

## **Aso Asiko (Fashion Forwardness): Yoruba Traditional Textiles and Contemporary Fashion Aesthetics**

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### **Abstract**

This paper examines the near invisibility of non-western textiles in current mainstream (western) fashion and explores possible reasons for non-adoption of this wealth of resources. It suggests some alternative models based on the work of African designers, such as Ituen Basi. From the intricacy of Madagascan *lamba akotofahana*, through strip-woven *Kente* and *Aso-Oke* to various configurations of *Adire*, traditional African textiles have inspired and been appropriated for centuries. Yet, like other contemporary non-western resources, are generally positioned as “other”, trend or niche. Does this indicate intellectual and imaginative laziness among western designers to incorporate these sensibilities or is it industry ignorance as to their potential in contemporary fashion? Is it the role of “local” designers to interpret and mediate their culture as accessible for the western consumer– with the unsupportable responsibility of protecting its integrity? Even mainstream non-western designers rarely “carry their culture” with them, their ethnicity used merely as accent, embellishment or counterpoint to designs western in perspective, rather than built on the versatility of their cultural textile capital. Is it reluctance to expose self and culture to a hypercritical western eye, fear of appearing parochial, unsophisticated, branded exotic and of limited appeal?

Non-western apparel, including textiles, may be considered “anti-fashion” a la Proctor and Polhemus – unchanging, static, moribund. Asakitikpi posits ‘The tradition of aso-ebi serves a number of functions. The first and major one being that it ensures... new and innovative designs are developed’ (A. O. Asakitikpi, *Nordic Journal of African Studies* 16(1): (2007). We can observe the concept of “*Aso Asiko*” (“fashion forwardness”) especially *Aso-ebi* among the Yoruba in Nigeria, as driving the dynamics of style and design. contemporising traditional textile techniques, provide models which renew precarious knowledge in creative contemporary fashion. This paper will use several visual examples to illustrate recent challenges and invention in this area.