

Colour Utilization among the Yorubas of Southwest Nigeria: An Empirical Analysis

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ABSTRACT

The paper highlights the adoption of paint to achieve colour decoration among the Yoruba people of Southwest Nigeria with particular emphasis on the city of Lagos. The city is predominantly inhabited by the Yoruba people who also are the natives. All cities, towns and villages within the Southwest are adequately represented within the area. It traces the historical advent of this material in achieving varieties of colour among the people. The use was pronounced in ornamentation at the initial stage before it was adopted on buildings as an extension of cultural value. Appreciation of aesthetic value is high among the people. This lays credence to the practice of the use of varieties of colour on attires and buildings of prominent persons. The method applied involved a survey approach which adopts qualitative and quantitative methods. The paper includes a critical review of existing literature, personal observation and the administration of questionnaires on 180 respondents that were randomly selected across the area. The results from the recovered questionnaires form a database for the quantitative analysis. The result shows that the adoption, choice and use of paint are predicated on a subsisting culture of colour appreciation.

KEYWORDS: Deities, paint, colour, Yoruba, traditional, ornament.

INTRODUCTION

Lagos is a small representation of all the tribes that constitute Nigeria in general and all the units of the Yoruba people in particular. The Yorubas, a West African people have a very rich philosophy of colour which leads to the adoption of paint [1]. The Yorubas are from the Western part of Africa which in modern days is a major part of the entity called Nigeria. The city of Ife which is about 250km north of Lagos is regarded as the origin of the people which have spread throughout the world [2]. The name "Yoruba" is of more recent origin than the concept, and was given a wider use by missionaries only in the 1840s. They are majorly found in Ondo, Oyo, Osun, Ogun, Ekiti, Lagos, Kwara and parts of Kogi States as shown in plate 1

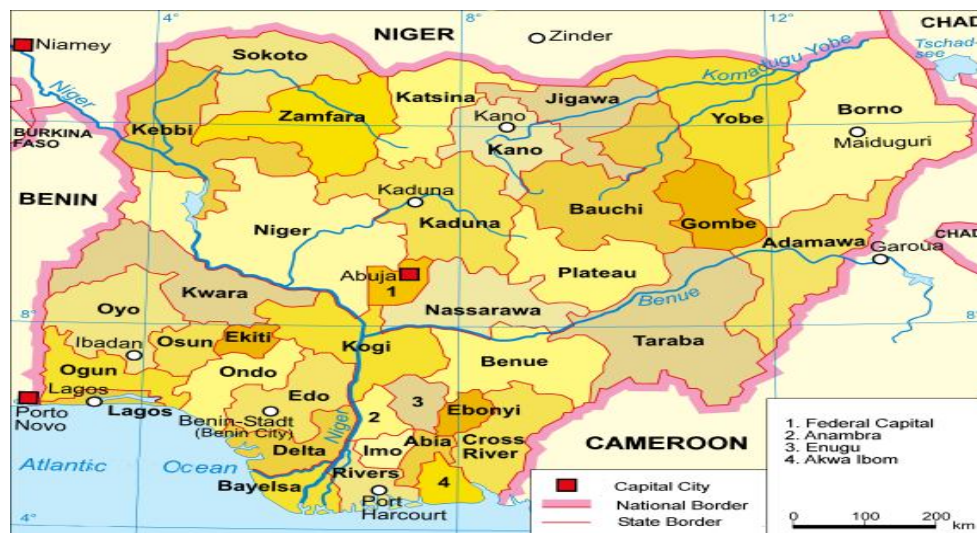


Plate1: Yoruba land covering the State of Lagos, Oyo, Osun, Ekiti, Ondo, part of Kogi and Kwara states. Source: <http://www.google.ng/imgres>, assessed 21st August, 2012

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Oyo was the pre-eminent city-state of the Yorubas between the 16th and 18th centuries, while some others were also growing. The people of the City of Benin speak a closely related language. They also trace the ancestry of the institution of kingship to Ile-Ife. Their religion is a polytheistic religion which means, they worship multiple gods and deities before the advent of Islam and Christianity. Their deities and gods are closely linked with the environment and nature. Some of these gods include for example, a thunder god which is associated with rain and rainy season, and several river goddesses like *Osun*. The use of colour was prominent among the ancient people which were also passed to subsequent generations. Colours were used as symbols for gods and goddesses in representative form for the deities. The colour yellow and gold represent the goddess *Osun* till date [3] The Yoruba people have a lot of rich symbolism they associate with colour. This covers the decoration of important buildings such as king palaces' shrines, cloths, beads and a host of other art works [4]. Because of cultural affinity to colour, it was easy to adopt the use of paint that provides an easy enhancement of the existing culture. However, the interest is in multiple colours and not necessarily paints. This is reflective in beads wearing for occasions, the dress of the people, the houses of important Chiefs and shrines [5].

Plate 2a, b&c show old painting of some carvings which represent some ancestral deities and colourful dress for *Egungun*. The use of colours also goes with ornamentation, traditional dancing, carvings, royalty and their traditional architecture. The use of multiple colours is also embraced in clothing as shown in Plate 2a, b&c and identified by previous researches [6,7,8]. Asakitipi [9] identified ornamentation as a prominent feature among the people as seen in Plates 3a&b below.



Plate2a,b&c: Old carvings. Source: jacarandatribal.blogspot.com, assessed 21 August, 2012



Plate3a & b: Yoruba buildings-early and modern use of colours. Source: Author's field work, 2012



Plate4: Typical Yoruba traditional stool. Source: jacarandatribal.blogspot.com, assessed 21st August, 2012

Plate4 is an example of a Yorubas' use of colour as classical ornament. This is an ancient Yoruba king's throne with the display of colour as a mark for royalty. The complete ornamentation on the chair is a clear way of Yorubas' use, expression and appreciation of colour. All the colours and patterns are symbolic which connotes various meaning for the Yoruba people. There reverence for nature is clearly represented by the inclusion of the various plants and flower decorations with various colours.

Traditional categorisation of colours

The Yoruba chromatic system is traditionally grouped into three chromatic categories. The first group is known as "fun fun." "Fun fun" can also be translated as "white." "Fun fun" represents the categories of colours which include white which connotes peaceful feeling, these category include turquoise, blue, silver, chrome, and other icy colours. The primary influence and purpose of white is seen as a replica of purity. White attires are won by people who are not expected to participate or do evil. Categorization of these groups of colours involves an emotional or psychological dimension. For the Yoruba people, "fun fun" also in psychological terms translates to a kind, cool and homely personality. The gods and goddesses that are described and represented with "fun fun" colours are practically accepted as the 'good ones'. These also include people that can analyse situations and foretell events.

The next group of colour is referred to as "pupa," which can be translated as "red." "Pupa" also encompasses any colour that relates to hot, fiery characteristics, such as orange, dark yellow, gold. The colour of fire is regarded as red which connotes danger and fearful individuals or creatures. "Pupa" has the psychological dimension of a dangerous personality who possesses a trait of wickedness and lacks mercy, someone who is very passionate about evil, which might get angry very easily, does and sees evil as a second nature. It marks some unstable characters. The "pupa" personality is very dangerous and wicked. The associated deities are deities that are involved in carrying out evil with passion. Buildings that are not for the general public are painted with red colour especially shrines. Entrances of such buildings are demarcated to pronounce its reservation. Abiding example of such buildings in Yoruba land are: *Orisapopo* in Ogbomoso, *Obatala* in Ila, *Oya* in Jebba and *Irele* in Ikirun [10].

"Du du" is the last group of colours, and can be translated as "black." "Du du" also includes any colour that is dark with a resemblance of the earth. Brown, and leafy dark greens and moss greens are also considered "du du." The psychological type is a down-to-earth, practical, earthy sort of personality. They are symbols of the secret world and occult. Deities and gods under this category are usually worshipped in the night and behind closed doors.

The people used various materials to generate colours in the past some of these are: animal fat like lard, leaves, ashes, blood, charcoal, clay and soil materials for pigment [11]. Animal dung was also used as pigment in rendering their houses. This was done on regular basis in order to change the outlook regularly. Different types of colours were employed in folklore stories to younger generation [12]. However, the advent of modern materials such as paint promoted an existing culture of colour. The use of paint predates the colonial era. The palace of the Oba (king) of Lagos was built with mud and timber as major components around 1630 with classical ornamentation and wall rendering (painting) before the addition of the Portuguese in 1670.

Study area

The location of the Yorubaland lies between latitude $6^{\circ}4'$ and 9° north of the equator and longitude $2^{\circ}3'$ and $6^{\circ}3'$ east of the Greenwich Meridian. The pattern of climate ranges between long rainy season of about 8 months between March and October to short dry season of about 4 months between November and February. Lagos, where the study was carried out has a good representation of the Yoruba people. Almost all the families in all the cities and towns of the Yoruba are represented in the area. It lies between latitude $6^{\circ}4'$ North and $4^{\circ}3'$ of the Equator and between longitude $2^{\circ}5'$ East of the Greenwich Meridian. It covers an area of about 3,577sq.km representing 0.4 percent of Nigeria territorial land mass [13,14]

METHODOLOGY

The method adopted involved a holistic search through literature and field observations at various locations with historical interests. A structured questionnaire was administered on 180 respondents that were randomly selected across the area for quantitative analysis. 18 respondents were randomly selected in each of the 10 Local Government Areas that were randomly selected from the existing 20 Local Government Areas. 161 of the questionnaires were retrieved while 19 were not returned by the respondents given a response rate of 89.4 percent. The categories of respondents are home owners, tenant occupiers and professionals of both sexes within the building profession. The questions were put on Likert's scale of 1 to 5, (strongly disagree=1 to strongly agree=5). The data collected was analyzed through SPSS software to obtain result for the research.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Chi-Square test was carried out to test the significant difference in respondents' answer to the questions that were asked in the study. The tables below describe the mean value of the issues raised and the significance of each variable as it affects the use of paint in the study area. The result shows that the common use of paint does not arise as a result of the cultural acceptance of paint by the people as shown in table1 ($X^2=7.5, P=0.58 > 0.05(C1)$) but due to cultural value placed on colour that the varieties that paints make available enhance. This suggests that any other material that comes in varieties of colours will be acceptable to the people. It shows that the respondents do not differ on their use of paint due to cultural affiliation. This is shown in table2 as a mean value of 1.8125 on 5point Likert's scale. With the *P*-value of 0.58, respondents show a consistent response that affirms that the use of paint is not a reflection of peoples' culture but merely gained prominence in usage due to its availability in varieties of colour availability in varieties of colour.

The result also shows that the respondents do not differ in their response on the passion for beauty and the aesthetic value of the people, where $X^2 =6.5, P=0.09 > 0.05(C2)$. The Chi Square test shows that the respondents do not differ in their responses. With a mean value of 3.438, the result suggests that the respondents all agree that appreciation of beauty by the people# is one of the major reasons for the use of paint in the area. On the other variables measured, especially those numbered as 3 to 6 in table 2, that is-ease of change of colour of building ($X^2=2.35, P=0.305 > 0.05(C3)$), personal attachment to colour ($X^2=2.75, P=0.60 > 0.05(C4)$), value of the colour of the exterior wall ($X^2=12.00, P=0.007 < 0.05(C5)$) and the desire to often change the colour of the wall($X^2=0.875, P=0.928 > 0.05(C6)$) show a regular pattern of response as respondents expressed the same view except on the importance of the colour of the exterior wall where $P=0.007 < 0.05$.

However, the result shows that the colour with which the exterior wall is painted is of concern to majority of respondents. The respondents do not differ and highly agree on the importance of the colour of the exterior wall to mean that the opportunities offered by paint to change the colour of the exterior dictates the use of paint. This is evident in table2 as a mean value of 3.75 and in figure (1). Only insignificant few among the respondents differ in their responses on the importance of the colour of the exterior wall. With the mean value of variables 3 to 6 at 4.313, 3.125, 3.750 and 3.125 respectively, it is evident that these variables significantly affect the use of paint in the area. These mean values suggest that the adoption of paint is due to the culture of colour usage among the Yoruba people. With a mean value of 4.313, the possibilities of changing the colour at will is highly significant and constitutes the major factor for the use of paint in the area.

The inadequate knowledge of the people about paint with a mean value of 2.625 do not significantly impact on its embrace so far it provides the opportunity and access to varieties of colours. The result indicate no divergent response ($X^2=2.750, P=0.600 > 0.05(C7)$). However, the activities of manufacturers in respect of sales promotion are found to significantly influence the specification and use of paint in the area. This is shown in table2 as a mean value of 3.375 where $P= 0.112 < 0.05(C8)$ with a value of $X^2=6.00$.

Table 1: Chi-Square Value/Test Statistics									
	C1	C2	C3	C4	C5	C6	C7	C8	
X^2	7.5	6.5	2.375	2.75	12	0.875	2.75		6
df	3	3	2	4	3	4	4		3
Asym sig.	0.058	0.9	0.305	0.6	0.007	0.928	0.6		0.112

Table 2: Determination of mean value					
Variables	\bar{X}	SD	Min	Max	
C1		1.812	1.047	1	4
C2		3.438	0.814	2	5
C3		4.313	0.793	3	5
C4		3.125	1.5	1	5
C5		3.75	0.856	2	5
C6		3.125	1.36	1	5
C7		2.625	1.258	1	5
C8		3.375	0.885	2	5

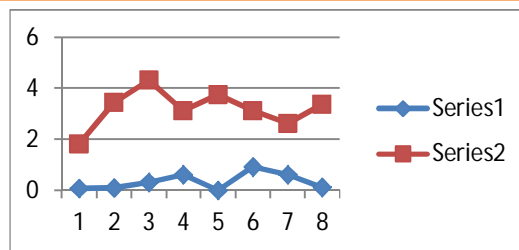


Fig1: series1=P-value, series2=mean value

Conclusion

The analysis that was used in this research showed that the use of paint was adopted because of existing culture of colour among the Yorubas. The embrace of paint did not take into cognisance its effects on man and environment neither was cost implication considered. The study shows that the people may embrace any other material that will give them the needed varieties of colour irrespective of cost and maintenance challenges. The appreciation of beauty and aesthetics is preeminent with existing practise of colourful dressing and ornamentation. The research also shows that the Yoruba people have a rich culture of colour which translates into every aspect of their life as submitted by Pendagast [3]. Different colours can be used in the study area to convey different messages such as warnings, signals and instructions.

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