

*The podcast is organized into an episode introduction; the main interview with the podcast guest(s); voiceovers, where the host pauses the interview to expand on something in more detail; and episode credits / acknowledgements. This is not a verbatim transcript of the original interview. The podcast episode was edited down to focus on a specific theme or narrative, and also for concision and clarity.*

*Yorùbá language is central to Yorùbá life & art. Where Yorùbá words or phrases appear, I have tried my best to include accurate written tonal marks – much indebted to Yorùbá encyclopedias, and the work of many language specialists, scholars, and generous aunties. But still, these tonal marks aren't comprehensive -- there are subtle variations from region to region that may not be reflected here. I marked Yorùbá words whose tonal marks I could not complete or confirm with a lighter shade of gray.*

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## introduction

Welcome back to season three of the *Fields of the Future* podcast. I'm your host, Mary. This season we've been talking about lace in Nigerian culture by looking at and working with laces closely, and by speaking with different experts on lace. In episode one, we sat at a family roundtable to hear different generational perspectives on lace. In episode two, we spoke with a historian and educator about the history of lace in Nigeria, through the establishment of a Nigeria/Austria trade relationship, among other important events. And in episode three, we looked at the social and community aspect of Yorùbá textiles – *aṣọ ẹbí*, the family cloth – that keeps Nigerians making, wearing, and/or buying textiles as a way to show solidarity and support to loved ones. And now, we're back for our final episode.

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## voiceover 1 – what i've been up to

Now, I've been gone for a little while and you might be wondering, what have I been up to? Well, one of the highlights of the past few months was having the honor and privilege to be in a family wedding, and sewing two outfits for it as *aṣọ ẹbí*. I spent weeks and weeks and weeks hand-sewing one of the outfits, and worked with two dressmakers on the other outfit. Shout-out to Ms Marilyn and Auntie Theresa! There was the day running around New York City looking for a lining to perfectly match the lace; and the experience of creating something with dressmakers -- bringing them an idea and watching them riff on it to make it a reality, with me over here waiting with bated breath to see how it'd turn out.

And finally, the unforgettable moment where we – the friends of the bride, dripping in baby-blue lace – danced into the venue and ushered the bride into a new season of her life. This experience was a reminder that lace is so much bigger than the lace itself. Now, I have to stop here and give the most special shout-out to the celebrants. You know who you are! Thank you for allowing me to be part of this special day, and for allowing me to keep talking about it, and to stand with you both during this time. I love you all and I'm rooting for you, always.

And so, for our final episode, there's no better way to end than to not focus on lace per se, but rather, to zoom out and look at the bigger picture. We'll talk about all of the things that have made lace possible, that have been around long before lace entered the scene. Things that form the foundation of Yorùbá dress culture, things that have me and many others running around trying to get these outfits just right, okay! Lace didn't bring us openwork. Nah, that was centuries old *aṣọ òkè*, hand-woven from wild silks and hand-spun cottons. Lace didn't bring us intricate patterns

and laborious designs. Nah, that was indigo-dyed àdirẹ with its beautiful hand-painted and -tied motifs. And lace didn't necessarily teach us how to be glam and value presentation in our culture. I gotta look at the proverbs for that.

And so, in this episode we talk about how there was nothing new about lace in Nigerian culture. Lace was a recognition and reimagination of things that already existed. But not only that, we'll also talk about how things have responded and where things are headed now, because as Ms Onuoha always reminds us, culture is dynamic. It's the reason why my baby-blue sequin lace was paired with a beige aṣọ òkè, which paid homage to the classic sányán, and it's the reason why weavers have introduced laser-cut aṣọ òkè that mimics the floral open work of laces. To have this conversation – linking history to contemporary, to making things – we're joined by an artist and historian whose lifelong work has been dedicated to making, to supporting designers and creators, and to honoring indigenous Nigerian textile and art practices, professor Péjú Láyíwọlá.

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**prof Láyíwọlá:** Thank you very much, Mary. What a delight to be here. My name is Peju Láyíwọlá. I'm an artist, an art historian. I teach courses in studio art and art history at the Department of Creative Arts, University of Lagos in Nigeria. I also run two artist platforms, the Master Art Classes and the Women and Youth Art Foundation, which was founded in 1994. I am very interested in textiles – I had an exhibition in 2019, titled *Indigo Reimagined*, which looked at the traditional processes of dyeing fabrics in southwestern Nigeria. So I'm excited to be here.

**mary:** I'm excited for our conversation today. First and foremost, I'll say thank you, Professor, for spending this little bit of time with us.

**prof Láyíwọlá:** Thank you too, and thank you for inviting me. Okay, well, I'll start by saying that lace was appropriated in a sense. We can't call it a traditional Yorùbá textile. But, what is interesting here is that the Yorùbá people were very fashionable, and are still very fashionable. They had the potential to take something that comes from elsewhere, something that is foreign, and to transform it into something that is their own. And that is where lace comes in. When [laces] came into the country, they were assimilated into the sartorial traditions of the people. And that shows how very ingenious the Yorùbá people are, in taking other people's fashion or traditions and also putting a stamp or an identity on it that makes it their own.

**mary:** You've seen so many textiles, and I know you collect textiles from way, way, way back – from the sixties! What would you say are the foundational textiles that shape Yorùbá dress culture?

**prof Láyíwọlá:** Okay, we have the hand woven fabrics. In southwestern Nigeria, “aṣọ òfi,” that's the name. Sometimes you hear of the word “aṣọ òkè.” Now, we know better that “aṣọ òkè” is derogatory because it refers to people who live in the hinterland. This is a name that was given by those who live in places like Lagos, which is very cosmopolitan, or in bigger cities. So when they refer to aṣọ, aṣọ means cloth and òkè means those from the hinterland, but the right word is aṣọ òfi, aṣọ meaning cloth, and òfi meaning loom. The fabric that derives from the loom, that is woven on the loom.

And there are three main types. You have àlààrì, which is wine colored, highly prized. You also have sányán. Sányán is beige colored, and is woven from silk yarns. And you have ẹ̀tù. Ẹ̀tù is a dark colored one, normally indigo, deep blue in color. It's worn by elites of society. The yarns are first of all dyed and then woven on the loom. [Ẹ̀tù] was dyed with indigo dye, vegetal dye. Sányán, unlike àlààrì and ẹ̀tù, is

woven with silk threads. Àlààrì and ẹ̀tù are woven with cotton. Sometimes the cotton is hand-ginned or the carding is done by hand as well. And in the past, we had a lot of cotton fields. The weavers would take cotton and spend hours on end carding, ginning, separating the seeds from the cotton itself. And then they make it into threads, into yarns, and put it on the loom. There are variations of these three fabrics. Sometimes they're combined. And also responding to social change and trends in fashion – imbibing new ideas from outside of the culture, and making something that is very contemporary and quite interesting as well.

It's so difficult to place a date on when this began. But looking at history and looking at the tangible heritage, as far back as the ninth century AD, some vast fabric from Iburuku region in eastern Nigeria were discovered alongside bronze works. And so that gives us an idea that weaving and making of textiles, actually started from very early. But then much later, towards the end of the 19th century, there was importation – an influx of fabrics from Manchester in UK – that came into southwestern Nigeria. And so what the artists did was to transfer all the skills that they had in weaving and dyeing, and created a large range of patterns, which they transferred onto this new canvas that came from Manchester. Amazing designs, and motifs that derived from the culture. And using the cassava as resist, they made àdìrẹ ẹ̀lẹ̀kọ, which is a cassava-resist method that became very well known all over southwestern Nigeria.

So the Yorùbá people take pride in this art form, designing cotton. Cotton that was made many centuries before the importation of fabrics, or shirting from the UK. But they embraced [even the imported] material and put their mark on it, stamping in the designs that had a lot of value within the culture that reflected their philosophies, their religious inclinations, their proverbs and adages. And also reflected the flora and fauna of the place. And these patterns, which are a broad range, are stamped on cloth and belong in this tradition of àdìrẹ ẹ̀lẹ̀kọ, or cassava-resist method. So these are the fabrics that we can refer to as strictly textiles that emerged from this culture.

**mary:** One of the things that I noticed, just looking at some of the aṣọ òfì I have– if you look at the pink and green aṣọ òkè or aṣọ- aṣọ òfì.

**prof Láyíwọlá:** –aṣọ òfì. (*laughter*)

**mary:** Now I have to remember to call it properly. (*laughter*) But this one is from at least 30 years ago. And you'll notice the holes in this one. So I wanted to just focus on this open work, if you could say more about that. I think we're both fresh from the Telling Textiles Tales Conference, where you brought together scholars, artists, designers, to just tell their stories about textiles, whether from a scholarly perspective or as creators themselves, how they use these textiles in their creative practices. And one of the ones that stood out to me was Professor Margaret Olugbemisola Areo, her talk on aṣọ òfì. And she specifically talked about this aṣọ òfì with holes. And I would love for you to talk about this a little bit more because open work isn't new to Yorùbá culture. There's nothing new about open work. We've been doing this design with the holes for a long time.

**prof Láyíwọlá:** Yes. So this is a very interesting technique, inserting holes in aṣọ òfì while weaving. And this was usually done by using the teeth of a comb. So the comb is inserted when the weaver is weaving and is doing this closed weave. After a while, he puts in the comb and then weaves around the comb – weaves around the teeth of the comb – and that gives you the holes. So in Yorùbá culture, or in Yorùbá language, ihu means hole. And so this style is called onihu or eleya. So sometimes you find reference to it as eleya or onihu...[*muffled*]...the size of the holes in the fabric. It's done on a narrow loom. So you have strips of fabric, which are now sewn together to make the wrapper, which is known as ìró, or the blouse, which is known as búbá.

And in some of the *aşo òkè*, or the *aşo òfi*— I also have to get used to using this term! (*laughter*) In some of the *aşo òfi*, you find that some threads are drawn from those holes and then link. They're short threads, they link from one hole to the other. And they call that *ojawu*, meaning that— *owu* is thread, and they're called threads to be cut. Short pieces of thread, short lengths of thread, that connect one hole to the other. So these are very interesting patterns, very ingenious ways of weaving.

And of course you know that *aşo òfi* itself has adapted to a lot of fashion trends. In one of the presentations, like you mentioned, in the Telling Textile Webinar that we just concluded, Professor Areo talked about computer-aided designs. Now you're finding that the designers are using computers to create patterns. And in some cases, you have embroideries done on *aşo òkè* itself, to make it look like lace. So you have floral patterns running all through the surface of the *aşo òfi*. You have shiny embellishments on the surface of the *aşo òfi*. And sometimes they're also beaded. Beyond these glass Swarovski beads, you also have the regular seed beads that are attached to the fabric. And I think one of the things that people like is that when it's shiny, it's all shimmery, it makes you more conspicuous. People like to have the glitter. And so that is also part of some of the innovations that have come on account of several other fabrics that have come into play in the fashion field within Nigeria. So *aşo òkè* is continuously responding to, and having these conversations with other fabrics, and imbibing some of their features and translating it into something that is very unique, and a fabric that is also very dynamic.

**mary:** I'm looking at one *aşo òfi* which has the thread between the holes. This one is from the past, maybe, 10 years. This is also an example of one that demonstrates the innovations you've discussed because it has lurex — the threads are shiny — and then it also still has the holes, and it also has the thread joining the holes. So this is one case where the artists have merged, essentially, long-lasting techniques with some of the more contemporary innovations, in response to what is all happening in textiles — what the tastes are, what the trends are right now.

**prof Láyiwoḷá:** Oh, yes. And you know, sometimes, you find that the clients themselves would ask for specific designs. And sometimes they want to have something very unique, and they combine as many innovations as possible on one fabric. (*laughter*) The weaver wants to also make a lot of money. So he says, "Okay, I will try it out and see." And so we have this dialogue between the clients and the weavers, to create a fabric that is unique. And so when that comes in the markets, other clients see it and say, "Oh, I want just that type. I want that type." And then they add another innovation again and you see that it begins to transform.

So *aşo òkè* is a fabric that responds to changes. I will call it the chameleon textile. (*laughter*)

**mary:** Oh, I love that! I love that. And I'm so glad you brought up the back and forth between the client and the weaver, "Oh I want to try— I want to see a little bit like this. I want to see a little bit like that. Okay, add something here. Add something there." And I think that's also very unique to Yorùbá dress culture, that there's this relationship between the person who's buying it and the person who's making it. It's not like the person who's making it has complete autonomy over the entire thing and once it's finished, you buy it like that. This back and forth is so special, and makes the outcome a very collaborative process. Is that something that is, would you say, relatively recent? Or is that something that has kind of been a core aspect of textiles in Yorùbáland, in Southwestern Nigeria?

**prof Láyiwoḷá:** I think it's been a core aspect of textiles. It's been like that for several centuries, where people who want a fabric, go to see the weaver. The weaver is also part of the community and is somebody that is down the road from where you live, perhaps. And so you have these conversations that

are very intimate, you know. And textile, for me, because it's worn very close to the skin, people are very concerned about what they will wear, what they put on.

And so, that relationship between the person who weaves and even the person who sells, is always there. There's always this interaction. The woman I acquire my fabrics from, I go to her even when I don't want to buy cloth. I sit down with her and we're talking and she's telling me stories from her past, from her childhood, how she goes about collecting fabrics from Ìlọrin to Ìbàdàn to Ede to Òndó, and all of that. So it goes beyond cloth. It goes beyond textile. It goes beyond the transaction that you have with the clients. It becomes more intimate. And that's exactly what textile is to the wearer. It's a very intimate part of the person.

In fact, there's an adage that says, èniyàn l'aşòṣò mi. Èniyàn means person. But you can also extend it to the plural, to mean people. That people are your covering. People are there for you in your time of need, to protect you from the vagaries of life, just like your fabric protects you from sun or from rain. So if you don't have people to stand in for you, then you are naked. Then you're exposed to life, to the difficulties of life. So èniyàn l'aşòṣò mi – likening people to fabric – tells you about this relationship between people and textile, and the proximity to the body.

**mary:** I have so many follow up questions. But I want to first talk about àdirẹ before we go on. When I look at àdirẹ ẹlẹkọ and the intricate patterns – I'm thinking of Ìbàdándùn for example, where you have designs that are specific to that city in Nigeria. I'm looking at one, this one is an àdirẹ ẹlẹkọ from probably the past 10 years. And I bought this one from Nike Art Gallery, the art gallery and cooperative that is spearheaded by Chief Mrs. Nike Òkúndayẹ, who does a lot of work with preserving indigo-dyeing and àdirẹ textile centers in Nigeria. And on this one is a gecko. And it's just a repeat of a gecko all the way down from top to bottom. And I was just so intrigued by it because when I look at patterns and motifs in lace, that came much later, I don't think I've seen a gecko, but you'll see things like apples and guitars.

And so you start to see this throughline, where the people are like, "Wait. All of the designs that you Austrians were doing beforehand, we don't want to do that. Let's start to put our images that reflect us." But they've been doing that since even making àdirẹ, which was an interesting connection to me. So if you could talk more about that, about àdirẹ and the pattern making, the selection of motifs, and some of the importance of these designs.

**prof Láyiwoṣá:** Well, even before we go to àdirẹ, we talked about lace and the way and manner in which the embroiderers were using patterns that were very European, but they also tried very hard to imbibe some of the motifs that had meaning within the culture — within Nigerian culture, within Yorùbá culture — and the taste of people. For example, because it was the oil boom era, people had a lot of money to play around with. And so they wanted fancy cars; they wanted cars that were very well known at that time, [such as] the 505. They had the symbol of the car imprinted on the lace. They had Volvo, they had the Mercedes Benz symbol, and those kinds of things that [Nigerian] people could relate with. And they'd draw cars as motifs, on the lace. So they responded to the taste of the people.

It's different from what the àdirẹ ẹlẹkọ artists did. What they did was to look at what was around them. Of course, they had object types – they had representations of buildings, for example, you mentioned Ìbàdándùn. And in Ìbàdándùn, you have the columns of Mápó Hall, which is the colonial building very close in Ìbàdàn here, in Beere. And that was a very significant building during that period, during the colonial era. And because it had those huge columns, which are very different from the usual architecture, it caught the attention of the àdirẹ artists. So in a sense, they were also infusing architectural patterns into

their textiles. So they were responding to their environment. Every Ìbàdándùn must have those columns, those columns of Mápó Hall, represented there.

When we talk about referencing the environment, the flora and the fauna, there's this very important motif that features in a lot of àdirẹ ẹlẹkọ. It's called *ewe ege*, the leaves of the cassava plant. And it's always there, sometimes in a very stylized form. They don't come out as realistic representation on cloth.

You find that some of the patterns are replicated, and then you have them named. Ìbàdándùn particularly refers to the beauty of Ìbàdàn – Ìbàdàn is sweet. That's what it means. Ìbàdándùn, it's a sweet place to be. And indeed Ìbàdàn is a very sweet place to be. I've lived here for more years than I've lived in Benin city where I was born, and I've found the city really an exciting place to be. I love Ìbàdàn. I love the topography, I love the spirit of the people you meet on the streets. They're very friendly people. It's beautiful living here. The cost of living is very low. It's easy to move around. You don't have the kind of horrendous traffic you have in Lagos. It's a cultural town. There's so much you can do within a short time in this city. You live at ease. And the environment and the air is cleaner, much cleaner.

Then, Orí mi pé is also very popular. Orí mi pé means my head is complete, my head is correct. It's very assertive. You're saying that your head is correct. And women would say "Orí mi pé" – also because, the designs on fabrics was also a codified way of passing on messages – so women would say "Orí mi pé" as an assertion that their heads are correct. When your husband says, "No, you're not doing something right", they would say, "No, I'm correct. My head is very correct, you know." And of course their heads had to be correct, doing this kind of beautiful art. So, they reflected things around them; they also spoke through cloth; cloth communicated messages to people. And it was just a beautiful language.

When you look at the circular form, that goes round and round in circles – very simple design replicated on cloth. It's really very philosophical. It tells you about the entire essence of a being – the connection he has with the ancestral world, the connection he has with the spirit world, and all that goes on in his life. That it goes on in circles. You talk about these fabrics, and it's endless. The more you look at a fabric that has these patterns, the more you are able to tell more and more about the culture. It was very dense with meaning.

And so when you find the patterns replicated, it's almost like a point of emphasis. You're trying to say, "Oh, this pattern. I want you to see it as often as you want." And because of the nature of cloth, when a particular design is in vogue, it goes into every home. People acquire them at that period. And when it's out of season, then another one comes up. So these fabrics register historical time. That's why you can actually place a date on them, "Oh, this pattern was very popular during the independence of Nigeria." And you can say, from 1967 to 1977, or maybe a 10 or 15 year period, a particular fabric comes into play, comes into season, and people acquire them at that time. So àdirẹ ẹlẹkọ is a timeless piece. We might say we have an idea of when it began, but we don't know when it'll end. It keeps imbibing new, and new motifs.

**mary:** There's one textile I have here, that's a dry lace *kampala*. And *kampala* was one of the things that evolved out of àdirẹ. Àdirẹ has continued, but kind of as a separate branch, we have *kampala*, which was made with synthetic dyes, as those became popular. So this textile here is actually *kampala* on dry lace, which is a bit unusual. Usually *kampala* is done on guinea brocade.

**prof Láyiwọlá:** Okay.

**mary:** But I wanted to call this one out because when I'm in Abẹ̀òkúta, there's a teacher that I sometimes work with who is an educator and also an artist as well, Brother Sunday. And I remember when I asked him what his favorite type of textile to make was, he said he loves doing kampala on dry lace. And so this piece was created after spending a few weeks working with him and he had taken the time to really instruct me on doing, essentially, wax-resist, which is another branch from the cassava of àdìrẹ. At a certain point, wax became a technique to use as well. And cassava is still used, but wax offers different advantages — and also disadvantages as well. Wax creates a different look, than using cassava.

This is an example again, of many things meeting to respond to the contemporary moment. To respond to the existence of lace now as a textile; to respond to the dyeing materials that are available; to respond to the different types of ways to create a resist. And also, honestly, it's just like you mentioned – even though kampala uses wax and it uses synthetic dyes that are “faster,” it's still a quite lengthy process. [You have] something like àdìrẹ ẹ̀lẹ̀kọ, which is the peak of skill and craft and labor. And yet and still, things like kampala still take quite a lot of time to do. And so this one always makes me think about the labor that's involved in making these textiles. You know, these things take days, if not weeks, like you said. And when you have aládirẹ that are tying– they'll tie for days and days, five yards–

**prof Láyíwọlá:** Yes.

**mary:** –It also makes me think a lot about how we value the textiles. Which is something I want to ask you. I'm curious about it, because there are laces that will go for several hundreds of dollars. But if we really think about the time and energy that is required to make àdìrẹ ẹ̀lẹ̀kọ, for example, it should be almost priceless! *(laughter)*

**prof Láyíwọlá:** Yeah, much more expensive. Yeah.

**mary:** Exactly! Or even for someone to sit there and hand weave aṣọ òfí. And so, I guess I wonder about that sometimes. I think we have to be careful not to apply Western economics onto everything. But I wonder sometimes if that has had a negative effect on the life of some of these really laborious, craft, skilled, textile practices because they aren't necessarily valued for the amount of labor that goes into it? But I wonder if I'm just– I don't know, am I not thinking about it right?

**prof Láyíwọlá:** Yeah, I think you're right. And it's not just for textiles. It also applies to other crafts that are going extinct in Nigeria because of patronage. When you think about the amount of work that's going into bronze casting for example, and the use of fire, the risk involved, you find that a lot of the bronze casters in Benin City – that is the home of bronze casting – have deserted the art because they feel that they've put in all their skills and labor, and what they get from it is not as much as they would get if they did some other profession that will not demand as much attention or labor. And so they've just moved away from it, to go do something that is more profitable. And so we lose a lot of our heritage, our Indigenous knowledge. We lose a lot of this through this process. So we have to devise a way in which the makers of these vintage materials can gain— get what is commensurate with the amount of effort they put in. We must think about this as luxury – luxury productions – because they are originals.

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### **voiceover 2 - fast forward**

Now, this is only a taste of some of the things professor and I spoke about. The rest of our conversation took so many twists and turns, from talking about designs in the market right now, to contemporary design houses that are incorporating Yorùbá textiles in their design work, whether

through process, labor, form or innovation. We could've spent another hour on the alakete-inspired designs of Ade Bakare, to the àdirẹ-laden styles of Deola Kamson, to the rich indigo-dyed and sustainable design practice of Nkwo, to the delicate wax-resist dyed fabrics of Maki Oh and Busayo NYC, to the vivid woven yarns of Kenneth Ize, to the elegant head to toe aṣọ òkè of Deola Sagoe, all the way down to the 2022 collection of Lisa Folawiyo, which references none other than vintage laces. We'll have to save all that for another time.

So, I'm just gonna speed us up really quickly, and get us to a later part of the interview where we reflect and share a few last thoughts on materials, processes, and proverbs. You'll hear me reference part of a conversation that happened earlier, but I just couldn't fit it into the edit of this episode. So with that, I'll get us back to the interview to round up.

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**mary:** I just wanted to follow up on two things that you said. The first one was bringing up the biodegradability of indigo-dyeing because I think that's such an interesting point. Because [with] some of the innovations that have come out in the past century, it also shows the downsides. In terms of, synthetic dyes can be unhealthy and harmful to dye with. You'll notice that dyers have to use more protective equipment because of the nature of synthetic dyes. Like you mentioned, wax is not biodegradable. Whereas indigo-dyeing with cassava resist is biodegradable, and indigo-dyeing with a fermented vat is also one of the safest ways to dye. It's so in balance with the environment, and there are even uses for the used-up dye liquid, after the fact. So that's something that I've always found interesting as well, that sometimes the innovations also come with drawbacks that we have to consider, when we're thinking about — what is worth saving time? Or, if you save time, are there costs in other areas?

**prof Láyiwoḷá:** You talk about the health hazards that can come from using these chemical dyes, and the way they're also disposed of. And the key word in this fashion and textile industry is sustainability. One of the reasons I did the *Indigo Reimagined* exhibition was to talk about all of those problems. Why do we jettison a well-tested tradition of using organic materials for everything that we do? Raffia for tying, rather than polyesters and synthetic threads we use for àdirẹ oníko today. The earthenware pots that held the vats, instead of using plastic bowls.

We really need to think about these processes. How do we return to that glorious history of having fields of indigo plants, fields of cotton? And how do we harvest these and make them commercially viable for the fashion industry in Nigeria today? These are things that we should be thinking about more seriously, because there's a lot of importation going on. Even when we do our beautiful textiles, we are doing it on materials that have come from outside. And this should not be the case.

**mary:** We'll end on a conversation about proverbs, to go back to the proverb you mentioned in the beginning. And you've also written about proverbs in the catalogue essay that you wrote for the *African Lace* exhibition, "The Art of Dressing Well: Lace Culture and Fashion Icons in Nigeria." Studying Yorùbá art and textile history, you cannot do it absent of the Yorùbá language and the things that have been passed down in the language and through proverbs. And I just wanted to talk to you about some of the proverbs related to dress culture. What are some of the ones that really stand out to you? That helped you have that understanding of why presentation is so important in Yorùbá culture?

**prof Láyiwoḷá:** Aṣọ tó yẹni, l'àáwọ relé àna. It is a befitting outfit that one wears to one's in-laws' house. I remember the days when I got married. My in-laws came to Benin City, where the marriage took place, and they came all dressed up in àlàári. Because my husband comes from Ìṣẹ̀yìn, which is a very well



known weaving center. They came to inundate my parents and my family, with the beautiful fabrics that they had. And of course, they stood out. They stood out! So that's the idea. You can't go to your in-laws' house dressed shabbily. When you're coming to take a wife, you have to dress very well, so that people know that you are really serious about this business. And that you're really going to be able to take care of the wife.

Sì mí ká ròde iyàwó, kíí wẹ̀wù ẹ̀tù. The celebrant must be the best dressed. You must make sure you do not wear an ẹ̀tù to a birthday party, where [the celebrant] is going to wear an English dress. Because you'll look much better than the person who is celebrating. You don't want to take away the shine from the celebrant. There's always a reference to ẹ̀tù, even in the proverbs, because that is like the ultimate.

Clothing, it's such a special thing for them, for Yorùbá people. It's part and parcel of their life. They believe that you must wear clothing, and it is the way you dress that people really take you. If you dress very well, they accord you respect. But if you dress shabbily, they may talk down to you. And so when they import clothing, they are also thinking about their own sensibilities, they are also thinking about where they're coming from. They take things that they can relate to; things that they can adapt into their sartorial traditions, and make it their own. And so the essence – the totality of it – is that when they come out, they must look gorgeous.

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### credits / acknowledgements

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Lastly, I'd be remiss if I didn't touch on a few logistical details. First, on the field of podcasting, more generally. I am new to all this, and over the course of working on this project, I really looked to the OG podcasts I've been listening to for years and years, to set a standard: the thoughtful asides and narration in *Ear Hustle*; the conversational flow of *Dreams in Drive*; the impactful scoring of *How I Built This*; the relatable academic-ness of *Freakonomics*; and the multidisciplinary perspectives of *The Cutting Room Floor*; to name a few. These shows gave a roadmap, and have produced some of the content I most look forward to hearing every week.

And second, on how this season was produced. I worked with a very patient team of sound editors and producer-administrators to turn several one and a half hour conversations into 30-40 min episodes focused on a specific theme or narrative. We had to make tough editorial decisions – to consolidate some discussion here, move up an excerpt there, add in new content in the form of voiceovers, drop things that

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took us too far off course. So I'd like to thank the team for their work, and also, our guests for allowing us room to take liberties with these edits.

If you want to hear more directly from the public-facing guests in this series – professor Péjú Láyíwọlá and Ms Louisa Onuoha – you can follow their work, much of which we discussed in this podcast. They have both published books / articles, they give talks, they participate in conferences regularly, and more.

And last but not least, thank you for listening. And that's a wrap!