowledge embedded in the motifs used in *Akwa-ocha* textiles. Investigate the processes and creative practices involved in the production and incorporation of motifs in *Akwa-ocha* weaving. Classify and organise the documented motifs into a systematic motif lexicon, providing clear descriptions and visual representations. Develop a scholarly reference resource that preserves and promotes *Akwa-ocha* textile motifs for use by researchers, textile designers, artists, and cultural historians. Explore the role of motif documentation in safeguarding and revitalising indigenous textile heritage within contemporary textile practice

Literature Review

Indigenous Textile Knowledge

Traditional textile practice function as a repositories of cultural knowledge embedded in materials, techniques, and symbolic motifs. Scholars have emphasised the importance of documenting indigenous craft traditions in order to safeguard cultural heritage and support sustainability. The publication of Iloeje and Edeh (2006) suggest that traditional hand-woven textiles in Nigeria are a cultural heritage. It indicates the culture, livelihood, creativity and intelligence of ancient people. Motifs and patterns on the textiles not only show craftsmanship and aesthetics, but they describe the fundamental principles of living, tell a story and explain the religious beliefs of people. Chidtavong (2016) opined that these factors are the main influence to archaeologists, mathematicians and scientists to investigate cultural and scientific contexts of traditional textiles. Glenn (2013) argues that craft practices function as cultural expressions that reflect the historical experiences and social structures of communities.

In Nigeria, Iloeje and Edeh (2006) noted that there are many peculiar designs by which certain ethnic groups are identified. The 'Akwete' cloth, for instance, is produced mainly in Akwete; a town in South-eastern Nigeria. Adire is a name given by the Yorubas to their indigo resist-dyed cloth. They also produce the Aso-oke cloth by which they have gained worldwide recognition. The Fulanis are known for the production of a woven cloth called 'Khassa' while the Ibibios produce the 'Ukatt'. Many other tribes in Nigeria have different types of locally produced textiles. Ohiorhenuan (2001) says that Nigerian traditional woven textiles are highly valued and cherished because they are seen as different vital expressions of cultural values. The weaving tradition is thriving, with Nigerian social functions now serving as a vibrant showcase for the nation's cultural heritage. At these events, people are adorned in a rich array of traditional textiles, including Aso-Oke, Akwete, Akwa-Ocha, and many others. In the same vein, Gyampoh (2004) avers that "Asoke" in Yoruba land and Akwete in Igbo land are good examples of traditional woven fabrics that are of great cultural value to Nigeria and have gone a long way to enhance the socio-cultural image of Nigeria locally and internationally. The Nigerian traditional woven textile, without doubt, by their nature, performs not only the functional role of being used as apparel but also an aesthetic role as its colour, symbols and motifs are derived from Nigerian traditional customs and traditions. Thus, most of the symbols and motifs used on the Nigerian traditional woven textiles are mainly influenced by the cultural activities of the immediate environment of the weavers, hence, this cultural identity.

Weaving traditions are common throughout West Africa - from Senegal in the west to Cameroon in the east, and from the edge of the Sahara south to the coast. Avins and Quick (1998) reiterate that Asante *kente* is unquestionably the most popular and best known of all African textiles because it is produced in greater quantity, exported and incorporated into a greater variety of forms than any other African fabric.

Theoretical Framework

Donald Schon's Theory of Reflective Practice is adopted to define this study philosophically, epistemologically, methodologically and analytically, in agreement with

Grant and Osanlo (2014). It provides a conceptual lens for understanding how knowledge is generated through creative and professional practice.

The concept of reflective practice (Schon, 1983) provides a link between action and practice-based research. Schon was concerned with an individual's reflection on his or her professional practice as distinct from the early form of action research, which was concerned with situations more broadly. He argues that much professional knowledge emerges through reflective engagement with practice rather than through formal theoretical instruction alone.

He defines reflective practice as the practice by which professionals become aware of their implicit knowledge base and learn from their experience. He talks about reflection-in-action and reflective action. Another term he introduced is "knowing-in-action" to describe tacit knowledge. He argues that 'reflection' in his words "is susceptible to a kind of rigor that is both like and unlike the rigour of scholarly research and controlled experiment. For Schon, reflection-in-action was the core of "professional artistry". His basic idea is that through reflection-in-action which responds to the belief "that our knowing is in our action" we can gain verifiable insight into our thought process. Schon describes the way a designer engages with their materials as a "conversation".

Significant is reflection-in-action, which occurs after the completion of woven textiles. This typically involves tangible and situated actions such as drafting, winding, warping, drawing –in weaving, and finally beaming the cloth. Reflection on the materials required to satisfy a productive dialogue with woven fabric. Critical reflection helps us to see and understand multiple perspectives, make new connections between our ideas, experiences, and thoughts, find flaws or strengths in our solutions to problems, think about alternative outcomes, consider new or additional applications, and gain meaning from an experience. Through critical reflection, we are able to evaluate the clarity, balance, and symbolic resonance of motifs, drawing lessons that inform subsequent weaving activities. This process contributes to the gradual evolution of motif structures and design variations within the *Akwa-ocha* weaving tradition. Overtime, such reflective engagement facilitates the emergence, modification, and preservation of culturally embedded motifs that form the basis of the *Akwa-ocha* motif lexicon. Applying Schon's reflective practice theory to this study therefore provides an analytical framework for understanding how indigenous textile knowledge is generated, refined and transmitted through practice. The mental thinking or concept starts with the standard formula of the basic unit of a bottom shedding loom. The formation of the unit pattern and the repeat of the basic unit numbers.

Through reflection in drafting the design, veritable insight is gained into the thought process of how the actual design will look. It is very tasking and makes the individual meditate more. Reflective practice here involves creating the pattern draft, observing the threading and treadling, reflecting on how to improve or adjust the fabric design before proceeding to the actual weaving practice on the loom.

The theory underscores the role of a weaver as a reflective practitioner whose creative decisions contribute to the development of the motif system embedded within the cultural fabric of the community.

Based on this, the documentation and analysis of *Akwa-ocha* motifs as a lexicon can be understood as an outcome of sustained reflective engagement with weaving practice, where experiential knowledge, aesthetic judgement, and cultural symbolism converge.

Consequently, Schon's theoretical perspective supports the practice-based ethnographic approach adopted in this study by emphasising the importance of embodied knowledge, reflective creativity, and experiential learning in the development and preservation of indigenous textile traditions. Through this framework, the study interprets the *Akwa-ocha* motif lexicon not only as a catalogue of visual forms but also as a reflection of the dynamic knowledge system embedded within traditional weaving practice.

***Akwa-ocha* of the Anioma Delta-Igbo.**

Anioma is the second largest ethnic group in Delta State, they are made up of Igbo communities which span across 9 Local government areas. They occupy Delta North Senatorial District, which consists of the Enuani (Oshimili/Aniocha), Ika, and Ukwuani/Ndokwa linguistic zones of Delta State. Anioma means "Good Land" in the Igbo language and it has an estimated total population of approximately 1.8 million people according to [dbpedia.org](https://dbpedia.org/page/Anioma_people). https://dbpedia.org/page/Anioma_people

The *Akwa-ocha* of the Anioma people of Delta and Anambra States respectively symbolises a core aspect of their culture. *Akwa-ocha* literally translates as white cloth; its white colour gives the wearer a pure, graceful and dignifying appearance. This noble material was indispensable to the Aniocha people. *Akwa-ocha* covers all the textile requirement of Aniocha people. In the words of Osuyi (2019), "*Akwa Ocha*, the popular hand-woven cloth, is peculiar to the people of Anioma (Delta North senatorial district) of Delta State, which has three sub-constituencies of Aniocha/Oshimili, Ika and Ndokwa. The area is the Igbo-speaking part of the state". Asabor (2020) concur by saying that *Akwa-ocha*, which literally means white cloth, is basically an indigenous hand-woven cloth that is produced by the Aniocha people of Delta state. Osuyi affirms that it is a ceremonial material that is not worn every day. He went further to point out that it is the opinion of many that the people of Ubulu-Uku in Aniocha South Local Government Area started it. Ubulu-Uku is one of the several communities in Aniocha/Oshimili constituency, otherwise referred to as Enuani people, and the community is believed to have started producing *Akwa Ocha* after processing harvested cotton, which was widely cultivated in the area. In agreement with this, Asabor (2020) reiterate by saying:

Akwa-Ocha, which literally means white cloth, is basically an indigenous hand-woven cloth that is produced by the Aniocha people of Delta state. The cloth which contains surface decorative motifs and symbols is used for various festive occasions among the people. *Akwa-ocha* motifs and symbols and their functions reveal the people's history, religion, and social behaviours.

Akwa-ocha is more than a clothing item; it is a visual representation of history philosophy, ethics, oral literature and beliefs. M.C. Okoye (personal communication April, 21 2019) described it as "Pride of the Anioma People" as shown in plates III and IV.

Akwa-ocha is very popular in Anambra, especially among titled men and women as shown in plate I and II. It is regarded as a symbol of purity and dignity. Most men with the revered Agbalanze title of Nze n' Ozo wear *Akwa-ocha* while women with the Odu title also adore the fabric to complement with their traditional statuses (Daily Independent).

Okeke in Nwosu, (2013) observed that Anioma which forms a distinct group of the Igbo have their own recognizable cultural values, patterns and dressing. In fact, their culture appears to be less eroded by western influence than in many other parts of Igboland.

The *Akwa-ocha* of the Aniocha and Oshimili is pure, graceful and dignifying. Generally, white is the predominant colour. The production of *Akwa-ocha* has been a very ancient traditional vocation passed from one generation to another among the Aniocha and Oshimili people of Delta State. It is the people's cultural heritan an age and identity.



Plate I: Onitsha Chiefs
Source: Calista Nwosu, 2022/10/24



Plate II: *Otu-odu* women group.
Source: <https://www.nigeriainfo.fm/news>, 2022/10/24.



Plate III: Dancers in *Akwa-ocha* outfits.
Source: <https://www.politicalconomistng.com/ubuluuku-cultural-carnival-delta-town-gave-world-best->



Plate IV: Researcher participating in Iwu festival in Ubulu-uku
Source: Jude Photos, 2019

Weaving

Weaving is the production of fabric by interlacing two sets of yarns so that they cross each other, normally at right angles, usually accomplished with a hand or power-operated loom. Sandstrom (1982) penned, “In weaving there are two yarn systems crossing each other at 900 angles and interlaced in some orderly fashions.” She further stated that, “the

lengthwise yarns in the fabric are called „warp“ ends and the width wise yarns are referred to as „filling“ or „picks“. While admitting that, Nkeonye (2009) acknowledges that by stating that “weaving is the interlacing of warp and weft threads on a loom to form a fabric”. He went on to say that, “The operation of weaving may be summarised as a repetition of the following sequence of actions:

- i. **Shedding:** The warp threads are separated by rising and lowering the heald frames (or harness) to form an opening called a shed, through which the shuttle can pass.
- ii. **Picking:** The shuttle, carrying the weft is propelled across the loom, through the shed.
- iii. **Beating-up:** The inserted weft yarn is pushed forward against the fell of the cloth by the reed.” He summarized the three actions in basic weaving as the “primary loom motions.”

There are many weave structures developed by weavers, but most of them were invented by a combination of three simple weave structures namely: plain weave or tabby, twill and satin. Stout (1970) states that "weaves are classified according to the method of the interlacing of the warp and filling yarns and the number of sets of warp or filling yarns required". Standstrom (1979), Thorpe and Larsen (1967) as cited in Ligom (2017) share the same view that plain twill and satin weaves are often considered as the basic weaves. Stout however explained that other weaves are largely combinations or variations of the three basic weaves. Standstrom (1979) then states that weaves are simple in themselves, limited in variety and logical in formation.

However, the main weave technique used for making traditional *Akwa-ocha* textiles is a compound weave; its weave structure is a combination between plain weave and supplementary weft pattern weave.

***Akwa-ocha* Motifs**

Motif is a decorative image or design, especially a repeated one forming a pattern. The motifs on *Akwa-ocha* are unique and simple. Asabor, (2020) observed that *Akwa-ocha* motifs and symbols and their functions reveal the people’s history, religion, and social behaviours. It is in the foregoing regard that Onwuakpa, (2017) notes that the weavers’ perception of all aspects of life and nature and most notably, of ideas that reflect cultural aesthetics and taste of Aniocha culture is translated into visual form. These motifs and symbols are ideas drawn from plants, animals and birds, the cosmos and man-made objects that are of importance to the Aniocha people. More so, inscriptions that convey messages and past historical events involving the Aniocha people also form part of the designs on *Akwa-ocha*.

In making motifs on *Akwa-ocha*, the weavers’ perception of all aspect of life and nature as well as ideas and objects that are held to be particularly important and representative of Anioma culture, are translated into visuals Nwosu (2013).

The motifs come in simple forms like triangle, square, rectangles and rhombus, among other basic shapes. These motifs are manipulated adeptly to arrive at some organic and non-organic form such as *Nkpulo-obi* (heart) and *kpakpando* (star), which are intricately laid on the cloth. Some designs on *Akwa-ocha* are either zoomorphic or anthropomorphic. The zoomorphic design may highlight a part of the animal body, or the movement of a particular animal while anthropomorphic designs may highlight a part of human body. Some domestic or essential household objective that serve certain function in the home, such as *Akangweose* (grinding pestle) Nma (Knife) Nha (comb), are used to convey messages, either through writing or representational imagery. Ceremonies involving historical events are also sources of design/motif on *Akwa-ocha*.

Ozue (2016) noted that most of the traditional cotton fabrics are drawn basically from nature and significant experiences that the Delta North people have passed through, thereby presenting it in form on folklore on the woven fabric. The motifs and symbols come in simple shapes and are not naturalistic, but stylised. Onochie (2003) explained that most of the motifs and symbols can be deciphered and their significance appreciated within the context of tradition and cultural values. Some design motifs and symbols in *Akwa-ocha* are symbolic and their meanings are determined by their sources of inspiration. Nwosu (2016) observed that the communities, beliefs, idioms myths, proverbs, folklore, tradition and philosophy are put into consideration in the symbolical meaning of designs of *Akwa-ocha*. She further remarked that other design motifs are mainly for aesthetic values. Some of the motifs and symbols found on *Akwa-ocha* are shown below:

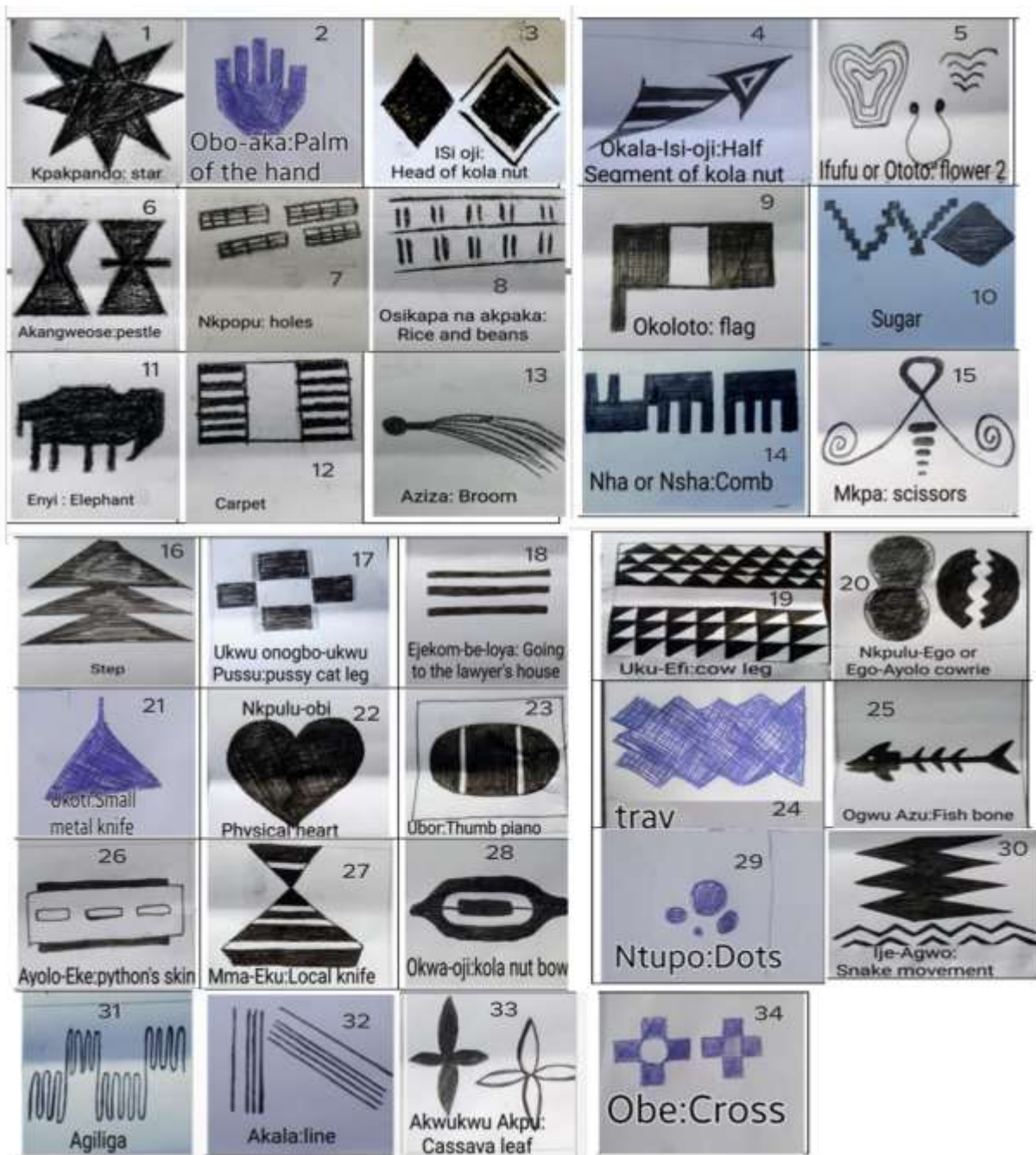


Figure 25: *Akwa-Ocha* Motifs and Symbols. Source: Calista Nwosu, 2023

Methodology

Qualitative data were collected through participant observation, literature and photography. Through studio exploratory method which anchors on Schons theory of reflective practice, some notable *Akwa-ocha* decorative images were selected as a motif for the production of *Akwa-ocha* motif lexicon hand woven fabric. The qualitative data was analyzed using visual content analysis. The creative artifact (lexicon) is an original investigation undertaken in order to gain new knowledge by means of practice and the outcomes is part of the contribution to knowledge.

Studio exploration

Materials and Equipment

The following materials and equipment are used for execution of this research:

- *Nsu* (Loom) and accessories
- Assort colours of yarn



Plate V: *Nsu* (loom)
Source: Calista Nwosu, 2022



Plate VI: *Ogbo*(warping tools)
Source: Calista Nwosu,2022



Plate VII: Assorted colours of yarn
Source: Calista Nwosu, 2022




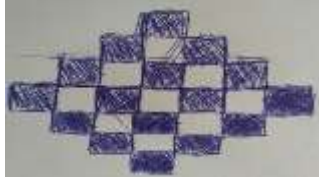



Procedures


The production of a Lexicon of *Akwa-ocha* motifs pattern, which will serve as experience-based motif referral were achieved under the following studio production stages:

3.9.2.1 Step one: Conception

The conceived motifs came from field observation and researchers ideas as shown in the sketches below.

Figure 30: Sketches of the extracted *Akwa-ocha* motifs

MOTIF	NAME AND MEANING
	<p><i>Oboaka</i> motif – palm of hand (from plate plate xiii)</p>
	<p><i>Enyi</i> motif –Elephant (from plate plate xiv)</p>
	<p><i>Ogwuazu</i> motif- fish bone (from plate plate xv)</p>
	<p><i>Ukwu-onogbo</i> motif - Pussy cat leg (from plate plate xiii)</p>
	<p><i>Kpakpando</i> motif – star (from plate plate xxi)</p>
	<p><i>Igodo</i> motif – key (from plate plate xiii)</p>
	<p><i>Akangweose</i> motif – Pestle (from plate plate xviii)</p>

		<p><i>Obe</i> motif – cross (from plate plate xvi)</p>
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Step three: Warping

The white yarns for the warp are arranged on a standard measure called *Ogbo* as shown in plate xxiv and beamed as shown in plate below:



Plate VIII: Measuring the warp yarn
Source: Calista Nwosu,

Step four: Loom dressing

The loom were prepared for weaving as shown below:



Plate IX: warp yarn set on the beams
Source: Calista Nwosu, 2022

Step five: weaving

The interlacement of weft and warp yarns to form a fabric called *Akwa-ocha* was achieved following the under listed steps in the plates below:



Plate X: Warped loom ready for weaving
Source: Calista Nwosu, 2022



Plate XI: shedding
Source: Calista Nwosu, 2022



Plate XII: In-laying
Source: Calista Nwosu, 2022



Plate XIII: designing in progress
Source: Calista Nwosu, 2022



Plate XIV Weaving in progress
Source: Calista Nwosu, 2022



Plate XV: stages of production
Source: Calista Nwosu, 2022

Result and discussion



Plate XVI: Akwa-ocha motifs lexicon hand woven fabric
Source: Source: Calista Nwosu, 2022

The result, which is an art piece depicting different motifs which is a skillful interplay of subtle assorted colours of yarn on white background initiated to serve as a yardstick for Anioma textile. It highlighted the glamour, glory and dignity of *Akwa-ocha* textile. The production of this lexicon motifs has further exposed the traditional weaving technique. The meaning of the symbols are stated as follows:

The first row motifs represented in red colour is called *obo-aka* which means palm of the hand symbolised the destiny of man. This is followed by *akangweose* which is a double headed pestle. It is a kitchen utensil used for pounding. It falls into the group of utility motif. The next is the *nchanwu* the umbrella motif also a utility group motif which symbolised protection. The next is a lined motif called *ejekombeloya* meaning going to the lawyers house represented by silver lurex yarn. The repetition of each motif in a line is done for duality of purpose. The flow of repetition of different motifs was adopted to create balance.

The production of *Akwa-ocha* motifs lexicon fabrics reveals that *Akwa-ocha* textiles contain a rich repertoire of motifs that extend beyond aesthetic ornamentation to embody symbolic, cultural, and communicative functions. Several motifs were identified and categorised according to their visual structure, cultural references and narrative associations within Igbo society.

The analysis further demonstrates that the meaning of these motifs is transmitted through oral transmission and myths., highlighting the implicit nature of indigenous knowledge embedded within craft practices. However, the study also reveals that modernisation and declining participation in traditional weaving are contributing to the gradual erosion of this symbolic knowledge.

The weaving goes through a series of stage-by-stage processes, that each stage is characterised by reflecting on unexpected outputs and experiments which serve to generate both new understanding of the weaving processes and modifying the technique. For example, the bobbin formation depends on the yarn and the action of the weaver in manipulating the wrap and weft on the loom creates the lexicon motif fabric. The creative art piece depicting different motifs is a skillful interplay of subtle assorted colours on white background is initiated to serve as a yardstick for Anioma design motifs. It highlighted the glamour, glory and dignity of *Akwa-ocha* textile. The production of the lexicon motifs has further exposed the traditional weaving technique. The meaning of the symbols reveals the day to day life of the people as already stated. This is in tandem with Schon's (1983) theory of reflective practice. He defines reflective practice as the practice by which professionals become aware of their implicit knowledge base and learn from their experience. The lexicon of *Akwa-ocha* motifs fabric reveals that just as writing puts thought or reflection in a steady, lasting form, granting it certain immortality, so does recording *Akwa-ocha* motifs immortalise the tradition. An unwritten tradition, once it is dead, remains dead; whereas a written tradition can survive its death in some form if its texts survive to be read again later (Walter, 2002). By translating tacit craft knowledge into an organised visual and descriptive system, the lexicon grants the culture a form of timelessness.

Conclusion

The study underscores the importance of documenting and codifying indigenous textile knowledge as a strategy for safeguarding cultural heritage. The motif lexicon development from *Akwa-ocha* textiles demonstrates that traditional weaving practices function as visual archives of cultural identity and collective memory within Igbo society.

By preserving these motifs, in a structured and accessible form, the research contributes to the sustainability of indigenous textile tradition while providing a resource for scholars, designers, and educators. Moreover, the study highlights the importance of integrating the indigenous design knowledge into contemporary textile practice and academic curricula. Sustained documentation, community engagement, and institutional support are therefore necessary for ensuring the continued vitality and transmission of *Akwa-ocha* weaving traditions in the context of rapidly changing cultural and technological built environment.

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