

Aesthetic Values and Potentials of Arts:

Interpreting Blangidi for the Baby Girl Dress Model in Kalabari Kingdom

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DEDICATION

Dedicated to the Almighty God. Also to students and
researchers who would find this book useful.

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Review & Introduction

This book emerges from the crossroads of art, culture, fashion, and anthropology. It provides an innovative exploration of how traditional textiles—specifically the culturally significant *Blangidi* fabric—can be reinterpreted through contemporary fashion lenses for baby girl clothing, while honoring and preserving the deep cultural values of the Kalabari people of Nigeria's Niger Delta.

Spanning twelve rigorously curated chapters, the book begins by grounding the reader in the broader thematic conversation on traditional African textiles and their evolving place in modern fashion (Chapter 1 and 2). It then explores emerging scholarly works in the reinterpretation of *Blangidi*, drawing attention to the scarcity yet growing relevance of literature in this area.

Chapters 3 through 5 offer vital contextualization. Chapter 3 introduces the foundational principles of design and fashion design as a discipline, while Chapter 4 situates dressing practices within the broader sociocultural landscape of the Niger Delta. Chapter 5 provides historical insight into how colonial rule altered gender roles and dress traditions in the region—a crucial backdrop for understanding the transformations in textile and clothing identities.

In Chapters 6 and 7, the discussion turns theoretical and empirical. Chapter 6 reviews key theoretical discourses on African art and design, integrating perspectives from Appropriation theory, Kant's Aesthetic theory, Joan Eicher's Dress Aesthetic Theory and Richard Shiff's Originality theory. Chapter 7 deepens this with empirical reviews of dressing practices across African contexts, drawing parallels and distinctions that inform the Kalabari case study.

The core research unfolds from Chapter 8 onwards. The methodology chapter details the qualitative and studio-based approaches used to engage cultural custodians, textile experts, and fashion designers in reinterpreting *Blangidi* for children's fashion. Chapters 9 and 10 present and analyze rich

qualitative data, showing how heritage, creativity, and identity converge in the reinterpretation process.

In Chapter 11, the findings are discussed in relation to aesthetic values, cultural continuity, and design potential—demonstrating how *Blangidi* fabric transcends utilitarian purposes to become an emblem of visual identity and future-facing artistry. The final chapter (12) offers a powerful conclusion, summarizing the key insights and advancing recommendations for scholars, designers, and cultural advocates.

Together, these chapters illuminate a vital discourse on the preservation of African cultural heritage through design. The reinterpretation of *Blangidi* not only revitalizes a traditional textile practice but positions it as a bridge between generations, identities, and artistic futures. The focus on baby girl dress modeling underscores the intergenerational potential of fashion to communicate history, beauty, and belonging.

This work serves as both a scholarly contribution and a creative journey. It speaks to the resilience of indigenous knowledge systems and the visionary power of fashion to act as cultural narrative, aesthetic expression, and social dialogue.

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Review & Introduction

In recent years, the global fashion industry has witnessed a renewed interest in the aesthetic values of traditional African textiles. Amid this cultural renaissance, *Blangidi*—a richly symbolic, woolen flannel fabric indigenous to the Kalabari people of Nigeria's Niger Delta—emerges as both a tactile heritage and a contemporary design possibility. This book is a creative and scholarly exploration of how *Blangidi* can be reinterpreted to reflect cultural identity through the lens of children's fashion, particularly in designing baby girl dresses.

The Kalabari, an Ijaw sub-ethnic group, have preserved *Blangidi* through generations as an emblem of status, ceremony, and communal identity. Despite the decline of local textile industries and the rise of imported materials, this fabric remains a resilient cultural artifact. In this volume, we probe *Blangidi*'s evolution from a ceremonial textile into a medium of modern artistic expression, anchored in cultural authenticity yet responsive to the design sensibilities of the present day.

This work spans multiple disciplines, including fashion design, cultural studies, textile history, and art theory. The chapters progress from foundational knowledge on traditional textiles and the socio-cultural dynamics of dressing in the Niger Delta, through theoretical and empirical discourse on African aesthetics, to a focused analysis of *Blangidi*'s reinterpretation. The qualitative methods used—interviews, ethnographic engagement, and studio-based experimentation—reflect the interdisciplinary spirit of the research and bridge the gap between academic inquiry and creative practice.

The reinterpretation of *Blangidi* for baby girl clothing is not a superficial exercise in style. Rather, it is an intentional act of cultural continuity, gender representation, and artistic reclamation. Through the pages of this book, readers will encounter the multiple dimensions of dress—not just as clothing, but as identity, memory, resistance, and narrative. By focusing on baby girl fashion, we engage the symbolic value of introducing cultural identity at the earliest stages of life.

This book is an invitation to artists, designers, cultural custodians, and scholars to reimagine the role of indigenous materials in shaping the future of fashion and cultural expression. It celebrates the resilience of African textile traditions and urges a deeper appreciation for the stories woven into every thread of fabric.

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AESTHETIC VALUES AND POTENTIALS OF ARTS: INTERPRETING BLANGIDI FOR THE BABY GIRL DRESS MODEL IN KALABARI KINGDOM

PREFACE

This study examined “Interpreting *blangidi* for the baby girl dress model in Kalabari Kingdom”. *Blangidi* is a traditional woollen flannel fabric used by the riverine people of the Niger Delta region of Nigeria, and a source of cultural identity for the Kalabari people. This study aims to interpret *blangidi* for the baby girl dress model, to examine its aesthetic values and the potential for creating unique girl apparels. Qualitative method, using interviews of key informants such as cultural custodians, fabric specialists and dressmakers, was used for this study alongside studio-based research methods. This study drew its conceptual framework from African textiles with focus on *Blangidi* fabric used by the Kalabari people of the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. The study's theoretical framework integrates aesthetic theory with emphasis on Eicher's Dress theories, appropriation theories and originality theory to create culture-sensitive and artistic dresses using *Blangidi* fabric for baby girls. These theories explore the multidimensional value of clothing in cultural, social and individualistic expression.

The interpretation of *blangidi* for baby girl clothing is an exciting opportunity to explore the evolution of fashion as an art form and its reflection of societal norms and customs. The findings suggest that *Blangidi's* unique aesthetic values and versatility make it suitable for creating unique and modern baby girl clothing. The study highlights the need for further research to understand the cultural practises of the Kalabari people and the suitability of *Blangidi* fabric for dressing children. Furthermore, the study enlightens the potentials of *Blangidi* in promoting African heritage, and culture and inspiring the next generation of designers. The findings contribute to the development of the Nigerian textile and fashion industry and showcase the beauty of traditional textiles in modern fashion, and emphasises the need to preserve the cultural identity of the Kalabari people in the contemporary world by giving creative expression to traditional fabrics. In conclusion, the

study showcased *Blangidi's* remarkable adaptability, seamlessly integrating with various design styles for young girls and underscores the crucial need to protect and celebrate traditional textile practices.

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INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY ON TRADITIONAL TEXTILES AND CONTEMPORARY FASHION

The use of traditional textiles in contemporary fashion has become a popular trend in recent years. As fashion trends continue to evolve, designers and fashion enthusiasts have turned to African traditional textiles for inspiration. One of such traditional textiles is *blangidi*, a woolen flannel fabric used by the riverine cultures of the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. The closure of local textile factories in Nigeria has led to an increased reliance on imported fabrics from other countries in Africa and the world at large. Despite this, *blangidi* remains a significant element of the dress culture of cultures in the Niger Delta, particularly among the *Ijaw* tribe. The *Kalabari people*, an *Ijaw* sub-ethnic group use *blangidi* to make various clothing items, such as dresses and skirts that are worn during important cultural ceremonies. However, *blangidi* clothing is not limited to cultural ceremonies, it provides a rich source of inspiration to designers of contemporary traditional fashion, and the fabric is suitable for making dresses for children as long as it is padded with pure cotton lining. The reinterpretation of *blangidi* for baby girl clothing provides a unique opportunity to explore the evolution of fashion as an art form and its reflection of societal norms and customs. The use of traditional textiles like *blangidi* in making dresses for baby girls can help accentuate and reflect gender distinctions, which are critical to every society, particularly the cultures of the Niger Delta.

The *blangidi* is a distinctive textile material popularly worn by the *Kalabari people* whose origin is the Niger Delta region of Nigeria where they have dwelled and traded since the 1400s (Daly et al., 1986; Jones, 1963). The *blangidi* fabric is described by Daly et al., (1986) as “printed woolen flannel”; a soft, fine cloth material made from twilled wool; it is napped at one end and has a stout feel due to the combination of cotton or synthetic fibres in making the flannel. *Blangidi* clothing, similar to other Niger Delta fabrics is colourful and printed with a vast array of designs and patterns (Cyril-Egware, 2015). Indigenous African textiles are made traditionally or imported from diverse countries of the world. (Akinwumi, 2021). Due to the closure of local textile

firms in Nigeria (Onwuamawze, 2022), the *blangidi* fabric, the most cherished fabric worn by the riverine tribes of the Niger Delta is largely imported from diverse locations such as Ewe (Ghana), the south-east and south-west part of Nigeria, with a vast assortment coming from India. The *blangidi* fabric – the woolen flannel, originates from and is still widely produced in England (Michelman & Eicher, 2016). The local textile factories within the country used local imageries such as lion heads, jumping antelopes, and diverse objects and shapes, represented in a diversity of colours. Oral accounts gathered in the course of this research indicate that the fabric known as *blangidi* was used by the Igbo tribe as *akwa'oché* (coverings for furniture). To date, the most popular *blangidi* print is by far the *isi agu* (lion head) (Ajiginni et al, 2020) also known as “chieftaincy,” used by Igbo ethnic groups to signify royalty.

Contemporary fashion has evolved from being a mere covering of nakedness to being a fashionable expression of art that reflects the uniqueness of societal norms and customs (Cyril-Egware, 2015). The use of traditional textiles such as *blangidi* in making dresses for the baby girl is indicative of the evolution in the purpose and function of fashion, hence the choice of the girl child in the re-interpretation of the *blangidi* fabric. It provides the researcher ample supply of creativity to explore and glean from the local mode of dressing to create unique, modern, and progressive art. The *Kalabari dresses*, as worn by the adults in the riverine cultures of the Niger Delta are often accompanied by several accessories such as necklaces, earrings, beads, feathers, armbands, and sequins. Additionally, the use of purses, fans, and umbrellas as handheld items is used. These provide a vast array of inspiration for styling female children between the ages of one and seven. Also, the choice of the girl child as the focus for the study's interpretation of *blangidi* is necessary to provide contemporary insight into femininity. Making dresses for the baby girl in *blangidi* fabrics helps to accentuate and reflect early distinction in gender roles and expectations, which is critical to every society. Dresses give sensory expressions to gender in a form that is most intimate to the body (Hamilton & Hamilton, 1989 in Michelman & Eicher, 2016). This applies to the dress culture of the *Kalabari* culture where there is a remarkable distinction in dressing according to gender.

This study examines the suitability of the *blangidi* material in making clothing for a baby girl. Forsberg & Mansdorf (2007) note that making clothing for children demands additional attention to the choice of styling and the material to avoid irritation of their delicate skin which can easily be affected by allergies. The author propose that the fabrics selected for the making of children's wear ought to be lightweight, soft on the skin, and

stretchable to accommodate the fast growth of children. The aesthetic values of blangidi clothing common among the *Kalabari people*, particularly the women are examined in this study in order to understand its intricacies and uniqueness in a global world of art and design and how this can be used to style dresses for the baby girl. Attention is paid to customary practices of the people such as the *Iria* which marks the transition in the lifetime of the *Kalabari* woman. These various stages of a woman's life, which begin with the baby girl are marked by different forms of dressing, as such, the development of a woman from childhood to adulthood is recognisable by the mode of dressing (Michelman & Eicher, 2016).

Academic research on the making of *blangidi* clothing as practiced by the *Kalabari people* of the Niger Delta region of Nigeria is scanty, as a result, *blangidi* -based costumes remain largely unappreciated by the global audience who consider the combinations of *Blangidi* costumes as haphazard (Daly et al, 1986). Researchers have observed the dressing of the *Kalabari people* (Daly, 1984; Daly et al., 1986; Michelman, 1987; Micheleman, 1987, 1992; Michelman & Erekosima, 1992); however, these works date back two and three decades ago. These researches offer useful insight into the difference in the mode of dressing of *Kalabari* men and women and how the influence of Western contact with the indigenous people has greatly altered aspects of the dressing. For example, Michelman & Eicher (1995) observes that the practice of covering women's breasts in public during ceremonies had greatly increased in the 1980s thereby contrasting pictorial evidence preserved in *Kalabari* albums which showed women who appeared in bare breasts. This raises the need to preserve cultural heritage from external influence. Cyril-Egware (2015) also highlights the need to train models through formal and informal means to showcase indigenous textiles in good light to the globe.

One traditional festival of the riverine people of the Niger Delta, *Iria* is closely examined in this study owing to its significance in understanding the adornment of the *Kalabari* girl child. The *iria* festival is used to mark the transition of a girl child to full womanhood (*iriabo*), after which she is now considered marriageable and able to bear children. As part of the ceremony, the young women are adorned in prized wrappers, coral beads, and necklaces as they are presented to the community. This study provides fresh insight to the study of the culture, customs, practices, and festivals of the *Kalabari* and the Niger Delta at large by exploring creativity in making dresses for the baby girl.

Using the exploratory method of research, the research studies the mode of dressing of the *Kalabari people* and gives in-depth attention to the art of making party dresses for the female child. In order to achieve the objective of this study, which is to make creative and modern designs of *Kalabari dresses* for the baby girl, the study takes a cue from the traditional practices of the Kalabari and the Niger Delta cultures as a whole. The researcher dutifully considered the aesthetics, intricacies, and components of the *Kalabari dress* culture. This was achieved through a review of literature which was the source of secondary data. Other sources of data required for this research were collected from photo albums, museum exhibits (e.g. the Small *Iriabo*), and interviews of the *Kalabari* indigenes. With the information gathered, the researcher designed party dresses for the girls aged 1-7 using *blangidi* materials.

Works of literature related to the research objectives of this study are scanty. Attention has been given to exploring the dressing of men and women of the *Kalabari* society and the *Ijaw* kingdoms of the Niger Delta region of Nigeria at large (such as Daly et al, 1986; Michelman & Eicher, 1995), however, inadequate efforts have been taken to expend such creativity in designing styling *blangidi* for the female child. This study is thereby a novel idea that re-projects the culture of the Niger Delta people to the globe and imagines the dressing-up of the girl child. Among the *Kalabari people*, little attention is paid to the dressing of the baby girl before the *Iriabo* coming-of-age festival during puberty. A BBC report on an *Iriabo* festival indicates that the female child is rarely clothed in prized clothing until the time of the festival. The findings of this research are a necessary source of inspiration to the native *Kalabari* people as it helps them to re-think the pre-*Iriabo* dressing of the baby girl. As such local fashion designers and dressmakers, parents, and social and educational institutions can also benefit from this novel work.

Statement of the Problem

- I. It has become challenging to differentiate between fake and original *blangidi*
- ii. Academic research on the making of *Blangidi* clothing as practiced by the *Kalabari people* of the Niger Delta region of Nigeria is scanty, as a result, *blangidi* -based costumes remain largely unappreciated by the global audience who consider the combinations of *Blangidi* costumes as haphazard.
- iii. There is a major decline in the demand and use of the original *blangidi*.
- iv. There is a down play on the *blangidi* material as such they now come in several other fabrics such as polyester, and velvet.

Aim and Objectives of the Study

The aim of the study is to interpret blangidi for the baby girl dress model in Kalabari kingdom, to examine its aesthetic values and the potential for creating unique girl apparels.

The objectives are to:

- i. Examine the cultural values of *blangidi* fabrics for children aged between 1 and 7
- ii. Restructure the usage of *blangidi* fabrics among the *Kalabari tribe* of the Niger Delta region, Nigeria
- iii. Use the principles of contemporary traditional designs to make dresses for female children ages one to seven using *blangidi* fabrics.
- iv. Demonstrate the suitability of the *blangidi fabric* for making dresses for the baby girl
- v. Exhibit the dresses during the final defense at the post graduate school.
- vi. Explore customary practices of the *Kalabari* people

Research Questions

To justify the essence of the study, the following questions shall be addressed in line with the various specific objectives identified:

- i. What are the principles of contemporary traditional designs that can be used to make dresses for female children ages one to seven using *blangidi* fabric?
- ii. What are the uses of *blangidi* fabrics among the *Kalabari tribe* of the Niger Delta region, Nigeria?
- iii. How can the suitability of the *blangidi* fabric for making dresses for the baby girl be demonstrated?
- iv. What are the cultural values of *blangidi* fabrics for children aged between 1 and 7?
- v. What are the social and economic implications of using *blangidi* fabrics for children between ages 1 to 7 in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria?
- vi. How can attention be paid to the customary practices of the *Kalabari people*, such as the *Iria*, which marks the transition in the lifetime of a *Blangidi* woman?

Assumptions

Fashion designing and dressmaking are generally considered a form of art that can be studied empirically (Klug, 1895; Chun, 2020). Hence, certain philosophical assumptions have been made in this study; these assumptions are derived from basic assumptions adopted in empirical research in the field of art and design (Richmond, 1991; Dissanayake, 2012). These include:

- i. Fashion and fashion designing are art (See Rovine, 2019; Chukueggu & Cyril-Egware, 2009; Cyril-Egware, 2012)
- ii. Art is universal, it exists in all societies throughout history, and it needs no language to be communicated.
- iii. Art is an expression: Philosophers have viewed art as a form of sociocultural expression conveyed through sensory means (Adajian, 2007), hence, the culture of the society is made by art (DeMarraais & Robb, 2012).
- iv. Art is an expression: Art is valuable not only for its beauty but for its communicative ability. As such, art is a social practice with the ability to create social and epistemic engagements with the viewers (Sherman & Morrissey, 2017).

Significance of the Study

This study is relevant as it promotes the use of *Kalabari dress*, hitherto popular among the Niger Delta tribes of Nigeria (Daly et al, 1986; Michelman & Erekosima, 1992), to a vast global audience. Cyril-Egware (2012) describes dresses as the primary expression of the identity of culture, as such, the clothing of the baby girl in *blangidi* promotes the culture of the Niger Delta people. It serves as a means of promoting and preserving the heritage of the people when it is modeled to persons of other cultures. In theory the study makes a relevant contribution to the body of knowledge in the fashion and designing of traditional clothing for the female child through the introduction of the use of *blangidi* for the clothing of the baby girl. The study further raises the need for independent studies of *blangidi* fabrics and their significance in the history of the Niger Delta cultures. To date, no independent study of the *blangidi* fabric is known to the researcher. Fashion designers and stylists who glean African traditional attires for inspiration will also find this study relevant.

The mode of dressing of the *Kalabari people* and other tribes of the Niger Delta provides relevant inspiration and make reasonable contributions to Afrocentric fashion and the practice of contemporary traditional dressing in other words bridge the knowledge gap by providing insight into the differences in the mode of dressing of *Kalabari men* and women and how Western contact with the indigenous people has influenced their dressing. Local community and their chieftains are expected to be encouraged by the results of this study as they strive to preserve the remains of their culture and to find creative means of showcasing their traditions, customs, and festivals to the world. Michelman & Eicher (1995) and Cyril-Egware (2015) have noted the need to preserve traditional fashion practices and festivals, as well as the need to export them to international platforms. This study thus, provides the

necessary impetus to drive the culture change. In practice the particular significance of this study which lies in its ability to provoke thoughts on the use of *blangidi* in designing dresses for the female child proves relevant to the locals of the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. The designs made in the course of this study will also inspire the local fashion designers, seamstresses, dressmakers, and mothers of female children to be creative in making dresses for the baby girl using the *blangidi* fabric. The results are the boost in creativity and design of dresses for the baby girl, also the use of *blangidi* materials has gained more prominence among dressmakers. The next generation of designers of baby wear will be inspired by the findings of this study. The findings of this study are relevant to traditional and social institutions, research and educational institutes, the six state governments located in the Niger Delta, and nongovernmental organisations. These stakeholders of the *Kalabari culture* will value the results of the study as it presents the local culture in a positive light.

The study sources inspiration from the traditional practices of the people to give creative expression to the designing of dresses for the baby girl. More to that, the study raises awareness of the need to examine other fabrics used by the *Kalabari* women. It upsurges awareness of the local festivals of the *Kalabari people* as well as boost the significance of those events such as the *Iriabo* to the outside world.

The *Blangidi* textile hierarchy among *Kalabari women* includes the following in order of importance; *India, loko, krukrubite, gom, and accra* with *India and loko* reserved for the most prestigious events (Michelman & Eicher, 2016). This study creates a need for independent studies on more Niger Delta traditional fabrics and how they can be adopted in the modern world of creative fashion designing for the female child. This study creates awareness for further studies to better understand the cultural practices of the local *Kalabari people*, the use of *blangidi* fabrics among the people, and the need to explore the use of the fabric for the baby girl. The research raised the need to explore precolonial traditional practices to recover lost elements of the *Kalabari* culture regarding the dressing of the men and women in general and the female child in particular.

Scope of the Study

The scope of the study is within the use of *blangidi* for making dresses for the baby girl. While the study of the dress culture of the *Kalabari people* has been documented by scholars for decades, the use of *blangidi* fabrics to make dresses for the baby girl is yet to be explored. The study embarks on a deeper understanding of the cultural values, and social and economic significance of

making contemporary traditional designs for the female child, its scope is delimited to the use of *blangidi fabrics*. The dress culture of the *Kalabari people* and other Niger Delta tribes (this has been discussed in much detail in subsequent chapters) consists of multiple arrays of fabric material, however, only the implications of the use of *blangidi* for the baby girl was put into consideration in making dresses for the baby girl.

Delimitations

The research focuses specifically on making dresses that are deeply rooted in culture for the female child aged between one and seven; this constitutes the overall objectives of the study. Also, the value placed on the use of *blangidi* for the baby girl and perceived socioeconomic values impacts is assessed in the study. The adornment of women and adolescents with *blangidi fabrics* is taken cognizance of in this study to provide helpful clues to styling the baby girl, however, it is not the crux of this study. In interpreting the results of this study, it is necessary to note that the findings thereof have been interpreted relative to the use of *blangidi fabrics* alone. Although a review of the literature covering the usage of other fabrics such as *loko*, *India*, and *acra* among the Niger Delta tribes is contained in this study, it only serves as a basis for comparison to the impact of *blangidi fabrics*.

The study is also based on the dress culture of the Niger Delta tribes, particularly the *Kalabari culture*. Niger Delta is a geographic region in southern Nigeria and consists of several tribes which are contained within the territory of 6 state governments of present-day Nigeria known as the south-south geopolitical region. The study is based on the cultural value and use of the *blangidi fabrics* among these tribes. Greater emphasis, however, were given to the *Kalabari Kingdom* of the *Ijaw* tribe. The *blangidi fabrics* are, perhaps, used by African cultures and have diverse applications for users in other parts of the globe, however, reviewing this is a task that lies outside the scope of this study. A thorough review of the pieces of literature were undertaken to reveal the nature, significance, and meaning attached to the traditional use of *blangidi fabrics* and the accessories worn alongside them. The understanding thereof was applied in the design and styling of dresses. The designs were based on the principles of contemporary traditional designs and make strong allusions to the culture and values of the Niger Delta tribes. For this project, the emphasis is, therefore not the aesthetics associated with African designs, but the cultural significance attached to *blangidi* in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. The timeframe was spent searching for and reviewing relevant literature, collecting, and analysis of secondary data, designing and styling fabrics, and writing the dissertation.

The researcher also carried out a first-hand interview of informants to gather information on the accounts passed on through word of mouth.

This chapter lays the groundwork for conducting research on the re-inventing of contemporary traditional fashion through designing dresses for the female child using *blangidi* fabrics. It has been shown that the *Kalabari dress* culture is unique and distinctively significant, the designs made after this research work allude to this distinctiveness identifiable to the *Blangidi* and Niger Delta tribes. The study is justified by the need to expound and showcase contemporary African traditional designs to the world, and to add to the body of knowledge a unique Africa-themed design and styling of the female child through the use of *blangidi*. The findings of this research bear social and academic importance as it boosts awareness of native *Blangidi* festivals, add to the knowledge of African design for the baby girl, spike the consciousness of chieftains and culture custodians of the various tribes in the Niger Delta regions, inspire local dressmakers and designers to rethink the use of *blangidi* for styling the baby girl between the ages of one and seven. However, the study expunges the need to further explore the cultures of the Niger Delta. It was observed that the pieces of literature available for this research are few and unlikely to represent the present-day situation since they date back to 2 and 3 decades. Also noted is the fact that the researcher did not get physical, first-hand experience with the culture and practices of the Niger Delta in the course of this study. However, the study makes remarkable, and novel contributions to the body of knowledge as it explores uncharted territory; the use of *blangidi* for the baby girl. These contributions provide a rich source of inspiration and resources that are convertible to marketable dresses for female children.

Limitations of the Study

The study faces several limitations that warrant consideration. This section acknowledges the inherent limitations to provide an honest evaluation of the study's restraints. These limitations potentially affect the quality of the result and its generalisability. It is noteworthy to acknowledge that these limitations are integral to the research process, hence, highlighting the need for critical interpretation of the results of this study, which is applicable only within the defined boundaries of the study.

- i. **Need for Comparative Studies:** The lack of comparison studies with other cultural groups limits the knowledge of the uniqueness of the use of *blangidi* cloth. While the research on the use of *blangidi* cloth to make newborn girl costumes within *Ijaw* communities is enlightening, it is devoid of comparison studies conducted in other cultural settings. This restricts how much we can grasp about the

value of the fabric to various ethnic groups. Adopting comparative research might offer insightful information that reveals the many ethnic groups' distinct traditional interpretations of the themes, colours, symbols, and other creative manifestations. A comparative analysis would have also shown how the *blangidi* fabric has evolved historically and how its use has changed to meet the demands of various cultural situations. Such knowledge might lead to a deeper comprehension of the fabric's use outside of the *Kalabari* and other *Ijaw* groups, but among the riverine tribes of the Niger Delta, as well as other regions of the country such as the southeast.

- ii. **Gender Focus:** The study mostly focuses on baby girl clothes. Extending the study to incorporate traditional fabric applications in boys' apparel or gender-neutral designs would provide a more complete knowledge of cultural practices. While this provides valuable insights into understanding the cultural significance of adorning the girl child in *blangidi* and another traditional aspect of the *Kalabari* culture, it reveals a large gap in understanding the broader use of this traditional fabric particularly in the context of the male child. Limiting the study to a single gender excludes potentially significant cultural practices and interpretations associated with the *blangidi* fabric in other contexts. Also, this gender focus approach creates an imbalance in the full understanding of gender roles within the *Kalabari* communities. A study that examines the use of *blangidi* fabric in making boys' garments could reveal additional cultural significance and symbolism associated with childhood and gender roles in the *Ijaw* community. Furthermore, expanding the research beyond the girl child could promote a more inclusive understanding of cultural practices and diversity of expression within the *Ijaw* communities.
- iii. **Inadequate Literature:** The lack of sufficient literature on the usage of *blangidi* by the *Kalabari* people or any *Ijaw* society makes contextualising findings difficult. The study recognises the limitation associated with the lack or insufficiency of literature and documented evidence to contextualise the use of the *blangidi* fabric by any *Ijaw* community. Additionally, the scholarly attempts to comprehensively examine the *Kalabari* cultural practices, festivals, and traditions are scanty. The documented evidence on the dress culture of the *Kalabari* people dates back to the late 20th Century, which consists of works by Michelman & Eicher (1995), Michelman, 1992; Daly (1984), and Eicher (1988). This reveals the extent to which the *Kalabari* culture regarding the use of *blangidi* fabrics is largely obscured. This insufficiency of scholarly evidence notably poses an

obstacle to placing the study in an accurate historical and cultural context and examining how cultural practices have evolved. As such, the research relied largely on reported data from the interviewees, who were elderly natives, traders, or custodians of the culture within their localities. Other forms of evidence such as historical photographs, which support the use of *blangidi* among the *Kalabari* tribe and other *Ijaw* communities, are grossly scanty.

- iv. **Small Sample Size:** The sample size for interviews performed during the practical design phase may be deemed modest. A bigger and more varied sample may improve the depth and representativeness of the findings. While the insights gathered from these interviews provide in-depth explorations on the use of *blangidi* for the baby girl, it must be acknowledged that the interviewed persons were key informants. While their opinions are valuable and relevant to the study, they still represent a small proportion of the population of the entire *Ijaw* nation. The result of a larger and more diverse sample could significantly affect the result of the study and the representativeness of these findings. Additionally, engaging a wider range of interviewees could help produce a result that is more representative of the diverse backgrounds and experiences of the various ethnic groups who use the *blangidi* fabrics in making traditional wear. The use of a diverse sample could have also helped to uncover potential variations in cultural/traditional interpretations and functional uses of *blangidi* fabric across different demographics. This knowledge is vital for developing culturally sensitive applications for the fabric. Moreover, a larger sample size helps improve the validity and reliability of the research findings. This will potentially add to the level of confidence in the result, and impact the weight of the research conclusion and recommendations.

RE-INTERPRETING BLANGIDI FOR THE BABY GIRL MODEL: EMERGING LITERATURE

African Textiles

The following section reviews pieces of literature related to African textiles. African textiles are produced from raw materials that are sourced locally among community members; this includes cotton, raffia, wool, silk, and goat skin. (Bawa, 2021; Debeli et al., 2013), and the weaving of bast fibres like flax is the common method for production of African traditional fabrics. Debeli et al. noted that the fibres are spun manually for traditional production and that synthetic fibres could be introduced to locally sourced fibres to increase the volume of fibre production.

African textiles are recognisable by their colours (Debeli et al., 2013; Okpu & Abimbola, 2020; Heckspeil, 2007; Cyril-Egware, 2015; Cryil-Egware & Ajiginni, 2017). African textiles, aside from being a means of visual communication, provide a framework for the communication of spiritual, historical, and cultural mutual association among a people (Debeli et al., 2013). Textiles used in the production of African traditional dresses are known by diverse names given to them by the locals (Cyril-Egware, 2015). These nomenclatures often differ from the name they are identified with from the countries where they are produced.

Origin of African Textiles

The traditional form of making textiles in Nigeria is an ancient practice which had been undertaken for thousands of years before colonialism in Africa, it is an established practice in various rural and urban settlements such as Illorin, Benin, Okene, Bida, Sokoto, Kano and Ile-ife (Bawa, 2021). Bawa further states that archaeological proof indicated that local handweaving, spinning, dyeing, and carding had been the practice of various communities in prehistoric Nigeria. The technologies of traditional textile production were adopted by communities as they utilise the raw materials in their physical environment. Several studies indicate that African traditional fabrics and textile designs probably predate European trade (Anquandah, 2014; McIntosh & Cartwright, 2022). A significant archaeological proof of the existence of historic advances in African fabrics is

Thurstan Shaw's excavations site in Igbo-Ukwu in the present-day Anambra state (Shaw, 1975; McIntosh & Cartwright, 2022). These excavations uncovered artefacts, technologies, and elements of an ancient civilisation that astonished the entire world, this includes the Igbo Isaiah and Igbo Richard recovery of textiles where textiles were preserved as a result of being sandwiched between bronze and/or copper artefacts in what archaeologist believe to be a shrine.

These series of excavations were prompted by the accidental discovery of what is thought to be an ancient shrine uncovered while digging a well at a depth of about 40-60 cm below the surface in 1938 (Shaw, 1970, 1975). Through SEM, McIntosh & Cartwright (2022) helped solve some of the mysteries associated with samples from the excavation sites using samples that had been preserved by the British Museum since the 1950s. Firstly, the study identified the properties (diameter, thread count, and source) of the fibres used for the sample fabrics. The study further used SEM (Scanning Electron Microscopy) to identify the plant fibres of over 20 textile samples that were uncovered in the Igbo-Ukwu excavation site in the 1960s that were not preserved by the British Museum. The work postulates that the presence of bast fibres and leaf fibres indicates the loss of a complex indigenous textile production technology from the African textile weaving landscape.

It is also noted in the literature that while the Igbo-Ukwu artefacts are said to date to the ninth century (Shaw, 1970 in McIntosh & Cartwright, 2022), recent evaluations place the dating of Igbo-Ukwu fabrics at the eleventh century between 1027 and 1180 CE. The textiles are likely to have been made between the 11th and 12th Centuries, while the bronze artefacts are likely to have existed in the shrine for a much longer period. This stance was upheld by Lawal (1973) who reported that the results of three carbon dating expenditures reveal a ninth century history, while the beads, thread, wood, and textiles samples contained in the excavations suggested a more recent date – the fifteenth-century. Another study also suggested a later date than the ninth-century carbon dating due to the state of the preserved fabrics, comparison with the assumed date for the Ife and Benin Kingdoms, the presence and abundance of copper in the excavations, and facts about Africa before European trading (Shaw, 1975). However, both studies agree that only the acquisition of better evidence can provide the answers needed, this was what McIntosh & Cartwright (2022) set out to achieve.

Archaeologist excavation in the Igbo-Ukwu settlement of present-day southern Nigeria provides evidence of the fact that textile production technologies in Africa date back to the pre-historic era (McIntosh &

Cartwright, 2022). Technologies used for the extraction and manipulation of fibres, interweaving of twin strand sets at the right angle to each other, and the use of these technologies in the production of woven garments, making of mats and baskets had formed part of African history. It has been noted that these ancient practices have been lost over time due to unknown reasons, however, some researchers postulate that the loss is due to external interference (Michelman & Eicher, 1995; Bawa, 2021). The production of African textiles and textile designs is largely undertaken industrially outside Africa (Akinwumi, 2021; Cyril-Egware, 2015). Thus, Akinwumi (2021) questions the appropriateness of calling such designs "African". The study of the social and economic value of African *aso-ebi* fabrics in Nigeria as undertaken by Ajiginni (2019), unlike Ajiginni (2022) adopts quantifiable methods of data collection using questionnaires and unstructured interviews to conduct the study. The study aimed to examine the impact and influence of fabrics used for commemorating events in Nigeria (a practice known as *aso-ebi*) and the economic and social ramifications it has on the value system of Nigerians.

More so, Ajiginni (2019) traces the origin of the practice of *aso-ebi* in Nigeria to the 1920s when a wealthy Yoruba citizen commemorated the funeral of Madam Shonowo by ordering printed wax which had the image of a woman trader printed on it. This was followed by "*Guinness Power*" material in 1960, printed in England and used in Nigeria to promote the Guinness brand.

Cultural Values of African Textiles

Cyril-Egware (2015) explores the origin of naming textiles as practiced in Nigeria. Cyril-Egware & Ajiginni (2017) propose that fabrics were not originally made for the cultural values attached to them, instead, they were made to serve as a covering for the people's nakedness and protection from the harsh African weather conditions. With cultural evolution, however, dresses began to adopt social, political, religious, and cultural meanings as the locals began to accord importance to different fabrics.

Types of African Textiles

Textiles in Nigeria, and indeed Africa, are divided into two categories, namely traditional and contemporary (modern) fabrics (Bawa, 2021; Cyril-Egware, 2015). The traditional fabrics include indigenous fabrics woven by hand by the locales, and contemporary textiles include fabrics manufactured in Nigeria including already-made garments imported from Europe (Cyril-Egware, 2015). The traditional textiles made in Nigeria are largely undervalued by the locals who prefer foreign textiles despite their exorbitant prices. Okpu & Abimbola (2020) note that the introduction of printed fabrics

by the Europeans in the 20th century is responsible for the decline in the prominence of traditional fabrics. It is further noted by Abdulharman & Daraojimba (2022) that the decline in the production and patronage of *Aso Oke* fabrics in the south-western city of Illorin and the neighbouring towns is due to the reduction in the availability of skilled labour and the impact of importation of fabrics from the western countries of the world. This has resulted in the dwindling of the economic contribution of African settlements which had gained prominence and contributed to the national economy through the weaving of African traditional fabrics. The authors posit that despite the decline in popularity of the fabric, it still plays a vital role in traditional art and dressing, as they are considered more relevant to cultural events and festivals. It is further noted that imported fabrics and already-made clothes are cheaper, more convenient, and more suitable for different African weather conditions as the clothes were made to suit specific weather conditions. The high cost of traditional fabrics, however, is due to the time spent on making the fabrics and the manual means of the weaving process.

African textiles are rich, colourful, beautiful, and diverse (Cyril-Egware, 2015; Cyril-Egware & Ajiginni, 2017). Indigenous textiles are woven by hand, dyed, or printed in factories in Africa similar to their European counterparts known as *Hollandis* (*Abada* or *Dutch wax*). The *Aso Oke* and *Adire* are produced in the southwestern parts of Nigeria. *Kente* and *Adinkra*, on the other hand, are woven in Ghana and exported to other countries across Africa and the globe. The *Kalabari people* of the Niger Delta region of Nigeria import plain *Indian madras* George and use them to produce *peletebite* and *fimate bite*. Other fabrics such as *feni*, *inziri*, and *popo* are popular among the riverine tribes of the Niger Delta. In the south-eastern region of Nigeria, *Akwa Ocha* and *Akwete* fabrics are produced by the Aniocha and Akwete people respectively.

***Bogolanfini* (Mud cloth):** Originating from Mali, *Bogolanfini* is translated as “made out of the mud”. The process of making the fabric involves using natural dye the fabric and creating patterns and designs on it afterwards using mud (Elsje 2003). Designs of spindles, sickles, and bold patterns are used to form motifs for designing the *Bogolanfini* textile. These symbols and design elements are significant to the Bamana cultures of Malian from where they originate. The fabric is used for diverse purposes for its beauty as pillowcases, bedspreads, shoes, vases, and artworks. According to Luke-Boone (2001), the mud cloth can be considered as one of the most influential ethnic fabrics since last four decades and have assumed an African-inspired fashion of contemporary ethnic origin. Luke-Boone (2001) and Elsje (2003)

identified that the production process of the mud cloth involves the use of cotton produced locally, combed and spurned by women into yarn. The yarn is later woven into a strip of 15cm by the use of double-heddle loom. This process is a labour-intensive practice that may take days and weeks to complete each process as it takes time to complete the weaven of each square inch of the cloth. After the weaven of the strip loom, the strip is reduced in length to shorter pieces and the strips are joined with a whipstitch selvedge to selvedge. The cloth is later washed and sun-dried and the dark black appearance turns to grey colour. The cloth is washed again to remove the mud and the dying is repeated and sundried again to darken the areas where the mud was painted. As the dying, washing and sundrying goes the cloth changes colour according to the choice of the designer on the materials. The yellow areas can be bleach-painted and the bleach can originate from costic soda, groundnut, water or millet bran which turns the yellow areas to brown. After this, the cloth can be sundried for weeks after which water will be used to wash off the bleached solution and white patterns are left on the dark background cloth.

Pieces of literature have explored the origin of fabrics which are now adopted as African fabrics. It is reported by Cryil-Egware & Ajiginni (2017) that the traditional fabric known as *Abada* was originally manufactured in Dutch, Indonesia. When the fabrics could not find a suitable market for it in Indonesia, English traders introduced the fabric to West Africa where, in no time, it became the prized fabric for many ethnic groups in the region. On the other hand, the *Kente* fabric has been adopted as an emblem of *Africanness*, it was first used by royalty and the highly placed in the ancient Asante kingdom. It represents one of the widely known fabrics from Ghana, worn by prominent political and influential people in Ghana and across Africa (Olawale & Ajayi, 2013).

A prominent South African traditional fabric is the *Amafu*, a 100-percent cotton fabric that is made through hand-dyed screen-printing methods. The fabrics are made in various colours and subtle discharge prints in copper and silver (Olawale & Ajayi, 2013). The *Aso Oke* is woven on “narrow strip looms from cotton or silk” mostly by men, and is an essential part of the Yoruba traditional attires as it depicts prestige and honour (African Heritage House, 2022). The fabric is made up of complex lacy patterns that were included in the weaves when the laces imported from England were unavailable during the Second World War. There are three types of designs for this fabric: *etu* (bluish indigo clothing that is dyed red); *sanyan* (which is brown cloth woven using beige coloured silk); *alaari* (European silk woven from Saharan) (Olawale & Ajayi, 2013). The *Aso Oke* textile is the most “vibrant and

successful” African textile on the continent, it is worn a limited number of times for occasions such as weddings, naming ceremonies, traditional festivals, and burial ceremonies (Okpu & Abimbola, 2020). Some African fabrics are often named by the place they originate from, this includes *Akwete* (a town in the south-eastern state of Abia), *Okene* (popular among the Ebira people of Kogi state), and *Bida* (a town of the *Nupe* people of Niger state) (African Heritage House, 2022). The name *Adire* means "tie and dye" in the Yoruba language of southwestern Nigeria while the *Aso Oke* is translated to mean clothes from the highlands or simply “top cloth” (Okpu & Abimbola, 2020). Two categories for *Adire* designs are identified by Olawale & Ajayi (2013) and Bawa (2013: the *Eleko* designs of *Adire* are designed on paper stencils and painted on the fabrics with starch, and *Alabere* designs are designed with raffia stitches on the fabrics).

While studies have been undertaken to identify and classify African textiles according to physical forms and textures, Olawale & Ajayi (2013) used computer-enabled models to analyse and distinguish African fabrics. Through techniques of image processing and wavelet analysis, multiple layers of stimulated networks that relied on structural features to recognise African fabrics, and stimulating the model in MATLAB environment, he was able to establish an enhanced system for identifying African textiles. The work develops a precision-based method to enable buyers and researchers to identify complex patterns and structures more accurately than search engines; this will enhance the development of commerce for traditional African textiles as consumers can be better educated on the choice of fabrics. More so, through the models so developed, users can gain insight into the uses of fabrics, their origins and history, the fabric prices in different markets, and ancient proverbs associated with each textile. The study employs a mathematical model which includes two stages of classifications: at the first stage, the fabrics are grouped into categories while in the second stage, fabrics are grouped within each group. The first stage of categorisation utilised principal component analysis and Discrete Wavelet Transform (DWT) together with multiple decomposition levels and classifications. The second stage of classification involves multiple layers of decomposing and classifying the fabrics.

Promoting African Textile

Several pieces of literature have highlighted the need for the promotion of African textiles across platforms of the world one of the means identified by a prior study for the promotion of African textiles is through modelling (Cyril-Egware, 2015). Cyril-Egware (2015) states that modelling African textiles through official and nonofficial means is necessary for the promotion of

African art. The official promotion pertains to the training of models to showcase African traditional textiles on fashion shows, TV programmes, and magazines. On the other hand, the author accords relevance to the unofficial modelling of African textiles which pertains to Nigerians at home and in the diaspora putting on attires designed with traditional textiles to events and occasions across the country. Unofficial modelling practices are gaining more prominence in African settings as West African women have discarded Western fashion systems and developed a unique and vibrant art form that embraces modernity and traditional practice simultaneously (Heckspeil, 2007). Through promotional modelling during shows and exhibitions, the beauty of traditional fabrics in Nigeria will be appreciated by a global audience. However, the scope of the work is broad and lacks a clear statement of problems. Although the author offers a progressive contribution to the fashion and textile industry in Nigeria, its findings are not critically attended. The study stems from the author's direct observation of three fashion shows in Nigeria. The results of the study are thus, subjective and theoretically unfounded.

The author highlights other benefits associated with modelling in the socio-economic landscape of Nigeria: through official modelling, young Nigerians can become gainfully employed and reduce the level of dependence in the country (this is also recommended by Okpu & Abimbola, 2020); the beauty and diversity of African fashion in Nigeria can become noticeable by a larger audience; entrepreneurs, fashion designers, textile designers and especially the Nigerian textile firms that have long been shut down can be revitalised. However, the study does not provide an objective basis for the arguments presented in the work, hence, the work is rhetoric-inclined and emotion-laden. While the recommendations of the study are worthwhile, they are based mostly on the opinions of the author. Previous works were employed by the author to form the basis for the literature review, however, the author failed to follow research methods to arrive at the conclusions of the work.

The significance of modelling in influencing trends and pop culture has also been explored (Ajiginni, 2022 & 2020). Individuals of influence have used the media to popularise fabrics, textiles, or styles. Ajiginni (2020) highlights the significance of social media in popularising the use of *Isi-Agu* fabrics through unofficial modelling for purposes and occasions other than the purposes assigned to them by the traditional Igbo societies. Fashion icons in the mediascape have also played a part in redefining the use of local fabrics for social events, this includes the influences of Ebuka Obi-Ochendu, a media personality whose dynamic representation of traditional attires has influenced Nigerians (Ajiginni, 2022). Another means identified in the

literature for the promotion of African textiles is through direct government investment in the textile industry which will in turn develop the economy of African nations. Bawa (2021) emphasises that no country can be said to have developed without sustainable improvement in the textile industry of the country. Advancement in the textile industry can serve as a source of tourist attraction (Cyril-Egware, 2016).

Through the textile industry, the youths can be positively engaged in the nation-building process, become gainfully employed, ensure job security, and make a positive contribution to society. The author further notes that through government involvement in promoting the textile industry in Nigeria, the restiveness and impoverishment in the Niger Delta can be alleviated. Another form of government intervention in promoting the textile industry in the Niger Delta and Nigeria at large is through incorporating the learning of textile design in the teaching of fine art subjects from the primary education level. Hence, a need to review the curriculum of schools in order to ensure that textile design is undertaken as a compulsory subject at some levels of education. Lastly, it is recommended that local motifs, patterns, traditional costumes, and designs be given priority at carnivals, traditional festivals, fashion shows, and exhibitions. Authors recommend that technical and technological improvements are prerequisites in order to achieve an efficient and sustainable means of producing traditional fabrics on industrial scales. This will make African fabrics available for export to diverse countries of the world on a large scale, and thus, also reduce the unit price of producing the traditional fabrics, African fabrics can be available for other uses such as curtains, bedspreads, and table mats (Okpu & Abimbola, 2020).

DESIGN AND FASHION DESIGN

Providing a suitable definition for the concept of design is a daunting task. Scholars acknowledge that proffering a specific conceptual boundary to what can be delaminated as design and what should not be difficult (Blackler et al., 2021; Suh, 2021; Bender-Salazar, 2023; Atkinson, 2017). The Cambridge University Dictionary defines design as the process of detailed depiction of the intended appearance and functionality of a product or building; it is the meticulous art of planning. Similarly, the Merriam-Webster Dictionary describes design as the process of creating, fashioning, executing, or constructing following a predetermined plan. It has to do with mental conceptualisation and planning, sketching, and creation of detailed plans for the construction of a particular object, structure or system.

Another interesting perspective on the concept of design is provided by Suh (2021). The author views design as the creative process that helps to solve problems. The definition provided by the author goes further to highlight that these problems usually originate from the needs and wants of customers. As such, the goal of the design process is to find a creative solution to these problems. This definition implies that the process of setting up the functional requirements of the consumers and selecting design parameters to meet these parameters is called design. The next stage, according to this school of thought, involves translating these design ideas and parameters into the physical domain. This involves establishing the details of the physical products. Then, finally, these details are implanted as actual steps or processes involved in the creation of the product. Contrary to the above viewpoint, Blackler et al. (2021) describe another school of thought which posits that design involves more than problem-solving. This viewpoint, in consonance with Herbert Simon, states that design is about reimagining what the world could be. According to Herbert Simon: "Engineering, medicine, business, architecture, and painting are concerned not with the necessary but with the contingent – not with how things are but with how they might be – in short, with design" (Blackler et al., 2021). This implies that design is concerned not with how things are at the moment, but rather, with the numerous options that can be in the future. Following this

perspective, design has to do with envisioning possibilities, and this highlights the importance of imagination in the design process. Designers are, therefore, imaginative thinkers who are inherently able to form new ideas and possibilities about reality.

However, one concern over the above schools on the concept of design is that they are focused on the science of design, as against the art of design. However, Bender-Salazar (2023) defines design as the "use of methods and research practices to solve problems that are traditionally not in the fields of design, architecture, or engineering." This definition increases the range of design beyond design sciences. It suggests that the principles and the methodologies of design as applied in architecture and engineering can be applied in diverse other disciplines such as education, healthcare, and the arts. Additionally, the definition emphasises the methodical approach to problem-solving, inferring that design is undertaken to render efficient solutions to societal problems. In commemorating 20 years of a scholarly journal that publishes research articles on the field of design, Atkinson (2017) provides the following scope for the articles that have been featured in the Design Journal over the past two decades:

"When we say 'design', we mean the design disciplines covering products, places and communication (i.e. graphic design, information design, product and industrial design, fashion and textiles, interior design and designer/maker issues), design management (design strategy, design policy, marketing and design, design and manufacturing, innovation), design theory (design methods, psychology and design, creativity and design), eco and environmental design, gender issues in design. We anticipate these topics will be addressed from an educational, historical, technological or practical perspective".

The above definition acknowledges that design is a practice that encompasses various disciplines, both in the sciences, technology, and art. This also indicates that the various design disciplines are interconnected and put together to provide holistic perspectives on social change. Moreover, the definition provided above identifies many fields that practice design, these include; graphic design, product design, fashion design, textile design, interior design, architecture, marketing design, design psychology, design strategy, and other fields of study or practices related to innovation.

Additionally, the definition above posits that design can be approached from multiple perspectives, e.g. educational, historical, and technological. The

historical perspective acknowledges disciplines and practices that study the evolution of design over time. This understanding of the historical perspective provides a rich repository of inspiration for modern and future designers from various disciplines (Yuksel, 2012). The educational perspective acknowledges the pivotal practices of educating future designers from various disciplines (Murzyn-Kupisz and Holuj, 2021; Shin, 2014). This involves training on both the technical skills needed for design and also the principles, management and theory behind the practices. From the technological perspective, the definition acknowledges the influence of design on the influence of design in determining the course of technological innovation. Through design, the next generation of technology can be birthed. These perspectives on the concept of design highlight the encompassing nature of the practices and concept of design.

Fashion Design

Similar to the concept and practice of design, fashion design is difficult to conceptualise. However, scholars agree that fashion design involves the conceptualisation, crafting, and creation of clothes and other accessories such as shoes, and scarves. Fashion design takes deeper root in the practical world more than theories given that it encompasses every part of everyday life (Zou et al., 2022). Every piece of apparel undergoes a design process before being transformed into a wearable commodity. There are various facets of professional fashion designing, these include ideation, sketching and refining designs, garment production, and marketing of finished products. At the heart of fashion designing is the ideation, the process of generating creative ideas for clothing. This stage involves drawing inspiration from sources, which could be of cultural, historical, or contemporary origin.

The role of fashion design in the entire fashion industry cannot be overstated. Murzyn-Kupisz and Holuj (2021) highlight the potential impact of fashion design on the "economic, environmental, social and cultural" aspect of society. They further highlight that fashion designers potentially play both negative and positive roles. This implies that fashion designers possess the capacity to drive social change as well as social or cultural decay in society, they can influence and control the economy of nations, as well as determine the attitude of the people towards safeguarding the environment. These are looked into much detail below: Scholars have examined the importance of fashion designers in promoting cultural practices (Piancazzo, 2023; Thornquist, 2018; Suh, 2020; Brown and Vacca, 2022). Moreover, fashion has played a major role in propagating social course (Robenstine and Kelley, 2009; Venkatasamy, 2015; Mazzarella and Black, 2022). In addition to the

above, Chun (2019) posits that a garment made by fashion designers is a tool for the expression of personalities. This perspective suggests that beyond the technical aspects of creation, fashion designers help people communicate their feelings and express uniqueness through what they wear.

Contemporary African Designs

The term is used to refer to design styles and fabrics that are illustrative of African culture which is achieved through fabrics and clothing of African or Western origin that have come to be identified and accepted as African style (Utoh-Ezeajugh, 2021). It is necessary to note that fabrics used for designing what constitutes contemporary African designs are neither produced by nor in Africa (Akinwumi, 2021).

Deola Sagoe is a Nigerian haute couture designer who has captivated the world with her creations. Born in 1966, Sagoe initially pursued a career in finance, but her creative spirit led her to join her mother's fashion business in 1988. Her passion for African textiles was ignited during her time with her mother. Her talent and skill have gained international recognition. She was the first black woman to present at Rome's AltaRoma Alta Moda Fashion Week in 2004, the Nigerian representative at the International Campaign by the United Nations World Food Programme in 2006, and the first Nigerian designer to have her standalone show at New York Fashion Week in 2014. Her creations have earned her a global clientele of celebrities such as Oprah Winfrey, Will Smith, Lupita Nyong'o, and Thandie Newton. (Lionesses of Africa, 2024 and ReDahlia, 2018). The Lioness of Africa recognises eight women in Africa who have championed African fabrics in more recent times. Below, are a few of these brands whose products are made from locally sourced African fabrics (Lionesses of Africa, 2024). Amelsa Yazew began the Little Gabbies, a fashion line that provides baby blankets for children using material-sourced traditional fabrics from Ethiopia. This was born out of a desire to both find the most suitable blanket fabric after she gave birth to her first child, and the commitment to honouring the African textile, Gabi.

This fabric has proven to be suitable for children due to its softness and absorbability. She employs locals from her community for spinning, weaving and embroidery of the fabric. Nkemdilim Begho, Ashim Egunjobi and Ijeoma Nwoke founded Always Me by Anne Li. They make beautiful dresses, play mats, diapers, and bags for children and mothers. Their products are remarkable for the softness of materials utilised in making them. Asma Dukanda, a South African fashion designer started the Mokopu brand. The brand uses locally sourced Shwe-Shwe fabric to make trendy clothes for babies. Similarly, Shingai Nyagweta, founder of Kuna Kids also

makes children's clothing that incorporates the same Shwe-Shwe fabric. Both company's products empower women through the entire production process.

African Textile Designs

Studies have shown that textiles and fashion are an inseparable part of a whole (Baw, 2021; Ajiginni & Osaigbov, 2021; Cyril-Egware, 2017). Chukueggu & Cyril-Egware (2009) hold that textiles constitute the earliest expression of art and human interaction with their environment. Anthropologists speculate that textiles in Africa had developed as a result of man's adaptation to harsh environmental conditions such as harsh sunlight, heat, and rain using natural resources (Bawa, 2021).

Fashion designers are often faced with the dilemma of embracing African textile designs for their aesthetic appeal or the cultural relevance attached to the fabric designs. To avoid the trade-offs and to ensure adequate incorporation of the traditional values of African symbolism in textile art, designers have had to travel to various areas of Africa to gain firsthand experience from local practices and insight to infuse cultural depths into the art of fashion design. The aesthetic values of African textiles, motifs, designs, and art are widely appreciated by a vast number of scholars and artists around the world. Debele et al., (2013) recount that designers such as Modigliani and Giacometti revered African design styles and drew inspiration from them to create their art.

Debeli et al., (2013) note that the creation of motifs is not just to appeal to the viewers, it rather is a medium for the communication of spiritual information and beliefs from ancestors. They state that motifs are used to symbolise "charity, culture, appropriate social relationship, and their behaviours in a society." A prior study posits that the use of vibrant colour schemes in African fabrics is neither coincidental nor a mere need to be aesthetic as patterns generally used in African designs have high colour resonance (Debili et al., 2013). According to the researchers, colours convey significance in the history of a people, and this varies from one culture to another across Africa. According to the authors, the process of preserving two (or more) loud colours in a piece of African fabric is achieved through the use of colour contrast, and the adjustment of colour saturation to get the right combination. The authors note some of the significance and meaning attached to colours used in African textiles: blue represents the sky depicts the divine presence of the God Almighty, the spirit that keeps humanity in harmony; red symbolises strength and power; black symbolises unity; blue and grey are used to depict cold weather while red and orange colours are

associated with warm weather; yellow, symbolic of egg yolk, depicts fertility; green is symbolic of growth, nature, birth, and death. However, it is worthy of note that the meaning of colours as stated above is dynamic and varies across cultures.

African textile designs are regarded by researchers as a source for trends in contemporary fashion trends (Debeli et al., 2013). While these artists draw from the aesthetic values of African art to feed their creativity, other artists and designers of traditional textiles maintain the uniqueness of traditional fabrics and textile designs in order to preserve cultural heritage and history. Textile design involves creating and printing seamless patterns, shapes, imageries, and objects on fabrics that could be used for garments, furnishes, and carpets, it is visual art that gives structure and creative expression to the process of fabric production (Cyril-Egware, 2015). Textile designs create patterns for fabrics and accessories used not only for making garments but also for carpets, curtains, furniture covers, automobiles, laboratory covers, and other functions. According to Cyril-Egware & Ajiginni (2017), textiles concern the conversion of fibres from their raw states to fabrics in a finished state usable for the manufacture of garments. The authors state that fabric production is a form of art related to designing and creating patterns which include processes such as “weaving, knitting, lacing, braiding, felting, embroidery netting, and bonding, tufting, and laminating”.

Another study appraises the impact of indigenous African textiles (with emphasis on *Aso Oke* fabrics) in alleviating the impact of economic crises in Nigeria (Okpu & Abimbola, 2020). Through industrial production and exportation of traditional African textiles, the foreign reserves of the federal and state governments can be boosted. Simultaneously, the importation of foreign fabrics and already-made products will reduce as the marketability of traditional fabrics will encourage local patronage when the production of traditional fabrics is sustainable. For thousands of years, the textile designs and the entire textile industry of several cultures and countries have positively impacted the development of economies in the past. The expansion of the textile industry played frontier roles in the success of the economies of the Republic of China, Korea, Singapore, Taiwan, and Hong Kong (Bawa, 2021). Industrial production of African textiles will ensure that the fabrics will further cross regional, ethnic, and social boundaries (Okpu & Abimbola, 2020). To strengthen the capacity for foreign exchange, efforts need to be put into building channels for the marketing of traditional African fabrics to various parts of the globe (Bawa, 2021).

According to Okpu & Abimbola (2020) the origin of indigenous African textiles and the time in history when these fabrics are largely unknown, however, Debeli et al., (2013) believe that textile designs and art in Africa are traceable to the prehistoric periods when ethnic groups began to make garments for diverse purposes. The impact of African textiles on the socioeconomic development of Nigeria is restated by Cyril-Egware & Ajiginni (2017) and the impact it has on inspiring creativity in other forms of African art. The study aimed to encourage the creative use of discarded fabrics and waste materials to boast the creativity and productiveness of African cultural art and to preserve historical styles. African fabrics such as *kente*, *Aso oke*, *Adire*, and *Abada (Hollandis)* can be infused into diverse forms of art to depict the richness of the African to tourists at historical sites and museums. To the author, incorporating African textiles in other forms of art (including souvenirs) constitutes an innovative means of documenting and adding value to historical and cultural pieces. The colourfulness and beauty of African textiles make manipulation with other art forms easy to achieve. The study approaches the research objectives using case study artists who derive inspiration and incorporate African textiles in their works, this includes a sculptor, painter, and mixed media artist. The authors thus study the works of these artists to glean the impact of art inspired by African textiles and the implication of the incorporated art forms to the social and economic development of the study.

Cyril-Egware & Ajinginni (2017) recount that the Nigerian Textile industry while at peak performance was the second employer of labour in Nigeria, second to the civil service of the Nigerian federation. Aibueku (2016) reports that the textile industry in Nigeria between 1985 and 1991 recorded an average annual growth rate of 67% and provided gainful employment to over 350,000 persons which represent about $\frac{1}{4}$ of the country's manufacturing workforce at the time. However, due to the harsh economic environment, the exorbitant cost of doing business in Nigeria, and neglect by the government in the form of inadequate provision of infrastructure, most textile production firms in Nigeria have shut down operations or moved to other countries. Traditional production outlets continue to operate to date, albeit at smaller scales and for local consumption. The textile mills in Nigeria at the moment run at 40% of their original capacity and employ only about 25,000 persons (Onwuamawze, 2022).

The textile industry in Africa is a thriving industry with the potential for economic development at regional and international levels. The textile industry in Sub-Saharan Africa is valued at about \$4 billion and records annual sales of more than 2 billion yards of fabrics (Aibueku, 2016) and about

130 million yards in Nigeria alone (B&FT, 2017). The report by Aibueku provides further insight into the production and consumption balance of textiles in Sub-Saharan Africa. It is reported that the global turnover for the global textile industry is about \$400 billion, of which 60% of the fabrics consumed in Africa originate from China and India. West Africa constitutes 65% of the industry consumption and about 38% demand for African print fabrics. Furthermore, out of the 130 million yards demand by Nigerian consumers, the top producers of African print fabrics in Nigeria produce only about 30 million yards annually (B&FT, 2017). These are indicative of the viability of the textile industry in Nigeria. The need for the quick intervention of the government to improve the textile industry will also impact agricultural production in the country. Local manufacturers of African print in Nigeria are unable to match the low prices of the products imported from China where the production of cotton is undergone on a very large scale (Aibueku, 2016). Hence, investment in the textile industry will necessitate government investment in the mechanised cultivation of cotton across the country to ensure that the cost of production and the final products can match the prices of products from China and India.

Blangidi: The *blangidi* is a fine, soft printed cloth material that is made from twilled and synthesised wool. The fabric is printed with different patterns and napped at one end. *Blangidi* is the traditional name for the "printed woollen flannel" (Daly et al, 1986), which although predominantly produced in England from where it is exported to Nigeria has been adopted as cherished traditional apparel.

Today, *blangidi* or *feni* fabrics continue to be produced by companies serving the Nigerian market from abroad. An example of such companies is the Fenico Textile Company Ltd. This company has a long history in Nigeria haven was founded in 1974. However, due to import regulations on the textile industry by the federal, the company ceased operations in 1983. Today, the company operates in the UK, Nigeria, and the United Arab Emirates, however, the actual production and printing of the woollen fabric is not carried out in Nigeria. The company makes over 100 designs, exclusive to its Nigerian audience, these are showcased on the company's official website – Fenitotextile.com.

Kalabari: Originally known as the Awome, the *Kalabari people* are a division of the *Ijaw* tribe based on the eastern side of the Niger Delta, Nigeria. The tribe was named *Blangidi* after their ancestor, Perebo *Blangidi* the son of Owei. With the invasion of the Portuguese who could not pronounce "*Blangidi*", the name was spelt as "*Kalabar*". *Blangidi* town was deserted by

the indigenous occupants who moved to other locations to engage in fishing. By the time the British colonial masters arrived, the old *Kalabars* had moved to a new location which became the present-day Calabar while different ethnic groups had settled in the location, predominantly the Efik ethnic group. The ancient *Kalabari* kingdom was a kingdom of about 35 settlements which consisted of *Bakana*, *Tombia*, *Buguma*, *Abonnema*, *Abalama*, *Bakana*, *Bukama*, and *Degema*. (Jones, 2000; AMNH, 2019).

NIGER DELTA AND DRESSING

This region of Nigeria occupies the continental margin of the Gulf of Guinea in the south of Nigeria between 3° and 6° latitudes and 5° and 8° longitudes (Reijers & Nwajide, 1997). Located in the geopolitical region known as “south-south,” the Niger Delta ranks among the petroleum-rich tertiary deltas of the world. The region has a population of about 30 million people (CRS, 2019) who occupy about 70,000 km² of land space (which constitutes about 25% of Nigeria's population and 7.5% of Nigeria's landmass). It is made up of six state governments of the Federal Republic of Nigeria and produces most of the revenue of the federal government. About 2 million barrels of oil are mined from the Niger Delta region of Nigeria per day (Adelfemi, 2013) and proceeds account for nearly 75% of Nigeria's earnings from export (Akpeninor, 2012). The Niger Delta is rich in culture, it comprises over 40 ethnic groups speaking about 250 dialects. Some of the ethnic groups residing in the region include; Ukwuani, Oron, *Ijaw*, Esan, Efik, *Kalabari*, Ogoni, Okirika, Ogba-Egbema-Ndoni, *Obolo*, Isoko, Urhrobo, Ibibio, Efik, Bini, Itsekiri, Yoruba and Igbo. The languages in the Niger Delta region include *Ijaw*, Ibibio-Efik, Itsekiri, Central Delta, Edo, Ikwere, Ngwa, Ekpeye, Izii-Ikwo Ishiagu, Ogba, and Yoruba.

Mode of Dressing in Niger Delta

Dressing in *Kalabari* societies of the Niger Delta region of Nigeria has been examined in previous studies (See Michelman & Eicher, 1995; Michelman, 1992; Daly, 1984). While these studies constitute early endeavours at understanding the cultural practices of the riverine people, they provide no indicators of the factors that influence gender and dressing in the contemporary fashion world.

Gender Roles and Dressing in Kalabari

A study by Michelman & Eicher (1995) set out to identify the relationship between gender and dressing in the traditional *Kalabari* society. Through exploratory methods of research, an analysis of dresses as a means of communicating gender roles and functions through nonverbal means. According to the findings of the study, the dresses were utilised from the old

times as a means of social control in ancient *Kalabari* societies. This has helped protect the cultural and economic position of men in society. Douglas (1982) states that normative behaviours which have been adopted as rules constitute sources of conflict in institutions of society such as gender. It is further asserted by the same author that the body and the mode of dressing represent a social phenomenon that transcends individual activities. Similarly, Michelman (1995) buttresses that with the change in gender roles, and economic and political achievements of women in society, in the same way, the dressing change. For instance, the financial independence of women in those days meant they could afford the luxury of purchasing some fabrics that were exclusive to men and chiefs. Focus was given to *Kalabari women's* club, *eremne-ogbo*, a popular dance group at the time.

These efforts to study the culture of the *Kalabari* lifestyle from the perspective of gender and dresses constitute the earliest theoretical and philosophical framework for subsequent studies. The information used for these researches (Michelman & Eicher, 1995; Michelman, 1992; Daly, 1984) was gathered through primary methods of participant observation and key-person interviews which are indicative of the researchers' commitment to making a significant contribution to the body of knowledge. Most participants in the research were bilingual, as such, the interviews (structured and semi-structured) were conducted in English. In instances where the participants were not fluent in English, an interpreter was used to ensure that there was no segregation based on the level of literacy or language spoken. Other sources of information utilised by these early researches include "solicited and unsolicited conversations, involvement and experience with daily activities, unobtrusive observation of behaviour and interactions, and observations on the production and use of items of dress."

Textile hierarchies identified in the *Kalabari* societies based on cultural values, social importance, and aesthetical values have been examined in these studies, and significance linked to gender roles is noticeable in physical appearance (Eicher, 1988). According to the findings in Michelman & Eicher (1995), the *Kalabari* prized fabrics in descending order of importance include the following: 'India', *lokobite*, *Kalabari*, *onunga*, *krukrubite*, and *injiri*. This places *blangidi* among the highly rated dresses worn by the highly placed in society. It is also observed by the researchers that *blangidi* fabrics can be worn underneath *accra* wrappers due to the price of the material which makes it difficult to afford the conventional two-piece wrapper worn by most *Kalabari women*. The wardrobe contents of women are considered a source of pride in the *Kalabari* society (Michelman & Eicher, 1995).

Iria Festival in Ijaw Ethnic Groups

This is a long-age festival practised by *Kalabari tribes* of the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. Girls who have approached puberty are adorned with new attires to mark their transition to full womanhood and to indicate that they are ripe for marriage and childbearing. This practice is common among the *Ijaw*-speaking tribes such as *Kalabari*, *Opobo*, *Nkoro*, and *Obolo* all located in Rivers State, Nigeria. There are slight variations in what the festivals are called in different *Ijaw* communities; in the *Kalabari* kingdom, it is known as “*iriabo*”, while it is known as *Iria Egerebite* and *Bighibite* in the Ibani kingdom.

Women in the ancient *Kalabari* society attained the full status of womanhood through marriage and childbirth. The transition from childhood to womanhood is noticeable in the wearing of *bite sara* and *iriabo* dresses, *India* or *Asari Tomina Ereme* wrappers (Michelman & Eicher, 1995). The choice of wrappers used by the woman is based on the purchasing power of her family, hence, it creates room for a display of prestige. This section presents a review of the significance of the change in the dressing of the girl child as she approaches womanhood in the traditional *Kalabari* society. Studies have explored the *Iria* festival which is the coming-of-age ceremony to mark the transition of the girl child to womanhood. Change in the dressing of traditional *Kalabari women* is marked primarily by age, and then by accomplishments. (Michelman & Eicher (1995) observe that gender roles for the *Kalabari* woman develop simultaneously with her social and economic achievements, and this is usually reflected in their appearance. The *Iria* festival symbolises the maturation and growth of the woman. The *Kalabari* society recognised the diverse stages of *Iria* through the use of distinctive physical dress codes which convey cultural meanings accompanied by a cultural pattern of behaviour (Daly, 1984).

The final stage of the *Iria* is the *Iyi Iriabo* ceremony which marks the period following childbirth for a woman. The period is associated with confinement in the fattening room after which the woman will be adorned with flamboyant clothing and body adornments before she is once again presented to the community. The traditional dressing style expected of the woman during this ceremony is described in detail by (Michelman & Eicher (1995). In the period preceding the main ceremony which lasts for weeks, the regalia which usually consists of clothing with complex patterns and adornment that touches the knee, necklaces, hats, corals, and beads on the neck, wrist, and ankle is used to decorate the woman before she is presented to the community. The regalia of the woman during the *Iriabo* festivals are designed to depict “opulence, roundness, and horizontal lines.” The woman is expected to appear before the people barefoot to perform a public dance

ritual. Dances are closely related to the *Iria* festivals, as such, girls begin to acquaint themselves with the dance steps from a very early age (Michelman & Eicher, 1995). These dance steps can be learnt from the elderly members of the society, such as mothers, sisters, and women's society meetings.

Blangidi Origin

The use of motifs in fashion for the creation of visual dialogue and the exploration of the cultural complexities of society has been explored by Ajiginni & Osaigbovo (2021). The authors define motifs as signs, symbols, and concepts that can be repeated to create visually appealing designs on the surface of fabrics. As such, a motif is the unit of a pattern, where patterns are reflections of form and conveners of purpose, and motifs are indicators of topical trends. On the other hand, design entails the art and process of selecting and ordering visual elements to serve the purpose of visual communication and to fulfil a defined function. Debili et al., (2013) note that design requires the arrangement of “lines, angles, spaces, colours, textures and other hidden values” according to the principles of design and the creativity of the artist. It is further noted in the work that the ability to use design tools and represent the artist's ideas on paper is not sufficient in making designs for African textile art, it is also required of the artist to be deeply knowledgeable of the history and culture of the African culture represented in the art. This practice explains why African art is filled with meaning, each sign and symbol depict a rich history, story, or cultural value.

The several kinds of motifs identified by the author include geometric, realistic, and abstract designs. While textile design using motifs can be undertaken for their aesthetic value, most traditional motifs in Africa are laden with cultural and historical values (Ajiginni & Osaigbovo, 2021). The authors observe that while some traditional motifs are no more in existence, some have survived and constitute a part of fashion trends in Africa. Motifs invoke imageries from traditional society, they are often associated with religious ceremonies, organisations, traditional values, honour, prestige, or royalty. The use of symbols and motifs in African traditional fabric production is figurative and representative of historical proverbs or events, it is associated to state the relevance of individuals, lineage or events, hence these fabrics are used in societies for political, social, and cultural occasions (Debeli et al., 2013). Through African traditional textiles worn in different communities across Africa, Africans define themselves and depict their societal values through visual communication (Debeli et al., 2013). The art of textile design is constantly evolving in Africa due to increasing innovation, advancement in technology, changes in fashion trends, and changes in the cultural value of the society (Ajiginni & Osaigbovo, 2021). Textile design and

printing as found in society is indicative of the relationship between fashion, local technology, society's value system, and the factors that alter fashion trends in the socio-scape (Ajiginni & Osaigbovo, 2021).

Ajiginni & Osaigbovo (2021) admit that creativity plays a critical function in impacting fashion trends. They note that the widespread adoption of trendy *Adire* styles and *Adinkra* fabrics for corporate wear demonstrates that creativity in fashion designing and styling is the vital driver of fashion trends. Through creativity, the social and cultural meanings attached to fabrics, motifs, and designs can be redefined and revitalised to appeal to a larger audience and, hence, influence social trends. Creative expression of traditional fabrics and advancements in technology have made cheaper variations of some traditional African fabrics available (Ajiginni...), and fashion trends keep evolving in the contemporary world. Imageries and concepts adopted for the designs of motives come from diverse sources. CyrilEgware (2016) notes that local imageries such as aquatic lives (shells of periwinkle and whelk, fishes) which resonates with the physical environment of the Niger Delta people are often incorporated into the design of motifs and textile designs. Textile production involves the art and process of making fabrics from fibres (Cyril-Egware, 2016). Cyril-Egware (2016) notes the process of information dissemination through dresses and garments goes as other means of cultural communication. The significance of textiles in the promotion, documentation, preservation, and highlighting of the rich cultural resources of the Niger Delta is also noted by the author. The author further notes the relevance of textiles in preserving the remains of the Niger Delta cultural heritages following the degradation of the cultural and physical environment as a result of oil exploration.

The impact of environmental degradation on the environment of Niger Delta due to the exploitation of oil in the region has created awareness of the need to adopt sustainable textile processes (Okeke & Chukueggu, 2021). People are becoming more aware of the impact of unsustainable practices on the future of the environment, and as such the need for the emergence of environment-friendly alternatives to the previous methods of production. The use of fabrics as commemorative clothes is largely practised in the Niger Delta region of the country (Cyril-Egware, 2016). It has been adopted by political aspirants as a souvenir distributed to supporters and a subtle means of promoting political parties or candidates before elections. It is also widely used by influential persons to commemorate deaths, births, weddings, or religious activities in the Niger Delta region. This highlights that textiles are identifiers of various cultures and traditions.

The Economic Impact of the Blangidi Fabric

The economic development of every country hinges on the ability of its economy to generate revenue both from internal and external sources from all aspects of its economy. The Nigerian economy is highly dependent on the revenue generated from oil exploration, thus making the economy monogamous (Onwuakpa, 2016). Previous studies suggest that the development of the textile industry in Nigeria must be undertaken to diversify the economy, ensure sustainable growth, and provide alternatives to the oil-based economy (Onwuakpa, 2016; Bawa, 2021; Cyril-Egware, 2015; Cyril-Egware & Ajinginni, 2017; Okpu & Abimbola, 2020). This suggests that the potential of the textile industry in Nigeria is largely untapped thereby resulting in lower patronage and export of traditional African fabrics from Nigeria to the global market.

Fabrics for the Baby Girl

Fashion in modern times is used to depict both material and non-material elements and it is associated with not only clothes by also hairstyles, pieces of jewellery, footwear, and bags (Okeke & Chukueggu, 2021). According to Cyril-Egware (2015), fashion is a dynamic, evolving element of culture; a “process of change” that adopts new values before the fabrics wear out.

Dresses are bodily adornments for several purposes such as work, recreation, and cultural functions (Cyril-Egware, 2015). A study by Chukueggu & Cyril-Egware (2009) states that clothing provides substantial information about the individual(s) putting them on; this includes information about the wearer's cultural origin, socio-economic status, personality and mood and events attended by the wearer. It is further considered by the authors to be the most itinerant aspect of art and culture identification and promotion that communicates using visual and non-visual means. Johnson et al., (2014) and Michelman & Eicher (1995) uphold the view of fashion as an essential form of nonverbal communication and highlight the cultural significance of clothing in the promotion of cultural and social meanings. According to Cyril-Egware & Ajinginni (2017), textile is a functional and significant part of daily living, they mirror the physical and social environment of the wearer, and it is a *revealer* of individuality and historical and cultural backgrounds.

Dresses for the Baby Girl

A considerable number of literature has considered the need to consider the health and safety of the fabric used for making dresses for baby girls (Forsberg & Mansdorf, 2007; Dogbey 2015). These studies posit that aesthetic appeal from styling and fashion design skills used in making clothes for

children must not be given priority over the comfort and health of the child. A more comprehensive description of the basic factors to be considered in choosing the right textile for making dresses for the baby girl is found in Michelman, & Eicher, (1995). To protect the skin of children from irritation, it is best to use natural fabrics such as cotton, wool, and silk instead of synthetic fabrics (Michelman, & Eicher, 1995). The fashion designer must pay attention to this considering that the chemical residues from fabrics put the child's safety and comfort at risk as the chemicals and dyes used in making the fabric can be absorbed into the skin of the child since the skin of children is thinner and more permeable.

Fabrics suitable for making dresses for the baby girl ought to be resistant to fading. This is necessary considering that garments for children need to be washed often, and a fabric that isn't resistant to fading will wash off with continuous washing. More so, the dyes and chemicals on a fabric that are not fade-resistant can easily be absorbed by the skin of children when the kids perspire. Michelman, & Eicher, (1995) in addressing the above subject matter highlight the consequences of inappropriate fabrics on the health of the child. The authors state that the chemicals and dyes used in the finishing of some textiles are capable of inflicting certain developmental issues for the baby girl, increasing the chances of reproductive complications, and leading to an imbalance of the hormone system. Skin-level symptoms associated with such harmful fabrics include soreness of cheeks and ears, hyperactivity, and behavioural problems. Another risk in using textiles with harmful chemicals such as benzotriazoles and phthalates is the possibilities of the possibility of oral absorption by the children (Zhenwu et al., 2020) as they are always guzzling things. The study indicates that the use of natural and low-impact dyes and colourants on the fabrics to be used for the baby girl will reduce or eliminate the adverse consequences associated with the use of harmful dyes and chemicals.

A study (Dogbey 2015) undertook a study to estimate the perception of the impact fabric selection and style design has on the physical comfort of children using a descriptive research design. The study examined 100 respondents which consisted of designers and mostly parents were selected through simple random sampling. The result of the findings indicates that 80% of fashion designers carry out practices that ensure the safety and comfort of the child in the manufacturing of apparel through the use of linen apparel, light zippers, and fewer buttons. However, the majority admit that these considerations are based on cost considerations, ease of handling the materials during sewing, and the ability to make more designs with the fabrics.

The findings suggest that fashion designers who make dresses for baby girls are not aware of the consequences of using the wrong fabrics in making dresses for the baby girl and that the lack of these considerations in choosing the right fabric for making apparel for the child will produce only non-functional dresses that inhibit the comfort of the girl child. Overall, the studies suggest that fabrics used for making clothing for baby girls aged 2 to 7 need to have a lightweight material made from natural fibres, permeable to the influx of air, gentle on the skin, resistant to fade, durable, and flexible to accommodate the rapid growth of children. Several studies have considered the significance of the *Iria* festival in the dressing of the baby girl as she approaches womanhood (Michelman & Eicher, 1995; Daly, 1984). It has been noted that the baby girl's dressing is largely for the basic need of physical protection from the harsh conditions of weather. In traditional *Kalabari* societies, the *Iria* festival indicates the first conscious effort to adorn the girl child with the luxury that is usually associated with the older population. Daly et al., (1984) state that the use of expensive adornments and pieces of jewelry are exclusive to people of age: women are seen wearing accessories such as head-ties, purses, and jewels, while older men wear accessories such as walking sticks, bowler or top hat, and jewelry.

The Ijo (*Ijaw*) Tribe

Aronson (1982) indicates that Ijo ethnic group, whose earliest ancestors had resided in the central delta, is the dominant ethnic group in the Niger Delta. As the group expanded towards all sides of the region, they began to expand and settle at the coasts of the region. This expansion resulted in the creation of sub-ethnic groups among the people as a result of varied geographical and historical differences. Five distinct sub-ethnic groups of the eastern *Ijaw* tribe are identified which share similarities and differences in linguistics, culture, and history, these include; the *Ogbia*, *Nembe*, *Kalabari*, *Okrika*, *Ibani*, and. The acquisition of political power in the *Ijaw* kingdoms was by age as respect is accorded to individuals according to their age. This, however, changed with the commencement of the slave trade, power became a question of one's ability and the lineage an individual comes from. Also, in this period, each community adopted rulers or heads (*Amanyano*) who served to represent the interests of the people, especially in their relationship with the Europeans.

Kalabari people migrated from the central region of the present-day Niger Delta which was their homeland in 1000 AD (Wariboko, 2016). Located close to the coast of the then Eastern Region of Nigeria, the communities served as a link between Nigeria and the rest of the world (Daly et al., 1984): routes to the east and west lead to the Western Region and other West African trading

centres such as *Accra* and *Cotonou*; while routes to the south open to European trades from England, Portugal, and Netherland. This linkage to the outside world provides the *Kalabari* society with a large pool of resources to uniquely assemble and adopt into their culture.

Occupation

The *Ijaw* (Ijo) ethnic group is predominately fishers due to the proximity of some sub-ethnic *Ijaw* groups to the ocean. Other sub-ethnic groups who live by freshwater creeks and have more arable lands for farming rely on agricultural cultivation. International trading among the *Ijaw* people is traceable to the early sixteenth century with the slave trade and palm oil being the major commodity. It was noted in the literature that the Ijo people of the Niger Delta had dwelt in the region where they currently reside and traded with other regions of the world since the 1400s (Daly et al., 1984; Jones, 1963).

Over time, the gender balance in Ijo communities experienced remarkable changes. Wariboko (2016) notes that the transformation of the community trade from fishing to trade tilted the gender balance to favour the men who dominated long-distance trade. This dominance of the male gender in the trade leads to the restructuring of social relationships in society to maintain the position of the male in the community.

COLONIAL RULE IN THE NIGER DELTA REGION AND CHANGE IN GENDER ROLES

The cultural practices of the riverine tribes of the Niger Delta have been explored and documented by numerous scholars (Michelman & Eicher, 1995; Wariboko, 2023; Borgatti et al., 2002). The state of the Niger Delta states was established by the colonial rules in the early 1900s through treaties signed by the local rulers of the riverine tribes (Gertzel, 1962). Awortu (2019) posits that the institution of colonial policies impacted the role of women in society before the establishment of indirect rule by the colonialists. It has been established that before colonialism, contact with the Western world had been initiated in the Niger Delta region through trading and missionary activities. The coming of the colonial rulers introduced a change in roles and operations among the Niger Delta tribes (Duke, 2010). Gender inequality in the Niger Delta during colonial authority had a major impact on both men's and women's results (Awortu, 2019). Colonial economic policies that prioritised agricultural exports produced jobs, but because missionaries oversaw education, there was a gendered labour market that favoured men.

There have been initiatives to rectify educational disparities, such as fee reductions and schools exclusively for girls. Colonialism accidentally promoted new activities, particularly Western education, and educated females while undermining certain women's interests. However, women were economically and politically marginalised and disenfranchised as a result of the colonial importation of foreign beliefs, such as the Victorian notion of women as housewives (Anigwe, 2014). The socio-economic and political environment is continuously impacted by detrimental laws and social institutions that were implemented under colonial control, such as inheritance laws and limits on women's activities. In the Niger Delta, the long-lasting effects of European patriarchy are still felt today, upending customs that gave women more control. Colonialism left a complicated legacy, affecting women's status and power, gender relations and roles in the region, and long-lasting consequences on socioeconomic and political dynamics — all despite the unexpected result of educating the female child.

Aniekan & Udom (2023) provide additional evidence challenging the notion of extreme patriarchy in the Niger Delta region before colonial influence. This study set out to evaluate the practices of women's inheritance in the traditional society of the Ibibio people and to explore the factors contributing to change and continuity. The process of inheritance ensures that parents pass down valuable and traditional assets to the next generation. Following the introduction of patriarchy by the colonial rulers, the Ibibio people prohibited female children and widows from inheriting family assets. However, recent observations suggest a departure from this practice. Anikan & Udom's (2023) research findings highlight a substantial transformation over time, granting women complete freedom to inherit various categories of property. The paper advocates for an egalitarian approach, urging parents not to prioritize one gender over the other in the allocation of privileges and inheritance rights.

Role of Kalabari Women

Women in *Blangidi* land play different and crucial roles across economic, religious, and political domains, each facet emphasizing their pivotal roles within the societal structure (Ige, 2020).

- i. Both married and unmarried *Kalabari women* play a critical function in maintaining the economy of the community. Through active participation in the trade of commodities such as fish, yams, plantains, and craft, they constitute significant contributors to family sustenance. Traditionally, some women garnered substantial wealth through their involvement in trade.
- ii. Within the *Blangidi's* patriarchal political structure, women historically function in advisory capacities, as well as in cleansing and purifying rituals. Their involvement in guiding and preparing men for warfare in ancient times signifies the crucial role they play in contributing to political and societal processes.
- iii. The female national divinity Akaso, also known as "mother" (waingi), is the centre of the traditional *Blangidi* land religion. Women play a crucial role as water spirits' conduits, even though male priests control the majority of rites.

Uzobo et al. (2014) provide further evidence to buttress the religious value played by women in the *Kalabari communities*. According to the researchers, the assignment of religious functions to women in the *Ijaw* communities is guided by the concept of the Supreme God and other deities as embodying a maternal identity. It is thus believed that women are more apt intermediaries for various gods and goddesses of the *Kalabari* land. A certain custom, known as Orukoro ereme or Owudogi ereme, in which women serve as vessels for

the spirits of gods, is best represented by the *Kalabari people*. Their role is comparable to that of prophets in Christianity. Women who are in possession, which is frequently linked to the appearance of the guest spirit (Oru), display euphoric behaviours and speak in a language that is said to be a warped form of the Ijo dialect. In addition, women are given positions of spiritual leadership (chief priestesses, for example) in some well-known community cults in *Kalabari*. A prime example is the influential pulo-ombia cult in *Tombia* (Rivers State), in which a female head is highly respected.

Women's collectives function as custodians of cultures, repositories of tradition, culture, and historical narratives. This becomes of critical importance during ceremonies such as marriages and funerals. Notably, women take a leading role in planning such events, especially in the negotiations surrounding bridewealth (Sokari – George 2003). SokariGeorge further highlights the importance of *Ijaw* women in bringing a sense of identity through the design of the cultural clothes worn during these festivals. Examples of dresses made by the women include *Indian Manadara*, *Kalabari*, *loko*, and *indiya*. This extends to the design and decoration of the interiors of homes and residences. Appah's observations among the Ekpetiama people underscore this, highlighting that assessing the character of the mother-in-law's family constitutes the primary consideration for marriage (Appah, 2003). For the girl child born in the Niger Delta region, she is influenced right from birth to take up these responsibilities and fill in the roles assigned to mothers.

The Value of the Girl Child in Kalabari Communities

In the context of the *Kalabari* and other Niger Delta tribes, the cultural significance and value attributed to the girl child represent a significant deviation from the conventional beliefs and practices in other regions of the country. Beginning at birth, the family celebrates the birth of a girl child in the Ijaw kingdom not just for the addition to the family size, but rather as a reflection of the belief that the girl child is a source of blessing to the family (Oyebisi, 2023). This belief stems from the expectation that the girl child, upon marriage, will bring financial benefits to her birth family through her husband. This financial benefit becomes even more pronounced when the girl child herself becomes a mother, particularly of a girl child. At this point, the bride's family is entitled to make substantial financial demands on the husband/father of the newborn. This unique cultural heritage usually results in female house ownership in the region, as husbands often build houses for their mothers-in-law. While the cultural practice's focus on the economic benefits to the family raises doubt on the intrinsic cultural value of the practice, it is, however, undeniable that the practice promotes a greater

sense of value for the girl child. The cultural dynamics in the *Kalabari tribes* present a unique perspective on gender roles and underscore the need for diverse considerations in understanding the value attributed to the girl child.

Matrilineal Lineage System in the Niger Delta Area

Although some studies have illustrated the high value placed on women and the girl child among some Niger Delta tribes (Ige, 2020; Azorbo & Ufford-Azorbo, 2014), a forthright evaluation of the matrilineal nature of the *Kalabari people* was carried out by Azorbo & Ufford-Azorbo (2020). The research aimed to examine the impact of the belief in the feminine deities on the religious and communal practices of the *Kalabari people*, as well as to evaluate how this has influenced the pseudo-matrilineal system still practised in the region.

Highlighting the significant role women play in Ijo communities, historians emphasise the high regard for motherhood, which has been pivotal in shaping the Niger Delta. In certain *Ijaw* communities, including the *Nembe* people, lineage is primarily traced through the mother's side, indicating an outright practice of matrilineal system. While individuals can inherit movable properties from their father's side, landed properties and chieftaincy titles are exclusive privileges from the maternal sides of families (Uzobo et al., 2014). It is crucial to understand that the matrilineal descent system does not imply the elevation of women above men in public affairs; rather, it signifies everyone in the society, including the male, identifies themselves through the lineage of their mothers. This cultural practice underscores the value placed on women and, by extension, emphasizes the importance of the baby girl within the *Ijaw* cultural context.

The matrilineal system observed in Ijo communities, particularly among the *Nembe* people, exhibits characteristics of a pseudo-matrilineal structure in the society, as it does not involve a complete subversion of gender roles, as women are not explicitly placed above men in public affairs. The pseudo-matrilineal system in Ijo communities thus intricately overlays elements of matrilineality within a patrilineal structure, thereby creating a societal structure that reflects the unique relevance of both genders. This high regard placed on motherhood in this system underscores the importance of women, including the baby girl, in keeping with the cultural heritage of the people. The baby girl is, consequently, viewed as a carrier of her family's lineage, potentially inheriting and transmitting not only material wealth but also cultural and social legacies.

Female Deities in Ijawland

The *Ijaw* people hold the belief that the Supreme *Creatress* is responsible for the existence, order, and well-being of both the physical and spiritual worlds. Dime (2004; Azorbo & Ufford-Azorbo, 2020) explores this belief by outlining the feminine attributes and names attributed to God among the *Ijaw* people. According to the author, the *Ijaw* people strictly refer to God in feminine terms, using names like *Temearau* (*Tamuno* is the *Kalabari* variant) translates to "The Creatress or Creatix," symbolizing the Moulder of the Universe. Other names include *Ayebaarau* or *Ayeba*, signifying "the Foundress of the universe," *Woyengi* or *Oyin*, meaning "Our Mother," and *Oginarau*, denoting "She who dwells in the heavens." Notable appellations include *Pere Bau*, "The Sovereign Queen," *Ogborogbo*, "the irresistible mighty Wind," and *Gburugburuarau*, "Great, mighty, and formidable Mother."

The *Ijaw*'s story of creation emphasises this concept. According to Alagoa et al. (2009), the myth emphasises that *Woyengi*, (Interpreted as "Our Mother,") is in charge of creation, life, and death. According to the myth, *Woyengi* descends carrying objects such as a sizable table, a chair, and the Creating Stone, shaping people from the dirt to sit on the table. At first, *Woyengi* gave the lifeless entities the option to transform into men or women. *Woyengi* then granted them wishes for wealth, procreation, and long life, among other things. When the creatures decide to die from illnesses in the myth's denouement, *Woyengi* affirms (Okara, 2009; in Azorbo & Ufford-Azorbo, 2020). Furthermore, the author provided a series of evidence, including insights from the sociocultural activities of the people, to substantiate the awareness of the feminist nature of the Supreme God in the *Ijaw* land. *Ijaw* and *Urhobo* drama and playwrights. Additionally, this is reflected in the names given by parents to them

Fashion in Ijaw Communities

Fashion among the ethnic groups of the Niger Delta region draws inspiration from the environment and the cultural practice such as proverbs, folklore, religion, and history of the ethnic group and sub-ethnic group (Cyril-Egware, 2017). Steiner (1995) however notes that the *Ijaw* society represents an example of a post-colonial community that is resistant to Western hegemony. Although most of the fabrics adopted by the *Kalabari culture* are imported from western and eastern countries of the world, it is further noted by the authors that the ethnic group remained independent in their fashion development and unique sense of cultural values attached to the imported fabrics. While Western culture had influenced the practices of the Niger Delta people through the introduction of foreign institutions and cultural elements such as religion, a system of government and education which were

imposed on the communities as superior, the riverine cultures of the Niger Delta interpreted the imposed culture uniquely in order to suit their traditional practices.

Western influence in the fashion and textile production on the traditional practices of fashion and textile production in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria is widely acknowledged in literature (Steiner, 1995; Michelman & Eicher, 1995; Debeli et al., 2013). On the other hand, Michelman & Eicher (1995) observe that the impact of Western civilization has led to great modification in the traditional practices adopted by the indigenous people. The researchers compared the pictorial evidence from photographs available with the communities' custodians and the direct observation made for the research to observe the extent of the impact. While the cultural activities of the people remained intact, the ceremonies were beginning to lose some intricate components. For example, photographs found in *Kalabari* albums as recent as the 1980s illustrate that new mothers left their breasts uncovered during certain traditional ceremonies to commemorate motherhood. However, the Western influence which frowns on uncovered bodies has so greatly impacted the practice of baring their breast in public that at the time of carrying out the research, the women no longer appeared bare-breasted at public ceremonies.

Fashion in the Traditional *Kalabari* Community

Kalabari people possess a unique cultural composition that is usually not identified as African by even experts (Eicher & Erokimson, 2017). A comprehensive description of the mode of dressing in the traditional *Blangidi* Kingdom is given in Daly et al., (1984). The authors describe the uniqueness of *Kalabari* dress culture as a factor of the unique assemblage of elements from diverse cultures that have established a form of trade relationship. The elements that compose part of the *Kalabari* dress culture include wrappers, blouses, shirts, sandals and shoes, handkerchiefs, beads, earrings, rings, and other accessories such as feathers, Christmas bell ornaments, purses, handbags, walking sticks, hand fans, elephant tusk, and umbrellas. These features are not only combined to be aesthetically pleasing but there are also traditionally set standards of what is established among the people.

Although there is an abundance of wrappers available to the *Kalabari* traditional society, they serve different purposes and do not possess the same level of significance, hence there exists a well-known textile hierarchy among the locals (Eicher, 1988; Michelman & Eicher, 1995). Several factors account for the composition of an individual's dress in the *Blangidi* society, these

include sex, age, individual's social and economic status, family, and ancestry (Daly et al., 1984; Michelman & Eicher, 1995; Daly, 1984).

Dressing in the Ijaw society is gender-based as the mode of dressing for males and females is distinct. A similarity that exists between the modes of dressing for both genders is the tying of wrappers. Dressing for the traditional *Kalabari* woman could include imported laces or fabrics worn with “up and down” matching wrappers. Thus, the wrappers come in diverse materials and varying prices, these include *Injiri*, *Kalabari*, *Ankara*, and *Kente*. For men, a loose shirt which is known as *woko* is worn with a piece of wrapper, women, on the other hand often tie two-piece wrappers (Daly et al., 1984). The researchers also note that in the traditional *Kalabari* communities, colours are used to maintain the theme of the different pieces of attire worn, not motifs, patterns, or textures. Hence, colour consistency plays a functional role in depicting the traditional correctness of a piece of clothing. Also, cultural value can be represented in a dressing through the addition of historical items that are related to the family of the wearer.

The socio-economic status of an individual also determines the kind of fabrics that such an individual can afford to buy. Michelman & Eicher (1995) and Eicher (1988) corroborated by Eicher (1988) gives a hierarchy of various fabrics used by the *Kalabari* people in descending order of affordability; 'India', *lokobite*, *Kalabari*, *onunga*, *krukrubite*, and *injiri*. While some members of the community might be able to afford some of the fabrics, these expensive fabrics are usually reserved in boxes so they can be preserved for a longer time for even the next generation. The contents in the box including heirlooms, accessories, and jewels constitute family inheritance which could be handed from one generation to another. Thus, an individual's dressing could be enriched by the contents of the inheritance handed down to them despite their present social class.

Some Fabrics Used by the *Kalabari* People

Some authors recognise that textiles serve as a form of cultural identity for people (CyrilEgware, 2017; Cyril-Egware & Ajiginni, 2016; Debeli et al., 2013) and this is especially true for the riverine ethnic groups of the Niger Delta. Diverse fabrics are cherished by the ethnic groups in the Niger Delta which play a significant role in the mundane activities of the people. Textile as an art form is interwoven with other aspects of art and culture of the people of the Niger Delta such as education, entertainment, industry, and commerce. Due to their unique history, there is no known traditional fabric produced by the *Ijaw* ethnic group (Steiner, 1995). Most of the fabrics used to identify the ethnic groups in the Niger Delta originate from different parts of the world

and other regions of Nigeria. Hence, the communities depend on trade with textile-producing towns such as the Awete in the east of the Niger River, Ewe in Ghana, Illorin in the south-western region, as well as transnational trade with India, England and the Netherlands (Daly et al., 1984). The art and culture of the Ijaw practice, thus, borrow elements from other cultures both within and beyond the shores of Nigeria. However, this is not unique to the Ijo ethnic groups as many African print fabrics used extensively across the continents are neither produced in nor by Africans, hence, Akinwumi (2021) doubts the suitability of the tag "African" to such fabrics.

Numerous fabrics are used by the ethnic groups of the Niger Delta to represent their cultural heritage, these include *Akwa Ocha*, *Pelete Bite*, *Kente*, *Ikagi Bara* (*Ikaki*) *Popo*, *Inziri*, *Abada*, and *Kalabari*. The nature of these fabrics has been described by researchers and authors (Michelman & Eicher, 1995; Eicher, 1972; Michelman, 1987; Cyril-Egware, 2017; Daniel, 2020; Kankpeyeng & Anquandah, 2014; Daly et al., 1984).

***Akwa Ocha*:** The fabric originates from the Anioma people of present-day Delta State, Nigeria. *Akwa Ocha* means white cloth in Igbo and some Igbo dialects. The fabric is a hand-woven woollen fabric that is distinctly white. Traditionally, men are tasked with the responsibility of harvesting the cotton needed to make the fibres, while women sort and weave the fibres into fabrics. The processes of producing the fabrics are strenuous and consume a lot of time. The fabric is durable and is said to last for a hundred years. In the Asaba massacre during the Nigerian Civil War, hundreds of people wearing the *Akwa Ocha* fabric were paraded on the streets of Asaba showing solidarity with "One Nigeria" and were massacred afterwards by the Nigerian Army (Ojoye, 2017).

***Pelete Bite*:** This fabric is worn by the inhabitants of the Niger Delta on special occasions such as funeral ceremonies and traditional festivals, it means "cut-thread cloth." It is uniquely produced by adding aesthetics to fabrics imported from India. The process involves cutting off all or part of the white threads from the imported fabric which are usually stripped or checked. This production undergone by artists and entrepreneurs in *Kalabari communities* leaves holes in the fabrics to add more visual effects, and they are given different names according to the motif created with the fabrics. The fabric is a unique product of the *Kalabari people*, it is worn by both genders, and however, women often tie it as wrappers.

***Kente/Adinkra*:** This fabric originates from Ghana and is worn extensively across Africa. It is made by dyeing cotton and silk fibres with the root of a

plant known as *Kuntunkuni* and then woven by hand into various rectangular shapes in vibrant colours. The colours of the *Kente* have cultural significance, and proverbs and wise sayings are coded into some of these fabrics which can be deciphered by natives. In ancient times, the fabrics were used by the royalty of the Ashanti kingdom of Ghana. Kente pattern designs are complex in nature and diverse in colour. Kente fabrics share close similarities to *Accra* fabric which is also produced in Ghana, and they are mostly woven by men. The Kente fabric is a formal regalia for the *Akan* people of Ghana.

George: This fabric is said to originate from India where it is used in the making of *saris* for Indian women. The *Ijaw* ethnic groups and sub-groups are known for their use of *George* wrappers. It is popular among the nobility in many African societies. The red *George* fabric had been adopted by the riverine people as traditional attire, however, diverse colours are now used.

Akwete: This fabric is indigenous to the Igbo tribe from Akwete in present-day Abia state, Nigeria. It is also a hand-woven fabric that involves weaving with sisal hemp, raffia, cotton, and other fibres. The textile is historically used as head cloth for masquerades and warriors. At present times, it is used as materials for making towels, bags, ropes, souvenirs, and art the weaving is mostly done by women.

Injiri: This is a light cotton fabric popularly known as *Indian Madras*. The fabric is usually hand woven with crisscross printing and colourful vertical and horizontal bands known as tartans. Outside the Niger Delta region, the fabric is used for producing summer wear, pants, shorts, jackets and dresses. Similar to the Awete fabric, the Madras takes its name from the name of the city in south India where it is produced. Among the *Kalabari people* of the Niger Delta people, the fabric has been christened and adapted to suit the traditional requirements of the riverine cultures.

African Wax Print/ Ankara/Hollandis: These have grown to become signature traditional clothes in Africa. They are printed in West Africa, China, and the Netherlands. African fabrics produced in the Netherlands are locally known as *Dutch Wax or Hollandis*. The design and pattern are printed on both sides of the cloth of an *Ankara* fabric. The fabric is said to have been introduced by Dutch merchants to the West African market in the 19th Century. However, the textile is said to have been inspired by traditional printing of batik in Indonesia and Akwete fabrics in south-eastern Nigeria.

Blangidi:

Blangidi is a printed fabric that is widely used in the South-eastern and Niger Delta regions of Nigeria. Initially, the fabric was used for cloth covers, *Akwa Oche*, over time, the fabric was gradually adopted as a material for making clothing. Fashion designers still make dresses using *Akwa Oche* materials to date. The riverine tribes of the Niger Delta region of Nigeria have adopted the use of the *blangidi* fabric. However, the *Ijaw* ethnic group (which comprises the Okirika, Ibani, Opbo, *Nembe*, and *Blangidi*) is more commonly associated with the use of the fabric. The woollen flannel material which was largely imported from England had been adopted to constitute a cultural element of the *Kalabari people* (Michelman & Elcher, 1995).

The fabric is called different names by different ethnic groups in the riverine area of the Niger Delta. It is called *Fenu* by the *Kalabari people*, and *Plakiti* by the *Nembe* and Boni people who had closer physical contact with the Portuguese traders. Diverse motifs are utilised in printing *blangidi* fabrics, this includes animal heads, birds, jumping antelopes, hands, combs, earrings, tortoises, and geometric shapes. Usually, the motifs show on only one side of the textile, although they can show on both. Each of these designs is unique in aesthetics and cultural relevance. The *Isi-Agu* material, for example, had strong significance among the Igbo cultures, and there exists a sizable body of literature that explores its symbolism, especially in the Igbo culture (Madukasi, 2018; Ibemesi, 2014; Madukasi, 2018b). However, it is used among other cultures in the riverine cultures where it is called *nama-tibi*.

Isi-Agu Fabrics

The use of the *Isi-Agu* prints is popularised by the Igbo cultures in south-eastern Nigeria where the fabric is widely considered the dress code of royalty. Until recent times, *Isi-Agu* fabrics were used exclusively by chiefs, rulers, kings, and princes, thus explaining the origin of the fabric's alias—chieftaincy. At the conferment of the chieftaincy title, *Ozo*, *Isi-Agu* fabric alongside other adornments such as the native red cap (*Okpu Agu*), eagle feathers, royal beads, and title-name given to the new chieftain (Ibemesi, 2014). As such, the use of the *Isi-Agu* material is often associated with royalty, leadership, and Igbo aristocracy.

However, it has been reported that the use of *Isi-Agu* has been disassociated with royalty in recent times. This proliferation, which was once considered profane and a dishonour to chieftaincy (Madukasi, 2018) is increasingly normalised in mundane ceremonies, especially weddings. It is further observed that although the *Isi-Agu* print comes in different colours and dissimilarity in pattern formation, its significance is situational. As such, the

Isi-Agu material was originally worn by diverse designated persons in society to signify position and prestige. Ibemesi (2014) attributes the proliferation of the *Isi-Agu* and the undue consideration given to monetary and political influence in *ozo* tittle-giving as the culprit for the profanity of the *ozo* chieftaincy. The use of the *Isi-Agu* fabric has since become a social trend popularised by social media users, this has created additional social significance for the fabric and increased its market value of the fabric. Hence, it is being worn by all who can afford it, despite power, position, social status, or even gender.

It is further noted that the popular usage of *Isi-Agu* fabrics can be traced to the influence of notable political and religious figures in Nigeria. Among these include Chief Dr Alex Ekwueme who served as the Vice President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria and Rev. Fr. Maduka, an influential Catholic priest in the then South-eastern region of Nigeria (Madukasi, 2018b). Haven served public functions in capacities that put them on the media consistently while simultaneously upholding the *ozo* title conferred on them, these men popularised the use of the *Isi-Agu* fabrics in the media as far back as the 1970s.

Some African Traditional Textiles



Plate 2. 1: Akwete fabric is made by women in Akwete, in Abia state, Nigeria
Source: vanguardngr.com



Plate 2. 2:(a,b): Red George wrappers are popular commemorative fabrics by women in the southeast and Niger Delta. Source: legit.ng, Pinterest



Plate 2. 3: Pelete-bite wrapper is popular among the Kalabari women, it is an alteration of imported fabric. Source: Eicher Joanna collection.artsmia.org



Plate 2. 4: A couple in traditional attires: the bride is adorned with Akwa Ocha fabric with neck beads, necklaces, and bangles. The groom is dressed in the Isi-Agu fabric which symbolises royalty in the Igbo culture. Source: bolakoka.com



Plate 2. 5: A couple of African wax print fabrics. Source: Amazon.com Different Blangidi Prints

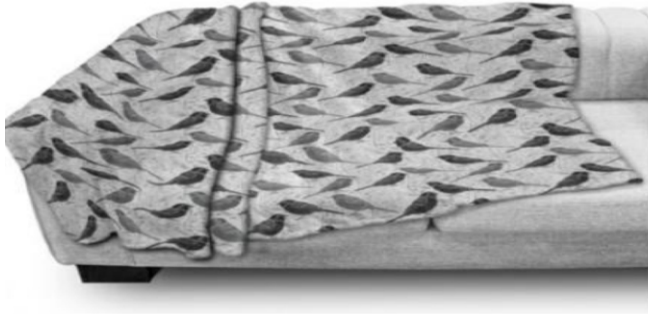


Plate 2. 6: Blangidi materials are used as cloth covers “Akwa Oche”
Source: Walmart.com



Plate 2. 7(a-c) Antelope and antelope head motif printed on a blangidi fabric
Source: Olist.com; fenicotextiles.com



Plate 2. 8: (a,b): Geometric shapes are also printed on blangidi fabrics
Source: aaroninternational.com



Plate 2. 9: **(a,b,c):** Isi Agu fabrics

Source: etsy.com, martlines.ng, clipkulture.com



Plate 2. 10: Leopard head printed on blangidi material Source: etsy.com, martlines.ng, clipkulture.com



Plate 2. 11: **(a,b,c,d):** Elephant head and tusks printed on blangidi material

Source: etsy.com



Plate 2. 12: Children wearing blangidi fabrics
Source: Facebook

AFRICAN ARTS AND DESIGNS: THEORETICAL DISCOURSE

Theory is a way of reasoning or a thought pattern, Theories are constructed to explain, predict, and master phenomena while a theoretical framework provides a general representation of relationships between things in a given phenomenon. It justifies the approach to which an art practitioner chooses in the work of art, by introducing and describing the theory that explains why the research problem under study exists. The word's origin (from the Greek *thoro's*, a spectator), stresses the fact that all theories are mental models of perceived reality.

This literature review examines the significance of Appropriation theory, Kant's Aesthetic theory, and Richard Shiff's Originality theory about the creation of unique and flamboyant dresses for baby girls using *blangidi*. Appropriation theory provides a lens through which artists can explore the politics of identity, representation, and power in the post-colonial era. According to Oguibe (1999), appropriation "involves the quotation and refashioning of preexisting images, objects, and forms, and their subjection to a new context or usage that alters their meanings." Kant's Aesthetic theory offers insights into the nature of beauty and the role of the artist in creating objects that elicit aesthetic pleasure. Shiff's Originality theory explores the concept of originality in art and the relationship between the artist's creativity and the cultural context in which they work. All three theories have implications for the design of clothing, particularly for those seeking to create visually striking and original pieces. By analyzing these theories and their relevance to the fashion industry, this literature review aims to provide a better understanding of how the principles of appropriation, aesthetics, and originality can be applied to the creation of unique and flamboyant dresses for baby girls using *blangidi*.

Appropriation Theory

This is a critical framework that has emerged in contemporary African art to address the complex historical, cultural, and social issues that have shaped the African continent. The significance of appropriation theory in contemporary African art, looking at its historical roots, key themes, and

examples of its application in practice is examined in this section. Afro-theme appropriation emerged as a response to the challenges faced by African artists in the post-colonial era. Following the end of colonialism, African artists were faced with the challenge of creating art that reflected their own cultural identities while also engaging with the global art world. This required a new way of thinking about art, one that was grounded in the realities of African life and culture, while also being open to the diverse influences of global culture. This led to the development of hybridity, a concept in African art that is viewed as "the sign of the productivity of colonial power" (Bhabha, 1994).

Contemporary African fashion has been significantly impacted by appropriation theory, which involves the borrowing or adoption of elements from one culture and incorporating them into another. This approach has enabled African fashion designers to create innovative designs that reflect their culture and identity. Otieno (2016) postulates that the appropriation has allowed African fashion to become more relevant and globally appealing. By incorporating African cultural elements into their designs, designers can create a fusion of African and Western styles that appeal to a broader audience. Appropriation theory in contemporary African fashion has created an opportunity for cultural exchange. Through the use of African cultural elements, designers can promote their culture and traditions to a wider audience. It allows designers to use their designs to challenge stereotypes and perceptions about Africa. Through the creation of contemporary designs that incorporate African cultural elements, designers can present a more modern and progressive image of Africa to the world (Okwedi, 2018).

The incorporation of African cultural elements into contemporary fashion designs has led to the promotion of economic development. African fashion is a significant industry that provides employment and income to millions of people across the continent. Through the use of the appropriation theory, opportunities can be created for economic development by promoting the local production and distribution of African fashion products. By creating designs that appeal to a global audience, designers can generate more demand for African fashion products, which, in turn, creates more jobs and generates more income for African communities (Wa Githinji, 2017; Rajab, 2019).

While appropriation theory in contemporary African fashion has many advantages, there are also concerns about cultural appropriation. The act of cultural appropriation involves taking elements from a culture without

understanding or respecting their meaning or significance. According to Appiah, (2012), cultural appropriation can be problematic when designers use African cultural elements purely for aesthetic purposes without acknowledging or understanding their cultural significance. Therefore, designers need to engage in cultural exchange and collaboration with African communities. This involves working with local artisans, designers, and textile makers to create designs that are culturally sensitive and respectful.

To create a more inclusive and respectful fashion industry that celebrates the diversity and richness of African culture, designers must acknowledge the origins and significance of African cultural elements. Cultural appropriation can be a missed opportunity for designers to engage in cultural exchange and create designs that celebrate diversity. By recognizing and respecting the origins and significance of African cultural elements, designers can create designs that are not only innovative and aesthetically pleasing but also culturally sensitive and respectful (Balogun, 2020; Ampofo, 2017; Annan, 2017).

Appropriation theory has become a significant aspect of contemporary African fashion. Through the incorporation of African cultural elements into fashion designs, designers can promote cultural exchange, challenge stereotypes and perceptions about Africa, promote economic development, and create designs that are both culturally relevant and globally appealing. However, designers must also acknowledge and respect. At its core, appropriation theory is concerned with the politics of representation (Hutton, 2018; Sanders, 2016). It explores how images, objects, and ideas are used to construct and reinforce social identities and power relations. Appropriation theory is also concerned with how artists can challenge and subvert these dominant narratives through the use of appropriation. One of the key themes of appropriation theory in African art is the concept of hybridity (Bhabha, 1994). Hybridity refers to the blending of different cultural traditions to create new forms of cultural expression. In the African context, this often involves the mixing of traditional and contemporary art forms to create new visual languages.

Kant's Aesthetic Theory:

Immanuel Kant's Aesthetic Theory, as presented in his seminal work "Critique of Judgment," provides a philosophical foundation for understanding the nature of beauty, taste, and the aesthetic experience (Kant & Bernard, 1914). Kant argues that aesthetic judgments are based on subjective feelings of pleasure and that they are disinterested, free from any

personal interest or practical considerations. In the context of designing dresses for baby girls using *blangidi* fabric, Kant's theory emphasizes the importance of capturing and evoking a sense of beauty and pleasure in the observer (Meredith, 1978). Kant's theory underscores the need for designers to pay attention to aesthetic principles such as harmony, proportion, and unity in the overall design. The use of African textiles such as *blangidi*, with its colourful and printed designs, presents an opportunity to create visually captivating dresses that align with Kant's aesthetic ideals (Cyril-Egware, 2015; Cryil-Egware & Ajiginni, 2017). By adhering to these principles, African designers can create dresses that not only please the senses but also embody a sense of timelessness and universality (Makkreel, 2021).

Joan Eicher's Dress Aesthetic Theory

Eicher's contributions to dress aesthetic theory are profound, offering valued insights into the relationship between clothing and human identity across cultures around the globe. Her research continues to inspire scholars to understand the value of fashion beyond aesthetics but also to investigate the use of fashion as an expression of culture and individuality. In the book "The Visible Self: Global Perspectives on Dress, Culture, and Society," (Eicher & Evenson, 2015, 4th Ed.), the authors present three global dimensions for exploring additional values of clothing— aesthetic, social, and biological dimension. This comprehensive framework enriches our understanding of clothing, first as a necessity to protect the human body from the weather, next as a means of expressing societal values, and as a means for expressing personal ideas of beauty. Also, in "Dress and Identity" (RoachHiggins & Eicher, 1992), the authors develop a comprehensive definition of the concept of dress, provide a holistic framework for understanding the linkages between dress and other similar terms, and establish the significance of communication using dresses in social interaction. This framework for understanding the multiple dimensions of dress is reflected in her research which collectively transform the study of dress and design from just aesthetics to a holistic understanding of the multifaceted significance of dress in shaping cultural, social, and individual identities.

In her book "African Dress as an Art Form" (1972), Eicher buttresses the theory of dress aesthetics in the African context through the depiction of the body as an "art form." The author posits that African dress culture views each element of the body— skin, hair, eyes, hands, as a form of expression. The unique features of the body— the texture, colour, and form, can be used and modified to achieve the aim of the artists. Body modifications can be achieved through "massaging, dieting, binding, piercing, and cutting". An example of such common practice among the Kalabari people is the use of the

fattening room. This involves rituals and processes of enabling women to gain extra weight ahead of cultural festivals such as the *Iria* or *Iriabo*. Eicher highlights other mediums through which the body is modified, these include the use of cosmetics and fabrics. The cosmetic "medium" utilises "paint, powder, oil, and scent" to achieve the desired aim. On the other hand, the fabric "medium" involves the use of natural or synthesised fabrics, precious stones, leather, and metals.

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Originality Theory:

Shiff's Originality Theory proposes a perspective on artistic creation that emphasizes the artist's ability to generate original ideas and expressions (Martin, 1979). According to Shiff, originality lies in the artist's capacity to depart from convention and create something new and distinct (Shiff, 1984). In the context of designing dresses for baby girls using *blangidi* fabric, Shiff's theory inspires creativity and innovation and challenges designers to push boundaries and break free from traditional design conventions (Shiff, 1984; Chukwuemeka & Okafor, 2019). This is at the core of the study which intends to reimagine African traditional wear. The flamboyance and uniqueness associated with *blangidi* fabric provide a fertile ground for designers to experiment with bold and unconventional dress designs. By incorporating elements of surprise, novelty, and artistic individuality, designers can create dresses that stand out, spark interest, and make a lasting impression.

The integration of dress Aesthetic Theory and Shiff's Originality Theory offers a powerful framework for the creation of dresses for baby girls using *blangidi* fabric. By combining the pursuit of aesthetic pleasure and the quest

for originality, designers can produce dresses that are both visually captivating and artistically groundbreaking. Designers can draw inspiration from Kant's emphasis on harmony, proportion, and unity to ensure that the dresses maintain a sense of balance and coherence. Simultaneously, they can leverage Shiff's call for originality to infuse the dresses with unexpected elements, intricate details, and innovative design features. This integration allows designers to create dresses that are not only aesthetically pleasing but also possess a distinctive flair that sets them apart from conventional designs.

DRESSING IN AFRICA: EMPIRICAL REVIEW

The concept of "dress" is very challenging to accurately define precisely, as people generally have an intuitive understanding of it. However, as Hester & Hehman (2023) note, drawing a clear border around what constitutes dress proves difficult. According to Eicher & Roach-Higgins (1992), dress represents a "powerful means of communication" which is being utilised by society to influence the adoption of gender roles in the girl child right after birth. As a non-verbal means of communication, girls learn gender differentiation which affects the life of the girl child. The authors further adopted the following definition of dress for their research: "as a comprehensive term to identify both direct body changes and items added to the body." They emphasise the sociocultural dimension of dress to the wearer and the society at large, adding that dress is "an assemblage of body modifications and/or supplements displayed by a person in communicating with other human beings." Johnson et al. (2014) highlight that these body modifications include "cosmetic use, suntanning, piercing, tattooing, dieting, exercising, and cosmetic surgery". In addition, supplements associated with dress include accessories, clothing, and glasses. While typical clothing items like shirts and pants are easily recognised as elements of dress, ambiguity arises with elements such as hair, makeup, tattoos, and accessories like backpacks and purses, prompting questions about where the line between dress and non-dress should be drawn (Hester & Hehman, 2023). Researchers have emphasised the impact of dress on how a person is perceived by others. The dresses an individual puts on can be utilised to infer their personality, interests, socioeconomic status, and ethnicity.

The Evolution of Children's Attire

Earlier Children's attire: Before the twentieth century, babies and early children wore clothing that did not indicate much gender difference (Ashelford, 1996; Callahan & Paoletti, 1999). This was a tradition that originated with European males wearing breeches and doublets in the sixteenth century. The eighteenth-century habit of swaddling, which involved immobilising babies with linen wrappings, progressively faded as

a result of evolving medical theories and viewpoints on child development. The works of philosopher John Lock which promoted wearing loose, lightweight garments for children helped to propagate an end to the swaddling era (Buck, 1996).

With the decline of swaddling came the transition to a new form of garment referred to as "long clothes," and later to ankle-length frocks as they commenced crawling (Calvert, 1992). Soon, parents began to vary the style of dressing with distinct stages of infancy as they transitioned to childhood. This saw the creation of different forms of clothing such as skeleton suits and layettes. On one hand, the use of trousers for boys became common in the 19th Century and supplanted the use of breeches as male garments. On the other hand, clothing for the baby girl experienced little changes as they continued to wear skirts, from infancy till adulthood. The use of colours such as blue and pink in association with the gender of children gained prominence in the 1900s. However, unlike what is obtainable today, blue was associated with the girl child while pink was associated with the boy child. Authors have highlighted the presence of evidence to suggest the prevalence of this colour standard up till the late 1930s.

In the 20th century, boys' attires grew less "feminine" with the removal of trimmings and ornamental components such as lace and ruffles. In modern times, the use of trousers has become increasingly acceptable for use by women. Girls can wear trousers both at home and on all forms of occasions. The use of blue jeans has essentially become unisex and socially acceptable.

"Pretty in Pink": Do Colour Preferences Matter?

The current literature on the preferences of the girl child for the colour pink offers differing and contrasting views. Some studies highlight that young girls prefer pink to other colours (Schaefer, 1993; Smith, 1998), others indicate that children of both genders have a preference for the colour blue over other colours (LoBue & DeLoache, 2011), yet other research indicates that there is no significance in colour preference in children (Goldberg, 1999; Robinson, 2001). With a focus on the developmental trajectory of young children's preferences for the colour pink, LoBue & DeLoache's (2011) investigation into the subject matter offers valuable insight. The authors utilised an extensive cross-sectional investigation to examine the selection of children ranging from 7 months to 5 years. The children were presented with eight pairs of objects from which they had to select one for each pair, and one object in the pair consistently featured the colour pink.

The research's findings illuminate an interesting trend in the colour preference of children: girls at the age of two exhibited a higher frequency of choosing objects with the colour pink than boys of the same age. Furthermore, girls at the age of 2 and a half demonstrated a remarkable preference for the colour pink over other colours while the boys exhibited a concurrent avoidance of the pink colour. The research outcomes illustrate that the colour preferences of boys and girls are, in fact, a societal construct rather than an intrinsic choice of the children. The process of socialization plays a crucial role, wherein parents' preferences, influenced by societal expectations, are transmitted to children from an early, preschool age. Halim et al.'s (2013) findings corroborate the above submissions and restate that between 3 and 5 years of age, children exhibit rigidity in dress and colour selection.

This transmission of societal colour preference through socialisation to the girl child takes effect immediately after the child is born, researchers note (Jadva et al., 2010; LoBue & DeLoache, 2011). These researchers have observed that the colour with which the rooms of infants are decorated and the toys seen are sufficient to guess the sex of a child. This stereotype is further advanced by advertisements and media agencies which constantly showcase little girls dressed in and playing with toys dressed in pink and carrying other pinkcoloured items. On the other hand, boys are portrayed to be dressed in blue, using bluecoloured toys, and carrying blue-coloured items.

Gender-Stereotyped Behaviour

Researchers have attempted to evaluate the origin of gender-stereotyped behaviour in children which is manifested in girls' preference for pink and boys for blue. Older studies show no indication that children of both genders did not exhibit signs of gender stereotypes in colour preference. A notable study indicated that children rather have a preference for primary colours such as blue and red, than secondary colours such as pink and orange. Other studies indicate that children at an early age prefer the colour red. However, a more recent study indicates the prevalence of these gender preferences to colour.

Jadva et al. (2010) provide insight into the understanding of colour and size preference to the girl child, emphasising the significance of society and environmental factors on early preferences in children. The authors compellingly argue that the gender-stereotyped preferences observed in children could be attributed to the pervasive association of certain colours and shapes with specific genders. For instance, toys marketed towards girls

are often adorned in pink, while those aimed at boys are predominantly blue. The findings further assert that any differences noticeable in preference to colour and shapes arise from socialisation and cognitive gender development, rather than inherent biological factors. This highlights the prevalence of learned preferences and socialisation in shaping choices for the baby girl.

Halim et al. (2014) uncover a phase in the development of children marked by gender appearance rigidity, where girls insist on donning dresses, often in pink colour and adorned with frills, while boys staunchly reject anything perceived as feminine. The study, which occurred in two stages, revealed in the first stage that there exists a gender-stereotyped preference for colour according to gender. It was observed that approximately two-thirds of parents with 3- and 4-year-old girls, and nearly half (44%) of parents with 5- and 6-year-old boys, reported instances of their children displaying a period of gender appearance rigidity. The second phase of the study involved a sample made up of a larger sample with more diverse ethnicities from across the globe. The outcomes indicated that gender appearance rigidity was prevalent across diverse backgrounds, suggesting that this behaviour might be indicative of early cognitive developments related to gender identity. Importantly, this rigidity did not seem to be influenced by parents' preferences for gender-typed clothing for their children.

Another work that highlighted the prevalence of gender-stereotype colour preferences is Paoletti's book "Pink and Blue: Telling the Boys from the Girls in America." The author examines the origin of the pink and blue stereotype, observing that although it took several decades for the colour stereotype to become ingrained, it first appeared in the middle of the 19th century. For a while, parents thought that newborns of both sexes may wear pink or blue outfits. Nonetheless, merchants and manufacturers started pushing pink for girls and blue for boys in the early 20th century, based on the notion that pink was a more robust and appropriate colour for males while blue was more delicate and daintier for girls. The 1940s saw more consumer preferences and marketing activities that strengthened this colour relationship. Children briefly wore unisex attire during the 1960s women's liberation movement's peak, when girls revolted against conventional gender norms and feminine fashions. But the pink and blue stereotype quickly took hold again, and it still has an impact on kids' wardrobe decisions today.

Whereas scholarly investigation into how colour shapes children's gender preconceptions and preferences in Western cultures has been widely explored in the past, similar studies are notably lacking in the context of

African fabrics. In light of Africa's rich and varied cultural heritage, where colour-rich fabrics are essential for expressing social, cultural, and individual identity, the dearth of scholarship on the subject is especially startling. Therefore, further research is needed to understand the complex interplay of colour, gender, and cultural identity in the context of African fabrics.

The Role of the Fashion Industry in Dressing the Baby Girl

The fashion industry, both in Africa and around the world, plays a significant role in shaping societal perceptions of gender and the reinforcement of gender stereotypes. Dressmakers and fashion designers perpetuate gender-based preferences through their products and services. In making dresses for the baby girl, fashion designers deeply take into consideration society's notions of masculinity and femininity. Following this stance, dresses for the baby girl are often associated with softer fabrics, pastel colours, and shapes, and flowy silhouettes. Through these stereotypes, infants are conditioned to conform to specific gender roles as they develop. The creative decisions of dressmakers and fashion designers constitute societal influence on the baby girl, confining their choices to narrowly defined expectations that limit creativity.

The Sexualisation of Children's Clothing

The commercialisation of clothing for baby girls has witnessed a significant transformation in recent years. A disturbing characteristic that has raised concerns among some scholars is the increasingly sexualised aesthetic associated with dresses for the girl child. This trend raised concerns among parents, educators, and child development experts who raise concerns over. The sexualisation of children's clothing has ignited a debate among parents, educators, and child development experts, with concerns raised over its potential negative impact on young girls' self-esteem, body image, and sexual development.

Lianne George's article "Why are we dressing our daughters like this?" critically examines the rising sexualisation trend in the dresses made for baby girls (George, 2007). The author argues that this trend is indicative of a broader cultural shift towards the sexualisation of women by pop culture. She attributes this to a combination of factors aside from pop culture; the pervasiveness of pornography, and the commercialisation of childhood. Some specific examples of the trend highlighted by the author include low-cut tops, tight-fitting dresses, and skirts with suggestive slogans or images. George also points to the growing popularity of beauty products and accessories targeted at young girls, further contributing to the *adultification* of

childhood. There is a need, according to the author, to reevaluate the way children are dressed. The basic focus of children's wear—comfort, practicality, and ageappropriateness should be favoured above sex appeal. She concludes by restating the importance of protecting children's innocence and ensuring they grow to have a robust sense of self-worth without the pressure of adult-like fashion trends.

The discourse surrounding modern trends in the dressing of baby girls has been critically examined by another scholar in light of the hegemonic tendency to sexualise the girl child. Loh (2022) argues that this discourse has gained “hegemonic status,” shaping perceptions of how girls' adult-like dressing is understood. The author, with a focus on the cultural context of Singapore, examines the impact of exposure to Western popular culture and the raunchy lifestyle of celebrities on young girls. The author highlights the importance of approaching the study and understanding of girls' dressing practices from a perspective that is consistent with the native cultural background, suggesting that a deeper insight into the influence of societal influence on girls' perception can only be achieved through this means.

Dressing the Baby Girl for Culture

The process of socialising a child into a culture or society is a complex and dynamic process that often takes place within cultural structures and contexts. This begins from the very moment a child is born. The child is exposed to the ongoing social and cultural activities around the child which provides a sense of stability necessary for the development of the child's identity. Hendrickson (1995) comments on the development of an idealised part of the body in the child termed the “social skin” which mediates between the newborn, the society, and the social self. The author further highlights that clothing serves as a means through which a wide array of meanings and values are physically imposed on the body, especially during a child's formative years of the child. The child, as they mature, engages with, rejects, forgets, or reconceives these learned bodily forms, contributing to their ongoing process of identity formation within the broader social fabric. This presents a unique perspective on the use of fabrics as a means of socialisation. The studies reviewed above highlight the essential point that the choices made in dressing the baby girl are not merely about aesthetics or practicality. They are, in fact, deeply rooted in the process of socialization. This is especially through in the African context where diverse forms of clothing and fabrics are symbolic and culturally relevant. These cultural messages about femininity, gender roles, and societal expectations are subtly communicated to the girl child right from birth. The diverse studies reviewed have indicated that this is true for both traditional African fabrics

and dress cultures which imitate the western cultures. Through the process of socialisation, the girl child grows into the social identity expected of her by the society within which she is raised.

Dressing the Baby Girl in *Blangidi*

In the traditional *Kalabari* society, the child is taught how to dress from an early age by observing the older members of the family and the society (Daly et al., 1984). The little child is exposed to the norms of the dress culture as they grow older, she is allowed to ask a question and get answers related to the dress culture.

Blangidi fabrics are one element of the *Kalabari* among several others. Making dresses for the baby girl using *blangidi* fabrics will ensure that the cultural heritage of the *Kalabari people* is preserved and it serves to promote diversity in contemporary African fashion (Ike & Obi, 2018). While the *blangidi* fabric is used to make diverse types of clothing which is suitable for making both formal and informal dresses (Chukwuemeka & Okafor, 2019), it is important to consider the suitability of *Blangidi* fabric for making dresses for children. For this purpose, several factors must be taken into account. One important factor is the type of dress being made. The unique design of the patterns and textures inspires creativity in fashion designers and makes it easy to pair the fabric with other fabrics used in designing dresses for the baby girl.

Another factor to consider is the sewing technique used when making dresses from *Blangidi* fabric. A study by Ezeugwu (2019) found that certain sewing techniques are more suitable for the fabric's texture and weight. The fabric is made from cotton or silk and is dyed using natural dyes such as indigo, which gives it a distinct blue colour. *Blangidi* fabric is commonly used for making dresses for children due to its soft texture and durability. *Blangidi* is an appropriate fabric for creating clothing for the baby girl in the form of skirts, blouses, gowns, pants, and a lot more. A prior study indicates that *Blangidi* fabric is a suitable choice for making children's clothing due to its durability and breathability (Ajao & Akinwale, 2020). The researchers indicate that the *Blangidi* fabric can be paired with other fabrics to create unique and stylish outfits for children which will both serve as a means of not only preserving the traditional heritage of the *Blangidi* and Niger Delta at large, will also constitute a significant contribution to the global fashion scene.

Benefits of *Blangidi* Fabric for Children's Dresses

Blangidi fabric is a versatile and fashionable fabric that is suitable for making dresses for children, particularly baby girls. The fabric's durability,

breathability, and unique patterns make it a practical and stylish choice for children's clothing. Some advantages make *blangidi* fabric a practical and stylish choice for making dresses for the baby girl. One of the main benefits is its durability; this is an essential requirement for fabrics that are suitable for making dresses for baby girls (Afroza 2018). A study by Ajao and Akinwale (2020) found that *Blangidi* fabric is strong and long-lasting, making it a suitable choice for clothing that children can wear frequently. The researchers suggest that *Blangidi* fabric is less likely to tear or fade compared to other types of fabrics.

Another benefit of *Blangidi* fabric is its breathability; this is another essential criterion for selecting fabrics that are to be used for making dresses for the girl child (Dogbey 2015). The fabric is made from natural fibres such as cotton, which allows air to circulate and keeps the skin cool and dry. According to a study by Oladokun et al. (2020), cotton fabrics like *Blangidi* are ideal for hot and humid climates, as they can absorb moisture and prevent skin irritation. This makes *Blangidi* fabric a practical choice for children's clothing in West African climate and during the summer in other regions of the world. *Blangidi* fabric also has unique patterns and colours that make it a fashionable choice for children's dresses considering that kids are easily attracted to colourful wear. The diverse African motifs usually designed on the motifs also serve as ready opportunities to introduce kids to learning about the significance of such motifs. This ensures that the baby girl is educated about her cultural identity and heritage.

Despite its benefits, there are some challenges associated with using *Blangidi* fabric to make dresses for baby girls. One potential challenge is the availability and cost of the fabric. According to a study by Ezeugwu (2019), the cost of *Blangidi* fabric may also be higher than other types of fabric due to its unique production process and popularity. *Blangidi* fabric is an imported element of the *Kalabari* dressing ensemble (Daly et al., 1986) that is predominantly produced in England. As such, it is usually more expensive than most African wax prints. More so, the fabrics are expensive due to the cultural relevance and high demand for some types of *blangidi* fabric, particularly *Isi Agu* fabric. Another challenge is the care and maintenance of *Blangidi* fabric. The fabric requires specific care instructions to maintain its quality and appearance. Ibrahim et al., (2019) stated that *Blangidi* fabric should be hand washed with mild detergent and cold water to avoid fading and shrinking. The fabric should also be ironed at a low temperature to prevent damage to the design. Also, the dress culture of the *Kalabari* people requires that attention be paid to details, and this adds to the aesthetics of the *Kalabari* culture. As such, a lot of time is consumed dressing up for ceremonies.

The *Ijaw* Ethnic Group (Ijo)

The *Ijaws* tribe numbers among the over 250 ethnic groups within the Nigerian Federation. It is recognised as the largest ethnic group within the Niger Delta region and the fourth-largest ethnic group in Nigeria (Adanzor, 2018) with a population of over 14 million people. Geographically, they are predominantly settled in Bayelsa, Rivers, and Delta states, however, they are also traditionally settled throughout the Niger Delta, with substantial clusters in six states out of the thirty-six in the Federation. Bayelsa state constitutes the largest concentration of the *Ijaw* population in the Niger Delta region which is considered “the only homogenous *Ijaw* State in the Federation of Nigeria” (Adanzor, 2018; P. 363). The origin of the *Ijaw* tribe can be traced to the earliest inhabitants of the Niger Delta region, spanning a history of over 5,000 years. The *Ijaw* language, which is often classified under the Niger-Congo language family (Blench, 2019), is actively being spoken by over 2 million people.

***Ijaw* Traditional Practices:**

One of the things that makes the *Ijaw* traditional practices unique is their access and connection to the water. Their principal source of income has always been fishing, and their complex fishing methods and boat-building customs are a reflection of their mastery of the watery environment. Water deities occupy a prominent place in the pantheon of the *Ijaw*, demonstrating their spiritual beliefs regarding water. *Ijaw* society is mostly matrilineal, with familial ties traceable back to the mother's line. Their social organisation and inheritance practices mirror this matrilineal structure. Women have positions of leadership and influence in *Ijaw* society, holding positions of authority and influence within families and communities.

Traditional *Ijaw* governance is centred on a network of chiefs and elders who manage community matters. These leaders, guided by customary rules and traditions, keep the peace, settle conflicts, and ensure the community's well-being. The *Ijaw*'s strong sense of community is seen in their collaborative approach to issue-solving, resource sharing, and social support. The *Ijaw* are well-known for their vibrant and colourful cultural displays, especially in music, dance, and masquerade performances. Their music is distinguished by the use of percussion instruments and rhythmic patterns, which are frequently accompanied by heartfelt vocals. Traditional dance displays their powerful movements as well as their cultural pride. Egbeon masquerades, which incorporate elaborate costumes, symbolic representations, and acts that transmit traditional narratives and beliefs, are a hallmark of *Ijaw* cultural events.

Religion and Spirituality

The *Ijaw* have a polytheistic religious system in which they acknowledge the existence of several deities. These deities are thought to rule over many parts of existence, ranging from the natural world to human concerns. Water spirits, known as *owu*, are especially adored as the keepers of the waterways and the source of fertility and prosperity. Ancestral spirits, known as *ujo*, play an important role in *Ijaw* mysticism. They are believed to keep an eye on their living offspring and provide protection. To please the ancestors and maintain healthy connections with them, offerings and sacrifices are usually made to them.

Political and Economic Influences:

The *Ijaw* have a strong history of resistance and activism, challenging marginalization and advocating for their rights in a country where they are classified among the minority. They have played a critical role in the struggle for environmental justice in the Niger Delta region since the discovery of oil in the region, as well as the fight for fair compensation for the natives of the region (Adanzor, 2018). Their activism has attracted international attention to the extent of environmental degradation and social crisis being perpetuated in the region, raising awareness of the plight of the *Ijaw* people. The coming of the colonial master brought a change in the *Ijaw*'s political and economic realities, disrupting traditional governance structures and economic systems. The discovery of oil in the Niger Delta in the 1950s came with a double-edged massive opportunity for economic development, and disruption of the incumbent economic activities, such as fishing and farming. While oil extraction brought wealth to the region, it also led to environmental degradation, social unrest and instability, and an inequitable resource distribution of resources in the region.

Periodization of Existing Literature

Periodization of literature attaches significance to the impact of the passage of time in the development of a field of study or a subject matter. Sarli (2022) states that the use of periodization is relevant to show the theoretical approaches adopted in the past till the present and to attempt to give form to the passage of time. Several approaches can be adopted in the periodization of literature, however, for this review, the chronological approach based on the passage of time is used to categorise works of literature on the use of *blangidi* fabrics among the riverine cultures of the Niger Delta region, Nigeria. For this purpose, the following time-frames are provided:

Post-Independence Era

These represent the initial attempts to examine the origin of African textiles

in Nigeria. Most of the studies in this era adopted archaeological and anthropological approaches to assemble evidence to prove the existence of ancient civilization in Nigeria before colonialism began. Major strands in this era began with the chance discovery of the first excavation site at IgboUkwu in the Southeastern region of Nigeria just less than 60cm beneath the surface in 1938 (See Lawa, 1973). This site which originally belonged to a man named Isaiah Anozie was named Igbo Isaiah and was sold to the British Museum in the 1950s, this was followed by the discovery of another archaeological site named Igbo Isaiah not too far away from Igbo Isaiah (McIntosh & Cartwright, 2022). The greatest discovery of the researchers in this era was that African traditional art and textiles which developed independently of external influence dated back to between the ninth and eleventh centuries. Researchers in this era were mostly Europeans who were curiously fascinated with uncovering the untold stories of Africa from the Nigerian standpoint with little input from indigenous authors. Various works conducted in this era include Shaw (1970), Lawal (1973), Shaw (1975), Eicher (1972).

1980 – 1990 Era

Following the discoveries of the first era of research into the origin of African fabrics in Nigeria, the need to corroborate the findings that have been made, to find new evidence to support previous findings, to explore the changes that have occurred over the years to the dress culture of Nigeria and the factors responsible for these. Researchers in this era adopted the direct observation method to explore the anthropology of different cultural practices in Nigeria. While there are numerous examples of such researchers across the country undertaking simultaneous exploration of the culture, dressing, gender roles, traditional festivals, and ceremonies of different ethnic groups and sub-ethnic groups in Nigeria, this review is particular about works related to the *Kalabari people* of the Niger Delta which falls in that era. Literary works in this era include Daly et al., (1986), Daly (1984); Michelman (1987), Michelman (1992), Michelman & Erekosima (1992), and Michelmand & Eicher (1995).

The researchers in this era popularised the method of direct observation as a suitable method for exploratory research of Nigerian cultures. Although most of the researchers, the stories in the works are told from the point of view of the participants and the community at large. Daly et al., (1986) explored the mode of dressing among the *Kalabari people* and the essential role of gender in distinguishing participants. Michelman (1987) and Michelman & Eicher (1995) focus on the traditional dressing for women and the cultural significance attached to gender in the *Kalabari* society. Eicher

(1972) compares dressing in the region with other forms of art such as dance, body art, crafts, and sculptures. Aside from the use of direct observation, the works in this era also utilised key-person informants and interviews with select individuals. Since most of the inhabitants of the *Blangidi* sub-ethnic group spoke the native language and English, it was easy to conduct the interviews. Interpreters were used when a participant did not speak or understand English. This era provides broad insight into the cultural heritage of Nigerians in the Niger Delta region and particularly the essence of dressing as an art form. The findings of these researchers constitute the earliest concerted effort at exploring the theme of African textiles among the riverine cultures of the Niger Delta, and this still proves useful in understanding the cultures of the people today.

1990 – Till Date

The time between the 1990s and till date can be grouped into two to depict the difference in the ideology of researchers in the period. The first category of literature focuses on the promotion of the use of African traditional fabric and dress culture to the world. Research in this era was aimed at revitalising the use of African fabrics in the Nigerian fashion industry.

African Textile Promotion Era

Literature in this period was focused on the promotion of African fabrics by Africans at both national and global levels. Cyril – Agware (2015) encourages the adoption of formal and information modelling as a technique for promoting African traditional fabrics to the world. Through official modelling, African textiles and dress cultures can be promoted at fashion shows and exhibitions. However, through unofficial modelling, every African promotes the use of local fabrics by wearing them to events and occasions both within the continent and beyond. Researchers in this sub-era are concerned with finding the relationship between the development of the textile industry and the social and economic development of the country (Chukueggu & Cyril-Egware, 2009; Rovine, 2019; Cyril-Egware & Ajiginni, 2017; Okpu & Abimbola, 2020; Cyril-Egware, 2015; Bawa, 2021).

These authors postulate that improvement in textiles will help grow the regional economy of Africa through the increase in Gross Domestic Product (GDP), an abundance of job opportunities, an increase in productivity, and a positive contribution to the African youth population which will reduce crime level across the continent, and reduce the dependency ration across the continent. Cyril-Egware (2016) also focuses on the adoption of African traditional fabrics as a source of tourist attraction in the country.

Textile is explored as an art form in this era, and as an art that can be incorporated into diverse forms of art such as sculpturing, music, body designs, painting, and mixed media. This constitutes the concerns of Cyril-Egware (2017) and Okpu & Abimbola (2020) which have established the African textile industry as a source of inspiration for other creative arts. Through explorative or interpretive research methods, these researchers explored the uniqueness and aesthetic features of the African fabrics; their vibrant colours, textures, patterns, the significance of motifs, the various types of hand-woven fabrics, and most importantly, the significance of these features.



Plate 2.13 (a & b): Bride wear 'Isi Agu' for church wedding tok why she do so
Source: www.bbc.com

Ikejiofor Ella Amy is a Nigerian Designer who out of love for African and black people as well as the quest to create something unique decided to use her wedding as a medium to promote African fashion by using *blangidi* otherwise known as *Isi Agu* by the Igbos for her church wedding outfit.

African Textile Progressive Era

This era represents the era of constant change in social trends in dress culture and the social values attached to dresses (Ajiginni et al., 2020). Pop culture has become come to a contributory factor to the popularisation of diverse kinds of fabrics beyond regional borders as more people embrace African fabrics across the globe with little less concern for the original purpose of the fabric (Eicher & Erokimso, 2017). While the promotion era above focused on the traditional functions of African textiles, the progressive era concerns itself with the changing values of African fabrics in the contemporary world. While some authors bemoan the new trend of rapid change in the cultural

significance of dress culture in Nigeria (Madukais, 2018), other authors (Ajiginni et al., 2020) embrace it as a sign of progress. It is further noted by the later authors that traditional fabrics such as *Isi Agu* are, as a matter of fact, not victims of social trends, however, it is constantly driving social trends at the national and global level.

The impact of the media and media personalities in popularising the use of traditional fabrics is also the concern of a researcher in this era. Ajiginni (2022) considered the impact of a media personality in Nigeria popularly known as *Ebuka* who has dynamically transformed the fashion consciousness of Nigerians through his progressive re-imaging of African traditional fashion in Nigeria. Foremost of these is his contribution to the popularity of *Isi Agu*, a *blangidi* material that has become a favourite fabric for Nigerian weddings. In this era, fashion is seen as a progressive entity that adopts new meanings and social significance faster than the fabrics wear out.

Ajiginni (2020) explores the significance of the emergence of cheaper versions of African traditional fabrics and social media as drivers of the cross-regional adoption of the fabrics. Traditionally, some of these fabrics are sold at exorbitant prices such that only the elites can afford to purchase them. With the invention of cheaper fabrics, the fabrics are available to all who can afford them. On the other hand, social media is adopted to radically publish the outcome of African dress cultures to other regions of Africa and the entire globe. More to that, this era is characterised by an increase in technological advancements such as artificial intelligence and the impact of AI in the world of art (Mikalonyte & Kneer, 2022). Due to rapid development in technology, the need to clarify what is an art and what is not arises. This is due for consideration because AI technologies can sample works of art and produce similar but unique works that could pass for artworks if not thoroughly considered. In the fashion and textile industry of Africa, AI can be used to generate impressive and creative ideas for styling and designing with African fabrics.

Summary/Gaps in Literature

Blangidi has been in use by male and female adults and have been documented by some scholars. For some years now parents have been using *Blangidi* for their female children's contemporary dresses but no documentation has been done on it. Previous studies have aimed at exploring the significance and the *Isi-Agu* print to the Igbo culture (see Madukasi, 2018, 2018b; Ibemisi, 2014). The *Isi-Agu* (lion head) *blangidi* print is symbolic of the strength and nobility of the lion in the animal kingdom which is indicative of the strength and courage of the Igbo culture (Madukasi,

2018b). The symbolism of the lion icon as the king of the animals has been exploited by different cultures of the world, especially in Africa; ancient Mesopotamia used it to signify royalty, ancient Egypt imageries regard the lioness as the beast of war, and the tribal head of a Mali culture is aliasd “the Lion of Mali.”

Ajiginni et al., (2020) observe that despite the popularity of the lion head motif, the lion head has no significance in the Igbo culture symbolism. The leopard (*Agu*) head was used until recently to signify “strength, agility, boldness and courage” in the Igbo culture because leopards inhabit the rainforests of south-eastern Nigeria more while lions preferred savannah vegetation which did not exist in the Igboland. Hence, the use of lion heads, tiger heads, and other feline species for printing on flannel materials (*blankie*) was introduced recently to the Igbo and riverine tribes. Authors have acknowledged the impact of traditional believes in the preference of the lion head motif to the leopard within the Igbo culture and mythology, stories abound that portrays the lion overpowering leopards, tigers, jaguars, and other furious beast to stand as the king of the jungle (Madukasi, 2018; Ajiginni, 2020; Eze, 2016). Thus, the use of the lion head motif for the *Isi-Agu* printing is no accident; it stems from local mythology which typifies the lion as a fearless, powerful beast, strong and unconquered beast. According to Eze (2016), the qualities of the lion are typical of Igbo cultural values that differentiate honourable men from commoners in society. Hence, the person on whom the *ozo* title is bestowed accompanied by the *Isi-Agu* fabrics is expected to embody leadership, strength, power, and courage attributed to the lion according to the traditional Igbo value system.

Research has been undertaken to explore the cultural practices associated with the use of *blangidi*, especially the *Isi-Agu* fabrics (Daly, Madukasi, 2018, 2018b; Ibemesi, 2014 ;). The majority of these researchers adopted interpretive research methods to gain better insight into the local practices of the people. However, these efforts are not sufficient to provide a grounded theoretical framework for the study of *blangidi* in the field of contemporary traditional fashion, and neither are they sufficient to form a paradigm for studying the traditional attire of the riverine tribes of Niger Delta Nigeria. This highlights the need for more systematic and theoretical exploration by scholars in the fields of contemporary traditional fashion. Although previous studies have investigated the significance attached by the locals to the use of *Isi-Agu* attires in the traditional Igbo society, the studies are yet to provide sufficient bases for the fusion of traditionally significant attires with the progressive nature of social change in fashion. Researchers have observed that advancement in popular fashion designs is tending towards what used

to be profane, for example, the usage of *Isi-Agu* materials and *okpu-obodo* by grooms at traditional marriages as against title holders and *ichies* during *ozo* title-giving ceremonies. However, only academic research has been carried out to explore the significance of the development of pop culture to traditional fashion practices and the inevitability of change in the field of contemporary traditional fashion.

While other works have viewed the influence of pop culture on traditional fashion and cultural practices, Ajiginni et al., (2020) adopt a progressive perspective on the advancement of the *Isi-Agu* social trend in fashion. The study attributes the popularity of the lion head print, which was an exclusive symbol of prestige and a visualised representation of authority in the Igbo culture, to the influence of innovative technology, widespread usage of the mass media (particularly social media) and the cheaper variation of the *Isi-Agu blangidi* fabrics in recent times. The study was conducted to understand how popular fashion trends have influenced the acceptance, design, and popularisation of the *Isi-Agu* fabric internationally. Ajiginni (2022, 2019 & Ajiginni et al., 2020) systematically explore the significance of *Isi-Agu* fabrics in contemporary Nigerian society. These works are unique given the focus of the research on the forces of social change and its influence on established values, morals, and practices. For example, Ajiginni (2022) examines the influence of a media personality, Ebuka ObiOchendu on the traditional fashion lifestyle of the Nigerian youthful population. Ebuka is prominently known for anchoring the Big Brother Naija show Seasons 1 to 7 and for his influence wielded via his Instagram account, from where he serves his audiences contemporary and dynamic designs of Nigerian traditional wear, which includes the *Isi-Agu* fabrics. Unlike previous studies that looked at the influence of past personalities in popularising the use of *Isi-Agu* fabrics (Madukasi, 2018; Ibisimi, 2014), this study focuses on the influence of personalities and pop culture which is influencing the current state of fashion and determining the directions the trend will go in the nearest future. Ebuka Obi-Ochendu's involvement with styling and fashion is said to have affected the fashion consciousness of Nigerian youth; the concept of fashion consciousness has been examined by scholars such as Nam et al., (2007) and O'Cass et al., (2013).

However, the methods utilised by the researcher to examine the influence of the media personality, Ebuka on the fashion consciousness of Nigerians is, at best an armchair philosophising. The data collected for the research are sourced mostly from magazine photographs, predominantly from Pinterest Magazine and Instagram posts by the media personalities. These provide good sources of entertainment to the readership of the magazines and social

media followers but do not serve as a practicable source for data to be used in academic research. Data, thus collected from social media, are largely unstructured, lack quality, and are most likely non-representative of the population or phenomena that are to be studied because most social media posts by influencers are staged. More so, the relationship between the fashion consciousness of Nigerian youths and the influence of Chukwuebuka Obi-Ochendu is not measured by the study. This lack of measurable relationship between the two variables studied by the researcher limits the acceptability of the research as a valuable contribution to the body of knowledge in the Nigerian traditional fashion field of study. As an interpretive study, the work accentuates the need for further understanding of the contemporary influence on the Nigerian fashion trend, owing to the non-rationality of the *IsiAgu* fabric in present-day Nigeria.

Researchers in traditional and contemporary fashion fields of Africa need to explore the determinants of change and influencers of fashion trends in Nigeria through quantifiable means of research. Traditional fabrics are usually hand-woven which involves the processes and techniques of making fabrics with looms where two threads known as warp and weft are interwoven (Okpu & Abimbola, 2020).

The popularity of affordable *Isi-Agu* materials is another reason for the proliferation of the once-revered fabric (Ajiginni, 2020). This implies that the number of persons in society who can afford to buy the material for their occasions and ceremonies significantly increased, hence more persons can afford to wear the fabric to occasions without any form of segregation associated with wealth and/or social class. *Isi-Agu* is thus, a common sight in traditional marriage ceremonies, child dedication ceremonies, funeral ceremonies, and others. In previous times, the cost of owning an *Isi-Agu* fabric was so exorbitant that only the highly placed in society could afford it, this has since changed due to the introduction of these affordable fabrics. The affordable fabrics are softer and more easily get turgid with time. Oral accounts by elders of the population indicate that *Isi-Agu* fabrics as we know them now are inferior in texture and quality to what was obtainable in the past. The advantages associated with the adulteration of *Isi-Agu* materials imply there is equity in the availability of *Isi-Agu* materials in the market at a cost that all who want it can afford.

A study, (Ajiginni, 2019) places the *Isi-Agu* fabric (which is the most prominent type of *blangidi* fabric) among the prized commemorative fabrics used at occasions such as weddings, and celebration parties. Other fabrics include *agbada* or *babariga*, *sokoto*, *woko*, *etibo*, *George*, *doni*, and *etibo*. Using the

well-structured questionnaires designed for the research, it was gathered that while the use of *aso-ebi* constitutes a financial burden on the populace, it helps to promote unity and affection among the family members, and it also prompts the need for uniqueness and creativity in the hosts and guest of occasions. This implies that the use of commemorative fabrics in Nigerian society can be viewed as another influencer of Nigerian fashion trends. The need to stand out and make a unique contribution to the daily event trends on social media has served to compel individuals and fashion designers alike to embrace creativity, this has helped to maintain progress in traditional fashion practices.

Chapter 8

INTERPRETING *BLANGIDI* FOR THE BABY GIRL DRESS MODEL IN KALABARI KINGDOM: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This chapter explores the blueprint guiding the research. Contained herein is the discussion of the various methods and procedures employed in carrying out the research. This includes the research design that combines qualitative, descriptive, studio-based methods, and library studies. The methodology enumerated below was carefully selected following comparison to other/similar research methods. A meticulous selection and application of these research methods are vital for acquiring accurate and insightful data, essential for addressing the research questions and objectives.

This chapter discusses the philosophy and the general procedure of work. The general procedure also covers the materials and methods of production. Also, the systematic framework employed in collecting, analysing, and interpreting data is discussed in detail. The chosen methodology aligns with the nature of this research, ensuring that credible and valid data are collected while ensuring a comprehensive understanding of the phenomena being explored. Meticulously following the approaches, methodology, and techniques enumerated below ensures the credibility of the research findings and contributes to the scholarly discourse on re-interpreting *blangidi* for the baby girl model.

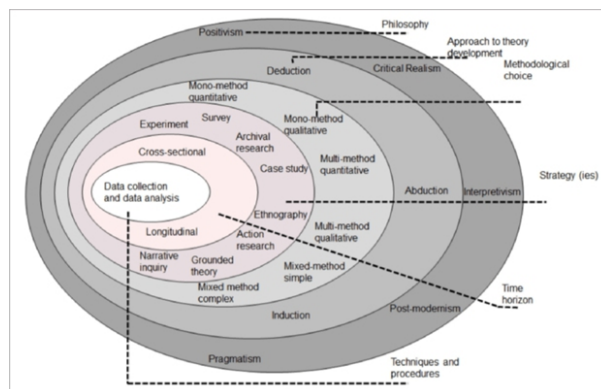


Fig 3. 1: Saunders Research Onion: Adapted from Saunders et al. (2019)

Research Design

To ensure a systematic execution of the research's aims and objectives, Saunders' research onion has been adopted (Saunders et al., 2019). It provides a structured framework for planning, conducting, and evaluating research processes. The six phases contained in the research onion contain a set of scholarly options available to researchers to choose which options are most suitable to their research topic and to make informed decisions about their research methodology.

Research Philosophy

According to the Saunders research onion, research philosophy represents the foundational layer upon which the entire research is built. It includes the basic beliefs and assumptions held by the researcher concerning the nature of knowledge, reality, and the process of acquiring knowledge. For any research, the chosen research philosophy serves as a guiding compass that determines the approach to data collection, analysis, interpretation, and ultimately, the fundamental understanding of the research topic (Mauthner, 2020). The following components of research philosophy have been recognised in academic publications.

Ontology: The Nature of Reality

Ontological considerations have to do with the nature of reality, the fundamental questions of what exists in reality and in what form it exists. Within the Saunders research onion, two primary ontological stances prevail realism and relativism. Relativism holds that society and individual interpretations create realities, whereas realism maintains the presence of an objective reality separate from human experience (Saunders et al., 2009).

Epistemology: The Pursuit of Knowledge

Epistemology is the second component of research philosophy. It addresses the means adopted in pursuing knowledge as well as the methods and processes followed to acquire knowledge (Hammersley, 1993). Two dominant epistemological perspectives guide scholarly research as evident in literature: positivism and interpretivism. Interpretivism emphasises understanding and interpreting subjective experiences and meanings, while positivism, in promoting objective, empirical observation and experimentation as ways to discover the truth. The interplay of ontology and epistemology determines the researcher's approach to the research process. A study that adopts the realist-positivist stance, for instance, would favour quantitative methods in a bid to achieve measurable and generalizable findings. On the other hand, a relativist-interpretivist stance would employ qualitative methods to capture the richness of subjective experiences. As a

result, the chosen research philosophy impacts the rest of the research methodology; the approaches, strategies, techniques, and the researcher's decision on data collection and analysis.

Positivism: As stated above, this philosophy emphasises objectivity, empiricism, and the pursuit of universal truths through scientific investigation. It calls for the use of quantitative methods, such as surveys, experiments, and statistical analysis, to gather and analyse data (Nelson, 2014). Positivists believe that knowledge is independent of human perception and is obtainable through objective observation and experimentations conducted to formulate laws and principles. Positivism's emphasis on precision, objectivity, and capacity for generating broadly applicable conclusions constitutes its main advantages (Park et al., 2019). However, its excessive focus on the quantitative, its indifference to subjective experiences, and its restricted ability to handle intricate social and cultural issues have drawn criticism from scholars in the social sciences and art.

Critical Realism: Critical realism philosophy is based on a layered ontology. It acknowledges the existence of objective reality but recognises that human perception of it is mediated and influenced by perceptions, experiences, and social contexts to which the observer has been exposed (Zhang, 2022). It challenges the positivist notion of objective truth and the interpretivist perspective of knowledge as solely constructed. Researchers who adopt this philosophy strive to uncover the underlying mechanisms and structures that affect our understanding of the world around us through a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods (Koopmans, 2022). This ensures that the limitation of both positivism and interpretivism is overcome and a robust understanding of the phenomenon is achieved. However, it has been criticised for being too complex and challenging in reconciling points of view.

Postmodernism: Postmodernism challenges traditional notions of knowledge and reality. It emphasizes the fluidity, fragmentation, and contingency of knowledge, viewing it as shaped by power structures and historical contexts. Researchers based on this philosophy focus on analysing socio-cultural factors which impact the perception of the world, through the application of qualitative methods such as ethnography, and narrative analysis. This research challenges traditional approaches to scholarly investigation and proposes a more inclusive understanding of the human experience. Nevertheless, the philosophy is criticised for its rejection of the

existence of universal truth and its potential for undermining the possibility of meaningful research and knowledge production

Pragmatism: This philosophy emphasises that knowledge is practical and has real implications in the real world. As such, researchers should focus on the usefulness of research methodologies on their usefulness in solving real-world problems (Dybicz & Hall, 2021). It also challenges the notion of absolute truth and universal principles, advocating for a more fluid and context-dependent approach to knowledge acquisition. Pragmatism advocates that researchers should develop solutions that work in practice rather than adhering to strict philosophical frameworks, which may not yield practical results. It enjoins the adoption of a variety of methods, ranging from quantitative and qualitative data collection to case studies and action research. However, it is criticised for its lack of rigour, its potential for neglecting theoretical foundations, and its inability to set universal standards for evaluating research.

Interpretivism: Interpretivism emphasises understanding and interpreting the subjective experiences and meanings of individuals (Alharahsheh, 2019). It challenges the positivist notion of objective reality and advocates for a more nuanced and contextualized approach to knowledge acquisition. This form of research seeks to capture the complex nature of human experience through qualitative methods such as interviews, observations, and case studies. (Bonache & Festing, 2020; Pham, 2018). This philosophy, however, is criticised for the difficulty associated with generalising the findings due to its subjectivity (Otani, 2020).

For the study on re-interpreting the use of *blangidi* in making dresses for baby girls, the choice of interpretivism aligns seamlessly with the research aims and objectives. Interpretivism, as a research philosophy, emphasizes understanding social phenomena from the perspective of those who practice these phenomena, with a unique focus on their unique context, meanings, and subjective experiences (Bryman, 2012). Additionally, interpretivism ensures that the cultural value of the *blangidi* fabric, particularly its usage for the baby girl, can be thoroughly examined. This qualitative approach allows for the exploration of the symbolism, traditions, and beliefs associated with *blangidi* within the *Kalabari culture*. The adoption of this philosophy can ensure the exploration of the deeper meaning and purpose of using this fabric for baby girls.

Research Approach to Theory Development

The research approach constitutes the second layer of Sauder et al.'s research

onion (2019). It explores the broader method the researcher has employed to address the stated research question. This choice has significant implications for the subsequent phases of the research, influencing data collection, analysis, and interpretation. This section explores the various research approaches and explains the rationale behind the selected approach and its implications for achieving the study's objectives.

Deductive: This approach begins with a theory or hypothesis and then aims to test or validate it using empirical data gathered in the research. It is mostly adopted in quantitative research, where structured methods like experiments and surveys are used to collect data that are subject to statistical analysis (Woceshyn & Daellenbach, 2018). Bonner et al. (2021), this approach is well-suited for situations where there is an established theory or hypothesis that can be tested using quantitative data.

Abduction: The abductive approach is a unique and insightful method for gaining insight into phenomena. It is deviated from the traditional deductive and inductive approaches and finds a middle ground where hypotheses are formed based on observations and available evidence (Awuzie and Mcdermoth 2017). The abductive technique is distinguished by its focus on creativity and inference. It challenges researchers to go beyond simple data gathering and analysis and instead try to draw conclusions and linkages between seemingly unrelated bits of data. New theories and explanations are encouraged to arise because of this abductive reasoning process. While the abductive approach has advantages in exploratory research, it is not suitable for the study of *blangidi* in Kalabari baby girl clothing. Abduction often thrives in situations where the research phenomena have incomplete information or are ambiguous.

Induction: Unlike the deductive, this approach begins by collecting empirical data to develop a theory from the observed patterns and themes (Saunders et al., 2019). It is more suitable for qualitative research, where unstructured methods like interviews, observations, and case studies are employed to collect data that is analysed through thematic analysis.

Given the approach's attention to a deep understanding of the complexities of phenomena, it is more suitable for this research on understanding the cultural and aesthetic significance of *blangidi* within the communities of the riverine tribes, and by extension, the girl child. As noted in an earlier section, the fabric recognised as *blangidi* does not have an African origin. Rather, originates and is widely produced in England (Michelman & Eicher, 1995). As such, the adoption of the induction approach enables the researcher to

explore the subjective experiences and cultural practices associated with the use of *blangidi* fabrics in the context of the local community. These social implications will not be appropriately captured by quantitative methods

Given the nature of the research topic which explores the adoption of the *blangidi* fabric in making dresses for the baby girl, an inductive research approach is most suitable. This approach entails starting with empirical data drawn by the researcher and developing a theory about the aesthetic values, cultural significance, and social implications of using *blangidi* fabric for baby girl clothing among the riverine tribes of the Niger Delta. The researcher collects empirical data primarily through qualitative methods, including interviews, natural observations, and interactions with natives, traditional leaders, custodians of culture, fabric traders, weavers, fashion designers, parents, and religious leaders. This ensures that the researcher gathers rich and detailed data on the preferences, aesthetics, cultural beliefs, and social practices regarding the use of *blangidi*, and understands how these apply to using the fabric to make dresses for the baby girl. The themes, patterns, and underlying meanings identified through this method would be analysed and utilised for the development of a theory on the aesthetic values and cultural significance of *blangidi* fabric for the baby girl clothing among the riverine tribes of the Niger Delta.

Moreover, the inductive approach allows for the emergence of fresh insights that can help develop theories on the traditional dress culture of the *Kalabari people* among other riverine tribes. This approach is particularly valuable for this research topic, which explores a relatively unexplored fabric utilized by the less-researched *Kalabari community* and its unexamined use in creating attire for baby girls. This approach, thus, allows the researcher to embark on a journey of socio-cultural discovery in the unfamiliar territory of the subjective practices associated with the use of *blangidi* fabrics within the *Kalabari community*.

Additionally, the inductive approach emphasises the importance of the context within which a phenomenon is practised. Adopting this contextual approach is crucial for uncovering the deeper meaning and significance of using *blangidi* fabric for baby girl clothing to reveal its symbolic implications as the locals know it. It is not uncommon that various elements of culture, such as motifs, fabrics, and fashion accessories adopt different meanings in different cultural contexts. Through this, new themes and insights that emerge as the researcher interacts with the data in the study area will constitute items for further explorations in subsequent research. This flexibility particularly enables the discovery of previously unknown

connections and patterns that may lead to a better understanding of the subject matter.

Research Methodological Choice

This is the third layer of Saunder's research onion. This layer outlines the specific research methods to be used to achieve the study's objectives. It involves the practical application of the chosen research philosophy and guides the selection of appropriate strategies, designs, and methods. The approaches selected have a significant impact on how the study is conducted, how data is collected, and how in-depth the analysis is. A careful examination of this stage guarantees a robust and well-founded research framework, which enhances the validity and reliability of the study. Careful consideration of the various options was undergone to arrive at this study's choice of methodology. The choice made is not arbitrary, rather, it was made taking into consideration the research question and the nature of the data to be collected.

Mono-Method Quantitative: This method emphasises the adoption of only quantitative methods of data collection and analysis. Typically, this involves first formulating a research question that can be answered using quantitative data. The researcher then adopts quantitative means such as surveys, experiments, or observations to collect data for analysis using statistical methods. This method emphasizes objectivity, measurability, and generalizability of the findings of research. Therefore, it is not suitable for a study on the application of *blangidi* fabric for baby girl clothing among the *Kalabari tribe*, as it might overlook the rich and distinctive cultural aspect of the phenomena studied. Moreover, the qualitative aspects and intricate meanings associated with the fabric's use may not be captured through this method, which is exclusively quantitative. The use of *blangidi* fabric for baby girl clothing among the riverine tribes presents a complex phenomenon that is influenced by a variety of factors, including aesthetics, cultural beliefs, and social practices. Mono-method quantitative research would allow the researcher to collect and analyse data on only one of these factors, which would provide an incomplete picture of the phenomenon.

Mono-Method Qualitative: This is a research approach that relies solely on qualitative methods for data collection and analysis methods. Qualitative data is non-numerical and is typically collected through interviews, observations, or document analysis. The research begins with the formulation of research questions that can be answered using qualitative data. Data is then collected through qualitative means.

While this choice of research can be a valuable approach to understanding the use of *blangidi* fabric for baby girl dresses, it has an inherent shortcoming that makes it passed over. The use of *blangidi* fabric is a complex phenomenon that is influenced by a variety of factors. While mono-method qualitative research would allow the researcher to capture the richness and complexity of the data, it may not provide a comprehensive understanding of all the factors that influence the use of *the blangidi* fabric.

Multi-Method Quantitative: This involves adopting multiple quantitative methods to gather and analyse data for a particular study. This approach aims to gain a more comprehensive understanding of a research problem by utilizing various quantitative techniques, such as surveys, experiments, or statistical analysis. While this approach is beneficial for obtaining numerical data, it is not suitable for the study on *blangidi* fabric for baby girl clothing among the riverine tribes of the Niger Delta. The intricate cultural and social significance associated with the use of *blangidi* may not be adequately captured through quantitative methods alone.

Multi-Method Qualitative: The multi-method qualitative approach aims to provide a thorough grasp of the study issue using a variety of qualitative research techniques. This might involve content analysis, focus groups, observations, and interviews. This method is selected for the study considering how effectively it allows for the various qualitative approaches involved in gaining an in-depth analysis of the practices of the locals regarding the use of *blangidi* fabric and its application. It allows a thorough investigation of the societal ramifications, personal experiences, and cultural values related to the usage of *blangidi*. This ensures that a robust and comprehensive perspective on the subject is achieved through this approach.

This study adopts a holistic multi-method approach, combining qualitative, descriptive, and studio-based research methods. The adoption of multiple methods allowed for a thorough investigation from various perspectives, ensuring a more nuanced understanding of the research topic. Through qualitative methods, the researcher can achieve an in-depth exploration of subjective experiences and perceptions. Descriptive methods allowed for a detailed portrayal of the phenomenon under study, as observed by the researcher. This played a crucial role in providing a detailed reflection of cultural practice within the study area. This method allowed the researcher to systematically observe, document, and describe the various aspects of *blangidi* fabric usage. This is captured in great detail following vital information from fabric sellers, cultural custodians, traditional rulers, and fashion designers. Field notes were dutifully taken by the researcher to

document the selection and preparation of *blangidi* fabric, the traditional techniques employed in garment making in the area, and the aesthetic features that characterize *blangidi* fabric.

Additionally, the inclusion of studio-based research enabled practical and creative exploration, enriching the investigation with tangible outputs that influence the use of *blangidi* fabrics in making dresses for the girl child. This method ensures that all the theoretical aspects of the studies and the insight gleaned from the researcher's observations are actively engaged practically, to produce dresses that both reflect the cultural beliefs and artistic of the larger population of the African traditional fashion industry. As a result, this involves the creation of prototypes showcasing the researcher's artistic ability to apply and incorporate the *Kalabari culture* into contemporary fashion design. This endeavour highlights the study's practical nature and substantial contribution to the exploration of African fabrics and dressmaking for the African girl child.

Research Strategy

The research strategy layer represents a critical and practical phase in the research onion, where the plan for data collection and analysis is detailed. The chosen strategy guides the research design and execution, ensuring coherence and effectiveness in the research process.

Saunders' research onion highlights several research strategies, these include experiment, survey, archival research, case study, ethnography, action research, grounded theory, and narrative inquiry. This section outlines the systematic approach employed by the researcher to address the research objectives and questions.

Experiments: This involves manipulating the variables to observe how they interact with each other. While this method is excellent for testing hypotheses in controlled environments, it is not appropriate for examining *blangidi* fabric usage, which comprises complicated and culturally rooted practices. In this case, experimental manipulation would be neither acceptable nor ethical.

Survey: Surveys involve data collection from a large sample of people by asking them questions that will be linked to the research objectives. This is a valuable tool for collecting quantitative data on a wide range of topics, however, it is not appropriate for this study. *Blangidi* fabric usage is a complex and culturally embedded practice that cannot be adequately captured by a simple survey. Surveys are limited in their ability to capture

the lived experiences and individualised views linked with *blangidi* fabric use. They frequently produce shallow data that fails to convey the richness and complexities of such cultural practices. Nonverbal clues such as the context of use, the symbolic meaning of patterns, and the underlying cultural values entrenched in the practice frequently indicate the significance of the *blangidi* fabric. Surveys are incapable of capturing these distinctions.

Archival Research: This research technique involves collecting and analysing data from already--existing sources, such as historical documents, photographs, and artefacts. It can be a valuable tool for understanding past events and cultural practices. While elements of archival research have been implemented in this study, on its own, the method is not well suited for the study. The use of *Blangidi* fabric by locals in the Niger Delta region has evolved as communities adapt to changing circumstances. Archival research is valuable in capturing historical practices but lacks the flexibility and dynamism to examine the current practices and prospective for future creative explorations. Another major challenge of archival research is the disregard for the transmission of knowledge through verbal means. The cultural significance and traditional knowledge associated with the *blangidi* fabric are often passed down through oral traditions and practical demonstrations and are not properly documented. Archival materials may not capture these intangible aspects of the practice, which are crucial for understanding its enduring relevance.

Action Research: Action research is a cyclical process of research, action, and reflection in which researchers actively participate in the research process to generate new knowledge and inform practice. This is a valuable tool for addressing real-world problems, however, it is not a suitable approach for this particular research topic. Action research is usually associated with the participation of the researcher and the community, which can be beneficial for addressing practical issues or practices. However, for a study that aims to gain a deep understanding of the cultural and aesthetic dimensions of *blangidi* fabric usage, a more observatory, rather a participatory approach such as in-depth interviews and participant observation, was more appropriate. Furthermore, action research emphasizes community engagement and collaborative approaches to the implementation of change. While this is valuable for addressing real-world problems, the primary goal of this research is to gain a comprehensive understanding of *blangidi* fabric usage rather than solve a specific problem or introduce any form of intervention. Also, *Blangidi* fabric usage is a significant cultural practice with symbolic meanings and cultural values. Action research, with its focus on intervention and change, is not able to effectively study this.

Grounded Theory: This is a qualitative research method that involves developing a theory from empirical data, suitable for exploring under-researched phenomena. While the use of *blangidi* fabrics in the Niger Delta regions is, by far, understudied, and the specific application of the woollen flannel to making dresses for the baby girl lacks scholarly exploration, they are new phenomena. There is a wealth of existing knowledge about the practices of making dresses with this fabric, howbeit, undocumented. This study adopts case study and ethnography research techniques.

Case Study: Case study research involves an in-depth, focused examination of a person, group, or event. This approach allows for a comprehensive understanding of a complex phenomenon, namely the use of *blangidi* fabric among the riverine tribes of the Niger Delta. Adopting this research technique allows the researcher to delve into the singular cases in order to uncover rich insights into the cultural context. A case study approach allows.

Ethnography: On the other hand, ethnography is a qualitative research approach that requires the researchers to immerse themselves in the cultural setting they intend to study to observe and document the activities of people in their natural environment. It is an invaluable resource for understanding intricate cultural customs, such as the Niger Delta riverine tribes' usage of *blangidi* fabric. The adoption of this approach provides the researcher with a holistic grasp of the cultural norms, values, and beliefs which shape the usage of *blangidi* fabric among the tribes of the Niger Delta. Further, it facilitates direct observation of the usage and interpretation of *blangidi* fabric in the social context of the study area. Moreover, it aids in cultivating a comprehensive understanding of the *blangidi* fabric as a cultural phenomenon, shedding light on its role in reflecting the culture of the *Kalabari people* and other riverine tribes in the Niger Delta.

Time Horizon

The time horizon refers to the temporal duration of the study. Saunders' research onion emphasizes the importance of selecting an appropriate time horizon that aligns with the research objectives. The layers establish the time boundary within which the investigation is carried out. It helps the researcher determine the number of times data collection will be conducted. The following section, thus, considers the time horizon that is most appropriate for the study on the use of *blangidi* for the baby girl among the riverine tribes of the Niger Delta. Two options are often considered when considering the time horizon for research, these include cross-sectional and longitudinal time horizons.

- i. **Longitudinal:** Longitudinal research, on the other hand, extends the time horizon, involving repeated data collection over two or more periods. This approach would enable the researcher to record changes in *blangidi* fabric usage over time and track the trends associated with these changes. Researchers can acquire a better grasp of the processes impacting the cultural value of the *blangidi* fabric within riverine communities by monitoring how perceptions, usage patterns, and cultural meanings vary between generations. While longitudinal research provides a valuable tool, it is not the most suitable approach for this study for certain reasons. Longitudinal research is often time-consuming and resource-intensive, and this requires the researcher to maintain contact with participants over an extended period. This can be particularly challenging in the context of the riverine tribes of the Niger Delta, where access to remote communities and potential logistical issues have been worsened by the environmental degradation in the area over time. This hinders the feasibility of data collection over a long period.
- ii. **Cross-Sectional:** Cross-sectional research requires that the researcher collects data at a single point in time for research. Through this approach, a detailed and valuable snapshot of the current state of *blangidi* fabric usage among the riverine tribes of the Niger Delta can be determined, as well as how this relates to making dresses for the baby girl. The researcher can gain insights into the prevalence of the *blangidi* fabric, identify common aesthetic preferences and motifs, and document the cultural and social practices associated with the *blangidi* fabric in the context of contemporary society. With the cross-sectional time horizon, the researcher can investigate the subject matter at a specific period to ensure that findings are consistent with the socio-cultural context surrounding the use of the *blangidi* fabrics among the *Kalabari* and other tribes in the Niger Delta region. Additionally, the time and resource constraint on the research necessitates the selection of a cross-sectional time horizon. Thus, proves an efficient means to gather data and draw insights without the need for prolonged observation. Moreover, the adoption of this approach sets the focus on the contemporary issues and application of the *blangidi* fabrics. In other words, the focus is on the present and ongoing community, not a historical perspective only. As a result, prevailing preferences, values, and aesthetic expressions will be captured in the data collection phase of the research. The instantaneous nature of cross-sectional data collection allows for immediate capturing of the cultural values associated with the use of *blangidi* fabrics in dressing baby girls, thus, providing an in-depth understanding of its significance in today's

society. Therefore, given the practical nature of this study and the importance of capturing the sociocultural implications of *blangidi* fabric usage, a cross-sectional approach would be more suitable for this study. By conducting in-depth interviews, observing traditional practices, and documenting cultural contexts, the researcher can obtain a robust understanding of *blangidi* fabric usage in its current form and its significance within the riverine communities.

Study Area

The study was conducted in Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria, where the *Kalabari*, *Okrika*, and other *Ijaw*-speaking riverine tribes reside in large numbers. This makes the city a cultural site suitable for this study as the locals are known for their mastery of *blangidi* fabric usage. The city serves as a hub for most *blangidi* sellers and users. Additionally, Port Harcourt connects numerous cities in Nigeria and serves as a centre for various lucrative businesses. The custodians of the original *blangidi*, adorned with indigenous motifs or symbols, also reside in and around Port Harcourt. Additionally, the city serves as a major hub for *blangidi* trade, with an extensive network of artisans, traders, and users, creating ample opportunities to gather insights into the processes of making dresses using *blangidi* fabrics, the diverse ways in which the fabric is used, and the cultural significance associated with it. Furthermore, Port Harcourt is home to the custodians of traditional *blangidi* designs and techniques, who have inherited and preserved this rich cultural heritage. Access to these traditional experts and cultural institutions is crucial for understanding the historical context of the *blangidi* fabric, therefore, the choice of location was deemed crucial in obtaining pertinent data for the study.

Population of the Study Area

Port Harcourt, the capital and largest city in Rivers State, Nigeria, is home to a vibrant and growing population. Based on recent projections by the United Nations, Port Harcourt's metro area population in 2023 would be 3,480,000, a 4.66% increase from 2022 (United Nations, 2023). This pattern of population increase is likely to continue, with forecasts showing a population of more than 4 million by 2025 (Macrotrends, 2023). The city has experienced remarkable population growth over the past two decades, according to statistical estimation by the United Nations (2016). From a population of 1.09 million in 2000, the city grew to an estimated 2.456 million in 2016, representing an average annual growth rate of 5.1%. Within this period, the city reportedly accounted for 1.3% of Nigeria's total population and a more substantial 2.7% of the country's urban population. This underscores the city's significance in Nigeria, particularly as it relates to urban expansion.

This remarkable growth trajectory is expected to continue, according to say UN, with projections indicating a population of over 4.562 million by 2030 at a growth rate of 4.4%.

Factors of Urban Population Growth in the Study Area

This section explores the factors responsible for the population growth of the study location.

- i. **Economic Growth:** Port Harcourt, as the centre for oil and gas exploitation, as well as other industries, such as manufacturing and trade easily attracted a large population of people coming from rural areas in search of greener pastures, and trained professionals in search of job opportunities. These and other economic activities in the city created employment opportunities in the city. The influx of people driven by employment opportunities has been a significant contributor to the city's population increase.
- ii. **Urbanisation:** The general trend of urbanisation that has been observed across various regions in Nigeria also takes effect in Port Harcourt. The city, geographically located in the Niger Delta area, magnets individuals seeking the benefits of city life. An increase in annual migration from rural to urban areas, a countrywide occurrence (Onokerhoraye, 2016), is particularly prominent in Port Harcourt. This has increased its population growth rate even further. As a major economic hub, the city becomes a beacon for individuals seeking a better quality of life options.
- iii. **Natural Increase:** Port Harcourt's demography is significantly influenced by natural increase, specifically, a high birth rate within the region over time. The inclination of the typical Nigerian family to large family sizes contributes to the city's organic expansion. When this is combined with a family-friendly environment, natural growth becomes a primary driver of Port Harcourt's rising population.
- iv. **Population for the Study:** The study's population was carefully chosen to include key stakeholders in the traditional fabric, particularly *blangidi*, context in Nigeria's Niger Delta region. This comprised traditional fabric artisans, elders, chiefs and traditional leaders, dealers, and consumers, who contribute to the lifecycle of the *blangidi* fabric. The choice of the population aims at gaining comprehensive insights into the current state and level of *blangidi* patronage in Nigeria. The inclusion of royalties, scholars, dealers, and users was strategic, acknowledging them as custodians with a comprehensive understanding of recent developments and changes in the *blangidi* domain. Opinion leaders' endorsement of the re-interpreted *Kalabari dress* for the baby girl, however, is crucial. To

determine if it would be possible to adapt the usage of other textiles with *blangidi*, traders of traditional fabrics were included. Children's customers were also seen as being extremely important, as their purchase of the project's output (items) would depend on them. The success of the endeavour in the community would depend on how well they received the clothes.

Sampling Technique

The non-random sampling method was used in the study. Under the non-random sampling method, purposive sampling was preferably chosen. In this method, the sample was specifically selected to suit the purpose of the study. Special elements and characteristics of the population were intentionally selected without compromise. This technique was adopted for its many advantages to the research. Purposive sampling allows for the deliberate inclusion of traditional fabric artisans, the elderly, chiefs, dealers, and consumers of traditional fabrics, ensuring that the chosen participants possess the necessary insights and experiences crucial to addressing the research questions. Purposive sampling helped in the selection of a sample that has a keen interest and is conversant with the trading and making of dresses with the fabrics in order to realise the objective of the study.

Given that the study's objective is to uncover the social and cultural perspectives and local practices related to the *blangidi* fabric in the context of the *Kalabari people* and other riverine tribes of the Niger Delta, it is pertinent to select participants with the necessary knowledge, expertise, and experience with the fabric. This method aligns with the qualitative nature of the study. Additionally, since purposive sampling ensures that the participants are selected based on their relevance, the researcher makes maximum use of the limited time and financial resources available for the study to gain valuable insight. By so doing, the researcher only selects individuals with specialised knowledge and experiences to increase the quality and relevance of the data collected.

Sample Size

Thirty participants were targeted, comprising five traditional chiefs, five *blangidi* dealers, and twenty traditional fabric consumers, including children. This sample size allows for indepth interviews, ensuring a comprehensive exploration of the subject matter. The sample size was flexible and varied throughout the study, and it was intended that it should be adjusted if more information is required or if data saturation is reached. The method places more emphasis on the quality and depth of the data than its mere amount.

Nature/Sources of Data

This section details the methods utilised by the researcher for data collection during the study. The research adopts a multi-method approach, incorporating qualitative interviews, participant observation, and studio-based research to investigate the use of *blangidi* fabric in the *Kalabari community* and its application in creating dresses for baby girls. The chosen data collection methods are interviews, participant observation, and studio-based research. This multi-technique selection ensures a well-rounded qualitative approach to exploring the subject matter. Interviews facilitate direct communication with individuals from the *Kalabari community* who can provide insight into the use and significance of the fabrics, particularly as they relate to making dresses for the baby girl. Through structured and semi-structured interview questions, the researcher comprehends the cultural norms, values, and beliefs associated with the *blangidi* fabric. Through participant observation, the researcher becomes an integral member of the population she intends to study, engaging in their daily lives, social events, festivals, and cultural practices.

Additionally, the researcher sourced secondary data for inclusion in the research. Photographs from custodians of culture and traditional and educational institutions were utilised to gain historical insight into the practice of the *Kalabari people* concerning the use of *blangidi* fabrics and dressing the baby girl. The researcher visited various libraries including the University of Port Harcourt's Department of Fine Arts and Design library, private libraries, and online journal publication databases. Other secondary data sources used for the study were sourced mainly from documented sources such as books, catalogues, publications, dissertations, theses, journals, reports, and magazines. These materials were relevant in enhancing and contributing to a deeper understanding of the subject matter.

Methods of Data Collection

The innermost layers of the research onion are the actual collection and analysis of data. This phase is critical in systematically transforming raw data into meaningful information and insight. Data collection methods ensure that themes and patterns are identified. This meticulous process ensures a comprehensive understanding of the research topic, providing a solid foundation for drawing valid conclusions and contributing to existing knowledge.

Interview

This is a research instrument that involves a face-to-face discussion between an interviewer and interviewee (questioner and respondent). The purpose of

the interview is to obtain valid and reliable data via responses or feedback from the interviewee concerning questions or a question from the interviewer. The interview questions can be structured or unstructured regarding the extent to which the content and procedures involved are prescribed and standardised in advance. A rapport is established once it is conducted in a cooperative atmosphere. A structured interview technique was adopted to achieve truthful data from traditional leaders and dealers on *blangidi*. These groups of people were interviewed on schedule, it is noteworthy that some were not schooled and therefore had challenges with reading and writing. To address the language barrier, an interpreter was selected from the local residents on the affected communities to help achieve effective communication with the respondents who cannot read or write in English language.

Exploration and Observation

Observation plays an essential role in every research attempt. It is a methodical approach to collecting information in which all the senses become active in social settings. Observation is a method that allows the obtaining of data directly rather than through the reports of others. The observation technique is appropriate for studying small groups and communities. It helps avoid memory errors of respondents and exaggeration. The study employed participant observation for collecting data. The researcher was a functioning member of the group and events under discussion. Trips to visit selected *blangidi* sellers, users, and scholars within and around Port Harcourt were made. The researcher observes that *blangidi* fabrics have become a popular choice among Niger Delta women in contemporary times. Various kinds of *blangidi* fabrics are now sold in the market, and styled in creative and expressive ways. *Blangidi's* versatility allows for diverse styling options, as women often can adopt it as two wrappers paired with blouses made from other kinds of fabrics. Also, they can be styled gowns, or as extension fabrics for other kinds of styles. While *blangidi* remains a significant part of traditional *Ijaw* attire, women are adapting its usage to suit contemporary fashion trends. For instance, *blangidi* wrappers are sometimes styled with modern accessories, such as handbags, jewellery, and footwear, creating a fusion of traditional and contemporary aesthetics.

Studio-Based Research

This stage involved studying the sketches, which helped familiarize the researcher with their different elements and compositions. This included the representation of models as sketches and swatches and the production of a dummy for a doll that was presented at the departmental seminar. It enabled

the experimentation of different finishing techniques and embellishment methods. Aesthetic qualities, design techniques, and subject focus formed the rationale of the designs and shapes that were chosen for the research.

- a. Aesthetics was well represented in the use of colours, shapes, composition, and design. The elements of design such as line, colour, form, shapes, and texture and the principles of design such as proportion, dominance, repetition, harmony, balance, variety, and unity were interplayed in the embellishment of the wares in this research based on different effects of colour as an expressive medium in art and design. Warm and bright hues were represented in their different values in off-white, red, green, and blue which are attributed to the Niger Delta elements while the animals and vegetation as motifs on the *blangidi* depict the rich endowments of the people. Lines, textures, forms, and shapes were used to explore aesthetic concepts and values. These attributes are typical examples of the experience of the Niger Delta region. The warm colours used in this research signify education, knowledge, optimism, a new hope, peace, and light at the end of the tunnel for the people.
- b. The design subject used for the study is fashion and applique.
- c. The finished works tell several stories of the girl child and child care.

Validation of Instruments

The research questions formulated in Chapter One constituted the basis for guidance. It was through these questions that the interview and observational checklist were anchored. The preparation of the interview questions and observational guide was done with the assistance of the supervisors. Adequate scrutiny and corrections were carried out to facilitate authentic and reliable administration of the instruments. Consequently, necessary remedies were effected based on the measures put forward by the supervisors. In the process of administering the questions, those that appeared challenging were explained in the quest to obtain valid and reliable responses.

The illiteracy level of some interviewees countered the choice of interview. Information attained from interviewees was in the form of verbal data. The verbal information gave the true concept of the people without alteration. To create room for respondents to express themselves well, open-ended questions were itemized and presented. The structured type of interview helped the researcher in realizing the objectives of the study.

Chapter
9

INTERPRETING *BLANGIDI* FOR THE BABY GIRL DRESS MODEL IN *KALABARI* KINGDOM: DATA ANALYSIS

The data analysis for this study was carried out using a qualitative approach with a focus on thematic analysis of the qualitative data gathered in the course of the research. This thematic analysis involved identifying, analysing, and interpreting patterns or themes from the interviews and participant observation, ensuring that the researcher uncovers the underlying cultural values, aesthetic preferences, and symbolic meanings embedded in the cultural practices of the people. Additionally, the study employed narrative analysis to highlight the stories, narratives, and personal experiences of the participants, and to explore the issues raised by this information. Resource materials were used to contribute to the qualitative and descriptive analyses. Literature materials were sourced from libraries and only academic databases such as Google Scholar, and personal interviews were very helpful.

Following the researcher's observation of the use of *blangidi* at events and festivals by the natives of the Niger Delta region, inspiration was drawn to be incorporated into making dresses for the baby girl. This began with the researcher making sketches of dress designs to be made. This played a crucial role in the design process. Several revisions were made until the desired representations were achieved. The motifs drawn on the sketches mirrored those found on the original *blangidi* fabric, incorporating descriptions based on aesthetic values, and economic significance, noting advantages and disadvantages. Careful consideration was given to the intentional and attractive use of colours for the dresses. This deliberate choice aimed to draw attention to the garments, particularly because they were designed for celebratory occasions. The process involved a thoughtful blend of cultural motifs, economic considerations, and aesthetic appeal in the creation of dresses for baby girls using *blangidi* fabric.

The studio-based research design justified the study's purpose and essence which is to explore and refine the creative process of crafting dresses for the baby girl using *blangidi* fabric. In this phase, sketches, thumbnails, a dummy,

and a comprehensive layout were meticulously created and presented to the supervisors. These designs were showcased at the departmental seminar presentation before the production of the actual dresses for the final defence/exhibition. A collaborative and cordial relationship between the researcher and supervisors played a pivotal role throughout the design phase. Quality interactions helped identify details that were initially unknown, becoming the driving force behind the successful conclusion of the study. The studio-based approach facilitated a thorough exploration and refinement of the creative process in crafting dresses using *blangidi* fabric.

Developmental Stages of the Design

Plates 3.1-3.10 (Sketches of the Designs used)



Title: *Abaibhar*

Medium: Ink on A4 Paper

Courtesy: Studio work by Woko, Opudo V.

Year: 2021

Plate 3. 1: Sketch 1a



Title: *Eganga*

Medium: Ink on A4 Paper

Courtesy: Studio work by Woko, Opudo V.

Year: 2021

Plate 3. 2: Sketch 1b



Title: Eganga

Medium: Ink on A4 Paper

Courtesy: Studio work by Woko, Opudo V.

Year: 2021

Plate 3. 3: Sketch 2a



Title: Eganga

Medium: Ink on A4 Paper.

Courtesy: Studio work by Woko, Opudo

Year: 2021

Plate 3. 4: Sketch 2b



Title: Onyi Olala

Medium: Ink on A4 Paper

Courtesy: Studio work by Woko, Opudo V.

Year: 2021

Plate 3. 5: Sketch 3a



Title: Onyi Olala

Medium: Ink on A4 Paper.

Courtesy: Studio work by Woko, Opudo

Year: 2021

Plate 3. 6: Sketch 3b



Title: *Etaria*

Medium: Ink on A4 Paper

Courtesy: Studio work by Woko, Opudo V.

Year: 2021

Plate 3. 7: Sketch 4a



Title: *Chiefba*

Medium: Ink on A4 Paper

Courtesy: Studio work by Woko, Opudo V.

Year: 2021

Plate 3. 8: Sketch 5a



Title: *Chiefba*

Medium: Ink on A4 Paper.

Courtesy: Studio work by Woko, Opudo

Year: 2021

Plate 3. 9: Sketch 5b



Title: Chiefba

Medium: Ink on A4 Paper.

Courtesy: Studio work by Woko, Opudo V.

Year: 2021

Plate 3. 10: Sketch 6a



Title: Ibebh Atoza

Medium: Ink on A4 Paper

Courtesy: Studio work by Woko, Opudo V.

Year: 2022

Plate 3. 11: Sketch 7a



Title: Ibebh Atoza

Medium: Ink on A4 Paper.

Courtesy: Studio work by Woko, Opudo

Year: 2022

Plate 3. 12: Sketch 7b



Title: *Ibiere*

Medium: Ink on A4 Paper

Courtesy: Studio work by Woko, Opudo V.

Year: 2022

Plate 3. 13: Sketch 8a



Title: *Ibiere*

Medium: Ink on A4 Paper.

Courtesy: Studio work by Woko, Opudo

Year: 2022

Plate 3. 14: Sketch 8b



Title: *Ibiere*

Medium: Ink on A4 Paper

Courtesy: Studio work by Woko, Opudo V.

Year: 2021

Plate 3. 15: Sketch 9a

At the Wrapper Market Purchasing the Fenico *Blangidi* Fabric



Plate 3. 16: At the Market purchasing Fenico/*Blangidi* fabrics



Plate 3. 17; Plate 3. 18

Date 1/5/2023

Photo credit: Judith Okpara

Plate 3. 19-23: At the Wrapper Market Purchasing the Fenico *Blangidi* Fabric

Cost Analysis

The cost of producing a fashion garment is influenced by several dynamic factors such as the cost of the fabrics, accessories, tools used, level of creativity employed, and time spent to be able to make a profit from each dress. To be able to capture the cost of production, a market survey and analysis of price were conducted with emphasis on the various qualities and prices of *blangidi* fabric. The best quality which is the most expensive was chosen for the study with the aim of the research in mind. The prices range from #3,000 for fabrics made of cheaper materials to #17,000 for quality ones.

At the beginning of the research, the original was sold at #12,000 except for the lion head which was #15,000 per yard but by July 2023 the price was increased by #2,000 due to the high rate of inflation in Nigeria.

Cost of Fabrics and Accessories for each Dress

1 Year Old Baby Dress Titled *Abaibhar*

S/N	Item	Units	Cost per unit	Total cost
1.	<i>Blangidi</i>	3yards	15000	45,000
2.	Organza	10yards	400	4,000
3.	Clothgum	4yards	1000	4000
4.	Crinoline	1pack	2500	2500
5.	Lining	4yards	400	1600
6.	Dull face	5yards	700	2800
7.	Zip	1	100	100
8.	Cone Thread	1	500	500
Total				60,500

2 Years Old Baby Dress Titled *Eganga*

S/N	Item	Units	Cost per unit	Total cost
1.	<i>Blangidi</i>	2yards	15000	30,000
2.	Soft Net	5yards	350	1750
3.	Ostrich feathers	1yard	2500	2500
4.	Lining	1yards	400	400
5.	Dull face	11/2yards	700	1050
6.	Zip	1	100	100
7.	Cone Thread	1	500	500
Total				36,300

3 Years Old Baby Dress Title *Onyi olala*

S/N	Item	Units	Cost per unit	Total cost
1.	<i>Blangidi</i>	1yard	15000	15,000
2.	Organza	10yards	400	4,000
3.	Fishing line	3 rolls	2500	2500
4.	Lining	11/2yards	400	1600
5.	Dull face	2yards	700	2800
6.	Zip	1	100	100
7.	Cone Thread	1	500	500
Total				26500

4 Years Old Baby Dress Titled *Etaria*

S/N	Item	Units	Cost per unit	Total cost
1.	<i>Blangidi</i>	4yards	17000	68,000
2.	Clothgum	4yards	1000	4000
3.	Dull face	3yards	700	2800
4.	Zip	1	100	100
5.	Cone Thread	1	500	500
Total				75,400

5 Years Old Baby Dress Titled *Chiefba*

S/N	Item	Units	Cost per unit	Total cost
6.	<i>Blangidi</i>	2yards	15000	30,000
7.	Hard net	11/2yards	700	3,050
8.	Bias	1roll	150	150
9.	Bone		450	450
10.	Lining	3yards	400	1600
11.	Dull face	3yards	700	2100
12.	Zip	1	100	100
13.	Cone Thread	1	500	500
Total				35,950

6 Years Old Baby Dress Titled *Ibebh Atoza*

S/N	Item	Units	Cost per unit	Total cost
1.	<i>Blangidi</i>	2yards	15000	30,000
2.	Organza	15yards	400	6,000
3.	Lining	3yards	400	1200
4.	Dull face	21/2yards	700	1050
5.	Zip	1	100	100
6.	Cone Thread	1	500	500
Total				38,850

7 Years Old Baby Dress Titled *Ibiere*

S/N	Item	Units	Cost per unit	Total cost
1.	<i>Blangidi</i>	2yards	15000	30,000
2.	Lining	1yards	400	400
3.	Dull face	3yards	700	2,100
4.	Zip	1	100	100
5.	Cone Thread	1	500	500
Total				33,100

Names of Some *Blangidi* Designs.



Plate 3. 20: *Feni bruku bruku*
Photo Credit: Woko Opudo Vivian
Date: 25/7/2023



Plate 3. 21: koro nama
Photo Credit: Woko Opudo Vivian
Date: 25/7/2023



Plate 3. 22: Lion Head or *Nama Tibi*
Photo Credit: Woko Opudo Vivian
Date: 25/7/2023

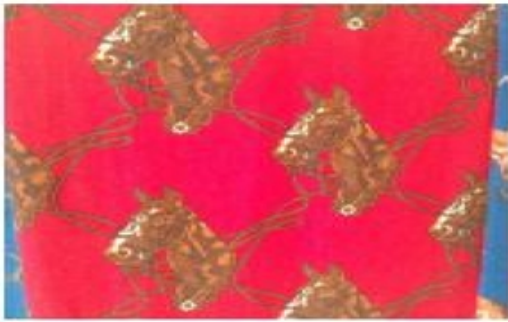


Plate 3. 23: Horse with Chain
 Photo Credit: Woko Opudo Vivian
 Date: 25/7/2023



Plate 3. 24: Standing lion
 Photo Credit: Woko Opudo Vivian
 Date: 25/7/2023



Plate 3. 24: Deer Head
 Photo Credit: Woko Opudo Vivian
 Date: 25/7/2023



Plate 3. 26: Chiri flema, Maths set or Broken Plate
 Photo Credit: Woko Opudo Vivian
 Date: 25/7/2023



Plate 3. 27: Running Tiger
 Date: 25/7/2023



Plate 3. 28: Dog holding bird or Obiri feni pkopu
 Photo Credit: Woko Opudo Vivian
 Date: 25/7/2023



Plate 3. 29: Gazelle



Date: 25/7/2023

Plate 3. 30: Blangidi as two wrapper

Photo Credit: Dakoru Abam

Date: 25/7/2023



Plate 3. 31: Blangidi as two wrappers and head tie

Photo Credit: Dakoru Abam

Date: 25/7/2023



Plate 3. 32; Blangidi as a blouse, two wrappers, and head tie

Photo Credit: Dakoru Abam

Date: 25/7/2023



Plate 3. 33: Blangidi as two wrappers and blouse

Photo Credit: Dakoru Abam

Date: 25/7/2023



Title: *Abaibhar*

Medium: Ink on A4 Paper

Courtesy: Studio work by Woko, Opudo V.

Year: 2023. *Plate 3. 34: Sketch 1b*



Title: *Eganga*
 Medium: Ink on A4 Paper
 Courtesy: Studio work by Woko, Opudo V.
 Year: 2023
Plate 3. 35: Sketch 1b



Title: *Onyi Olala*
 Medium: Ink on A4 Paper
 Courtesy: Studio work by Woko, Opudo V.
 Year: 2023
Plate 3. 36: Sketch 1b



Title: *Etaria*
 Medium: Ink on A4 Paper
 Courtesy: Studio work by Woko, Opudo V.
 Year: 2023
Plate 3. 37: Sketch 1b



Title: *Chiefba*
 Medium: Ink on A4 Paper
 Courtesy: Studio work by Woko, Opudo V.
 Year: 2023 (*Plate 3. 38: Sketch 1b*)



Title: *Ibebh Atoza*
 Medium: Ink on A4 Paper
 Courtesy: Studio work by Woko, Opudo V.
 Year: 2023 (*Plate 3. 39: Sketch 1b*)



Title: *Ibiere*
 Medium: Ink on A4 Paper
 Courtesy: Studio work by Woko, Opudo V.
 Year: 2023 (*Plate 3. 40: Sketch 1b*)



Title: *Ibiere* Medium: Ink on A4 Paper
Courtesy: Studio work by Woko, Opudo V.
Year: 2023
Plate 3.41: Sketch 1b



Plate 3.42: The Sewing Process

Chapter
10

INTERPRETING *BLANGIDI* FOR THE BABY GIRL DRESS MODEL IN *KALABARI* KINGDOM: PRESENTATION OF RESULTS FROM DATA ANALYSIS

This chapter presents a detailed discussion of the result of the use of *blangidi* fabric for the baby girl. The chapter systematically examines the procedures involved in transforming *blangidi* fabric into creative dresses for baby girls, while providing insights into the cultural richness and artistic significance embedded in this traditional textile. The section also highlights meticulous documentation and a comprehensive review of each step of the creative process, from initial sketches to final production stages. An in-depth analysis of each dress produced in this study is provided with due consideration of the symbolic motifs, colour choices, design intricacies, and fabric combinations. For each design, the cultural and creative process embodied by the *blangidi* fabric is duly represented. The subsequent section of the chapter undertakes a thorough analysis of the interviews conducted to identify various emergent themes from the research process. This serves an essential role in examining meaningful patterns, and highlighting insights and trends from the investigations.

Results and Analysis

Work Analysis

This chapter analyses and appreciates the various projects executed. The appreciation considers the aesthetic qualities concerning the arrangement of the various elements employed, in connection with settlement and structures and discusses the significance of the projects, and their impact on the past, present, and future of textile art.

a. Production Techniques

The production methodologies are systematically categorized into three phases: pattern drafting, compositions, and garment assembling. These phases constitute the fundamental building block of the production process which plays a vital role in shaping the outcome of the dresses made.

Using a strategy based on experimentation, a wide range of techniques were used to achieve the research's goals. This methodological diversity made it possible to thoroughly explore all possible design options. This helped to guarantee that the garment-making process fulfilled the intended criteria. The trial procedure was iterative, which made it easier to identify the best design solutions and improved the production methods used at each stage.

The production journey is initiated with paperwork, involving drafting the dress patterns as a foundation for the subsequent stage of the research. This phase is critical as it serves as a practical blueprint that guides the entire production process. Transitioning from paper works, the next stage involved translating these designs from paper to fabric. This phase involved a seamless integration of design concepts onto fabric surfaces. Finally, these processes culminated in the assemblage of the dresses. This phase marked the transformation from idealised and abstract concepts to tangible wearable garments.

Phase One: Sketches or Drawings of the Designs.

As mentioned earlier, the first step was drawing basic costumes in pencil on paper. These sketches were then enhanced and developed digitally on a computer. Tracing paper (kodatrace), a glass table, and lighting were used to improve the accuracy and efficacy of the drawings or sketches. During the refining phase, computer software was used to smoothly integrate chosen *blangidi* designs into the drawings, which were then coloured. The original *blangidi* motifs were intentionally left in their original form, thus it is important to notice that no changes were made to them. The purpose of this choice was to bring back recollections of the ancient symbols' names, meanings, and symbolism, as well as the distinctive texture of the *blangidi* cloth. In the pursuit of aesthetic enhancement, plain colours were strategically employed to represent materials such as net, organza, and dull face (bridal satin). This addition not only added visual appeal to the works but also served the purpose of highlighting the diverse textures and materials commonly associated with *blangidi* designs. This meticulous process ensured that the final sketches not only captured the essence of the original *blangidi* motifs but also presented them in a visually compelling and culturally resonant manner.

The report included a thorough description of the methodical steps taken to achieve the final motifs needed for fabric manufacture, all of which were meticulously recorded. The methodical processes were documented comprehensively to ensure that the actions taken to achieve the intended themes were effectively communicated. The methods were methodically

outlined and demonstrated the organised methodology used to guarantee the originality of the motifs used for fabric manufacture. The subtleties of the creative process are covered in this documentation, which gives readers a road map for understanding how each stage influenced the evolution of the final themes.

Blangidi Fabric Analysis and Discussion

Blangidi fabric, as used by the *Ijaw* tribes of the Niger Delta, is a vibrant and expressive fabric with both artistic and cultural significance. Its intricate patterns, symbolic motifs, and vibrant colours embody the cultural richness of the riverine communities. The motifs that adorn *blangidi* fabric are not merely for decorative purposes. Rather, they convey deep cultural meanings and historical references that have evolved. Some of the fabrics carry geometric shapes, such as triangles and diamonds. While other motifs are stylized depictions of animals and plants that symbolize harmony with nature. The animal motifs have diverse representations, with the lion-head and elephant-tusk motifs being closely linked to the noble class and royalty. The colours are vibrant and numerous, consistent with other African fabrics. These include bold hues of red, blue, yellow, and green. The *blangidi* fabrics are widely used by the *Ijaw* tribes to make attires for ceremonies and festivals such as weddings, funerals, and other important occasions. It is, thus, symbolic of status, class, and cultural identity. In contemporary times, fabric usage has evolved and has lost the significance that were previously attached to the motifs. For example, the use of lionhead motifs is no longer exclusive to the noble class and royalty.

Phases 3: Constructional Processes of the Dresses

The process of bringing the selected dress designs to life encompassed a series of steps, with each contributing to the elegance and excellence of the final garments. Following the selection of specific designs for the dresses, the constructional processes unfolded as follows: Step 1: Drawings and Sketches of Dresses, Production Patterns and Finished Products. Numerous drawings and sketches were crafted for this study to help achieve the research objectives. The garments were specially designed for female children's party dresses and for this reason; much attention was paid to details. Notably, two of the dresses featured detachable skirts, creating room for creativity and versatile use of the fabrics involved in the design process. Each dress underwent a detailed design process where attention was accorded to great details.

To further depict how the dress designs would look in real life, the drawings of the garments were placed on fashion models. This allows for a

comprehensive assessment of the visual appeal and overall effect the garments will have when finally converted to tangible garments. This also served the crucial purpose of gauging the beauty and grace these designs would exude when adorned by live models. Each dress is given a unique name to ensure effortless identification and foster a sense of individuality. These drawings were standardized and meticulously tailored for specific girl models within the age range of 1 to 7. The selection of this specific age range, as discussed in previous chapters, is driven by a desire to instil a sense of beauty, pride, and self-respect in the younger generation. Similarly, it sought to preserve and celebrate the unique cultural heritage of the *Ijaw* nation, ensuring that these designs would become timeless artefacts soon.

Presented below are not just sketches and patterns, but a testament to a holistic design process – a visual narrative that encapsulates the creative evolution from concept to completion. The sketches, patterns, their corresponding finished products, and their thoughtfully assigned names collectively form a comprehensive exploration of the artistic journey and cultural preservation inherent in this creative endeavor. Project One

Abaibhar Baby Dress - Fashion Plate Analysis



Plate 4.69(A)
Title: *Abaibhar* (Front View)
Medium: Fashion
Artist: Woko Opudo 2023



Plate 4.70(B)
Title: *Abaibhar* (Back View)
Medium: Fashion
Artist: Woko Opudo 2023

Measurement for *Abaibhar* Dress

Shoulder=8 inches
Stomach=20 inches
 $\frac{1}{2}$ length=7 inches
Burst=19 inches
Full length =24 inches

Shoulder to knee=15 inches

Arm hole=9 inches

In examining the Abaibhar baby dress represented in Plate 4.69(A) (Front View) and Plate 4.70(B) (Back View), attention is directed towards the design process and measurements. The dress is crafted for the one-year-old girl child. This section intends to provide insight into the creation of the garment, with a focus on the intentional design choices in the measurements. Beginning with a shoulder width of 8 inches, the goal is to establish a balanced design that ensures both comfort and a visually pleasing silhouette on the baby girl's shoulders. This measurement ensures that the dress sits securely on the baby girl's shoulders, contributing to an overall pleasing silhouette. The deliberate choice of a stomach circumference of 20 inches reflects an understanding of the dynamic movements of a one-year-old, allowing for both freedom of motion and a snug fit.

The dress's 7-inch half-length shows that care was taken to fit the particular requirements and body type of a one-year-old. This is done to emphasise the balance between functionality and aesthetics in making the dress. This dimension addresses practicality and also serves as a stylistic consideration, harmonizing form and function. With a bust size of 19 inches, the design prioritises upper body comfort while adhering to the dress's overall aesthetic objective. Measuring 24 inches in length, 15 inches from shoulder to knee, and 9 inches for the armhole, each measurement represents a deliberate choice made throughout the design phase. The dress's entire length gives it a touch of elegance, and its shoulder-to-knee length guarantees overall proportion. The large armhole size emphasises freedom of mobility, recognising a one-year-old's busy and playful lifestyle.

In essence, the Abaibhar baby dress represents a thoughtful and meticulous design process. Each measurement is carefully selected and executed to fulfill more than just aesthetic functions, but also to maintain functionality. The dress typically emphasises that intentionality in design can result in the creation of aesthetically pleasing dresses which also accommodate the natural movements of the baby girl with grace and comfort.

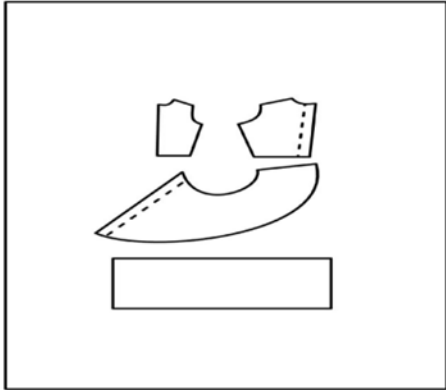


Plate 4.: Patterns for *Abaibhar*
Source: Field Survey: (Woko Opudo, 2023)

Project Two - *Eganaga* Baby Dress



Plate 4. 69(A)



Plate 4. 70(B)

Title: *Eganaga* (Front View)
Medium: Fashion
Artist: Woko Opudo 2023

Title: *Eganga* (Back View)
Medium: Fashion
Artist: Woko Opudo 2023

Measurement for *Eganga* Dress

Shoulder=8.5

Stomach=21

Half-length $1/2=8$

Burst=21.5

Full length =28

Shoulder to knee=18

Arm hole=11

Commencing with a shoulder width of 8.5 inches, a subtle increase from the one-year-old dress, the design aims for a better balance of comfort and grandeur. This measurement thus sets the stage for the grandeur of the ensemble. The stomach circumference of 21 inches maintains a secure fit while providing room for the increased mobility expected in a two-year-old. The dimensions from a full length of 28 inches to shoulder-to-knee at 18 inches is a deliberate brushstroke. The 11-inch armhole measurement, while emphasizing unrestricted movement, also accommodates the elegant hat, ensuring it complements the overall design. However, the introduction of a flamboyant hat as an accessory introduces a delicate dimension to the dress ensemble. The stylish head cover takes a focal point and adds a touch of exuberance to the dress. The dress's train also adds elegance to the dress while still maintaining practicality. It is not overly long (10 inches) as it is designed to prominently complement the dark-green coloured *blangidi* fabric with its purple hue. This length ensures that the train gracefully trails behind the two-year-old wearer with a sense of sophistication without hindering movement.

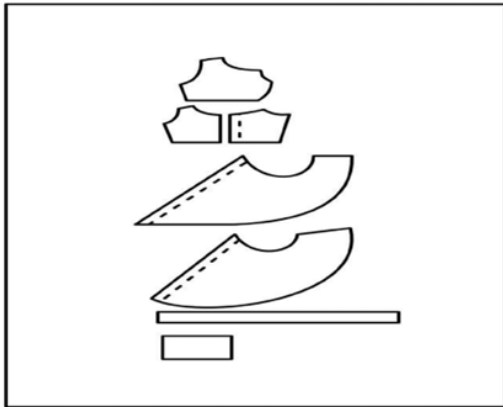


Plate 4.: Patterns for *Eganga*
Source: Field Survey: (Woko Opudo, 2023)

Project Three



Plate 4. 69(A)
Title: *Onyi olala* (Front View)
Medium: Fashion
Artist: Woko Opudo 2023

Plate 4.70(B)
Title: *Onyi olala* (Back View)
Medium: Fashion
Artist: Woko Opudo 2023

Measurements *Onyi Olala* Dress

Shoulder=10
Stomach=23
Half length1/2=8
Burst=22
Full length =36
Shoulder to knee=24
Arm hole=10.5

The measurements for the *Onyi Olala* baby dress embody a thoughtful design catering to a three-year-old. The 10 cm Shoulder Width indicates a fitted silhouette, emphasizing the tailored nature of the dress. The 23 cm Stomach measurement ensures a comfortable midsection fit, with adequate freedom for ease of movement. With a 16 cm hip circumference, the dress reflects traditional Nigerian styles to ensure a slim and graceful fit through the hips. The 22 cm Bust Circumference offers a slightly spacious chest area, prioritizing comfort, and easy movement. The Front Length of 36 cm elegantly falls at knee-length, contributing to a modest and refined aesthetic. The 24 cm shoulder-to-knee length confirms the knee-length design, providing coverage. A 10.5 cm armhole circumference suggests short and puffed sleeves, enhancing the dress with traditional Nigerian aesthetics. The combination of the small armhole circumference and the missing arm length measurement strongly suggests the presence of short and puffed sleeves. These puffed sleeves at one arm only add volume and visual appeal to the dress. This is particularly chosen to enhance its playful and vibrant aesthetic. The 8 cm neck circumference ensures a comfortable fit without constriction,

while the 19 cm waist circumference creates a defined waistline, contributing to the overall elegance and simplicity. The dress's knee-length design balances modesty and grace; this is practical for young children.

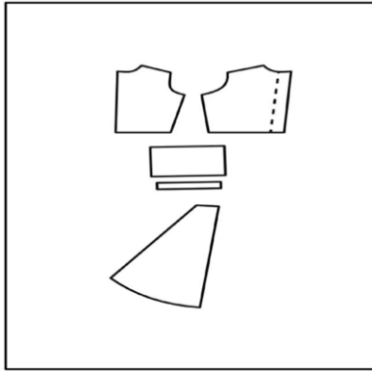


Plate 4.: Patterns for *Onyi Olala*
Source: Field Survey: (Woko Opudo, 2023)

Project Four - *Etiria* Dress



Plate 4. 69(A)
Title: *Etiria* (Front View)
Medium: Fashion
Artist: Woko Opudo 2023

Plate 4.70(B)
Title: The *Etiria* (Back View)
Medium: Fashion
Artist: Woko Opudo 2023

Measurements for *Etaria* Dress

Shoulder = 11

Stomach = 23.5

Half-length = 9

Burst = 24

Full length = 38
Shoulder to knee = 27
Arm hole = 12
Neck = 4

The dress is designed for a 4-year-old model following the above measurements. The measurements indicate careful attention was paid to crafting the piece for the baby girl. The narrow shoulder width (11 inches) compared to the larger hip and bust circumferences (24 cm and 23.5 cm, respectively) suggests a fitted silhouette across the shoulders and torso. This maintains the focus of the research's focus on elegance and practicality. Hence, the stomach circumference measurement (23.5 inches) allows for a comfortable fit in addition to the fluffy designs made from the stomach to the below-the-knee level. The front length (38 inches) and the shoulder-to-knee length (27 inches) indicate a knee-length dress, offering both modesty and ease of movement for the girl-child model. The relatively small armhole circumference (12 inches) complements the armless design of the dress.

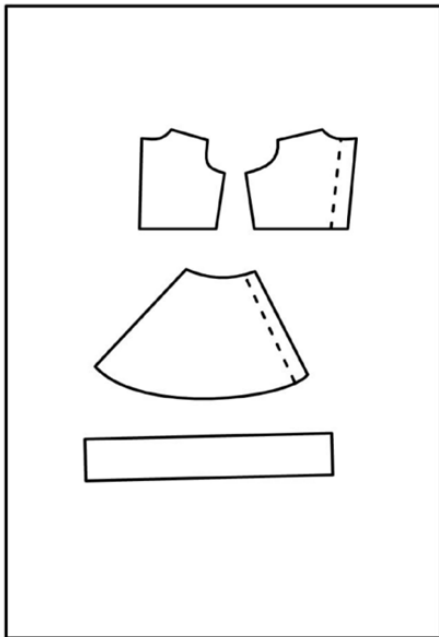


Plate 4.: Patterns for *Etiria*
Source: Field Survey: (Woko Opudo, 2023)

Project Five – *Chiefba* Dress



Plate 4. 69(A)
Title: *Chiefba* Front View)
Medium: Fashion
Artist: Woko Opudo 2023

Plate 4.70(B)
Title: *Chiefba* (Back View)
Medium: Fashion
Artist: Woko Opudo 2023

Measurements for *Chiefba* Dress

Shoulder=12
Stomach=23.5
Half-length=9 Burst=22
Shoulder to knee=29
Arm hole=12
Full length=47
Step up=24
Hip=26



Plate 4. 69(A)

Plate 4.70(B)

Title: *Chieftba* (Front& attachment)

Medium: Fashion

Artist: Woko Opudo 2023

Title: *Chieftba* (Back & attachment)

Medium: Fashion

Artist: Woko Opudo 2023

The study's *Chieftba* dress, showcased in Plate 4.69(A) (Front View) and Plate 4.70(B) (Back View) above, is uniquely crafted for a five-year-old girl model. The dress's measurement includes a Shoulder Width of 12 inches. With a Stomach Circumference of 23.5 inches, it provides a comfortable, secure fit and freehold on the model's frame. Just as in other dresses, consideration is given to the active nature of the girl child model.

The Half-Length measurement of 9 inches ensures that a well-fitted upper portion is achieved to balance the model's silhouette. The Bust Circumference of 22 inches prioritizes upper body comfort and showcases a consistent consideration of comfort. A Shoulder-to-Knee measurement of 29 inches ensures proportionality in the overall design, providing both coverage and freedom of movement. The consistent Arm Hole Circumference of 12 inches accommodates natural movement, contributing to the beauty of the off-shoulder gown.

The Full Length extends to 47 inches, adding grace and elegance suitable for older age groups and providing an adequate framework for the attachment of the dress's train behind the dress. The Step-Up measurement of 24 inches introduces a stylistic element that showcases creativity. Also, the Hip Circumference at 26 inches creates a well-defined silhouette, reflecting traditional Nigerian dress styles while ensuring comfort for the five-year-old wearer. The *Chieftba* dress displays a dedication to skill and aesthetism. It is a fancy dress with a special meaning for young girls and their culture.

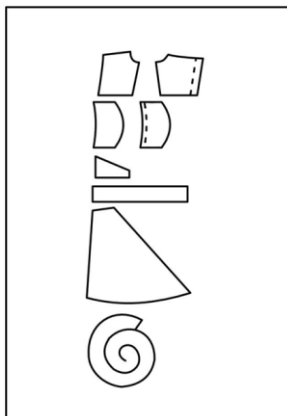


Plate 4.: Patterns for *Chieftba*

Source: Field Survey: (Woko Opudo, 2023)

Project Six



Plate 4. 69(A)

Plate 4.70(B)

Title: *Ibebh Atoza* (Back View)

Medium: Fashion

Artist: Woko Opudo 2023

Title: The *Ibebh Atoza* (Front View)

Medium: Fashion

Artist: Woko Opudo 2023

Measurements for *Ibebh Atoza* Dress

Shoulder=13

Stomach=23.5

Half-length=9

Burst=24.5

Full length=38

Shoulder to knee=27

Arm hole=12.5

The *Ibebh Atoza* baby dress, portrayed in Plate 4.69(A) (Front View) and Plate 4.70(B) (Back View), is crafted for a six-year-old female model. The dress's meticulous measurements include a Shoulder Width of 13 inches with a Stomach Circumference of 23.5 inches. These allow for easy movement and comfort of the model.

The Half-Length measurement at 9 inches which features the *blangidi* fabric with the antelope motive complements the fluffy attachment. The well-fitted upper portion ensures a balanced silhouette that provides adequate space for the child as she continues to grow. The extended Full Length of 38 inches adds non-traditional elements to the *blangidi* fabric, thereby making a progressive design choice. Proportionality of the entire design is maintained through the Shoulder-to-Knee measurement of 27 inches, providing adequate cover for the girl child and ease of movement. In essence, the *Ibebh Atoza* baby dress exemplifies the researcher's artistry in seamlessly blending form and function, traditional and contemporary.

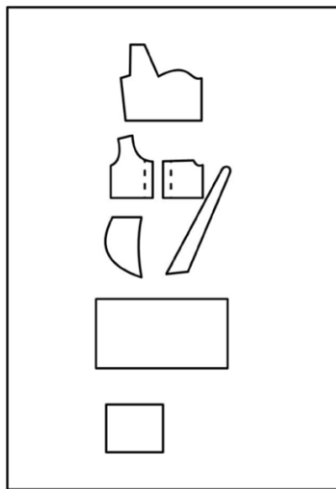


Plate 4.: Patterns for *Ibebh Atoza*
Source: Field Survey: (Woko Opudo, 2023)

Project Seven



Plate 4. 69(A)

Plate 4. 70(B)

Title: *Ibiere* (Front View)
Medium: Fashion
Artist: Woko Opudo 2023

Title: *Ibiere* (Front View)
Medium: Fashion
Artist: Woko Opudo 2023



Plate 4. 69(A)

Plate 4.70(B)

Title: *Ibiere* (Back View)

Medium: Fashion

Artist: Woko Opudo 2023

Title: *Ibiere* (Front View)

Medium: Fashion

Artist: Woko Opudo 2023

Measurements for *Ibiere* Dress

Shoulder=14

Stomach=26

Half lenght=10.5

Burst=26

Full lenght=45

Shoulder to knee=30 Arm hole=13

Full length=46

Step up=24.5

Hip=27

The *Ibiere* baby dress, captured in Plate 4.69(A) (Front View) and Plate 4.70(B) (Back View), is expertly tailored for a seven-year-old model. Below are the exact measurements taken to execute the project, with due consideration to the elegance and comfort of the model. At a Shoulder Width of 14 inches and a stomach circumference of 26 inches, the dress accommodates the broader proportions of the growing child for a balanced fit. This creates ease of movement and a secure fit for the baby girl model.

The Half-Length measurement of 10.5 inches contributes to a well-fitted upper portion, maintaining a balanced silhouette as the child continues to grow. The Bust Circumference of 26 inches reflects Opudo's consideration for upper body comfort. The extended Full Length of 45 inches which introduces extra material that matches the *blangidi* fabric, adds grace and

elegance suitable to the dress ensemble. Thus, the Shoulder-to-Knee measurement of 30 inches ensures proportionality in the overall design, providing a robust and versatile party gown for the wearer. The Step Up measurement at 24.5 inches contributes to the dress's unique design, as well as the Hip Circumference at 27 inches which creates a well-defined silhouette.

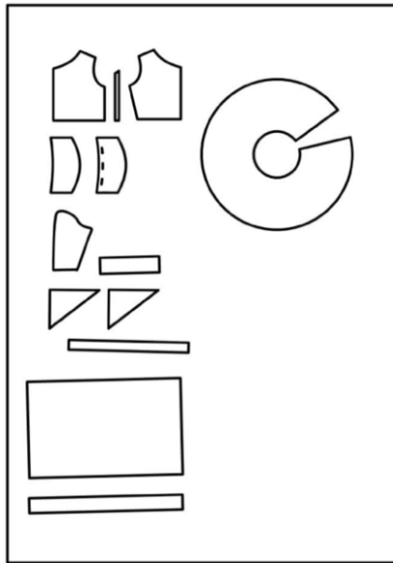


Plate 4.: Patterns for *Ibiere*

Source: Field Survey: (Woko Opudo, 2023)

Step 2: Pattern Preparations

Patterns were created according to the sketches and sizes selected. Patterns are templates used for cutting garment components of garment styles from fabrics. There are different methods of making patterns for garment construction. Some of the methods include pattern drafting (flat pattern making), pattern draping, and knockoff. Pattern drafting method was chosen for the study. For this reason, basic patterns were first made before constructing the final or working patterns. Pattern instructions were introduced to the pattern pieces as cutting and sewing indicators.

Tools and materials like pencils, pins, brown papers, scissors, tape measure, rules, curves, and a tracing wheel were employed during pattern preparation. A sample dress was designed to check the pattern's reliability and validity, before cutting the actual garment. Several sketches were used for the final production. The working designs include *Abaibhar* (Plate 4.) *Eganga* (Plate 4.), *Onyi olala* (Plate 4.), *Etiria* (Plate 4.), *Chiefba* (Plate 4.), *Ibebh*

Atoza (Plate 4.) and *Ibiere* (Plate 4.). As indicated earlier, the dresses were produced in size for baby girl models of ages 1 to 7. However, the patterns were prepared according to the ages.

Step 3: Lay Planning and Cutting

Lay planning involves the spreading of fabric(s) on the cutting table before cutting. It ensured proper fabric management skills so patterns were drafted on paper are properly arranged on the fabrics before cutting. Considering that patterns laid wrongly would likely be cut and assembled. In this exercise, the fabrics for construction were arranged or spread in a manner that all animal motifs were faced upward or according to the arrangement of the motifs and how they were to appear on the dresses. Cutting shears were used to cut the garment parts into replicas or pattern pieces.

Step 4: Preparation for Sewing or Assembling

After cutting, the garment components were sorted according to sizes. Fusing of the pieces with woven interfacing was done to strengthen the fabric for better sewing processes, for some of the dresses horse tail also known as crinoline was used to achieve a firm and wavy effect. Pattern details and instructions were later transferred onto the garment components to aid accuracy in the assemblage.

Step 5: The Actual Sewing Processes

This section looks into the actual joining of the various components of the dresses. In the making of a garment especially at the joining stage, there are two major technologies concerning sewing of the pieces or replicas. The joining can be either carried out in a round or flat method style. The only difference between these two methods is that, in the flat sewing style, the seam of the sleeve and that of the main bodice are sewn together with a single stitching line. These stitches start from the hem of the sleeve passing through the underarm until reaching the hem of the bodice. Looking at the round method, both the sleeves and the bodice are separately prepared before they are joined together. Any of the methods does well in tailoring baby garments depending on which method the designer is more comfortable with. This study used the flat method for putting the garment components together where necessary although most of the dresses were sleeveless. An open seam was used throughout the construction.

All the stitches, darts, and style lines were pressed neatly with a steam iron. The facings were prepared and joined to the lining before they were attached to the fashion fabric. For perfect hang, the lining was tacked firmly to the fashion fabric. This also facilitated smooth lying. The next point of call after

working on the front bodice was to prepare the back bodice. In dress-making, more attention is given to the front section than the back. The front and back sections of the bodice were joined together at this stage by starting from the side seams before the skirts were sewn and attached.

Bodice Pattern

The bodice pattern requires folding the fabric into two considering fabric management and tracing the neckline, shoulder, bust, stomach, and shoulder to half length, armhole, and sleeve using a tailor's chalk and having the baby's measurement as reference. This practice goes up the sides and draws a line between the two sides with a ruler, for the back add ½ inch to leave room for the zipper and cut both the *blangidi* and lining.

Sleeve

The researcher cuts two sleeves on the fold. For the accent fabric, she cuts 7 long and 1.5 wide, and detachable sleeves were made for about two of the dresses to add drama.

Skirt

The researcher cuts full flare of 360 degrees and some 720 degrees depending on how full the flare is intended to be. It is imperative to note that a tailored dress is judged by the neatness of the seams, placement of the motifs, and the entire finishing.

Step 6: Finishing and Packaging

Garment finishing is the concluding treatment a designer gives to a dress at the end of the constructional activities, which includes cutting off hanging threads, the loosening of temporary stitches, wiping off chalk marks, ironing of the dresses and packaging as the final operation of the constructional process.

Analysis of the Dresses

The analysis of the dresses is based specifically on the individual garment specifications. The parameters used to analyse the garment include the motifs, use of colour, design, fabric combination, and style.

Project 1

***Abaibhar* (Plate 4.)**

Abaibhar means what a beauty in the *Ogbia* language

The *Abaibhar* dress is captivating in vibrant red, which epitomizes the essence of beauty and elegance. Its name, "*Abaibhar*," meaning "what a beauty" in the *Ogbia* language, perfectly captures the captivating charm of

this garment. Designed as a party attire for young girls, the Abaibhar dress exudes a regal aura. Drawing inspiration from the *Isi-Agu* motif, a symbol of royalty and prestige in the Niger Delta region and among the Igbos, the dress epitomises beauty. The bold red hue, symbolic of passion and strength, complements the backdrop for the *Isi-Agu* pattern, creating a visual symphony that commands attention. Despite its royal associations, the *Abaibhar* dress retains a sense of simplicity and grace, making it an ideal choice for children's parties. The dress gently hugs the wearer's form, cascading down in graceful folds that accentuate youthful exuberance. The uncluttered design, with its harmonious interplay of colours, allows the wearer's natural beauty to shine through.

Project 2

***Eganga* (Plate 4.)**

Eganga means pride in Ikwerre language

The *Eganga* dress showcases a blend of traditional artistry and contemporary elegance, with the *blangidi* fabric playing a central role in its exquisite design. The *blangidi*'s dark green colour serves as a suitable backdrop for a splash of geometric shapes, each with diverse hues. The geometric patterns blend culture and contemporary African symbolisms on the dress, connecting the wearer to their heritage. The *Eganga* dress is accentuated by its elegant hat, which complements the dress's colour palette. The dress's train is blended with a purple hue which sweeps the floor behind the model. The pieces are appropriate for special occasions, dinner nights, and parties.

Project 3

***Onyi olala* (Plate 4.)**

Onyi olala means child of the wealthy in *Ogbia* language

The *Onyi olala*, a captivating creation in hues of cream and yellow, exudes grace and simplicity. This garment, designed as a party dress for young girls, seamlessly blends elegance and comfort, ensuring the wearer feels as radiant as she looks. The cream-coloured *blangidi* fabric serves as a canvas for a captivating lion-head motif, a symbol of strength and royalty. The interplay of colours between the *blangidi* background and the lion-head motif creates a visually appealing contrast, capturing attention with understated elegance. A distinguishing design element of the *Onyi olala* is the split by the side in a yellowish hue. This split adds a touch of whimsy and movement to the dress, allowing the girl child to move freely and comfortably. The yellowish hue of the split complements the cream-coloured *blangidi* background.

Project 4

***Etiria* (Plate 4.)**

Etiria means love in the *Ogbia* language

The *Etiria* dress, a cascade of floral style, showcases sophistication and elegance. Designed as a party dress for young girls, the *Etiria* dress embodies youthful charm and sophistication. The dress's short and fluffy silhouette creates a playful and whimsical aura. The harmonious nature of the various layers in the garment creates a visually captivating dress that catches the eye. The *Etiria* dress's design seamlessly blends traditional *Ijaw* motifs with contemporary fashion trends. This fusion of tradition and modernity makes the *Etiria* dress a timeless piece that will outlive trends.

Project 5

***Chiefba* (Plate 4.)**

Chiefba means the chief's daughter in the *Kalabari* language

The *Chiefba* dress, a captivating creation in hues of rich *blangidi* fabric, exudes an aura of refined elegance and adaptable versatility. Its name, "*Chiefba*," meaning "the chief's daughter" in the *Kalabari* language, aptly captures the essence of this exquisite garment, designed to embody the grace and poise of a young lady.

The *Chiefba* dress seamlessly transitions between two distinct styles, this is useful as it caters to a range of occasions and preferences. In its first form, the dress stands as a straight, offshoulder gown with a timeless elegance. The off-shoulder neckline adds sophistication, while the straight silhouette exudes a sense of simplicity and grace. This style is suitable for children due to its uncluttered design and ease of movement. When adorned with the detachable train, which makes the second style the dress can take, the *Chiefba* dress transforms into an embodiment of grace. The train adds a touch of royal splendour, making the dress ideal for formal events or special occasions. The *Chiefba* dress is thus, versatile and seamlessly conveys the creativity of blending contemporary African elements with nonAfrican styles. The dress's modern design elements, such as the off-shoulder neckline and detachable train, can be said to demonstrate the adaptability of traditional *Ijaw* culture to contemporary fashion trends.

Project 6

***Ibebh Atoewoza* (Plate 4.)**

Ibebh atoewoza means beautiful leaves in *Ogbia* language

The *Ibebh atoewoza* is an elegant dress in hues of blue and peach. Designed as a party dress for young girls, the *Ibebh atoewoza* dress seamlessly blends traditional artistry with contemporary fashion elements. The dress's blue

blangidi fabric, adorned with antelope motifs, points to the cultural appeal of the dress. The dress's overall design and colour palette reflect contemporary fashion style which helps the study's aim of interpreting the use of *blangidi* for the girl child. To enhance the dress's *wearability* and comfort, the *blangidi* fabric is strategically blended with plain peach material, and stitched in floral layers. The peach colour complements the blue *blangidi* background, creating a cohesion that further enhances the dress's elegance.

Project 7

Ibiere (Plate 4.)

Ibiere means beautiful woman in the *Kalabari language*

The *Ibiere* dress is a captivating dress created with versatility in mind. It can be styled in four distinct styles to cater to a diverse range of occasions and personal preferences. In its first form, the dress stands as a straight gown that is adorned with delicate lace accents on one arm. This style is indicative of a timeless elegance that makes it suitable for multiple events and ceremonies. The second style transforms the dress into a glamorous work of art, with a standing hood that gracefully drapes around the neck of the model. This regal style adds grandeur to the dress. The third style lowers the standing hood and creates a delicate illusion of wings on the shoulder. Finally, the fourth style transforms the dress into a flowing cape around the waist, flowing down to the floor. This epitomises royalty and sophistication, making it perfect for grand ceremonies and receptions. These four styles of *fiber* style can be further combined differently to yield more styles. This dress graciously puts *blangidi* fabrics in the class of international fashion exhibits for glamorous dresses for the girl child. The dress's modern design elements demonstrate the adaptability of traditional *Ijaw* creativity to contemporary fashion trends.

INTERPRETING *BLANGIDI* FOR THE BABY GIRL DRESS MODEL IN *KALABARI* KINGDOM: DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The study used a structured interview. The interview aimed to collect relevant data on the cultural, artistic, and practical aspects of using *Blangidi* fabric among the *Ijaw* communities. This endeavour is to enhance the tradition-consciousness of the studio-based research that was subsequently conducted. The interviewees included a diverse group of participants: *blangidi* fabric traders, elderly natives of various *Ijaw* communities, custodians of culture, fashion designers, and consumers/customers. These people helped to provide perspectives on market trends, social and cultural implications of using *blangidi* in making dresses for the baby girl, traditional ceremonies and fabric evolution over time, as well as the relevance of motifs and symbolisms used in making the *blangidi* fabrics.

The interview covered a vast array of topics, including the historical and cultural significance of *Blangidi*, its relevance in traditional *ceremonies*, and its application in contemporary fashion contexts, particularly as regards the acceptability of a re-interpretation of the *blangidi* fabric in making dresses for the girl child. The interviewees' diverse backgrounds contribute to a holistic exploration of the *blangidi* fabric within the *Ijaw* community. *Blangidi* fabric dealers provide insightful information about the market dynamics, economics, and modern uses of the fabric. Elderly *Ijaw* community members contribute historical and cultural richness and offer insights into *Blangidi* customs and celebrations. To further our awareness of the cultural value of *Blangidi*, custodians of culture are selected based on their proficiency with its symbols and themes. The interview settings were familiar to the participants, which encouraged candid discussions and guaranteed the gathering of real, contextually rich data.

Theme One: Cultural Significance of *Blangidi* Fabric

The respondents reveal that the use of *blangidi* fabrics has become an essential part of the *Ijaw* culture. Although some respondents acknowledge

that the fabric is relatively new to the Niger Delta region and had been introduced by pre-colonial Western traders, others argue that the use of *blangidi* can be traced to time immemorial. However, most respondents seem to agree on the evolving nature of fabric usage over time. From this perspective, a custodian of culture noted that "*Blangidi* used to be purely ceremonial. Now, it is part of daily life. Any and everybody has access to buy it in the market provided they have the means." Some respondents affirm that the use of the *Isi-Agu* fabrics among the Igbo communities is a practice borrowed from the *Ijaw* communities. Another respondent who is a trader affirms that the Igbo adoption of *Isi-Agu* as a symbol of royalty has made certain *blangidi* fabrics in high demand, and subsequently, more expensive.

As the researcher sought further insights into the ceremonial uses of *blangidi* fabric within the *Ijaw* communities, respondents revealed that the use of *blangidi* has evolved to form an essential part of the community's social life. An elder remarked, "*Blangidi* is present in every celebration—births, weddings, and funerals. Together with other fabrics that we use in our communities, it showcases our identity. Wearing it is an honour to our ancestors."

Theme Two: Economic Impact of *Blangidi* Fabric

For some of the traders who dealt with the *blangidi* fabrics, the proceeds they make from the sales constitute their means of livelihood. In discussing the economic aspects of trading *blangidi* fabrics within the local market, one trader emphasized, "*Blangidi* is more than a fabric; it's our livelihood. When questioned further, the respondents reveal that *blangidi*, among other fabrics in the region, serves critical economic functions through the production and sales of these fabrics. An elder articulates it thus; "*Blangidi* is part of our culture. In the process of preserving our culture, our culture is also preserving us the traders. This is how many of us are surviving now." This underscores the pivotal role *blangidi* fabrics play in the economic sustenance and sustainability of the *Ijaw* communities.

Other traders note that over the years, there has been a notable change in market trends and customer demands. "The market has evolved; customers now look for specific patterns, and we adapt to meet those demands." This change is being promoted through the rise of *blangidi* fabrics such as *Isi-Agu* fabrics in popular culture across the nation.

Theme Three: Developmental Impact of *Blangidi* Fabric on Children

In exploring the impact of *blangidi* fabric on the visual development of children, a respondent notes, "Babies are drawn to the colours and patterns.

It's like a visual playground for them. Maybe it's more than just clothing; it could be shaping their thinking." All respondents welcomed the proposed re-interpretation of the *blangidi* fabric for the baby girl. In addressing the contemporary, non-traditional touch that would be given to the dresses the researcher intends to make, the interviewees expressed positive feedback. A particular respondent opines that since the use of *blangidi* was initially an adopted dress culture, there is no point insisting on the traditional practices. To her, culture is progressive and should not be dammed. Additionally, thoughts on how the *blangidi* fabric contributes to cultural education for the younger generation were shared. A custodian expressed, "Children learn through what they see. *Blangidi* teaches them about our roots." All respondents agree that adopting the use of *blangidi* in making dresses for the baby girl provides a ready avenue to inculcate the *Ijaw* heritage and culture to the next generations.

Interpretation of Findings

This section examines the study's findings in light of the research questions before exploring the interpretation of the findings. The aim is to extract significant knowledge from the information gathered and discuss the wider implications of the research findings. A practical understanding of how *Blangidi* fabric has been combined in this study with elements of modern fashion styles provides an opportunity for an in-depth analysis of each outfit project.

To help solve these research problems, the chapter discusses the implication of the research findings based on the stated objectives of the study;

- i. Explore the uses of *blangidi* fabrics among the *Kalabari* tribe in the Niger Delta region.
- ii. Demonstrate the suitability of *blangidi* fabric for crafting dresses for baby girls.
- iii. Investigate the social and economic implications of using *blangidi* fabrics for children in the Niger Delta region.

Significance of the *Blangidi* Fabric among the *Kalabari* and other Tribes of the Niger Delta

Blangidi fabric holds profound cultural, social, economic, and ceremonial significance for the *Kalabari* people and other tribes of the Niger Delta region of Nigeria (Michelman, 1992). While being a relatively recent introduction to the *Kalabari* culture (Eggan et al., 1982; Daly, 1986), *blangidi* has seamlessly been incorporated to become a symbol of identity, heritage, and tradition by which the *Kalabari* people, and the *Ijaw* nation at large, can be identified (Lynch & Michelman, 1998). This study has identified the various

significance this fabric holds among the people in the context of their cultural and socio-economic practices.

The interview conducted for this research reveals the critical significance of the *blangidi* fabrics in the region, as well as the various use of these fabrics. According to the findings, *blangidi* fabric plays a significant role in contributing to the local economy, as a lot of traders deal in its production, trade, and distribution within the outside the region. This serves as a source of income, livelihood, and entrepreneurial opportunities for the few who take advantage. This way, the production and sale of *blangidi* fabrics contribute to the local economy, preserving traditional weaving techniques and empowering women within the community. Similar studies have identified the impact of fabric trading, dressmaking, printing, and weaving on the economy of communities in Nigeria (Akinbogun & Ogunduyile, 2009; Bawa, 2021; Onwuakpa, 2016; Saheed, 2013).

Socially, the *blangidi* fabric is widely used for its ceremonial significance. The fabric is widely used both by celebrants and attendees of ceremonies in the region. This has created a strong link between the use of *blangidi* and the culture of the Niger Delta region. However, it is essential to note that other fabrics are worn by the *Kalabari* people for ceremonies. These include *India*, *loko*, *krukrubite*, *gom*, and *accra*. (Michelman & Eicher, 1995). The authors identify the *India* fabric as the most prestigious fabric worn by the *Kalabaris*. However, there has been a recent rise in the patronage of *blangidi* fabrics in the region as people are consistently seeking new ways to express cultural heritage (as noted by Debeli & Zhou, 2013). As such, *blangidi* has become a common sight at weddings, funerals, and festivals. *Blangidi* fabric adds vibrancy to festivals and celebrations in the Niger Delta region.

Additionally, fabrics have been used, in the context of Africa, to symbolise social status, class, and royalty (Johnson et al., 2014; Hendrickson, 1995; Turner, 2012). This has been utilised to add grandeur to important ceremonies. The ceremonial implication of *blangidi* fabric in the context of this research is observed in how often the fabric is been chosen by the locals for various ceremonies and festivals. *Blangidi* fabrics can be said to have provided the natives of various tribes in the Niger Delta a means to showcase their communal identities and uniqueness among other tribes in Nigeria.

Furthermore, the research findings illustrate how the various types of *blangidi* fabrics, based on motifs used on the fabric or innate quality of the fabric, take on different functions and roles among the *Kalabari* people. This is consistent with research in the field of contemporary African fashion which

reveals that clothing can be used to highlight distinction in class or other socio-economic status (Debeli et al., 2013). The interview highlights the prime consequence of motif-based distinctions in *blangidi* fabrics.

One unique feature that differentiates the *blangidi* fabrics from other fabrics known among the *Kalabari* people is the significance of motifs in the fabric (Ajiginni, 2019). Although other special wrappers and African prints used in the Niger Delta region contain various designs and, sometimes, motifs, the use of motifs in *blangidi* is reckoned to have more significance. For example, the *Isi-Agu blangidi* fabric, the lion head, is symbolic of royalty and nobility (Ajiginni, 2019; Madukasi, 2018). Other fabrics such as *India*, *loko*, and *accra* are distinguished mostly by the nature and quality of the material, not by the motif used. Additionally, the quality of *Blangidi* fabric can also influence its ceremonial significance. This price difference is often marked by the difference in the material used and the difference in the price of the fabrics in the market. Higher-quality *Blangidi* fabrics are often reserved for more honourable occasions or worn by individuals of higher socioeconomic status, while low-quality fabrics are reserved for less prestigious events or worn by people at the bottom of the social ladder.

These findings highlight the fact that the *blangidi* fabric transcends singular function, rather it impacts cultural artefacts and distinguishes status, and class, hence, seeking to preserve the unique identity of the tribe. The motifs' historical references underline the fabric's role in social stratification and differentiation. The shift in contemporary reality has revealed the destratification of all types of languid fabrics, as individuals can purchase. The preservation and appreciation of *Blangidi* fabrics and their essential motifs have been used over the years by the upcoming generations. Given this, this research suggests that these fashion elements contained in the *blangidi* fabrics are beyond acts of mere fashion. Rather, they are instrumental elements introduced by the society in the past to protect and represent the peculiarity of the *Kalabari* cultural heritage. Furthermore, the study attempts to export this traditional export to a worldwide stage by incorporating *blangidi* materials with dress designing skills that are worthy of international fashion exhibits, with their unique fabric type, intricate patterns, vibrant colours, and symbolic motifs.

The above implies that the *blangidi* fabric plays a pivotal role in portraying and reinforcing the heritage of the people. This exploration of the *blangidi* fabrics also implies that creativity is not limited to conventional styles adopted within the region. Rather, *blangidi* is first a fashionable and artistic choice, then is a valuable link to the traditional practices that link the baby

girl to her roots in the *Kalabari* society. The researcher's choice of creatively adapting *blangidi* fabrics in international styling is suitable for a dinner dress. Through this means, the author can instil a sense of cultural pride among the young *Kalabari* girls. Doing so will also establish a lasting connection between the future and the present, preserving the richness of the *Kalabari* cultural practices.

Demonstration of the Suitability of *Blangidi* Fabric for Crafting Dresses for Baby Girls.

Blangidi fabric has a soft feel and gentle texture on the skin, making it an ideal choice for delicate baby skin (Ajiginni, 2019; Adeoti, 2023). The fabric is also characteristically breathable, ensuring the comfort of the child, and preventing excessive heat. All these are crucial for maintaining the well-being of the baby girl in making dresses. These factors enhance the suitability of the *blangidi* fabric in crafting dresses for the baby girl. These factors that enhance the suitability of the dress are corroborated by findings in textile science and infant development research.

Scholarly research has emphasised the significance of certain fabric characteristics in dressing for children, prioritizing factors such as comfort, breathability, and softness of skin (Aparna & Adanan, 2021; Skodova et al., 2020). This is required to minimise irritation of the tender skin of the children. Moreover, the emphasis on the well-being of the baby girl in selecting fabrics for the baby girl aligns with scholarly discussions on children's clothing and the impact of textiles on their health and comfort. Scholars have stressed the necessity for dressmakers to focus on skin sensitivity and regulation of the child's temperature. The highlevel suitability of the *blangidi* fabrics is thus consistent with scholarly findings on the suitability properties of textiles for children's clothing.

***Blangidi* Fabric's Versatility and Adaptability:** The study reveals the characteristics of the *blangidi* fabrics which make it suitable for making clothing for children. In addition, the studio-based designs created in the course of the study reveal the versatility and adaptability of the *blangidi* fabric to a broad range of art form, including western-style gowns for the baby girl. *Blangidi* fabric can be tailored into a variety of dress styles, from simple A-line dresses to more elaborate designs with ruffles, or embellishments. The versatility of the fabric allows for easy customisation to cater to individual preferences and numerous occasions. As such, the fabric has been demonstrated to show a high level of adaptability to a broad range of dress types.

Moreover, the study demonstrates that dresses made with traditional African fabrics can take on multiple functions in one. This is demonstrated by some of the dresses made in the course of this research which could be worn in two or more styles. These designs not only underscore the fabric's adaptability but also showcase its suitability in enhancing artistic expressions and seamlessly incorporating multiple options for baby girls. This illustrates that the *blangidi* fabric is not confined to the traditional styles which are most conventionally used by dressmakers in Nigeria. This versatility component of the *blangidi* fabric exemplifies the fabric's ability to transcend cultural boundaries and adapt to evolving fashion trends around the world. This characteristic positions *Blangidi* as a versatile material capable of catering to the needs of the global audience. Moreover, considering that the *blangidi* fabric was originally a Western input into Nigeria which became largely favoured by the riverine tribes of the Niger Delta region, it is justified to create a broad range of dress styles that cater to both local and Western audiences.

In addition, the dresses illustrate *blangidi* fabric's versatility to extend beyond aesthetics to incorporate practical considerations in dress-making for the girl child. The customizability of the dress aligns with individual preferences and personalised stylings for various occasions. This adaptability is crucial in the context of children's clothing, where the multiple styles can conveniently meet the varied preferences of both parents and young girls. The adaptability of the fabric is also demonstrated by its enduring popularity in the face of other foreign textile importations over the years. The fabric remains a top choice that has been embraced by the *Ijaw* people while overlaying a unique cultural expression, demonstrating an immense ability to preserve their heritage even through external interferences.

***Blangidi* Fabric's Vibrant Colours and Style:** The vibrant colours of *blangidi* fabrics and the colourful motifs used on each fabric contribute to the charm and elegance of the dresses. These constitute another justification for its suitability in making dresses for children, especially the girl child. These beautifully designed motifs can help stimulate the visual development of the baby. This is in agreement with evidence in the literature which indicates that the visual development of children, unlike the experiences of adults, does not occur with clear and stable objects, rather, it is characterised by fragmented objects that move in unpredictable ways. Johnson (2010) observes that children learn through association, active assembly, and visual-manual explorations. The use of the *blangidi* fabric can be adopted to enhance the child's development due to the colourful motifs and patterns on the *blangidi* fabric. This can be demonstrated in different ways:

High-Contrast Patterns: Infants are highly attracted to high-contrast patterns, and the vivid and bold colours, designs, motifs, and patterns of the *blangidi* fabrics provide a rich visual environment for children's eyes. Scholars agree that infants demonstrate a strong preference for high-contrast patterns, and this is often attributed to the developing visual system's ability to better detect and process high-contrast stimuli. Also, it has been noted that high-contrast patterns effectively capture children's attention, thus resulting in increased engagement. The bold colours and vivid patterns on various types of *blangidi* fabrics constitute high-contrast stimuli that are inherently attractive to children. It is therefore, this study's submission that the vibrant hues and sharp contrasts of these fabrics provide a rich visual context for children's physical and psychological development, as much as they contribute to the development of their experience of the *Kalabari* culture. High-contrast stimuli play a significant role in early visual learning, and the bold designs of *blangidi* fabrics offer a unique and culturally enriching way to support this crucial developmental process.

Furthermore, as infants' visual development system matures, they begin to recognise patterns and shapes. The patterns and motifs on the *blangidi* fabrics are potentially relevant elements that can be adapted to enhance the development of the child. This aids the child's visual tracking and visual discrimination as they interact with the elements of languid fabrics. The movement of objects within a visual field is also important for infant development. The vibrant colours and patterns on *blangidi* fabrics can engage an infant's attention, thereby enhancing psychological socialisation. Additionally, children, particularly those less than two years old, develop visual memory skills by observing and remembering patterns and colours. The repetitive elements in *blangidi* fabric designs can aid in this process, and engrain the cultural values and aesthetics in the child as she goes through childhood.

The Social and Economic Implications of Using *Blangidi* Fabrics for Children in the Niger Delta Region.

The findings from this study reveal a complex interplay between cultural, social, and economic factors regarding the use of the *blangidi* fabrics among the *Kalabari* people. It has been established in earlier segments of this research that this complex interplay extends beyond and cannot be confined to the aesthetical components only (Roach-Higgins, 1995). Culturally, the significance of *Blangidi* fabric is deeply woven into the fabric of cultural festivals and ceremonies. Several researchers have demonstrated the use of *blangidi* fabrics for various forms of cultural events in the Niger Delta and South-Eastern states of Nigeria. Traditional institutions have, over time,

adopted various classes of these fabrics as traditional attires for coronations and enthronement rituals (Madukasi, 2018; Akuejezi, 2021). This has been extensively adopted by Igbo cultures. The use of feni fabric, as it is called by the eastern *Ijaw* tribes, in children's clothing becomes a symbolic act, connecting the younger generation with age-old traditions and customs. This cultural linkage is vital for the preservation of the rich heritage, as it provides a tangible connection between past, present, and future.

In terms of economic development, the study demonstrates the impact of the local textile industry's sustainability through the trading of *Blangidi* fabric. The continued use of this traditional material for children's clothing contributes to the economic vitality of local artisans and traders who specialize in the production of *Blangidi* fabric even in the face of the high cost of production considering the deplorable state of Nigeria's textile manufacturing companies. This economic sustenance is crucial for the overall welfare of the community and the country at large as it supports livelihoods. It is to this effect that Akuejezi (2021) highlights that the textile industry's development is crucial for the economic development of the textile industry in Nigeria. In addition, crafting the *blangidi* dresses has enormously contributed to the preservation of the old skills and crafts of dressmaking, and fabric printing. This enhances the creation of job opportunities for the teeming population of Nigerian youths.

Moreover, the economic implications extend beyond the immediate production phase. The study suggests that the market demand for children's clothing made from *Blangidi* fabric can create a sustainable income source for local artisans. This can foster economic development of the region, as well as promote economic resilience of the region. Since the discovery of oil in the Niger Delta region, the natives of the region have been subjected to enormous economic hardship owing to the destruction of the natural resources – land and water (Obi, 2012). This has brought economic hardship to a large population of the natives who depended on farming and fishing as a means of livelihood (Albert & Amaratunga, 2018; Ipingbemi, 2009). This study, therefore, highlights the need for the development of the textile industry in the region as a more sustainable source of income for the locals. This can be used to promote promoting self-reliance and entrepreneurship within the local community.

In highlighting the social dynamics, the utilisation of *Blangidi* fabric for children's attire carries implications for social cohesion and communal identity among the *Ijaw* tribes. Children adorned in *Blangidi* garments become embodiments of cultural pride, representing a shared heritage that

binds communities together. Its symbolism, therefore, fosters a sense of unity shared identity, and a collective consciousness. *Blangidi* fabrics, thus, provide a visual means through which children can express their cultural identity and instill a sense of cultural pride in the baby girl from an early age. Moreover, the use of *Blangidi* fabrics for children ensures the intergenerational transmission of cultural heritage. As the baby girl grows up experiencing the significance of *Blangidi* fabrics through the processes of socialisation from birth, they begin to internalise the cultural values and traditions embedded within these garments, ensuring the continuity of *Ijaw* cultural identity.

In addition to the intergenerational transmission of culture, *blangidi* fabrics effectively serve the purpose of international communication of the *Ijaw* culture to the rest of the world. The fabric is an apt testament to the influence of local cultures in the development of fabrics. Having been imported through European trading activities in relatively recent times, the fabric has been adopted by the *Kalabari* and other *Ijaw* sub-ethnic groups (Ajiginni, 2019).

The adoption of *Blangidi* fabrics by the *Ijaw* sub-ethnic groups demonstrates the profound influence of local cultures on the development of textiles as the fabrics have been significantly transformed in use and significance into an integral part of *Ijaw* cultural identity, reflecting the deeper aspect of their culture – creativity, and craftsmanship, which finds expression despite the materials used.

Unexpected Discovery Made in the Research: In conducting the research, certain unexpected discoveries emerged, to highlight and enhance a deeper understanding of the role the *blangidi* fabric plays in enhancing the crafting of a dress for the baby girl. One such discovery is the potential positive contribution of *blangidi* fabric to enhancing the visual development of children. This discovery amplifies the significance of crafting dresses for the baby girl beyond the functional and basic requirement of covering nakedness or aesthetics. Rather, the bold colours, motifs, and styling of *blangidi* fabrics can serve as useful elements in enhancing the psychological development of the girl child.

Limitations of the Interview

The selection of respondents was restricted to key informants who were available and willing to participate in the research at a particular point in time. Their opinions may not reflect the opinions of the larger natives. In addition, there is the risk of cultural biases since all the respondents are

natives and culture custodians of an *Ijaw* subethnic group. As such, they are more inclined to present positive views of *blangidi* fabrics. Furthermore, the interview was conducted in the natural environment of the interviewees. However, this might introduce a level of social desirability bias, wherein participants may respond in a manner they perceive as socially acceptable.

Chapter
12

INTERPRETING *BLANGIDI* FOR THE BABY GIRL DRESS MODEL IN *KALABARI* KINGDOM: SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATION

Summary:

This chapter constitutes the climax of this study, which explored the topic "Interpreting *Blangidi* for Baby Girl Dress Models." In the preceding sections of this chapter, the discoveries made in the course of this exploration are given an in-depth examination. The chapter culminates the core objective of the study related to the cultural value of the *blangidi* fabric as practised by the *Kalabari* people among other *Ijaw* tribes, to draw compelling insight that will benefit contemporary practices in African fashion and dress culture. The cultural depths of the *Blangidi* fabric, as well as the recommendations for its usage in the making of dresses for the baby girl dress model, are discussed. This intends to create a culture-rich insight that transcends the mere creation of dresses for young girls for aesthetic purposes. Thus, recommendations are also made as regards the infusion of rich African traditional elements in making dresses for the baby girl, thus, creating a linkage between bind tradition and modernity. Furthermore, the essence of *Blangidi* fabrics as well as their dynamic nature is through the suggestions on their artistic, social, and cultural implications.

This study briefly explores the multifaceted nature of traditional *Ijaw* attire, exploring its cultural significance, artistic elements, and contemporary interpretations. This resulted in the creation of seven garments from the study's studio-based research which have been named: *Abaibhar*, *Eganga*, *Onyi olala*, *Etiria*, *Chiefba*, *Ibebh Atoewoza*, and *Ibiere*. These creations can be said to create a bond with the past, present, and future in a versatile design style. While *Eganga* skillfully blends traditional creativity with a contemporary flair through geometric designs, *Abaibhar*, in vivid red, exudes regal majesty. *Onyi olala* embodies subtle beauty with a delicate mix of cream and yellow. *Chiefba*'s two designs are versatile for a variety of settings, while *Etiria*'s flowery cascade embodies both fun and elegance. *Ibebh Atoewoza* skillfully combines peach material with blue *Blangidi*,

balancing old and new. Last but not least, Ibiere's four looks highlight how versatile *Blangidi* is, highlighting both its ageless appeal and cultural relevance.

This has unravelled the rich cultural traditions and their influence on modern fashion elements. The styling and vibrant colour palettes employed in these garments demonstrate the exceptional craftsmanship and artistry of the *Ijaw* people. Moreover, the study has highlighted the adaptability of traditional *Ijaw* designs, as evidenced by their seamless integration into modern fashion trends.

The *blangidi* holds profound cultural significance, embodying cultural identity and fostering a sense of pride among the *Ijaw* people (Michelman & Eicher, 1995; Cyril-Egware, 2016). This *Ijaw* fabric is evolving to adjust to the changing lifestyle and preferences of younger generations, incorporating modern structure and a bold sense of expression.

Significant advances have been made in both the theoretical and practical application of this study. This helps deepen understanding of *Blangidi* fabric as practised by the *Kalabari* people of the Niger Delta region. Additionally, the research offers a thorough examination of the production methods used, including compositions, pattern drawing, and clothing assembly. The production of seven different outfits highlights *Blangidi*'s flexibility in a range of styles and events in modern baby girl fashion. The research is positioned as a significant resource for researchers, designers, and fans interested in the cultural and artistic components of traditional textiles.

Through the use of the *Blangidi* fabric, the preservation of the *Ijaw* cultural legacy can be guaranteed. It spreads the cultural legacy to the next generations by emphasising baby girl dresses, which encourages a feeling of pride and identity. In textile art and fashion, the study's detailed analysis and documentation of the production process, motifs, and designs. These offer valuable resources for designers seeking inspiration to re-interpret traditional fabrics. The versatility showcased in the seven dresses not only highlights *Blangidi*'s adaptability but also opens avenues for integrating traditional fabrics into contemporary fashion, bridging the gap between heritage and modernity. Additionally, the research provides a foundation for future explorations in textile studies, encouraging further investigations into the interlink between cultural fabrics and modern fashion.

Conclusion

The study's conclusion highlights the most important discoveries and

provides an overview of the investigation into the complex world of *Blangidi* fabric. The main goal of this study was to determine the distinctive features and commonalities of *Blangidi* usage among various ethnic populations. In addition, this study looked at the possible social, cultural, and economic ramifications of using these attributes in the design of costumes for young girls. The research demonstrably showcased *Blangidi*'s remarkable adaptability, seamlessly integrating with various design styles, particularly evident in its successful adaptation to western-inspired party gowns for young girls. This adaptability, coupled with its enduring cultural relevance, solidifies *Blangidi*'s position as a resilient fabric that bridges the gap between tradition and contemporary fashion.

Beyond the practical findings, this research has been a journey of continuous learning and personal reflection. It has highlighted the pivotal role of *Blangidi* fabric as a gateway to broader cultural dialogue, sparking discussions on the potential for blending traditional symbolism with contemporary fashion design expertise. These insights offer a deeper understanding of the intricate relationship between tradition and contemporary life, enriching the perspectives of scholars, artists, and policymakers alike. Furthermore, the research underscores the crucial need to protect and celebrate traditional textile practices. By recognizing their irreplaceable contribution to cultural heritage, we can ensure their continued existence and empower future generations to appreciate and embrace their cultural roots.

The research expenditure has unveiled the beauty and significance of *Blangidi* fabric particularly as it relates to making dresses for the baby girl. Its unique symbolism, remarkable adaptability, and continual cultural relevance provide promising opportunities for contemporary fashion design in Africa. In the same vein, it emphasises the importance of safeguarding and celebrating traditional textile practices and symbolisms while attempting to gain international acclaim. Further research can harness the potential of *Blangidi* to pave the way for a future where traditional and contemporary industry practices seamlessly intertwine. This will achieve the twin goal of fostering an appreciation of cultural practices and improving artistic innovations in African cultural practices.

While this research has illuminated the potential of *Blangidi* fabric in contemporary fashion, the journey is far from complete. To truly unlock the full potential of African fabrics in the contemporary scene of fashion design and ensure its long-term sustainability, a collaborative approach is crucial. This involves fostering partnerships between researchers, designers,

artisans, and fabric traders to create a fertile ground for innovation, cultural exchange, and ethical practices.

Another crucial approach to achieving widespread acclaim for Africa-theme fabrics is fostering support and empowering artisan communities. This can be achieved through fair trade initiatives, skills development programs, and cultural exchange opportunities. This creates a strong hub at the local level to serve as a point of convergence for the international communities to come to explore the nature of African fabrics, especially among the Niger Delta tribes of Nigeria. This will also ensure that artisans and designers are adequately compensated and that their knowledge and skills are valued and preserved.

Furthermore, research and development efforts should be dedicated to exploring the sustainable production and use of *Blangidi* fabric. This includes investigating eco-friendly dyeing techniques, utilizing natural fibres, and minimizing waste throughout the production process. By embracing sustainable practices, we can ensure that *Blangidi's* beauty and cultural significance continue to thrive in harmony with environmental responsibility.

Recommendations

Researchers should conduct cross-cultural comparative research with diverse ethnic groups to investigate variances and commonalities in traditional fabric use and design preferences. To gain a deeper understanding of traditional fabrics such as the *blangidi*, future research should venture beyond the confines of a single culture and fabric. The recommended crosscultural comparative research would typically involve diverse ethnic groups. This will provide a valuable tool to investigate variability and commonalities in their fabric usage, design choices, and cultural symbolism as practised by the various ethnic groups.

This approach can potentially uncover shared themes across cultures while highlighting and appreciating the uniqueness of each ethnic group. Additionally, this kind of study can help highlight the evolution of cultural practices and symbolism as traditional practices evolve and adapt to modern times.

- I. Longitudinal Studies are necessary to monitor changes in cultural practices across time to capture the changing character of traditional textiles and garment designs. Further research that intends to study similar subject matter could explore this approach in other to achieve a continuous observation rather than just a snapshot in time. There is, therefore, a need for further studies to undertake an in-depth

exploration of how cultural practices and preferences have experienced significant shifts over time. This will provide rich insight into the evolving nature of tradition. Among others, longitudinal changes reveal the impact of globalization, technological advancement, and socio-economic changes on the dress culture of communities in Nigeria. Adopting longitudinal studies can capture these influences and assess their long-term impact as cultures develop over time. Moreover, longitudinal studies help preserve elements of culture that may have been forgotten or lost value over time.

- ii. This knowledge from previous years can provide insight into the natives and dressmakers who incorporate cultural elements in their designs. This would provide adequate context for re-interpreting the use of traditional fabrics for the baby girl or other members of the communities at large. Drawing inspiration from how the dress culture has evolved, researchers can adequately reimagine the use of traditional fabrics to represent the traditional value attached to the fabric.
- iii. Future research should expand its scope beyond the current focus on baby girls to explore the diverse applications and cultural significance of traditional textiles in apparel design across age groups and genders.

To fully comprehend how these fabrics are woven into the fabric of many cultures, a more detailed approach is required. Including people of all ages and genders in the investigation will yield important new information on how traditional fabrics are incorporated into clothes choices at various phases of life. This comprehensive investigation enhances our understanding of the cultural customs connected to these fabrics and sheds light on the changing roles and representations across various demographic groups.

Scholars should investigate how these fabrics speak to individuals of all ages and genders, exploring the complex ways in which clothing choices convey cultural importance. This more comprehensive viewpoint makes it possible to recognise possible differences in weaving styles, design choices, and symbolic meanings amongst different demographic groups. This could involve examining the symbolism and cultural meanings associated with traditional textiles for various age groups, from infants and children to adolescents, adults, and even the elderly. This can also be used to explore the distinct ways in which traditional textiles are used to express gender identity and social roles for boys, girls, men, and women across different cultures.

Further studies are necessary to explore the psychosocial impact of traditional fabrics on children. Engaging child psychologists in research endeavours will allow for an in-depth analysis of the emotional and cognitive effects that traditional fabrics may have on children. Hence, collaboration with specialists from domains such as child psychology, health sciences, and sociology to ensure holistic investigation is necessary.

Research projects with child psychologists will enable a thorough examination of the potential emotional and cognitive impacts that traditional textiles may have on kids. This partnership can provide insight into how these textiles support a child's identity, self-worth, and general well-being development. Involving specialists in the health sciences can also yield insights into possible physiological effects, guaranteeing a thorough comprehension of the overall health consequences.

Additionally, sociological viewpoints—which take into account cultural norms, family relationships, and community practices—can shed light on the larger social impacts on children's interactions with traditional textiles. Working together with experts guarantees that the research explores the complex relationships between traditional textiles and several facets of a child's psychological development, going beyond a cursory analysis.

Contributions to Knowledge

Theoretical Contribution to Knowledge

The literature review section of this research examined relevant theoretical models that were selected for their suitability in examining the subject matter of the research. These models included the Appropriation Theory and Kant's Aesthetics Theory.

Appropriation theory notably opposes the notion that cultural elements are strictly tied to their original cultures and that they cannot be used by others (Olsthoorn, 2022). Scholars who utilise this theory argue that cultural elements can be reinterpreted and used in new ways to create new and meaningful forms of expression and/or in a different context (Olivecrona, 1975; Suh et al., 2016). This theoretical model forms the basis for this research on the reinterpretation of *blangidi* in making party dresses for baby girls. The basic principles associated with the theory are given due consideration in executing this research.

Appropriation emphasises the importance of understanding the initial context within which the cultural practice that is to be appropriated is based. In essence, this involves the researcher being aware of the context in which

cultural elements are appropriated, and ensuring that they are not used in a way that is contemptuous or a way that disregards the original art form. This research contributes to the appropriation theory through an in-depth examination of the cultural context of the study. This work advances past research that has examined the *Kalabari* cultures over the years (Michelman, 1992; Eicher, 1992; Eicher & Erokisoma, 2017; Eicher & Roach, 1992).

However, the study also acknowledges that neither the *Kalabari* nor any other *Ijaw* community in the Niger Delta region lay claim to the origin of the fabric. As such, it is needful to acknowledge that the examination of the *Kalabari* cultural context does not necessarily represent the farthest known origin of the *blangidi* fabric. It has been noted earlier in the study that the *Ijaw* use of the *blangidi* fabric (including many other fabrics used in the region) is, in itself, appropriation. This limitation to the application of the appropriation is well noted by the researcher, however, it does not affect the outcome of the research considering that the aim of examining the *Kalabari* cultural interpretation of the use of *blangidi* fabric and the application to making dresses for the baby girl is achieved. This challenges the assumption by appropriation theorists who insist on the study of the original context of the culture that is being re-interpreted. This research, hereby demonstrates that numerous cultural elements, as demonstrated by the *blangidi* fabrics, have been subjected to numerous informal appropriation processes.

In addition, the theoretical model encourages critical examination of how cultural elements are appropriated, as well as examining the potential consequences of these appropriations. This research, in implementing the appropriation theory, ensures that the purpose of appropriation is well-defined and, the aim of the researcher is pure. The appropriation is thus attempted based on academic research motives with no ulterior motives of generating wealth from the outcome of the study. This study sets the pace for other researchers who intend to conduct similar studies in the future to explore the riverine tribes.

Also, the use of appropriation theory in this research was careful to ensure that wherever appropriation is used in the context of power imbalance, care is taken to ensure there is no marginalisation of the *Ijaw* tribe or reinforcement of stereotypes. To address these concerns, the research employs several strategies to ensure that the use of *blangidi* fabric is respectful, authentic, and contributes to the empowerment of the *Ijaw* community:

The researcher focused on cultural exchange through participant observation to immerse the researcher in the cultural values and beliefs of the *Kalabari* culture. This fosters mutual respect and prevents misappropriation. Effort was made to enhance the rich cultural heritage of the *Ijaw* people, rather than highlighting the superficial or stereotypical aspects of the culture. This ensures that the art so created is not commodified to promote the exoticisation of any culture. The research on designing dresses for baby girls using *blangidi* fabric aligns with and expands upon Immanuel Kant's Aesthetic Theory in several ways.

Kant's theory highlights the significance of disinterested pleasure in aesthetic judgment, implying that aesthetic experiences are not motivated by personal interest or usefulness (Zeldin & Crawford, 1975). The study on designing baby girl dresses using *blangidi* fabrics gives solid evidence in favour of Kant's argument. The elaborate patterns, brilliant colours, cultural iconography, and styling applied to each of the dresses made in the course of the study elicit feelings of pleasure and adoration unrelated to its functional use. Individuals are drawn to the fabric's beauty as a way of admiring the beautiful craftsmanship involved in making it. The researcher observes that the emotions of individuals who come into contact with *blangidi* fabrics demonstrated unaligned fascination and joy at the creativity and depth of culture. Moreover, the study demonstrates that the visual appeal of dresses transcends geographical and cultural barriers. Even if they are unaware of the fabric's cultural context, people from all walks of life may enjoy its beauty. The fabric's beauty does not lie in its specific function but in its ability to stimulate the senses and evoke a sense of wonder and appreciation. This implies that, as Kant argued, there is a universal aspect to aesthetic judgment that permits individuals to perceive beauty independently of their own background or cultural experiences.

According to Kant's theory of aesthetics, aesthetic things have a distinct sort of purpose that separates them from those having solely practical functions (Bird, 2006). This purposefulness is not related to fulfilling a function or a tangible requirement; rather, expresses a sense of meaning that appeals to the observer's aesthetic senses. The study of the *blangidi* fabric gives convincing data to support this claim. The visual elements woven into the fabric give the fabric a feeling of purpose that goes beyond its practical function as a textile. This rich symbolism gives it a higher significance and purpose that goes beyond its basic use.

However, findings from this research differ from Kant's theory's focus on the formal properties of objects in aesthetic judgment (Guyer, 1975). The

research on *blangidi* fabric suggests that cultural context plays a significant role in aesthetic appreciation, as the fabric's meaning and symbolism are deeply rooted in the *Ijaw* cultural interpretation of the woollen flannel, they named *blangidi* (or *feni*). The fabric, motifs, and brilliant colours of *blangidi* cloth are more than just decorative components; they also have great cultural meaning and symbolism in the *Ijaw* culture. This cultural background has a significant impact on the aesthetic evaluation of *blangidi* cloth.

Individuals from the *Ijaw* culture who are familiar with the cultural significance and symbols contained in the fabric and motif will get a greater sense of aesthetics when they come in contact with the fabrics. They can relate the visual aspects to their cultural values. On the other hand, individuals unfamiliar with the cultural context of the *blangidi* fabric may still appreciate its visual appeal, but their aesthetic experience may not be as profound or meaningful. They may admire the fabric's overall look, yet will be unable to grasp the cultural significance and symbolism beneath the symbols.

Practical Implications

The research extends beyond theoretical considerations and offers practical applications that can positively impact cultural preservation, economic empowerment, and sustainable fashion practices. This section, thus, explores the implications of the research, highlighting how the findings can be translated into actionable plans in practice.

Relevance to the Practices of Making Dresses for the Baby Girl

When making dresses for the girl child, is it essential to take into consideration the developmental needs and comfort of the infant. This study embodies this consideration in making dresses for the girl child model between the ages of 1 and 7. Simple, non-restrictive designs with loose fittings allow for unrestricted movement of the infant, enabling them to move freely and play as infants should. In making party dresses for the baby girl using *blangidi*, it is, thus, essential to ensure that due consideration is given to this essential function over aesthetic considerations.

Several scholars and specialists in making dresses for the girl child recommend that the fabric used in baby girl dresses should be soft, gentle to the touch, and breathable to ensure their comfort (Ajao & Akinwale, 2020; Aparna & Adanan, 2021; Skodova et al., 2020). *Blangidi* fabric, known for its softness and breathability, is an ideal choice for infant garments, minimizing the risk of irritation or allergic reactions. The use of *blangidi* has been, hitherto, restricted to traditional purposes. However, the findings of this

research reveal that the fabric should be favoured by local dressmakers and fashion designers to craft dresses that are suitable for the baby girl. In addition, the fabric has been demonstrated to provide comfort for the child, preventing overheating and overall safety for the young models. This forms another critical implication of this study relevant to crafting dresses for the baby girl – the need to design fabrics with an intentional focus on ensuring the safety of the children.

Another critical implication that can be drawn from the study is the need for designers of dresses for baby girls to incorporate the sensory development of the girl child in the dressmaking process. This study has revealed that dresses are capable of not only instilling a sense of identity in the child but also influencing their visual development. As such, fashion designers and dressmakers should maximise the use of colours, patterns, motifs, and textures to stimulate babies' developing senses of sight, touch, and even hearing.

Cultural Sensitivity in Dress Making

When incorporating *blangidi* fabric into baby girl dresses, this study highlights the need to prioritise cultural sensitivity and respect. This entails understanding the cultural significance of the fabric, observing closely the practice of the local *Ijaw* communities, and ensuring that the garments are designed and produced in a way that does not disregard the *Ijaw* traditions and values. Hence, designers should strive to create designs that are inspired by *Ijaw* culture, not exploitative or disrespectful.

This research holds significance for fostering cross-cultural appreciation. The reinterpretation of the rich heritage of the *Ijaw* tribes through the *blangidi* fabric in an art form that resonates with a wide range of international audiences. This is bound to trigger dialogue about the region's unique traditions and the significance of cross-cultural representation across the globe. This paves a path for designers and dressmakers to re-imagine the styles and patterns of other cultures across the globe, and create unique means of representing them using *blangidi*, among other fabrics used by the *Ijaw* tribes.

Educational and Research Impact

Furthermore, this research has significant implications for the practices of education and research. Evidence has been provided for the use of fashion in providing insight into the culture and traditions of a people. For the dressmakers and designers, this implies that the outcome of their practice are outright means of providing cultural education about the *Ijaw* traditions.

Designers, hence play a critical role in exposing the baby girl to their cultures through the dresses they make.

In essence, this study establishes the interconnectedness of cultural heritage, fashion design, and aesthetic appreciation. It informs appropriation theory in fashion by exploring the rudiments of cultural appropriation and the ethical considerations involved in using traditional textiles in contemporary design. This promotes cultural sensitivity in research by emphasizing community engagement, collaboration with local artisans, and respect for cultural traditions.

Reflection on the Research Process

The journey of investigating the cultural significance of *Blangidi* fabric as well as its applicability in making dresses for the baby girl has been both enlightening and challenging. Reflecting on the various stages in this research into the intricate relationship between the textile industry and cultural symbolism reveals valuable insights, one of which is the complex interplay between cultural practices and cultural evolution over time.

The initial phase of the research involved defining the specific scope and objectives the study will adopt. The decision to focus on the *Blangidi* fabric stemmed from an inadequacy of scholarly efforts to independently study the use of the fabric despite its widespread usage among the riverine people and its fascinating historical richness. At first, streamlining the study and defining the specific scope within which it is to be bound poses a great challenge. It became evident, at the early stage of the research, that the narrowness of the research process would prove inadequate to capture the full aspect of its cultural applications. However, adopting a broad approach and extending the scope of the study would exceed the reasonable boundary of this study. This is due to the consideration that the focus of the study remains to glean from the traditional dress culture of the people and use this to re-imagine dressmaking for the girl child. This realization prompted a refinement of the research questions and objectives to suit a limited scope of study. It has been acknowledged in a previous section that the results of the study highlight the need for a comparative study to unravel the unique and similar practices of various ethnic groups who use the *blangidi* fabric, as well as the application of a similar technique to studying the usage of the *blangidi* fabric for the boy child.

The research design and methodology were meticulously developed to provide a robust framework for exploring this culturally sensitive subject matter. Numerous methodologies were carefully considered for inclusion,

presenting the researcher with a significant challenge, particularly in deciding whether to adopt a qualitative or quantitative approach. The determination of the study's focus stemmed from the recognition that it was primarily studio-based, with fieldwork selected to enrich the research by providing cultural and traditional context for the studio design. This decision-making process aimed to ensure the robustness of the research design while balancing the need for both methodological depth and cultural insight. Collaborating with specialists in dressmaking, culture custodians, elderly people, and other persons involved in the trading and making of *blangidi* fabrics became imperative to ensure a deeper and wider understanding. The interview sessions which ensued subsequently, provided the needed direction for this study. This process underscored the importance of widespread consultation in understanding the cultural significance embedded in traditional textiles.

The data collection stage began with the interview conduction to explore the social and traditional context for re-imaging dressmaking for the baby girl using *blangidi* fabric. This began the journey of exploring communal practices and cultural symbolism as obtained from the typical *Ijaw* communities where the use of *blangidi* is deeply woven into the daily life of the people. Engaging with individuals from across generations and professions provided a rich perspective to the study. The challenges of language barriers and different cultural contexts required a delicate and respectful approach given that the riverine tribes of the Niger Delta region are very diverse. Communicating the various *Ijaw* dialects and subethnic groups proved difficult. Interpreters were used where necessary, to communicate with the elderly, traders without formal education, or various culture custodians consulted. Given the number of ethnic groups and dialects involved in this study, the need to respect the cultural integrity of the communities involved was paramount. Obtaining informed consent from some elderly ones was difficult as it was difficult for some to understand the purpose of the study. As such, the researcher ensured that the process was followed diligently to preserve the anonymity and privacy of interviewees. Highlighting the ethical responsibilities inherent in cultural research. The dynamics of power and representation within the research process were critically examined, emphasizing the need for reciprocity and mutual benefit.

The analysis phase marked the emergence of various themes on identity, tradition, and culture adaptation over time. This is typically associated with qualitative data. This process raised a need to revisit the field to obtain further clarification and validation of collected results. Time management

became a mounting problem. The study's immersive format and unanticipated logistical problems necessitated frequent adjustments to the research schedule. This emphasised how crucial it is to be adaptable and resilient when faced with unforeseen obstacles.

This research process has been transformative on a personal and academic level. It has deepened my appreciation for the complexities of cultural research and highlighted the reciprocal relationship between the researcher and the *research*. As the threads of *Blangidi* fabrics unravelled, so did my understanding of the relationship between tradition and modernity. This journey has not only contributed to the academic discourse but has instilled a profound respect for the cultural richness woven into the fabric of our global tapestry.

Throughout this study, my skill in designing and making dresses for the girl child has experienced substantial development. This journey has not only enhanced my technical skills but has also revealed a deep-seated passion for advocating for the girl child. This study, therefore, provided me with an opportunity to seamlessly integrate academic research tools with my design capabilities. I have, thus, discovered an avenue to channel this passion into tangible empowerment and advocacy efforts for the well-being and advancement of the girl child. I intend to leverage the newfound synergy to initiate concrete empowerment for girls in my community. This will begin by creating dresses that reflect cultural values and foster a sense of identity and pride. With this, I will contribute to the positive self-perception and confidence of young girls. In addition, I intend to use the results of these findings, particularly as related to the matriarchal nature of the pre-colonial *Ijaw* tribe, to advocate empowerment and gender equality among the natives.

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Appendix

Questions Relating to Study Statement of Problem

Problem One: There is a major decline in the demand and use of the original *blangidi*

From your experience of the trends in demand and use of the original *Blangidi*, what can you say of the product?

- i. Do you think there is a major decline in the rate at which *Blangidi* is demanded and used? If so please state;
- ii. What do you think are the major causes of the decline in the demand and use of *Blangidi*?
- iii. What do you think should be done to improve demand and use of *Blangidi*?

Problem Two: There is a down play on the *blangidi* material as such they now come in several other fabrics such as polyester, and velvet.

Lending credence to the previous demand and quality of the original *blangidi* material relative to other clothing materials in the industry, do you think the *blangidi* material has been down played necessitating it now coming in form of other fabrics?

- i. Do you agree that the down play of the *blangidi* material has caused it to be coming in the form of polyester and velvet? Please justify your opinion
- ii. What do you think can be attributed to the cause of the *blangidi* materials being down played?
- iii. What other varieties can the *blangidi* materials come in form of? Please state your opinion

Problem Three: It has become challenging to differentiate between fake and original *blangidi*

It is evident that the fake versions of the *blangidi* materials are prevalent in the marketplace, as an experienced person, are you finding it difficult to differentiate between original and fake *blangidi*?

- i. Are you finding it challenging to identify original *blangidi* from the fake ones?
- ii. What are the striking features differentiating original *blangidi* from the fake ones?

- iii. Are the fake *blangidi* s decimating the wide acceptance of the product across the clothing industry?
- iv. What can you suggest to the producers of *blangidi* to do to minimise the rate at which fake balngidi are circulated in the marketplace?

Appendix 'C'

Table of Oral Interviewees

S/N	Name Date	Sex	Age	Status	Place
1.	Arikawei Righteous 13/01/2023	M	-	Professor	Yenagoa
2.	Chimeziem Ejiro 03/05/2023	F	39	Designer	Port-Harcourt
3.	Dakoru Abam 08/05/2023	F	42	Barrister	Port-Harcourt
4.	Medline A. Abam 08/05/2023	F	70+	Dealer	Port-Harcourt
5.	Don Mark 14/06/2023	M	40	Designer	Port-Harcourt
6.	Hope Mc-Boyle 19/12/2023	M	50+	Teacher	Port-Harcourt
7.	Christiana Mac-Pepple 19/12/2023	F	32	Indigenous user	Port-Harcourt
8.	Tamunolobo Ibama 19/12/2023	M	45	Indigenous user	Port-Harcourt
9.	Otorudiki Michael 21/12/2023	M	47	Indigenous user	Port-Harcourt
10.	Ibiba Ibiada 23/12/2023	F	55	Seller	Port-Harcourt
11.	Ibitroku Pepple 23/12/2023	F	45	Buyer	Port-Harcourt
12.	Sisi Gold Wokoma 5/1/2024	M	67	Custodian	Port-Harcourt

Appendix “D”
Interview

At the Fabric Market in Port Harcourt for the Interviews on the 25/7/2023



Preparation and Execution

Working with Ejiro Chimeziem at the Mode House on the 27/7/2023

