

THE REACTIONS AND TRIUMPH OF WAIST BEADS: A CASE STUDY OF EKITI PEOPLE IN THE 21ST CENTURY

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Abstract

The resurgence of Ibèbè (waist beads) among the Ekiti people in the 21st century represents reclamation of a traditional cultural practice that had been largely declined due to the influence of Colonialism and Westernization. Ibèbè were once an important part of Ekiti culture, representing femininity, beauty, and sexuality. However, the practice began to decline in the 20th century as western clothing and values became more prevalent. In recent years, there has been a resurgence of interest in ibèbè, with more women wearing them as a symbol of pride in their heritage and a way to expressing their culture. This paper provides an account on the origin of ibèbè (waist beads) in Nigeria, cultural revival and identity, social significance and symbolism of ibèbè; it also investigates the roles of waist beads as a fashion accessory in Ekiti region as well as economic implications of the resurgence of waist beads including their production, distribution and commercialization. Primary and secondary sources were rigorously consulted during the documentation of this work.

Keywords: *Ibèbè, femininity, beauty, sexuality*

Introduction

The history of *ibèbè* (waist beads) dates to the old age. Historians argue that, the origins can be traced to ancient Egypt (depicted in Egyptian hieroglyphics) where they were first called girdles. These girdles were worn by women as a status symbol¹. In Nigeria, however, the tradition of adorning waist beads was made popular by the Yoruba ethnic group of South Western Nigeria. They are worn as a celebration of womanhood, sexuality, femininity, fertility, healing, spirituality, body shaping, protection and wealth.

Beads generally are small round perforated objects which are usually strong to form necklaces, bracelets, waist beads or textile decorations. They are made of glass, copper wood, silver, brass, aluminum bones, ivory, minerals including precious stones and plastics. Before the 12th century, beads were commonly made from materials such as clay, ivory, bones, cowries, animal teeth, shells, precious stones and even egg shells².

The Yoruba people refer to waist beads as *ilèkè*, *ibèbèidí*, and *Lágídígba*. They are both a piece of jewelry and a part of their spirituality. In Yoruba culture, waist beads are part of the rites of passage for young women. As a young woman outgrows her beads, she receives newer ones, which are worn as symbols of confidence, femininity, fertility, and well-being. Waist beads are worn for posture, beauty, weight tracking, protection, growth, sexual desire, and other reasons. In addition, waist beads can represent royalty and social standing, depending on the price and quality of the beads. Women of royalty usually wear more expensive and rare beads to distinguish themselves from others.

One finding by the News Paper reveals that, beads are grouped into different categories according to their quality. *Iyùn* is said to be the richest and most expensive of all the categories. This submission can be found in the Yoruba axiom which asserts: (*Iyùn Babalèkè*), "Iyùn is the father of all beads."³

Iyùn is deposited at the basement of the river prior to extraction. Digging for *Iyùn* is said to be comparable to the search for gold. After it is successfully extracted, work then shifts to polishing it to reveal its colours of wine and red.

According to the duo of Táíwò and Kéhíndé of ModúpéOlúwa Twins beads outfit at Òjé Market, Ìbàdàn, the Òyó State capital, for *Iyùn* beads availability in the market, it is assumed that such beads must have been sold by one who inherited it from late parents.

"In fact, those who still have it don't keep it at home. They deposit it in the bank for safe keeping. This is to tell you how expensive *Iyùn* is. It has existed since ancient times and is still very valuable till date. Traditional rulers and rich men and women use it. But they must have inherited it from their forefathers,"

Ranked next to *Iyùn* is the one called `Akùn. Like *Iyùn*, *Akùn* is also scarce. But unlike *Iyùn*, it is made of stone and filtered before it is ready for market. The third in the category is *Eyin Erin* (Ivory). It is also expensive. There are others like *Sègi*, *Òpòtó* and *Ikan*, all of which serve the same socio-cultural purposes.

According to findings, beads are used for religious, cultural and beautification purposes. For instance, Ifá devotees, go with green and brown beads while their *Òsun* counterparts wear white⁴.

The *Àràbà-Olúawo* of *Osogboland*, chief *Ifáyemi Elebuibon*, revealed that waist beads, for example, were used to stop the recurrence of *àbíké* in a family, for birth control, and, in particular, preventing unwanted pregnancy. The renowned Ifá Priest, however, clarified that beads worn on the neck and wrist were adorned for the purpose of status identification while noting that it was a practice that exists till date, *Elebuibon* stated that "This is a way to showcase our rich culture and tradition⁵. It is cheaper than spending scarce money on expensive jewelry."

The founder of *Nike Arts Gallery*, Chief Mrs *Nike Okundaye*, dismissed the claim which linked beads with fetish practices, accusing the proponents of the claim of mischief and ignorance. She said wearing of beads was part of Yoruba culture, a culture that has been a source of attraction to the foreigners.

Chinua Achebe in chapter 12 of his work 'Things Fall Apart' says,

*"If I hold her hand she says, 'don't touch!' if I hold her foot she says 'don't touch!' but when I hold her waist beads, she pretends not to know."*⁶

In the realm of love and intimacy, waist beads take on a deeper, more sensual meaning. They are not just body adornments, but tools of seduction, enhancing the intimate experience between partners. Waist beads are often associated with the goddess of love and fertility in many African cultures. They are believed to attract and entice the opposite sex, making them a symbol of desire and eroticism. The colours and types of beads used can also carry specific meanings. For instance,

Blue: knowledge, healing, peace, truth, harmony - a cooling colour symbolizing faith, devotion, deep insight.

Green: prosperity, hope, harmony, healing and ripening, encouraging the wearer to love nature and be generous, humble and self-controlled.

Red: self-confidence, vitality, sexual energy, passion, courage.

Yellow: wisdom, knowledge, clarity, increase⁷.

Moreover, waist beads can also serve as a form of non-verbal communication between partners. The revealing or concealing of waist beads can signal a woman's willingness or reluctance to engage in intimate activities. Traditionally, most waist beads are worn under clothing and are considered a private affair. More recently, they have been used as fashion accessories, worn over clothes and under crop tops, showcasing each strand's beauty.

Cultural Revival and Identity of Waist Beads

The use of *ibèbè* in Ekiti predates written records, with archaeological evidence suggesting that similar adornments were worn by ancient African civilizations. *Ibèbè* were an integral part of traditional African societies, including those in Ekiti, serving as symbols of femininity, beauty, and cultural identity⁸. Artisans in Ekiti crafted waist beads (*ibèbè*) from a variety of materials such as beads, shells, seeds, and metals, using traditional techniques passed down through generations.

Ibèbè held profound cultural significance in pre-colonial Ekiti society, symbolizing rites of passage, fertility, and spiritual protection. Waist beads are commonly worn during social gatherings, festivals, and ceremonies in Ekiti. They may be displayed prominently as a symbol of pride and cultural identity.

The colonial period brought significant changes to Ekiti society, including shifts in cultural practices and the introduction of western fashion trends. Despite colonial influences, *ibèbè* remained a symbol of cultural resilience and resistance among the Ekiti people, serving as a tangible connection to their pre-colonial heritage. There was an adaptation to changes as Waist beads evolved during this period to incorporate new materials and designs influenced by global fashion trends, while still retaining their traditional symbolism and significance.

In the post-colonial era, there has been a resurgence of interest in traditional African practices across Nigeria, including Ekiti. This cultural revival has led to a renewed appreciation for waist beads as symbols of cultural identity and pride. Today, waist beads continue to be worn by women in Ekiti for various purposes, including fashion, cultural expression, and spiritual beliefs. They are often customized with personal preferences, reflecting individual style and identity. The resurgence of *ibèbè*, a traditional waist adornment among the Ekiti people of Nigeria, reflects a broader trend of cultural revival and preservation in the face of modernization⁹. The resurgence of *ibèbè* signifies a conscious effort among the Ekiti people to reclaim and preserve their cultural heritage. By reviving the practice of wearing *ibèbè*, individuals honor the customs and traditions passed down by their ancestors, ensuring their continuation for future generations. *Ibèbè* is more than just a fashion accessory; it holds profound cultural symbolism for the Ekiti people. Its resurgence reflects a desire to reassert cultural identity and values in the face of external influences and modernization. In a rapidly changing world, where globalization and modernization threaten traditional practices, the resurgence of *ibèbè* represents a form of resistance against cultural erosion. By embracing

ibèbè, the Ekiti people assert the importance of preserving authentic cultural expressions amidst external pressures.

The revival of *ibèbè* ensures the continuity of cultural practices that have defined Ekiti identity for centuries. It serves as a link between past, present, and future generations, fostering a sense of continuity and belonging within the community. Cultural revival movements in Ekiti often involve community engagement and participation. The resurgence of *ibèbè* is fueled by grassroots efforts to promote cultural awareness and appreciation, involving collaborations between artisans, cultural organizations, and community leaders.

Examples of this cultural resurgence are evident in the following areas:

Fashion Trends: In recent years, *ibèbè* has gained popularity as a fashionable accessory among young Ekiti women. Its resurgence can be seen in contemporary fashion trends, where *ibèbè* is incorporated into modern attire, blending tradition with contemporary style.

Cultural Events: The resurgence of *ibèbè* is often showcased during cultural events and festivals in Ekiti, where participants proudly wear *ibèbè* as symbols of cultural pride and identity¹⁰. These events provide platforms for celebrating and promoting traditional practices within the community. Example of this festival is the *Ogun Onire festival*. The *Ògún Oníré Festival* is a significant cultural event celebrated annually in Ire Ekiti, waist beads play a prominent role in this festival, serving as symbols of femininity, cultural identity, and spiritual connection. Waist beads are often worn by women during the *Ògún Oníré* festival as symbols of fertility and blessings. They are believed to invoke the blessings of the deity *Ògún Oníré*, who is revered for his powers of fertility, prosperity, and protection.

For many participants in the *Ògún Oníré* Festival, wearing *ibèbè* is a way to connect with the spiritual realm and honour their ancestors. The beads are seen as conduits for divine energy and protection, enhancing the wearer's spiritual presence during the festival. The beads serves as tangible expressions of devotion and reverence, enhancing the spiritual significance of the offerings. In addition to their spiritual significance, waist beads worn during the *Ògún Oníré* Festival contribute to the visual spectacle of the event. The vibrant colors and intricate patterns of the beads add to the overall festive atmosphere and showcase the beauty of Yoruba craftsmanship.

On the while, the resurgence of *ibèbè* among the Ekiti people reflects a broader trend of cultural revival and preservation, as they seek to reconnect with their heritage and uphold traditional practices in the face of

modernization. By embracing *ibèbè*, the Ekiti people reaffirm their cultural identity, resist cultural erosion, or extinction ensures the continuity of their rich cultural heritage for future generations.

Social Significance and Symbol of Waist Beads

The resurgence of *ibèbè* within Ekiti society stands as a testament to the enduring significance of cultural traditions in shaping collective identity and values. *Ibèbè*, a cultural emblem deeply rooted in Ekiti heritage, holds profound social significance and symbolism across various facets of community life, including rites of passage, cultural ceremonies, and everyday interactions. This resurgence not only revitalizes age-old customs but also signifies a reaffirmation of cultural values within the Ekiti community. The resurgence of *ibèbè* serves as a catalyst for the preservation and promotion of cultural heritage in Ekiti society. By examining its role in reinforcing tradition, fostering community cohesion, and promoting economic empowerment, insights can be gained on the profound impact of *ibèbè* resurgence on the cultural landscape of Ekiti.

The resurgence of *ibèbè* serves as a tangible expression of Ekiti culture and identity. As individuals embrace the wearing of waist beads, they signal a connection to their cultural roots, honouring the traditions and customs that have been integral to Ekiti society for generations. Its resurgence reinforces a sense of pride and belonging among community members, who see it as a tangible representation of their unique cultural heritage. Through the revival of *ibèbè*, Ekiti society reaffirms its distinct cultural identity in the face of external influences¹¹.

Thus, by adorning themselves with *ibèbè*, people actively participate in the preservation and celebration of their cultural heritage. The revival of *ibèbè* brings people together to celebrate shared traditions and values. Cultural events and ceremonies centered on *ibèbè* provide opportunities for community members to connect, bond, and strengthen social ties. Waist beads are not just individual adornments but also have a social significance within Yoruba culture. They can signify different stages in a person's life, such as puberty, marriage, or motherhood. As more individuals choose to wear waist beads, it cultivates a sense of unity and commonality, strengthening the ties that bind the community together. This resurgence serves as a reminder of the enduring value of cultural practices in promoting harmony and shared experiences.

Ibèbè are often used in various rituals and ceremonies within Yoruba culture. These rituals serve to reinforce cultural values, beliefs, and practices that have been passed down through generations. The renewed

interest in *ibèbè* reflects a commitment to preserving traditional practices and customs that have been passed down through Ceremony generations. One example of *ibèbè* being used in a ritual rite in Ekiti is the *Orí Òke* ceremony in *Ido Ekiti*. This ceremony is performed for a young girl who is preparing to marry. On the day of the ceremony, the girl is dressed in a special white garment and her hair is plaited in a traditional style. She is then led to the shrine of the goddess "*Òsun*," where she is cleansed and blessed. The priestess then adorns her with a new set of *ibèbè* waist beads. This ritual is considered an important step in the girl's journey to becoming a wife and mother. By embracing *ibèbè*, Ekiti society reaffirms its connection to its cultural heritage and acknowledges the importance of maintaining these traditions for future generations. The resurgence of *ibèbè* could be viewed as a continuation of these traditions, where the act of wearing waist beads becomes a ritualistic practice that reinforces cultural values within Ekiti community¹².

As *ibèbè* experiences resurgence, older generations pass down their knowledge and skills related to its creation and significance to younger members of the community. This inter-generational transmission of cultural knowledge ensures that traditions surrounding *ibèbè* continue to be preserved and upheld for years to come.

Ibèbè in Ekiti Society, Its Role in Rites of Passage, Cultural Ceremonies

Social Significance and Symbols Attached to Ibèbè within Ekiti Society.

Ibèbè serves as a potent symbol of Ekiti cultural identity, embodying the unique customs, beliefs, and practices of the community. Its use in various ceremonies and rituals reinforces a sense of belonging and heritage among Ekiti people. During cultural events and ceremonies, *ibèbè* plays a central role in conveying respect, honour, and tradition. *Ibèbè* is often adorned with intricate designs and colours representing the richness of Ekiti culture and heritage. In Ekiti society, *ibèbè* is often used in traditional ceremonies such as childbirth, marriage, and initiation rites. It is used to signify the transition from one stage of life to another, symbolizing growth, protection, and cultural identity. For instance, *Ibèbè* holds great significance during puberty rites in Ekiti society¹³. They are often worn by young girls as they transition into womanhood. The beads symbolize the coming of age and serve as a visual representation of their maturity and readiness for marriage and adulthood. It is a way to celebrate this important milestone in a girl's life and also to impart cultural knowledge and values.

The wearing of *Ibèbè* during puberty rites is a cherished tradition that connects young girls to their cultural heritage and prepares them for their future roles within the community. One example is the "*Orísun Òsarà*" in *Ilawe-Ekiti* ceremony, which is performed for a young girl who has just given birth for the first time. In this ceremony, the girl is presented with a special waist beads known as the "*Orísun Òsarà*" bead. This bead is made of red and white beads, which represent the blood of childbirth and the innocence of the newborn baby. The ceremony also includes prayers and offerings to the gods, asking for protection and guidance for the new mother and her child. This ritual is considered a blessing for the new family and a celebration of the girl's transition into motherhood.

In some parts of Ekiti, *ibèbè* is used as part of the traditional funeral rites. In the town of *Emure-Ekiti*, for example, *ibèbè* is worn by the eldest son of the deceased during the burial ceremony. The *ibèbè* cloth is believed to protect the son from harm and to help him fulfil his obligations as the new head of the family. In addition to wearing the *ibèbè*, the son also performs other rituals and customs during the funerals.

The use of *ibèbè* in the *Òmùgbó* ritual signifies a number of things. Firstly, it represents the transition from life to death. *Ibèbè* is seen as a protective garment that shields the eldest son from harm and helps him to move forward. Secondly, *ibèbè* represents the continuity of the family lineage. By wearing *ibèbè*, the eldest son is symbolically taking on the role of head of the family, ensuring that the family's legacy will continue. Finally, *ibèbè* represents the ancestors' presence and guidance during this time of mourning.

Within Ekiti society, *ibèbè* is often imbued with spiritual significance, believed to possess protective and auspicious qualities. It is used in ceremonies to invoke blessings from ancestral spirits and to ward off evil influences, reflecting the spiritual interconnectedness of the community. For example, during pregnancy, women may wear waist beads as a way to provide support and protection for both the mother and the unborn child. After childbirth, there may be ceremonies where the waist beads are adjusted or replaced to signify the transition into motherhood.

Also in everyday life, *ibèbè* is a symbol of authority and prestige. It may be carried by individuals of high status or used as a decorative item in homes to showcase cultural pride and identity. The use of *ibèbè* is closely tied to social hierarchy and status within Ekiti society. Historically, it was reserved for individuals of high rank or authority, such as traditional rulers and elders. Its presence signified respect and authority, serving as a visual marker of social standing¹⁴.

ROLES OF WAIST BEADS IN THE 21ST CENTURY; FASHION AND PERSONAL EXPRESSION

Waist beads hold cultural significance and are worn for a variety of reasons. They can be seen as a form of adornment, enhancing the beauty and femininity of the wearer. In some cultures, waist beads are worn as a symbol of fertility, sexuality, and sensuality. They can also serve as a means of body decoration and personal expression.

Fashion statement: many people today wear waist beads as a piece of body jewellery or an accessory.

Weight control: others use the waist bead to measure their waist size and over time the band will fall or roll up due to weight loss or weight gain.

Culture: there are a variety of meanings for waist beads in different cultures such as maturity and sexual attraction. Cultures that traditionally utilize waist beads include the Egyptian culture, Ghana, Yorùbá, Ewe, Ashanti, Krobo, Ga-Adangbe, and others.

Spirituality: Those who are practicing the awareness of the spirit use the waist beads for personal performances. The colours and patterns of waist beads can vary depending on the cultural context and personal preference. Some women choose specific colours or combinations of beads to represent their heritage, spiritual beliefs, or individual intentions.

Additionally, waist beads may be worn as a form of body shaping or to track changes in weight or waistline¹⁵.

The tradition of wearing waist beads is not limited to a particular region or country in Africa. It is found in various countries across the continent, including Nigeria, Ghana, Senegal, Kenya, and many others. Each culture may have its own unique symbolism and meanings associated with waist beads.

Today, waist beads have gained popularity beyond Africa and are appreciated as a fashion accessory and a form of body positivity. They can be worn discreetly under clothing or as a visible part of an outfit, depending on personal preference. Many artisans and designers now create waist beads using a wide range of materials, including traditional beads, crystals, gemstones, and even charms.

The Place of Colour in Picking Waist-beads

Colour is considered powerful and the main factor while choosing beads for most beaded jewellery. Besides the beaded jewellery design and types of beads, the dominant aspect and overall focal point remains to be

the colour of the beads. Bead`s colour is a magical element which symbolizes emotion and connection to events and feelings. For example, when representing new life by the virtue of being pregnant or when trying to conceive, shades of green will signify your desire and the deep connection with new life.

Below are some bead colour meanings:

- Black – Power and protection
- Blue – Loyalty and truth
- Brown – Earth and stability
- Gold – Good health, power and wealth
- Green – Abundance, fertility, nature and prosperity
- Orange – Courage, self-confidence and vitality
- Pink – Care, beauty, love and kindness
- Purple – Royalty, spirituality and wisdom
- Red – Confidence and vitality
- Turquoise – Communication and self-awareness
- White – Light, truth and purity
- Yellow – Energy, joy and happiness¹⁶

ECONOMIC IMPLICATIONS OF THE RESURGENCE OF WAIST BEADS; PRODUCTION, DISTRIBUTION AND COMMERCIALIZATION

The resurgence of waist beads has significant economic implications for the production, distribution, and commercialization of this traditional African accessory, especially in the Ekiti region of Nigeria. This trend may impact local artisans, businesses, and the broader economy through various channels.

Production and Artisanal Impact

The revival of waist beads creates opportunities for local artisans in the Ekiti region to showcase their craftsmanship and traditional bead-making skills. Artisans specializing in beadwork and jewelry crafting stand to benefit from increased demand for waist beads, leading to enhanced income generation and sustainable livelihoods. For example, skilled bead makers who craft unique and culturally significant waist beads can capitalize on the trend by producing customized designs that appeal to local and international markets. For example, local bead-making cooperatives or individual artisans may form partnerships with retailers or online platforms to reach a wider market. This collaboration can lead to increased visibility and sales for the artisans while providing retailers with unique, locally-

made products to offer customers. Consequently, the increased demand for waist beads can provide local artisans with more opportunities for work and income. Artisans skilled in bead-making may see an uptick in orders and commissions, leading to improved livelihoods for them and their families.

Moreover, the production of waist beads may also provide employment opportunities for individuals involved in the intricate process of bead crafting, including stringing, weaving, and embellishing the beads. This can contribute to the preservation of traditional artisanal skills and cultural heritage while fostering economic empowerment at the local level.

Distribution and Commercialization Impact

The resurgence of waist beads presents opportunities for entrepreneurial ventures focused on the distribution and commercialization of these products. Local businesses, including retailers, fashion boutiques, and market vendors, can capitalize on the trend by incorporating waist beads into their product offerings. This diversification of merchandise can attract a wider customer base and drive revenue growth for businesses operating in the Ekiti region.

As the trend of waist beads grows, businesses involved in the production, distribution, and sale of these items may experience increased sales and profits. This could lead to the expansion of existing businesses or the emergence of new ones catering to this market niche.

Furthermore, the commercialization of waist beads can contribute to the growth of the local fashion industry, with designers and fashion entrepreneurs integrating waist beads into their collections and marketing strategies. By leveraging this trend, local businesses can create new revenue streams and bolster the visibility of Ekiti's fashion and accessory sector.

Impact on the Broader Economy

The resurgence of waist beads can have multiplier effects on the broader economy of the Ekiti region. As local artisans and businesses thrive due to increased demand for waist beads, the circulation of income within the community is likely to grow. This can spur economic activity, leading to enhanced consumer spending, investment in infrastructure, and overall economic development. The commercialization of waist beads can contribute to the overall economy of the Ekiti region by creating employment opportunities, stimulating local production, and potentially attracting tourism interested in the cultural significance of these items.

Moreover, the promotion of waist beads as a cultural and fashion accessory may attract tourists and visitors interested in exploring and purchasing indigenous products. As a result, the tourism sector in the Ekiti region may experience a boost, contributing to job creation and the generation of foreign exchange earnings.

It is important to note that the resurgence of waist beads in the Ekiti region does not only benefits individual artisans and businesses but also contributes to the overall economic growth of Ekiti state at large. The success of businesses like "Beads and Beyond" creates job opportunities, supports local artisans, attracts tourists, and fosters a thriving market

The resurgence of waist beads has led to the growth of several businesses, both online and offline that cater to the demand for these traditional accessories. For example, there are now numerous online stores that sell waist beads made from a variety of materials, including glass, metal, and even beads made from recycled plastic. In addition, there are now a number of workshops and classes that teach women how to make their own waist beads. These businesses have helped to create jobs and provide income for many African women. In addition, the increasing popularity of waist beads has led to a rise in demand for other African-inspired accessories¹⁷.

Another example of how the resurgence of waist beads has fostered economic development is through the emergence of new fashion trends. For example, there has been an increasing popularity of African-inspired fashion, which often incorporates waist beads as a key design element. This trend has led to the creation of new fashion brands and labels that focus on this unique style. In addition, it has also led to the growth of African fashion shows and events that celebrate this style of fashion. These fashion events have helped to bring attention to the talent and creativity of African designers, as well as generate revenue for the local economy.

Before the 21st century, waist beads were primarily handmade by artisans using natural materials such as glass, wood, and beads made from animal horn or shells. These artisans often had limited access to technology and resources, so production was slow and limited.

The rise of the internet and global trade in the 21st century has changed the way waist beads are made. Now, many artisans have access to online platforms where they can sell their products to a global audience. In addition, they have access to new technologies and materials that allow them to produce their beads more efficiently and at a lower cost. Due to the increased efficiency of waist bead production in the 21st century, the cost of these accessories has been reduced significantly. This has made waist

beads more accessible to a wider range of people. In addition, the internet has allowed for the creation of *niche* markets, where people can find waist beads that are tailored to their specific needs and preferences. For example, there are now waist beads specifically designed for different body types, sizes, and even genders. This has allowed for greater inclusivity in the waist bead market, which has helped to drive economic development¹⁸. In addition, the internet has also allowed for the sharing of knowledge and information about beads to improve their design and functionality. For example, many artisans now use 3D printing technology to create intricate patterns and designs on their beads. They can also customize their beads with materials such as crystals, stones, and even precious metals. This has led to the creation of high-quality, luxurious waist beads that are more than just accessories, but works of art. This increased design sophistication has further contributed to the economic development of the waist bead industry.

By and large, the rise of the internet has had a significant impact on the waist bead, particularly, its distribution and commercialization.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the history of *ibèbè* (waist beads) dates back to the old age of which historians have argued that the origin of *ibèbè* could be traced back to Ancient Egypt where they were first called girdles¹⁹. In Nigeria, the tradition of adorning *ibèbè* (waist beads) was made popular by the Yoruba ethnic group of south western before the intrusion of colonialism and westernization. The Yoruba tribe refers to waist beads as *ilèkè*, *ibèbèídí*, and *Lágídígba*. They are both piece of jewelry and part of their spirituality. They are worn for the celebration of womanhood, sexuality, femininity, fertility, healing, spirituality, body shaping, symbol of wealth and many more. Some believe it wards off evil spirits while others see it as symbolic of fertility or prosperity²⁰

The resurgence of *ibèbè* among the Ekiti people reflects a broader trend of cultural revival and preservation, as they seek to reconnect with their heritage and uphold traditional practices in the face of modernization. By embracing *ibèbè*, the Ekiti people reaffirm their cultural identity, resist cultural erosion, and ensure the continuity of their rich cultural heritage for future generations.

The tradition of wearing waist beads is not limited to a particular region or country in Africa. It is found in various countries across the continent, including Nigeria, Ghana, Senegal, Kenya, and many others. Each culture may have its own unique symbolism and meanings associated with waist beads. On the while, the resurgence of waist beads in the Ekiti

region goes beyond economic benefits, fostering cultural appreciation, community engagement, and sustainability. It represents reclamation of heritage and tradition in a rapidly changing world, while also embracing innovation and global connectivity.



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