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## **The Making of a Feminised Economy in the Gambia: Musu Kebba Drammeh and Batik Livelihood, 1940–2013**

**ABSTRACT.** This work examines the growth of Batik textile art in the works of Musu Kebba Drammeh in The Gambia. While African societies were swayed with the colonial economy, this paper unravels how textile art was a resilient economy, yet little scholarly attention is paid to it. Furthermore, it elucidates how sustainable livelihood reflects in the heritage and tradition of Kebba's work in The Gambia. Livelihood process in her work creates a perspective to understand women's influence on indigenous entrepreneurship. The fundamental objective is to analyse Kebba's influence in the growth of Batik textile art in the Gambia. The historical method is adopted to explain the dynamics of times in the growth of Kebba's work at Latrikunda. Most studies focus on the description of the art, with little reference to the actors involved and how the social, political and economic system influence their work.

**KEYWORDS:** Batik Art, Musu Kebba Drammeh, livelihood, The Gambia

### **Introduction**

Batik design is a branch of art that involves making patterns on fabrics. It is a type of visual art that is expressive of the environment and human mind. The end product of design on fabrics, comes with an artistic creation that requires not only tourist appreciation but should amount to commercial impact. Batik is a profound textile artwork in West Africa. Few literature within West Africa examines the textile art. Scholarly literature abound on textile art, but mostly written by scholars outside West Africa (Picton & John, 1989). While textile art is an ancient tradition in Africa backed up by archaeological evidences, there are typologies of production of textile art with various traditions of origin. Art in African history is traced to ancient Egyptian civilization as evident in renowned Egyptian portraits (Hartwig, 2015, p. 275). Before Arab and European incursion into Africa several societies possess artistic creations. The existence of these

artworks, depict a heritage that profoundly expresses the civilization in Africa. Also, it projects the talent and finesse for creations which shows the richness of the human brain.

Batik histories in West Africa have been traced to Dutch-Indonesian presence in Africa, however, the lines of origin are quite obscure. The most recent encounter is traced to the nineteenth century return of African soldiers in West Africa. Undoubtedly, the line of skill transfer is obscure, but Batik work became prominent in postcolonial West Africa. In spite of the challenges of identifying the traditions of origin of Batik, the global interactions with twentieth century West Africa aided the supply value chain for African inspired Batik textile art.

During the Trans-Atlantic trade era, much of these artistic creatives were shipped out of Africa to Europe. Production of art works still continued in times of adversaries that constrained Africa till the twentieth century. The phases of imperialism and colonialism obviously depicted how Africans have been disempowered for centuries and thus, unable to advance even at the attainment of independence. While modern infrastructure were made in to Africa to aid colonial rule, artistic creators were resilient to continue production and recreated the learning practices required to foster continuity. In the words of Catherine Fourshey:

The colonial state had thwarted the precolonial education system and apprenticeships to a large extent by banning, undermining, and otherwise trying to end various historically developed educational practices and apprenticeship programs while pushing for greater engagement in cash-cropping and migrant labor schemes (Fourshey, 2019).

The traditional education systems jettisoned in The Gambia favoured the rise of new class of women exposed to formal education. Fourshey (2019) highlighted how new class of elite women emerged in colonial Gambia, without considering the status of women that are not educated in formal settings. Therefore, Musu Kebba Drammeh's life is analyzed to vary the dimensions of women's experiences in The Gambia.

The biography of Kebba's artistic creations revolves around the production and marketing of Batik design. Kebba was born in the colonial era of 1940. At eight years she started learning from her mother which is a typical model of girl child education in traditional African societies. The learning curve lasted till the 1960s when she started independent Batik design production in The Gambia from the 1960s till her death in 2003.

Other factors are the role of Islamic history, practice and solidarity in Kebba's family as a daughter of a Marabout; and the legacy of precolonial intergroup relations that suffices till contemporary times in West African history. Similar works are those written on Chief Nike Okundaye of Nigeria (Adeleke, 2020).

The geographies of being an itinerant marabout is justified in Arnold Hughes explanations about the social and economic setting of The Gambia, where religion was a strong factor in understanding the realities. (Hughes, 2006) Reference to Arnold's work is fundamental as there are dearth of research on the history of The Gambia. Unlike the case in Abeokuta (Nigeria), where there were several women dyers in the first half of twentieth century, (Byfield, 2002) rarely are there documentations about women dyers in The Gambia (Njie, 2023). Accounts showed the linkage of Batik work across West Africa, Saros from Sierra Leone introduced the work of Batik into Abeokuta, and it was an art learnt from the Mende of Sierra Leone. Few women like Kebba took up the craft of fabrics art. In the map of West Africa, such connection is inevitable because Christopher Fyfe's description of trade relations in West Africa (Fyfe, 1968) shows that communities converge to trade thus, the exchange of commodities influenced transfer of skills.

Judith Byfield's work on Adire producers in Abeokuta puts into context the variants of fabric/textile art spread across West Africa. In the case of Nigeria, Abeokuta is a space of agency and institution for production and marketing. It also depicts how Yorùbá women create entrepreneurial spaces for livelihood while it features cultural relationships expected of women in lineages and associations. The fact that women in these spaces were independent producers also imply how women and motherhood identities are constructed at work and in lineages. This work posits that public motherhood (Byfield 2002) is a phenomenon in West Africa, where women exercise mentorship and agency in extended lineage settings and community. The manifestation of public motherhood is in line with Asuwada philosophy that puts communal collaboration as a way of life (Akin Makinde, 1988). Oladejo in a study of black soap production in Olode village in Ibadan (Nigeria) also explains how communal cooperation and inter-village relations enhanced women's entrepreneurship in black soap production and marketing (Oladejo, 2021). The camaraderie of communalism created in Madam Jojolola's compound of Abeokuta where Adire production started in Nigeria typifies how communities in West Africa work together in pre-colonial societies (Byfield, 2002, p. 92–95). Kebba's work

in Latrikunda portray the gendered approach to understanding industrial settings preexisting before colonialism. Studies in the informal sectors in West Africa have shown that most women's work in urban settings does not fit into the existing ideas about work and developing classes (Sheldon, 1996, p. 5). Kebba's Batik design and fabric art fits into the irregular initiatives' women explore to make a living. Mostly, the colonial economy accounted for women's concentration in residues of work culture from the precolonial economy. To Abeokuta women, Adire work was a like a cult of collaboration of several women from networks of lineages (Byfield, 2002, p. 94). Thus, re-creating the kind of work culture prevalent in the precolonial economy. This is similar to Kebba's way of operating the Batik factory in The Gambia. Furthermore, Kofo Adeleke's *Bàtàmí á dún ko ko kà: A Biography of Nike* give a detailed analysis of how a variant of Kebba in Nigeria grew and organized the work of Batik over time (Adeleke, 2020). Strictly, a biography, Nike Okundaye's life was analysed as a wholistic, this book considers the connection between the rural and urban important, as it explains the transitions in women's lives across West Africa. The experience Nike relayed about transition of her life as a Batik designer implies a lot for perceptions about artistic creations. That, in the 1960s, few Africans recognized the essence of artistic creations, but now, the situation changed (Adeleke, 2020, p. 81). Studying Kebba's situation in the Gambia creates a perspective to understand how artistic creations are valued across spaces in West Africa.

While colonialism created a modern life across Africa. Villages in Africa remain centres of civilization and enlightenment in custody of tradition. Despite the colonial influences in The Gambia, Kebba chose to stick to live within village traditions. Everyday life in the village defines African communalism and it was a heritage to uphold even in the context of colonialism. Africa is an open economy as analysed by A.G. Hopkins, (Hopkins, 1973) the colonial economy was just a continuum; hence it was normal to have Europeans exploring in new forms in the twentieth century. Through a communal entrepreneurial system, Kebba created a work space. The cash crop economy was rife when Kebba was born in 1940.

The precolonial subsistence system that sustained communities were replaced with commodities that suited the export—import economic system. Also, rural-urban migration from villages to the cities shifted access to labour. In spite of this, Kebba took advantage by engaging few people who chose to remain in the village by creating an agency around the art work of Batik. Several factors hindered women of Kebba's time from acquiring

education. Kebba belonged to a generation of Africanism where men had absolute control over resources, hence it was difficult for women to own land and make independent living (Njie, 2023). Furthermore, Islamic education for women was not also accessible because Islam in Africa was largely paternalistic in practice. Similarly, western education was rarely accorded to young girls rather, the girls were left in the homes and trained to learn domestication from homes. Therefore, Kebba's learning started at 8 years as she watched Batik art from her mother in the 1940s. Invariably, motherhood was functional as an agent of teaching traditional functional education. According to A.B. Fafunwa, traditional African education consists of seven cardinal principles all tied to the philosophy of communal education (Fafunwa, 1973). These principles emphasized by Fafunwa defines the type of education Kebba was exposed to. Thus, unravelling the role of women in the development of vocations and livelihood through the agency created by Musu Kebbah Drammeh in the development of Batik textile art in Gambia. Oladejo (2022) and Nwafor (2021) set the pace for this perspective by aggregating the connection between textile, fashion and society in Nigeria.

## Methodology

Kebba's Batik work is located in the long historical process in West African history. Several histories in West Africa focused on precolonial and colonial milieus with less emphasis on the postcolonial realities and what manifest after western modernity. Western modernity subjugated Africa historically and philosophically to European cultures (Lamola, 2017). The colonial era was the climax that mainstreamed Africa into Western Modernity.

Thus, Kebba's Batik work is situated within the context of non-conformism to western modernity, rather enmeshed in a process of reconstructing African modernity. The residue of non-conformism to western modernity reflects in the way African indigenous culture and skills survived and re-make itself.

Kebba's Batik work was a resilient endeavor in the milieus of colonial influences. Kebba was born in the colonial era of 1940, it was until the eve of Gambian independence in the 1960s that she started production. In essence, Kebba's birth time and the period of starting Batik work was a phase in the historical process of Africa's colonial encounters. Further-

more, Kebba's work is not in isolation to the global economy, hence the frameworks of economic transitions are considered. From the oral interviews with Kebba's descendants, it is established that family and communal entrepreneurship is a source of sustainability in the livelihood systems. Invariably, there are flows of economic informality which also resonates with Hopkins explanation that the economy is open (Hopkins, 1973). West African trade networks that existed since the Trans Saharan and Trans-Atlantic trade, served the itinerant exploits of communities without colonial boundaries. Fifteen oral interviews were conducted. From the oral interviews the itinerant, open, and informal nature of economies across West Africa manifests. The legacies of Kebba's factory in Latrikunda, available online served as a digital means to screen video documentaries of Batik designs event after the demise of Kebba. The project explores interdisciplinary works interfacing with studies in the informal sector and textile art studies in West Africa.

### **Kebba and the Marabout Experience**

The Marabout derived from the Arabic word—*Al Murabitun* signifies a scholar/teacher who guides people on the part of Islam. Marabouts in the West African context is part of the Sufi order and Muslim brotherhood spread around the Senegambia region. From the fifteenth century, Marabouts are basically Wolof by ethnic identity and they are itinerant across West Africa because of their job to guide and teach Islam. Kebba was from a family of Muslim scholar and a grand Marabout with ancestral connections to Mali. The chain of migration to Gambia first had contact with Nui-mi before settling at Latrikunda (current Kanifing) (Drammeh, 2023). As it is typical of Africa, settling in new areas is an aftermath diplomatic connection and favourable intergroup relations. Abdalai Drammeh (Kebba's father) had favourable relationships with Badjan family, who were autochthonous land owners in Latrikunda. *Kunda* was a family suffix synonymous to followers of Drammeh. The followers adopted Kunda as an identity to distinguish their status. Literally, Kunda is a Mandinka ward for domain or settlement.

Kebba's ancestry are prominent Marabout. Kebba's father—Abdalai Drammeh was an itinerant Marabout whose tentacles spread across West Africa. His ancestry as a Marabout has linkages with Mali, Senegal and The Gambia. Being a Marabout Abdalai's itinerant nature exposed his family to

movements across West Africa, which is typical of the traditional ways in the precolonial era.

Kebba moved around in her childhood, as being itinerant was part of learning and socialization in pre-colonial African life. While Abdalai Drammeh was a spiritual itinerant, her daughter used the itinerant experience as a learning curve. Before colonialism, movements across West Africa were open and it enhanced cultural interchanges. Such contacts reflected in how Kebba learnt textile art from Mende women in Sierra Leone. Kebba's contact with Mende women was also similar to the experience of Madam Jojolola of Egba.

That Kebba became itinerant in the marketing of Batik is typical of how West Africa had been a transitory commercial space. According to Bala Saho Gambia evolved from how trade around the river and Atlantic Ocean with Europeans led to its making in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Gradually, series of migrations led to formation of Gambia (Saho, 2019).

### **Work at Latrikunda**

The Gambian-Senegal history before colonial rule showed connections bound by language and culture. Latrikunda Yiringanya as fully spelt was a village in the colonial era and in the early years of Kebba's practice (now an urban area). The name Latri was given to describe a noble that migrated from Senegal. The forms of migration indicate inter-ethnic relationships which showed Africans were not strange bed fellows. At the centre of such relationships was the exchange of culture and skills, where in African communalism is significant.

Kebba established her work space in Latrikunda (Ceesay, 2011, p. 17). Latrikunda factory, is an industrial setting sufficed as it were dug into the ground to enable dyeing of fabrics. Kebba's work at Latrikunda initially started off for communal appreciation of artworks, but the process transformed into large scale buying by tourists in the Gambia. Latrikunda became a place of convergence for production and marketing of Batik. Watching Kebba work at the dyeing pit using indigenously made manual technologies was a form of tourist attraction. Production of Batik was a performance in itself that made Latrikunda a centre of attraction. The commercial worth of Latrikunda aided the direction of Gambian tourist policy, therefore, the government keyed into organization of tourism fairs to increase patronage from Las Palmas, UK, USA, among others (Ceesay,





Figure 1. Metal plate showing the location and address of Kebba's factory in The Gambia

Source: Fieldwork

2011, p. 17). Work at Latrikunda meant a lot for the growth of Gambian tourism. Kebba's artistic creations was a cynosure to project Margaret Trowell's concept of launching Africa's designs into the world Gambian government aided marketing of artistic creations of outside Africa. Her work had global visibility as she was part of the entourage in the Gambian Culture Tour of North America and the Caribbean. In the words of a foreign visitor to Latrikunda.

It is a place where you can find all the kinds of African art and batik. There were so many people from other countries who came to buy some of the paintings made by her, everybody is welcome here! (Ceesay, 2011, p. 18).

In the documentation of colonial era in the archives, arts and crafts subsisting in Africa were classified as '*native industry*'. The concept of the classification complexified the meaning of what is tradition and modern in Africa. The concept of native industry in colonial lexicon enabled the differentiation of modern industrial setting. Basically, the mindset of Africans changed in this regard as the native industry was regarded as unfit and primitive, thus, not essential to modern growth. The misdirected conception of native industry and modern growth enabled her to focus on indigenous production of batik when it was obvious that colonialism



regarded uneducated peoples as primitive and not significant for economic development. Kebba's work of Batik was self-defining as it created economic oriented internal self-rule. Without recognition from colonial government, she took up the arts and craft space to create a cosmopolitan Gambian attraction to the world. While the government created by Britain in The Gambia was shaping its ideal of a modern world, Kebba's traditional status in the village use an alternative form is shaping its own Gambia. By the Mid 1960s, Kebba was already in her mid-twenties and had become an established fabric artist. Thus, she gave custody to the tradition of Art, such that the tradition being regarded as primitive transformed to a point of tourist attraction. Her work defies nativity and primitiveness associated with African crafts by reinforcing it with modernity.

### **Making Meaning of Kebba's Designs**

Kebba's designs features fashion communication. The designs on textiles gives the buyer and tourists message about history, heritage and culture. The designs are symbolic as they convey meanings that Erving Goffman regard as essential to keep appearances in a manner necessary for identity representation and valuation (Goffman, 1956). Thus, the Kebba's work is a maker and determinant of fashion trends and it communicates values, beliefs and national heritage. The Batik cloth depicts what Jean Allman regard as a political language that contests, challenge and unify (Allman, 2004). The symbolism reflects in the techniques of tying and dyeing, and the choices of waxing done on textiles. The outcome of the designs makes the wearer a conveyor for fashion communication. The designs also serve as content for griots to sing at Latrikunda, while tourist visit to purchase.

The fabric on which Kebba makes prints are cotton cloth imported from Europe especially from British and Dutch companies (Roschenthaler, 2015, p. 700). Importation of cotton cloth into West Africa was part of the global trade flows. The texture of cotton cloth made it suitable to work Batik arts and dyes on it. In the twentieth century African countries had industrial settings to manufacture cotton. This enabled craft uptake in textile design. Production of Batik designs on cotton cloth is entangled in foreign influences, as cotton was not solely produced in Africa. But the consumption of fabrics in Batik is a factor because it is used to define culture. Kebba's Batik designs depict a language of clothing for The Gambia. It answers

question about what the society chooses to express, and also rehearse the history that underpins the society. While dresses don't speak, the patterns on the Batik speak. The designs from Kebba offers a perspective to understand dress histories through drawing, dyeing and visuality. The designs are thus historical and interactive. Batik designs in Latrikunda rarely depicts nor criticize colonialism and westernization, but more emphasis is placed on making the global customer reflect on African representations on the fabrics.

Family and communal entrepreneurship is a process that enhanced sustainable operations of the factory at Latrikunda. From her home and factory, Bakary Conteh from Bassori village wine and dine with other learners (Conteh, 2023). Living "as an apprentice the most fundamental means of learning was constant learning and offering labour to support production.



Figure 2. Samples of Kebba's designs

Source: Fieldwork

Beyond production and marketing the end users of Kebba's designs on fabrics also utilizes it as decorations. Batik designs interprets the culture and environment of Africa. This affirms the fact that cloth is part of culture.

While the texture of textiles used in pre-sixteenth century Africa rarely provided the nature of dress worn, the influences of Trans-Atlantic trade accounted for more of what is understood of African dress in contemporary times. Be that as it may dress as adopted a long the trade routes linking North to West Africa, showed lots of Islamic influences. Dani Lyndersay (2011) puts into perspective how the influences of Islam and Trans Saharan trade mattered in how dress is constructed on the body. Similarly, Renne (1994, p. 3) explains the way cloth is absorbed among the Bunu (central Nigeria), hence cloth is used to construct and reproduce ideas about the social world. The Bunu example places premium on cloth as a reflection of social life and it enables the understanding of technologies and knowledge of production acquired across generations. The art of Batik design is typical of generational knowledge passed on. Al Bakri's account as cited in Levztzion and Hopkins showed that people wear robes of silk and brocade in the West African royal courts of eleventh century (Levtzion & Hopkins, 2000). Cloth became a prominent unit of exchange in the sixteenth century.

Kebba's nephew described her as almost a man, as she did things that women ordinarily could not do in Gambian society (Musu Kebba Drammeh – Pioneer Woman Boss in Entrepreneurship Urban – YouTube). This affirms scholarly expositions that textile practices is a gendered work peculiar to women (Auslander, 2014). Most societies gender the work of cloth as an exclusive for women, that, the skills involved are acquired domestically, but they became source of power and independence (Goggin & Tobin, 2009). The gendered meaning Kebba made of Batik design in the Gambia spans through domestic and public space, nexus with diplomacy. Therefore, Kebba created a market space for Gambian tourism (Musu Kebba Drammeh - Pioneer Woman Boss in Entrepreneurship Urban - YouTube). Latrikunda became a space of consumption allowing foreign exposure to Gambian culture.

Accounts of the Batik industry shows that Kebba was not the only expertise, there were other professionals. While Kebba made meaning of Batik in Latrikunda, Amie Krubally, was another woman that made meaning of Batik. Amie actually established a school and introduced a different method and used her designs to portray the histories of her joint Malian—Gambian heritage. Unlike Kebba, Amie attended formal school and she had more leverage to foreign exposure. She left Gambia to San Francisco in the USA.

Artistic creativity is a feature of design. It manifests when the art work is completed and it shows in the stage of marketing. Artistic creations from Africa have been a major connecting source between Africa and Europe. It

is quite challenging to label artistic creation as generic across Africa. There are heterogeneity of artistic creations and borrowed artistic skills. Thus, the meaning or ancestral origin of design are difficult to understand. Yet, art works and designs are associated to postcolonial societies based on cultural values manifest from the nineteenth century.

Artistic creations are wide and expresses lots of versatility about how best Africans create designs. Kerstin Pinther and Alexandra Weigand's edited book—*Design Histories between Africa and Europe* explains the various platforms in which designs from Africa are promoted in the global space, there by depicting transcultural transfers (Pinther & Weigand, 2018, p. 5–7). Transcultural transfers of artistic creations are not a new phenomenon in Africa as highlighted by Pinther and Weigand. African governments from the immediate postcolonial era adopted transcultural transfers of artistic creations. Thus, modus operandi is rarely evident until unraveled in the context of how governance is structured. Tourism department and agencies became entangled in the process of transcultural transfers as they became vehicles of marketing and communicating artistic creations. From imperialism to colonialism, world fairs and exhibitions prominently served as tools of conveying Europe and elsewhere into Africa. This also became an avenue for Africa's exposure to the global space. That of Africa is often regarded as primitive and taken as the 'other' that ought to be improved. Based on the politics of otherness, African tourism institutions "package" artistic creations to fit into the otherness.

Of recent, Achille Mbembe came up with ways of understanding Afropolitanism and gave in the thinking about the vastness of Africa beyond Africa (Mbembe, 2007, p. 26–29). Afropolitanism, thus allows the thinking that Africa is not necessarily the 'other' but a part of the global order. Fashion Afropolitanism have proved to be globally dynamic. The ways of primitiveness often associated with Africa is dislodged in the artistic creations. Hence, Kebba's work is a testimony to how primitiveness is faceless in the context of the commercial forces driving African fashion and design in the global system.

As African government established agencies for projecting Africa to the world, Margaret Trowell (1904–1985) moved from Europe to Africa to import foreign arts for practice, where she settled in Uganda in 1953 to establish art work studio for pottery, ceramics sculpture among others. The system portrayal of Europe into Africa did not necessarily undermine traditional craft work, but recognized the fact that Africans had the existing skill sets.

Practitioners have criticized the dearth of documentation on art markets in Nigeria. (O'Leary, 2018) As an art connoisseur, O'Leary discovered that the flow of commerce in art businesses is not documented. Thus, little attention is paid to the context and nature of artistic creations. Yet, evidences show that Nigerian art market thrives favourable with that of South Africa. However, in the general history of West Africa, art production and marketing cuts across communities. Kebba evolved the markets for art in the Gambia, even when there was no documentation of marketing strategies and sales.

Haruna Drammeh in describing Kebba categorized her as a trailblazer in the Batik industry. In the quest for succession, Haruna recounted how she involved family members in production and marketed Batik to the world, not only promoting her artistic creations, but initiating legacies of succession (Musu Kebba Drammeh - Pioneer Woman Boss in Entrepreneurship Urban - YouTube). Also, Kebba's was part of a marketing revolution of the art market in the 1990s, until the millennium. This era witnessed global attention to exhibitions and trade fairs.

### **Kebba and Tesiti-Tesito of the 1970s in The Gambia**

In the oral tradition of West African societies, the griots are phenomenal in the chants of praise singing. The griots are a compendium of history and philosophy of societies. They relive the past and bring to fore memories of generations. The philosophical aspect of the griots chants is a perspective to unravel phenomenal realities that occurred in the past. Hence, this reflected in how Yankuba Saho a griot from The Gambia sang about Kebba in the 1970s and 1980s (Conteh, 2023). Yankuba constantly visited Kebba's factory in Latrikunda to sing. This period was at a time when tourists visited Latrikunda, thus Yankuba praise signing was not just about Kebba, but an embodiment of how African communal system is relived, since it was a site of tourist convergence. A philosophy profound in praise singing Kebba was the Tesiti Tesito. It was a slogan depicting self-reliance. Tesiti Tesito manifests the exactitude of Kebba's work because it makes meaning of work in the society where opportunities are stifled due to rural urban migrations. The colonial economy had segregated job lines, where there is a civil service and the informal sector. Therefore, survival in the latter had to be defined and developed by the individual, thus, giving a perspective to describe Kebba as an entrepreneur. Tesiti-Tesito is a philosophy

of self-reliance that connotes how Gambians source for livelihood (Gaibazzi, 2010). It was a common lyric in the chants of the griot in Latrikunda as at the 1970s (Conteh, 2023).

Furthermore, Tesiti-Tesito thoroughly depicts means of livelihood. As explained by Kate Meagher, informal economies are a making of individuals determined to survive (Meagher, 2010). Hence, the forms of organization and connections developed there in are manifestation of how Africans survive and create an economic system favourable for prevailing circumstances. Singing Tesiti-Tesito in Kebba's factory was also a means of expressing solidarity among workers, in order to have a sense of belonging and self-esteem suitable for the promotion of the business. Yankouba Saho singing in Kebba's workspace is an indication that singing and dancing was part of African life, and as a griot, he relives memories of the past.

Stephanie Bonifant's study of textiles in the Gambia articulates its feature as a work and industry that enables survival. According to her:

In the Gambia, the textile industry is a prevalent form of artistic expression as well as a profitable trade. Walking down the street it is rare to find a shop without some amazingly beautiful, tie-dyed fabric and handmade batik cloths. Most of the people you pass on the street are adorned with brightly colored clothing that is elaborate and intricately designed (Bonifant, 2000).

Stephanie's experience points to the contemporary relevance of batik as a source of livelihood. It testifies to the fact that Kebba's initiative is real and reflects Tesiti Tesito for survival on the streets in The Gambia. A philosophy that emerged from the songs of the griots at Kebba's factory, which depicts survival.

### **Kebba's Art Work and Gambian Tourism**

The colonial government concentrated mostly on locating spaces for democratic development in post-independence Africa. This also resonated with Kwame Nkrumah's thoughts about a seek ye the political kingdom and every other shall be added unto you" (Mazrui, 1993, p. 105). The nationalist struggles had reached a peak that political independence was all that mattered. Also, the UN Charter had resolved to cede independence to colonies. However, economic independence of African nations remained hanging, because the commodities of exchange remain the same, as Africa



was used as a space to market manufactured goods and fetch raw materials. The trade system failed to take cognizance of the resilient skill systems remaining in Africa. Indigenous skills in Africa feature resilience. While postcolonial government departments were established, the tone of policy was to create enabling environment for foreign visits to Africa. As sites of tour, entertainment and anthropological scene, rural areas in Africa were regarded as merely useful for the wildlife, rivers fall, and other natural resources therein. In the midst of this African arts and crafts thrived. Few artists took advantage of this. Postcolonial tourist policies in Africa enabled art marketing. Art marketing became prominent and it formed the essence of redefining African values and heritage in postcolonial Africa. Development evolved around the works of indigenous artist. As a channel of marketing the Gambia to the world Kebba was a major participant in Gambian art marketing in the 1960s and 1970s (Ceesay, 2011).

In the early 1990s, The Gambian government recognized the tourist attraction and revenue the crafts available offered for national development. The state intervened in developing a tourist market a research study was commissioned in 1993 (Silcox, 1993). In the report, handicraft of about twelve categories were recognized and all produced through indigenous skills and technologies. Handcrafts were critiqued for low quality and considered a risk in context of the growing completion in the global market. However, the report attempted to draw the handcraft businesses into an agglomeration that strips it off of informality. A major recommendation is to lump hand craft business under the management of a non-governmental organization. This recommendation is a manifestation of how African industrial settings are regarded as primitive. Planning to bring all handcraft business based on the report was a way of drawing owners from private entrepreneurship to state entrepreneurship. With funds from United States Agency for International Development (USAID), trainings on market-driven product development and quality control were implemented for artisans. This intervention to American government was a diplomatic effort and also an aftermath of the cold war. USAID's history was an offshoot from John F. Kennedy's Administration in USA. At a period when there was tacit scramble for the world along capitalist and socialist ideologies. The US peace corps was established to offer aid to the Third World by John F. Kennedy. Therefore, USAID'S interest also resonates with promises Kennedy made to African Americans for better rights once his presidential victory suffices. Thus, a major reason for the USAID funded research on The Gambian handcraft was to enable availability of quality products for



African Americans, as the target consumers (Silcox, 1993). Kebba's factory at Latrikunda was officially given a business name as MKD Batiks and Tie-dyes (Silcox, 1993, p. 20).

However, recommendation on product development tend to water down the skill initiatives in Batik designs. The idea projected implied that Batik design should be produced based on consumer specification and not producer's initiative. Yet, the varieties in producer's design of Batik gives the customer the ability to make choices.

The Gambian government regarded the handcraft industry as lacking standards and thus invited USAID funded intervention for improvement. The industry was perceived by government as incapacitated, thus a human resource development approach was introduced for product-driven efficiency. Unlike it were in other African states, the Gambian informal sector of handcraft production was based on communal conglomerations and not necessarily unified as an informal association. This is a deviation from informal sector (Lindell, 2010, p. 1–3). The call for USAID intervention in 1993 was the state realizing inefficiency and vulnerability, thus calling for unification of handcraft business owner to train them for desired results, with a view to have a tourist market suitable for foreign buyers. The report of the intervention showed how foreign concerns take interest in shaping Gambian Tourism. Kebba's business transition from informality to the formalization process feature clash of capitalism. This reflects in Ulla Wagner's summation that Gambian Tourism ought to bring development, rather it is an extension of dependency, where the operations of the handcraft industry are influenced by foreign interests (Wagner, 1981).

## Conclusion

Kebba died at 63 in 2003. Her designs continue to manifest in the Twenty-first century. Sustaining Kebba's workspace is also embedded in African culture of succession, notions of lineage continuity and communalism. Kebba laid the foundation for family entrepreneurship by accommodating her family members for work and learning the business of Batik. After Kebba's death, Fatou Ceesay, Kebba's niece manages the Batik factory (Fatou Ceesay, 2023). Fatou continues as the manager with the support of Kebba's son and granddaughter. Fatou having studied in France and know little about Kebba, but she took the business side of Batik passionately as she sees it is a family legacy. While Batik work is expressive and communi-

cative, connections with tourists and foreign influences overtime in Gambia's history working with Kebba shaped the lives of her nieces and nephews, as such, Haruna Drammeh, a nephew, garnered such experiences to foreground in media entrepreneurship through the operations of Paradise TV in The Gambia. With the growth of western education, Kebba's descendants have attended universities. Unlike it were when she accumulated labour through African communalism and Islamic lineage cooperation and solidarity in her lifetime, now, her legacies of Batik designing are sustained by generational business interests.

The colonial government regarded Kebba's work as a category in the cottage or native industry. However, the making of self-government in African states had Africans evolving new ways of engaging the modern in its 'primitive' state. Achille Mbembe's definition of Afropolitanism already manifest from the 1960s in the works of Kebba in Latrikunda. The work connects arts, designs, and architecture in contemporary times. The contemporary economies of Africa and specifically West Africa have question marked the essence of fabric art made manually. The African designs and story lines on the fabrics rarely matter any longer. Nina Sylvanus book—*Patterns in circulation: Cloth, Gender, and Materiality in West Africa* explains the influx of global interest in the types of fabrics consumed (Sylvanus, 2016). It is established that Vlisco Netherlands have the long history of producing African textiles even before. And Margaret Trowell's postulation of driving African artistic creations into the world as she did in Uganda already manifest across Africa. However, at the death of Kebba in 2003, Afrofuturism in the artistic creations from Africa had set in, hence, Batik is basking in Afrofuturism, where Africans and African diaspora use the batik designs handmade from Africa as an alternative for self-expression and assertion of the black identity. The global visibility of handmade Batik from Africa also crossed the colour line as other races make meaning Kebba was born at a time when Vlisco already manufactures textiles for Africa's consumption. Yet, reveling handmade Batik designs speaks volume of the African culture being recreated in original artistic forms and very interpretive of the everyday life. The level of globalization in production of textiles into Africa also involve the Chinese. The Nana Benz textile commerce in Togo dwindled during the SAP era thus, contemporary Chinese production of Ankara have revived the Nana Benz and also created class segments in textile trade, as the Chinese could afford to provide cheap textiles for new generation of entrepreneurs in the commercial system. Invariably, spaces of batik design in Latrikunda remain a local factor in the

fabric art value chain system. It creates a perspective to understand Kebba's work and legacies as a heritage despite global influence that affects consumption and lack of modern production technologies that could enhance Latrikunda to transform to a modern textile production hub within Africa.

As it were, Latrikunda still maintains as the production and marketing hub for batik in the Gambia. In a youtube video of Latrikunda after Kebba's demise, the Gambian Tourism Board, covered a life session of production and marketing of Batik at Kebba's factory (Musu Kebba Drammeh tie and dye factory | By Gambia Tourism Board | Facebook). Across African universities knowledge of production and marketing of art in historical perspective is gaining attention through essays, filming, excursions and fieldwork enquiries (Olatunji, 2021).

Note: The research that produced this article is enabled by a short grant from IFRA Nigeria.

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