

Materiality and Memory: Appropriating the Manilla Motif in Textile Design

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Abstract

Materiality and memory of *Manillas*: A metal bracelets and a valued currency used as a medium of exchange for goods and services in Port Harcourt for trade that involved local and international partners is significant. In history, especially as it relates to designing for utilitarian purpose, textile motifs are usually a recurring phenomenon, recall the value of memory in the manifestation in culture and cultural production. Manillas one such item that underscores the reinforcement of memory considering medium of economic exchange then. In rethinking the “Arts of Oil” in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria; it is important to recall it two phases of the Oil Rivers Province of Nigeria. The period of palm oil and the period of the crude oil in the first phase, the manila played a significant role and stood out as the major means of exchange then. The essence is shift Manilla from the previous connotations to create new textile discourse. Promote material culture, innovation, functionality values, and stimulate community awareness of resource management across the diverse ethnic groups in Port Harcourt. Batik and printing techniques, on polychromatic background will be employed. Fabrics, dyes, chemicals, printing inks, yarns will be used to create diverse end uses. Exploratory and descriptive research method will be employed and complemented by a literary source for data. The effort is to maintain continuity and integrity of the history of Port Harcourt indigenous currency motifs that are commercially viable in the global market.

Keywords: *Manilla, Batik, Dyes, Yarns, Printing inks*

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Background to the Study

Manillas are metal bracelets or amulets used as pre coinage, currency usually made of bronze, copper or brass crescent-shaped with flattened ends at the opening. Similar to horseshoe shaped with enlarged finial terminations at the edges used extensively as a medium of exchange for goods and services during the trans-Atlantic slave trade in West Africa from the 15th to the 20th centuries. A period when Nigeria, had contact with the Portuguese and the Dutch, who were the first Europeans to visit the coastal region of Nigeria.

Oziogu (2012) observe that before the introduction of a cash economy in Nigeria by the British: Pounds, Shillings, and Pence (1959-1973) which preceded the introduction of Naira and Kobo on 1, January 1973, Nigeria's monetary system evolved gradually from the use of Trade by Barter to the use of cowry shells, manilas and a retinue of currencies due to the country's phenomenal economy's advancement and political leadership. Different indigenous and imported items such as: salt, dry fish, metal, live stocks, farm products, stick tally, jewelry, textiles, gin, tobacco, weapons and tools were used as a means of exchange of goods and services. Also, apart from manilla currency, cowry shells and beads currency were extensively used as a measure of wealth, body adornment, ritual sacrifices and an ornament for social occasions in many traditional African societies.

Temple as cited by Chukwu (2008) describes barter as “exchange of one article for another, adding that “currency implies exchange through a medium while the Cambridge English dictionary defines currency as the money that is used in a particular country at a particular time. Ekwunazor(2015) says manillas were introduced to the Bini kingdom from where it was shipped to Old and New Calabar and Eastern region of Nigeria. It is called *Okpohookuk* and *Ama-Ogono-Igbiki* in New Calabar, *Jaja* manilas: still in use at Opobo in Rivers State, *Okuu-Kpaw*, the manila of Jumbo of Bonny, *Perekuleor Ono-doin* Akwete, Ohambele, Asa, and Obunio, *Nkobkob* in Efik, Annang, *Ibibio* of Cross River and Akwa Ibom State respectively while *Ejema* among the Bende in Abia State, and other parts of the Igbo speaking regions

Manillas was manufactured in Birmingham, England in large numbers embellished with intricate designs, sizes, and weights essentially for transacting palm oil, ivory and slaves with the Portuguese merchants. There are different styles of manilas: Antony manilla, *Congo Singlo*, *Onadoo*, *Finniman Fawfinns*, *Cutta Antony*, *Nkobukob-Onoudu* and this metal content varies from bronze, copper and brass, as many components were mixed with lead and iron. Also, Talbot (1932:284) as cited by Derefaka (2010) listed the name manilas are called in Kalabari: *Awarawu*, the ordinary currency, *Abe*, Prince manillas, *Amogonoigbiki* known as Town Money, *Attirni*, *Amakiriigbiki*, *PeriEkule*, obsolete but used in Bonny, *Okolosupuruma* and *Okku-kpaw*: the manilla of Okku Jumbo of Bonny.



King Manilla
Fig. 1



Linear Manilla
Fig. 2



Queen Manilla
Fig. 3



Decorative Manilla
Fig. 4



Manilla
Fig. 5



Twisted Manilla
Fig. 6



Coiled Manilla
Fig. 7



Ring-Like Manilla
Fig. 8



Twisted Manilla
Fig. 9



Finile Enlarged Edge Manilla
Fig.10



Bangle Manilla
Fig. 11

Earlier researchers: Jone (1977), Birthwistle (1913), Talbot 1967, Moore (1907), Bovil and McPhee (1970) underscored that different manillas were extensively used as a currency in the Oil Rivers Province of Nigeria, prominently in the Eastern Delta of modern Nigeria, the interior of Eastern Nigeria and the coastal region between the New Calabar and the Bonny Rivers where manilla dominated the commercial transactions of the Niger Delta in 1699. Pereira quoted in Lyndersay Pp: 425-426, 2011 says:

Five leagues up a branch of Formosa (Benin River) there is a trade in slaves, cotton cloths, palm oil, leopard skins, and blue beads with red lines which the Negroes call coris.... Which we (Portuguese) buy for the bracelets (manilas) of brass and copper....Nearer the coast are Negroes called Jos (Ijo).

This statement indicates the use of manilas in the Oil Rivers Province and the Portuguese and European merchants spread the use of manilla as a means of exchange for the purchase of pepper, copper, ivory, cotton, and slaves during the trans-Atlantic slave

trade. This manilla has history in Port Harcourt; the enter pot of coal, crude oil and slave. The appropriation of Manilla on fabric surface will constitute an important part of this write up. Motifs appropriation in this context shall relate to a recall or capturing cultural property of preexisting medium exchange relating to the values or the facts of history. To enable an exhaustive study of this paper, interviews with celebrities, descriptive and exploratory research method will be employed. Printing and batik techniques will be applied. The objective is to create a new textile paradigm shift, promote material and cultural heritage in Port Harcourt.

Port Harcourt and Foreign Textiles

Manilla was used in Port Harcourt as a medium of exchange for the transaction of palm products, coal, timber, crude oil and other economically viable products, as the British needed to transport goods, especially when coal was discovered in commercial quantities in UdiHills, Enugu and the demand for raw materials from various parts of the world, including Africa, to sustain the emerging industries age in Europe in the 19th century became an engulfing pre-occupation (Ndimele, P:75). Transformation ages were machines replaces simple tools, muscle power gave way to coal, crude and gas power. Then the British conceived of it as a port from which a railway would access the resources of the Protectorate of Southern Nigeria, east of the Colony of Lagos (Alagoa Pp:128-129, 2018), through the Niger Delta, Southern-eastern Nigeria and the Cross River valley.

Within the period of transacting trades in palm oil, trans-Atlantic slave trade and crude oil, different textiles were imported by Portuguese and Dutch merchants. These textiles were adopted, renamed in vernacular and authenticated by the native. Okeke (2002) observed that the traditional methods of weaving fabrics practiced by different ethnic groups in Nigeria were gradually influenced by these foreign textiles. This implies that, the importation of textiles led to artistic creativity and commercial success amongst weavers in the periphery. Writing on the Indian Madras in 1850, William Clarence-Smith asserts that Indian Madras export probably did more to stimulate them to undermine the local weaving production as it provided patterns to imitate and commercial design to explore. Woven fabrics such as: *Akwete*, *AkwaOcha*, *Asooke*, and *Anger* incorporated imported yarns and intricate motifs from foreign textiles to enhance aesthetic and break conventional method.

In Port Harcourt, aesthetically embellished textiles, densely patterned, with tremendous variety, flamboyance, polychromatic hues, textures, elegance, beauty have for decades influenced the style and definition of fashion since creation. Women and men store impressive African textiles that go with a multitude of names: The Real Dutch Wax Prints, Veritable Java Print, Guaranteed Dutch Java, Veritable Dutch Hollandais, Indian Madras (George orijinri), *Kente* woven fabrics, *Blangidi*, Da viva Prints, High Target, Fancy fabrics (imiwax), *Pelete-bite* (cut thread), *fimate-bite* (pulled thread), and other fabrics. Even elaborate textiles that belong to past generations are kept and exhibited during important ceremonies.

Nwanodi (2018), says that Port Harcourt is a modern creation unlike many urban centers in Northern and Western Nigeria. Port Harcourt Local Government Area is the most populous followed by Obio/Akpor, Etche, Andoni/Opobo, Khana and Okrika; the remaining nine LGAs are: Ogba/ Egbema/Ndoni; Ahoada (East and West), Asari Toru; Abua/Odual, Gokana, Emohua, Tai/Elemo, Ikwerre and Akuku-Toru. The land is intersected by many rivers and creeks, thus making mobility easier by water and by land. Dressing constitutes an integral part of peoples' way of life. The quality, motifs and colour harmony in fabric and the manner the wrapper is tied, draped and manipulated is most magnificent, and requires great skill of practice and care in facilitating it with comfort, elegance and style. In the words of Isichei (1983:3)

Almost all wear clothes of European manufacture....The dignified and attractive dress of the modern Ijo- a wrapper of high quality Nigeria cloth, with a Western shirt and hat- exactly symbolizes the regions cosmopolitan past.

The statements above indicate the importance of dress aesthetic, vogue and opulence that determine the social class and wealth of the personality. Port Harcourt cosmopolitan traditional attires have gone through dynamic style transformations, from *etibo* (eight bob), *angapu* or *woko* and *don*, *doni* or *dona* and the *big white shirt*, known as *opuseti* by the Nembe (Bell-Gam et.al, 1999:204). Copied from the Portuguese capuchin catholic cassock and this attire has undergone evolution as a dress type in Port Harcourt. These tops are worn atop Indian Madras or george (*injiri*) or jumpers/trousers for men while women tie double wrapper, using lace materials for blouse and customized skirts and blouses for special occasions like: chieftaincy ceremony, naming ceremony, marriage, funeral and thanksgiving.

These fashion trends come from social-cultural changes brought about by the economic, environmental, political and technological innovations that impact living in region in Nigeria. Shifts in fashion trends can also result from end-user's lifestyle and culture. The transformations above took place within the last century. However, these noticed trends were the result of innovators who were either clients or designers. Sylvanus (2000) notes that having the latest designs, and wearing carefully chosen, meaningful patterns communicate social status. This shows the extent textiles play in shaping the consciousness of the riverine people. Some contemporary, appealing designs inherit the African material culture, hues and motif distinctive sequence that communicate the concepts or aphorisms of the people's prestige and personality. Warm and cool hues like wine, red, golden yellow, orange, blue, green, brown, lemon, white and black are utilized.

However, most of the fabrics are not authentically African. Shonibare as cited by Felsenthal (2012) says "They prove to have a crossbred cultural background quite of their own". As most decade textiles exhibit tremendous influx of appropriation and re-appropriation of Indonesian designs and Indian-inspired British designs with a global concept and not culturally related. The motifs are repeated in a block, diamond and mirror repeat patterns and the subject matter consist of floral motifs, geometric motifs,

inanimate motifs, zoomorphic motifs, and aquatic motif rendered in naturalistic design, stylistic design or geometric design. The designs reflected not only the fashions, but also the events of foreign culture.

Recently, a number of distinctive cultural elements have been incorporated into traditional attires in order to maintain an identity and minimize foreign influences on traditional and political beliefs. It is a truism that textiles serve as cultural authentication, national identification, historical documentation and narratives of power, beauty, death, intimacy, depravation and violation. Thus, textile is an indispensable discipline in the socioeconomic development of the riverian people. Indigenous currency; the manila is communal items of value, that can be appropriated by an authority to express originality and Port Harcourt authentic textiles. Especially, as the sources of certain fabrics are traced to the origin of the motifs and symbol embellished on the fabric like: *Kente*, royal cloth of the Ashanti, *Adinkra* of Ghana, *Bogolan*, mud-dyed cloth of Mali, Raffia cloths of Zaire, *Shew-shew* of South Africa, *Baoule* of Cote d'Ivoire, *Capulana* of Mozambique, *Saso Dan Fani* of Burkina Faso, and *Akwete*, *Asooke*, *Akwa Ocha*, and *Isinbidi* of Nigeria, and These motifs being an emblem of cultural heritage and identity; are mostly embellished on fabrics produced for indigenous peoples.

Concept of Re-appropriation

This is in line with The Partnership for Africa Development (NEPAD) objectives, to place African countries, both individually and collectively, on a path of sustainable growth and development; halt the marginalization process and enhance its full and beneficial integration into the global economy. As such, this discourse sought to create a visual document of manillas items on fabric that are for global consumption. The concept of re-appropriation, as Berthes as cited by Nelson and Shiff (2003) explains, is a distortion, not a negation, but a shift from the former connotations to create new textile discourse, because a borrowed or preexisting indigenous currency "on its way out" (manilla) can represent another's expression or become a subject matter of establishing a new textile in a new form in the Port Harcourt region. Just as aquatic, zoomorphic, floral and inanimate motifs are printed on fabric surfaces.

The Concept of Manillas

Contemporary, the most dynamic importance of technologically developing nations is global integration that is, building gaps between the developed and the developing nations. The reality of the modern technology of camera, image reproduction has in no small measure added to the proliferation of items of cultural values that can be traced to the pre-colonial era in the Niger Delta. In this design, that is a product of contemporary engagement with the history of the time; the manila functions as a material essence, that defined the period and it is mode of commerce hence *materiality* and memory in relation to the manila appropriated in the contemporary textile design to sustain the impression that was symbolic of the time. As textiles, represent a veritable source of influencing the culture and history of people from different geographical locations. The different local government in Port Harcourt though far apart geographically, is seen to have a rich

collection of manilla items with similar connotations. When these manillas from different cultures are synthesized and embellished on the fabric surface, it will create a new textile hybrid that is unique in form and content.

Studio Intervention and Reinvention

I present my intervention in the reinvention usually associated with innovations in fashion and culture. In this regard is my application of manilla motifs on these attires. The content of this paper explores the tie and dye, batik techniques, mixed media and printing technique for the production of fabrics sown into customized fashion. Created from quality fabrics using asymmetrical arrangement of manillas; an inanimate motif, employing mirror, turning and block repeat patterns and rendered in geometric and stylistic designs, with polychromatic hues to blend trending African inspired fashion. In the resist technique, I explore spraying, spattering, marbling, clapping and dribbling to achieve a particular effect on a fabrics background.

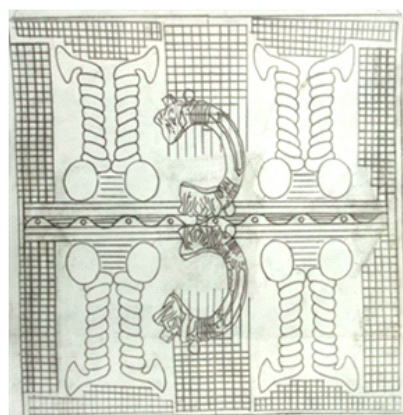
Sample 1



Decorative Manilla Motif
Fig. 12



Coiled Manilla Motif
Fig. 13



Repeat Pattern (Change Nigeria Design)
Medium Printing Technique
Courtesy: Margaret Ajigiinni, 2018
Fig. 14



Name: Change Nigeria Design
Fig. 15

This mixed media painting (Change Nigeria) is executed with olive green printing ink using the silk screen printing technique on polychromatic background. The five yards of Posmi brocade was pleated zigzag; lengthwise and crosswise, different dyes: pepper red, pink, and lemon absorbed the ridges of the pleat, resulting in hexagon and polygon shapes in the background. The Mirror repeat pattern was utilized using the combination of decorative and twisted manilla with wider finial termination on the edges. The background texture created from the tie and dye technique, broken crackles, horizontal and vertical lines, were used for enhanced aesthetic, giving richness and evocative effect that is intriguing. The twisted manillas motifs represent the demand for 'resource control' while the decorated manillas represent 'quest for justice' for oil producing state.

Sample II



Linear Manilla Motif
Fig. 16



Ring-Like Manilla Motif
Fig. 17



Repeat pattern (The Niger Delta Design)
Fig. 18



Title: The Niger Delta Design
Medium: Printing Technique
Courtesy: Margaret Ajigiinni, 2018
Fig. 19

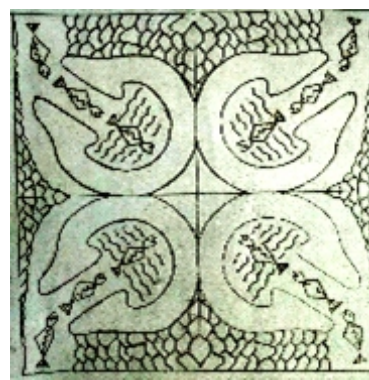
'The Niger Delta Design' is rendered using the combination of intricate designed round manilla and interlocked ring like manilla. The design is rendered in turning repeat pattern with the intricately designed manilla and floral motif at the center and the four

edges creating unusual pattern not envisaged. The floral motifs are clustered and the elongated manillas form continuity; no motif need to be singled out, but rather accepted as a holistic design. The five yards of Posmi brocade was pleated and dyed with lemon, orange and brilliant red hues in the background, giving a striped design with wider, textured stripe across the fabric, this stimulates tactile responses and effectively create pleasing playful spontaneity. The clustered floral refers to Nigeria's oil and gas generating wealth and employment in other countries, the connecting manillas displayed in this design.

Sample III



Manilla Motif
Fig. 20



Repeat Pattern of Natural Resources
Fig. 21



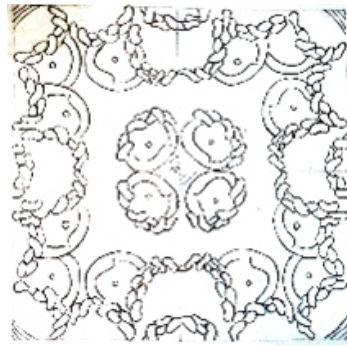
Title: Natural Resources
Medium: Printing Technique
Courtesy: Margaret Ajigiinni, 2018
Fig. 22

The screen printing technique, colour scheme, and polychromatic background of 'Natural Resources' designs; create an oil exploration/exploitation effect. Rendered using king manillas with enclosed river and skeleton-like fishes swimming in. The Block repeat

pattern is employed with scale crackles at the edges used to create contrast while the vertical crackles make illuminated detail of strength at the background. Marbling or mottled tie and dye effect is utilized, different streams of dyes: purple, orange, and red dyes were evenly distributed to form randomly textured background on five yards of Posmi brocade giving a continuous irregular shapes. The inanimate manilla motifs printed with purple hue add vividness of expression to the enslavement, colonial subjugation and forceful dispossession of strategic lands and minerals by the British colonial government in 'The Art of Oil'.



Title: Twisted Manilla Motif
Fig. 23



Repeat Pattern of Restiveness Design
Fig. 24



Title: Restiveness
Medium: Printing Technique
Courtesy: Margaret Ajigiinni, 2018
Fig. 25

The second design 'Restiveness' is a combination of twisted manilas and 'The Niger Delta' motif rendered in printing technique with blue, green and light orange in the background. The units are fitted rhythmically together to create an all-over repeating pattern, The blue

and green hues symbolize the rivulets and the Niger Delta mangroves while the total composition reflects the plunder and pillage of oil pollution that have devastated the farm lands causing the death of aquatic life, unemployment and youth restiveness in the region.

Sample IV



The Manillas motif used in "Togetherness" design
Fig. 26



Title: Togetherness Design
Medium: Batik Technique
Courtesy: Margaret Ajigiinn, 2018
Fig. 27



Name: Port Harcourt Woman Tying
Togetherness Manila Double Wrapper
Fig. 28

In 'Togetherness' design, different types of manilas are encased within a square that form both horizontal and vertical lines. Stiffness are avoided by the curved manilas around individual units. The polychromatic manilas differ in sizes and fit evenly, keeping uniformity in over-all tone. This design is rendered in batik technique with multi coloured background that formed the manilas motifs. Aesthetic is here enhanced by what has been omitted, by the spaciousness in relation to design details. The entail background is dyed purple representing the determined struggle of Port Harcourt people to be free from social dispossession, economic exploitation, and political oppression of. Each historical period of Manilla as a medium of exchange has been re-appropriated on a wide variety of traditional patterns of the above textile fabrics and the colour scheme comply with the local preferences of the end-users.

Conclusion

This write up has bridge visual histories of Materiality and memory of “Manillas”: a medium of exchange for goods and services within the two phases of palm oil and crude oil in the Oil Rivers Province of Nigeria. The period when coal was discovered in UdiHills: Enugu, and up to the exploration of petroleum products in Port Harcourt. Art practitioners have frequently utilized borrowed or preexisting items such as Manillas, 'I am the primitive of my way own way' as sources of inspiration or use them to create new contemporary textile directions. Re-appropriated items, or designs inspired by, historic textiles are often used for apparel fabrics and interior design. The techniques employed have the capacity to produce infinite design possibilities, and such boost the fashion/textile industry, hence materiality and memory of “Manillas”. Appropriation can be perception itself, the response to things seen, or even memory, the minds reconstruction of the past (Nelson, p. 164). The essence is shift Manilla from the previous connotations to create new textile discourse in order to maintain the continuity, integrity of history, and material culture of Port Harcourt.

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