

TYOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF DRESS PATTERNS IN THE PORT-HARCOURT CARNIVAL.

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Abstract

The world over, many cultures or people have been able to express their cultural values by the use of clothes and dresses on one occasion or another. Africans use textiles and dress patterns as an expression of cultural heritage in festivals to promote and preserve the traditional culture. The Port-Harcourt carnival displayed a lot of costumes and ornamentals. However, researchers who have carried out works on the Port-Harcourt carnival focused mainly on tourism, the theatre industry, masquerades and other artistic elements in the Port-Harcourt carnival, Rivers State. Some of these researchers discussed the potential impact of the carnival on socio-economic activities in Rivers State. Others enunciated factors that will improve the Port-Harcourt carnival and other festivals for the development of tourism and recreation in Nigeria. The objectives of this study are to have the typological analysis of dress patterns used in CARNIRIV, identify some costumes and ascertain the social essence of these dress patterns, and determine whether these costumes used by participants have symbolic importance in their cultural context. The study adopted a qualitative research design and, relied mainly on primary and secondary sources of information for data collection. In the course of this study, the researcher discovered that modernization has brought change in some dress patterns. The typology of dress patterns used included more of Western outfits than indigenous or native dresses. This study, therefore, identified, evaluated and analyzed the typology of some dress patterns in the Port-Harcourt carnival.

Keywords: Dress patterns, Typology, Port-Harcourt-carnival, Analysis

Introduction

Every cultural system of the world has peculiar festivals and dress modes. Despite the cross-cultural influences, every culture has a typical dress pattern to reflect its cultural background, values and aesthetics. Over the years, dress pattern as a medium of expression in cultural festivals has developed into varied types of costumes and fashion styles. It must be noted that some new dress patterns were introduced and costumes have changed or modernized over the years to become innovative in different fashion styles. This is evident in some of the costumes and traditional attire. Costume from a theatrical perspective is referred to as any material worn to perform, such as make-up materials used by participants in the festival. Aside from the native dress patterns, modern fashion styles were used as costumes in the Port-Harcourt carnival. However, the people of Rivers State have dress patterns for special occasions or ceremonies such as a carnival or other festivals. The dress pattern is the use of cloth or dress to make an appearance or outfit that defines and reflects a character, position, personality, ability and age. In many cultures, these dress patterns reveal the people's ideology,

beliefs, arts and cultural values. In Nigeria, there exists ethnic diversity in dress, cloth and body art, which are used to express themselves as identities on any occasion.

Berthelot (2011) enumerated the different clothes and attires of the three major ethnic groups in Nigeria and other minority ethnic groups such as the Yoruba, Igbo, Hausa, Fulani and Niger Delta. He pointed out that the Yoruba weavers produce *Adire*, *Aso-Oke* and *Alarin* as their traditional cloths. They believed that cloth and clothing is a vital part of man and to the Yoruba man, it is to indicate status and wealth, and reflect their contact with the *Muslim* Hausa in the nineteenth (19th) century. In modern Yoruba, the *Adire* and *Aso-Oke* fabrics are used for all sorts of designs like wedding and party attires for men, women and children that have evolved from the original *Gbariye*, *Sokoto* and *Buba* attires. The Igbo people are known for the production of *Akwete* and *Akwa-Ocha* cloths which are like the *Aso-Oke* and *Adire* being used for all sorts of modern designs. The Hausa weaving communities produce *Rigagiwa* and *Yankura* which are used for modern designs covered with widespread hand embroidery decorations. The change seen today is a result of modern civilization and technological advancement, most of the textiles and dress patterns are modernized to suit innovations.

Background Information of Port-Harcourt Carnival

The Port-Harcourt carnival was one of the oldest carnivals in Nigeria, hosted in Rivers State and a unifying festival that involved men, women and children from the 23 Local Government Areas of Rivers State. Port-Harcourt is the capital city of Rivers State, Nigeria, and the Rivers State Ministry of Culture and Tourism in collaboration with the Rivers State Tourism Agency, and the Rivers State Cultural Centre, Port-Harcourt, strived to see to the successful hosting of the carnival in every second week of December, in Port-Harcourt until 2014. From the historical point of view, the concept and idea of CARNIRIV look quite encompassing but the hosting of the carnival in Rivers State has not been regular or celebrated annually. After the maiden edition in 1988, the Port-Harcourt carnival celebration was paused until 2008.

It is noteworthy that in the year 1996, another festival was introduced in Rivers State which was the "RIVIFEST." It was later rebranded as "CARNIRIV" in 2008. The second phase of the celebration started from 2008 to 2014 and has since been stopped and not celebrated again. Unlike the Calabar Carnival in Cross Rivers State which celebrates annually from every first day to the last day in December. Aselemi (2018) noted that the last CARNIRIV was held in 2014 and the successor to the former Governor Chibuike Rotimi Ameachi, Governor Nyenson Wike has transformed CARNIRIV into Hosanna Praise in Rivers State which started in 2015 till date. The Hosanna Praise holds at the Elekohia Stadium, Port-Harcourt and the chairman has been Chief Adonye Omubo Pepple since its inception.

The world over, every cultural system has its peculiar way of celebrating festivals which are used for entertainment, reunion, fanfare and

social intercourse. In Africa, there are different types of festivals; some are sacred or religious while others are secular or social. These festivals are used to build the foundation of man's belief, inspiration and culture. Carnival is a festival of fanfare where a lot of people come together to interact and clothes, dresses or costumes are used for the celebration. Cuffy (2017) stated that carnival as an annual festival is celebrated in different parts of the world as it is also celebrated in Africa. She described the carnival as "many destinations around the world use this well-established festival sub-niche as a tourism development strategy."

Carnival has gone through evolution to create an awareness of the key dimension of Caribbean-based carnivals that works in unison with different cultures to create effective street festivals in different places. The origin of carnival is traced back to the Roman pre-lent fast of the Catholic celebrations. The January new year Roman festival of the Kalends later became the Catholic celebration preceding the beginning of lent in the early 12th century. Today, many cities in the world celebrate carnivals in different ways. Oftentimes, people in various places tend to have special clothes for some occasions like carnivals and other festivities. For instance, the Port-Harcourt Carnival combined two groups that displayed the native and Caribbean or free-style dressing patterns. The participants in the cultural groups used native dress patterns during their display while participants in the Caribbean also referred to as freestyle groups used conventional fabrics for their Western costumes.

In Nigeria, some governors are using carnival and other special festivals as a means to boost their state economy through the tourism and hospitality industries. Nigeria, as a country has different ethnic groups that celebrate various cultural festivals with special attires and some of these prominent festivals, include: the *Eyo* festival in Lagos State, *Osun Oshogbo* yearly festival celebrated in the *Oshogbo* Sacred Grove at the banks of the river *Osun*, *Osun* State, the *Ofala* festival which is celebrated by the people in Anambra State and the *Argungu* fishing festival in Gurbin Kokuwa of Augie Local Government Areas in Kebbi State. Others are the *Ekpe* festival of the present-day Abia State, *Owu AruSuun Alali* of the Kalabari people celebrated in Buguma, Rivers State; the Rivers State Festival (RIVFEST) which was later rebranded as Rivers State carnival (CARNIRIV) in 1988. Another is the Calabar carnival in Cross Rivers State. It is noteworthy that the National Festival of Arts and Culture (NAFEST) which rotates among the 36 States in Nigeria is organized by the National Council for Arts and Culture (NCAC).

Research Objectives

The purpose of this research is to conduct a typological analysis of dress patterns used in the Port-Harcourt Carnival in Rivers State, Nigeria. The study seeks to identify some dress patterns and discuss the significance of these attires to the people of Rivers State.

The study is also to ascertain whether the dresses used by participants reflect the Rivers State cultural heritage.

Methodology

The study adopted a qualitative research method, and relied mainly on primary and secondary sources of information for data collection. The primary sources included fieldwork, archival materials, photographs taken by the researcher, other photographs previously used in the Port-Harcourt Carnival were also collected, and oral interviews. The oral interviews were conducted with many culture activists, staff members from the old Cultural Centre, Agbani Darego Cultural Centre, and the Rivers State Culture and Tourism Agency. The oral interviews were conducted to six selected senior administrative staff members each from culture activists, the old Cultural Centre, Agbani Darego Cultural Centre, and the Rivers State Culture and Tourism Agency using random sampling method. The instruments of data collection were a tape recorder, diary and a digital camera. Books, private collections, journals, festival catalogues, and documents from electronic media constituted the secondary sources. Diary was used to keep information on the names of cloths, dress patterns and its relevance in CARNIRIV and a digital camera was used to take previous photographs from the archives. The analytical approach is used to examine the cultural practices and symbolic importance of dress patterns in their social context. The descriptive approach is used to identify the names of dress patterns.

Theoretical Framework

This study is centred on semiotic and reception, and modernization theories. The semiotics and reception theory emphasizes that through experiences, values, historical and cultural awareness of viewers, the meaning of a message is made clear. The researcher hinged on Utoh-Ezeajugh (2011) in whose view, many cultures have used dress to express their worldview over the years. As cultures vary from one to another, so are the colours of traditional costumes and their significance or symbolic values. The author argued that cultural symbolism is the hallmark of traditional Nigerian dress. To preserve Nigerian traditional dress culture, people need to use traditional clothes and dresses in festivals, masquerade performances, marriages, and others to preserve heritage.

Modernization Theory

This refers to a socio-cultural theory used to explain the progressive transition from a pre-modern or traditional to a modern society. Its origin dates back to the classical work of Max Weber (1864-1920). This theory provides a foundation for the modernization paradigm developed by Talcott Parson (1902-1979). In recent times more works have emerged in this area of study which includes Frank (1929-1979) and Wallerstein (1930-2019) studies in whose view, modernization requires the destruction of the indigenous

culture and replaced by a more Westernized culture. Modernization theory aims to identify the social variables that contribute to social progress and ascertain the process of social evolution in culture. It also emphasizes the process of change as well as responses to change. To the proponents of modernization theory, traditional societies will progress and experience development better when they adopt more modern practices.

The modernization theory is useful as it throws more light on why people are to be guided about acculturation, so their cultural values or heritage such as dress patterns are preserved and not be destroyed and replaced by a more Westernized culture which is the argument of this paper. The modernization theory was applied in analyzing the cultural practices and symbolic importance of dress patterns in their social context.

Findings: Typology of Dress Patterns in the Port-Harcourt Carnival

In the first edition, which was in 1988, different types of native dress patterns were used in the Port-Harcourt carnival. It is a fact that dress patterns have symbolic importance to any society and every ethnic group has a special type of dress pattern as an identity. The Port-Harcourt carnival was holistically to cohere and project the cultural values of the people. This infers also that distinct costumes were used by various performing ethnicities in the spirit of oneness. The people of Rivers State have styles of dressing that are significant to each ethnic group which are used in local, state and national festivals like a carnival.

During CARNIRIV most men, women and children tied cloths as wrappers and appeared in special native dress patterns to express their cultural heritage. Men tied George and other cloths with shirts such as *etibo*, *don*, *ebu*, *woko* or *atigara* as native attires. These dress patterns are generally used by young and elderly men for special occasions and festivals but the *etibo* shirt could also serve as weekend office wears or outfits. However, traditional rulers and chiefs could wear *etibo* and *woko* shirts and tie George wrappers as everyday dress patterns. Tolofari (2004) affirmed that during festive periods, both men and women dress in native attires. For instance, the women dressed with blouses and tied wrappers around their waist while men wore *etibo*, *woko* and *don* shirts in any colour with wrappers. There are also assorted types of ornaments and coral beads that men use on their necks. Figs.1&2 shows some of the dress patterns worn by both young and elderly men for cultural dances in CARNIRIV.

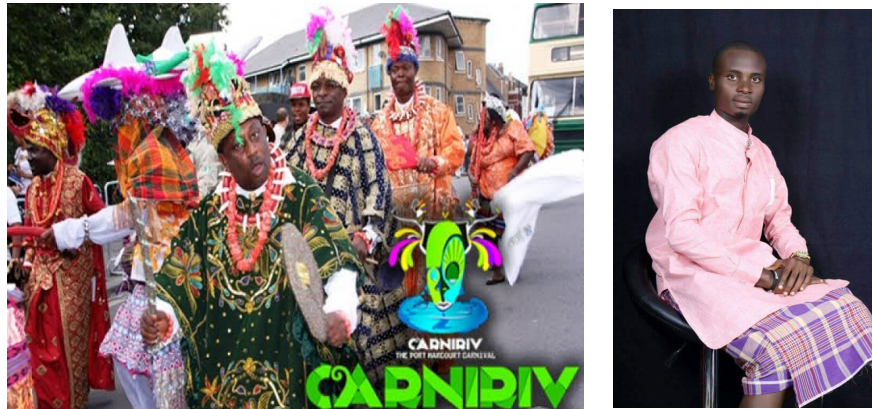


Figure 1: Men from Asari-Toru LGA dressed in *don* and *ebu* long shirts with *ajibulu* cap, CARNIRIV 1988.

Source: www.hometown.ng (2018).

Figure 2: A young man dressed in *etibo* native shirt over a plain George wrapper.

Source: www.kalabariiInniakoli.ng (2018).

The native shirt used by men determines the type of cloth to be tied around their waists. For instance, the *etibo* and *woko* shirts are worn over George wrappers with bowler hats as head covers. Presently, some men use trousers instead of tying wrappers around the waist with native shirts, which are not to be the right mood for dressing in Rivers State. Most young men don't wear hats when dressed in *etibo* and George, as shown in fig.2. The shirts known as *don*, *ebu* and *atigara* long gowns are worn with the same type of cloths used for the shirts. For instance, when a man used George, Indian or other cloths for the long gown or shirt, he also tied the same cloth under the shirt and wore *ajibulu* cap on his head with a hand fan on the right hand and *Ofo* on the left hand. They also used coral beads around their necks to enhance these dress patterns with shoes to match. Kalango & Horsfall (2014) noted that the *etibo* shirts are traditional shirts used by the typical Rivers man, which are popularly known as resource-control. Other similar types of these shirts are also used by men from other parts of the Niger Delta.

Men from the South-South region of Nigeria use them but they have variations in style. For example, men in Rivers State, Bayelsa and Delta States use this type of shirt with a gold, silver or coral bead stud on the neckline buttonholes while men from other parts of Nigeria use it without studs. These shirts are sewn to be with long sleeve styles. They are made from cotton fabrics of different colours and patterns such as striped, checkerboard or plain materials as ceremonial outfits for men in Rivers State. These shirts have different styles such as the short sleeve *woko*, or the long shirts also known as the *don*, *atigara* and *ebu* long gowns which are mainly for chiefs

and traditional rulers. The style of *etibo* is unique and impressive, and it is the pride of men; no doubt, it is referred to as "resource control".

According to Meneux in Dorleac (2006), "Social art is any artworks in texts, in actions and in artistic forms that have effects on the spectator". It is a kind of art made for or addressed to society as a whole. It can be said that cultural dress like the *etibo* is a social art. This is because *etibo* shirt has symbolic essence in its social context. Today, *etibo* shirts are used by people from other tribes in Nigeria. For instance, many people now wear these shirts as *aso-ebi* to assert their group identities in social, political and other ceremonies. Presently, some men from other tribes are using studs on the neckline buttonholes as well.

There were female dance troupe from Obio/Akpor LGA on display at CARNIRIV 2014 at the Libration Stadium, Elekahia playground. They tied two or double styles of sky-blue Georges and wore white blouses with white handkerchiefs on both hands. Another female group, the *Egwu-Amala* dance troupes from Ndoni. The *Egwu-Amala* dancers tied George wrappers and wore blouses to dance in a calculated and rhythmic style of dance steps. They held small paddles in their hands to facilitate their wriggle movements and dances; the paddles were painted in white, black and red colours. The women wore costumes in brilliant colours such as red, yellow, white, blue, and green because they believed the colour itself has a psychological force that radiates hospitality.

The *Egwu-Amala* dancers wore red blouses and tied wrappers flowing down to their feet. The cloths have designs in yellow, red and black colours; the wrappers tied were elevated from underneath and appeared around the waist with fullness. They have headdresses with white fabrics across head warmer caps in red colour, with raffia tassels on necks, arms, and wrists. The appearance of their costumes depicts the aquatic environment associated with the Rivers people; hence, paddles were used to demonstrate this dance. The red colours in their dress patterns symbolize the awesomeness of the river's environment that they represent in their dance. The yellow colour depicts the power and abilities of the river's people to influence their environment and the people that come in contact with them. The white and black colours represent peace and harmony between the coastal areas and these water spirits. The blue colour used by these groups depicts the beauty of the sea or rivers and water around the people of Rivers State. The female dancers in *Egwu-Amala* do mock paddling and sometimes kneel with the paddles and shake the upper parts of their bodies to the delight of spectators.

Obasi (2015) stated that African drama involves performance and performers to achieve their set up goals, and emphasized by the chorus and the audience in accompanying songs, chanting, costuming, dancing, drumming... and other art forms. Similarly, some female dance groups used fascinating dress patterns in promoting culture and native attires as the songs dictate their dancing steps. Some of these dances include the maiden

dance also referred to as the fattening room, *iria* cultural dance by Kalabari and Okrika cultural troupes as shown in figure 3.



Figure 3: A woman in *iria* outfit from Kalabari on two India wrappers with heavy red coral beads on her neck

Source: www.kalabariiniakoli.ng (2018)

In light of the dress pattern in its cultural context, the *iria* ceremony and its costuming are symbolic to the people of Rivers State. Particularly, in Okrika, Kalabari, Bonny and Opobo, the *iria* cultural dress pattern is considered as the dignity and pride of a woman. The *iria* costuming and dances serve as cultural rites with pride for every woman, portraying dignity, values and ways of life of the people in their communities. It is a cultural dance for both young and elderly females. Most females costumed in *iria* dress patterns are held in high esteem and appreciated by people and given gifts in money, cloths, and other items. The *iria* ceremonies are cultural dances with synchronized music and dance steps portraying identity. It depicts a woman as being visually impressive in culture, rich in accessories, and costly in outlook with the dignified dancing steps of breathtaking attractiveness in those costumes.

The *iria* attires are used either as ceremonial costumes for the rite of passage in Bonny and Opobo. In Kalabari, *iria* outfits are used as ceremonial attires in traditional marriages, childbirth and funeral rites. Generally, mature women tied double wrappers and made the down cloth to become longer than the upper cloths. All the females who tied two cloths wore lace blouses of any colour with or without foot wears and held two handkerchiefs each as they danced. Usually, some women in long two-wrappers carried

handbags. The younger females and girls in *iria* tied cloths short with or without blouses and go barefooted especially among the Kalabari women's *iria* costuming. All females dressed in *iria* costumes wore large and small coral beads on their necks, and also used caps decorated with fabrics or coral beads as head covers. In Okrika, the costumes are used in pre-marriage ceremonies to prepare females who have come to the age of marrying. All the stages require staying in a "fattening room" either for one or two weeks or a month. Experienced women of the community also give the girls who are preparing for marriage instructions on socio-cultural settings, marriage, childbearing, and parenthood. After the set timing for the "fattening room," the skin or bodies of the girls or women are painted with "*Idala*" or "*Buruma*," as it is called in Ibani and Kalabari dialects. The *iria* cultural dance also displays on essential occasions such as chieftaincy installations, marriages, and burials. However, the *iria* troupes were for entertainment in the Port-Harcourt carnival.

There is the *Koo* maiden dancers from Khana LGA in Ogoni, a community group for young and energetic females. They tied plain orange cotton fabrics short and above the knees for effortless performances. The orange fabrics on their waists have a little combination of green to make them colourful, they also tied red coral beads around their waists with silver rattles to support the beads. They used green fabrics to cover the busts with a combination of orange materials that demarcated the centre of the two breasts. The female dancers made hair-dresses in a pyramid shape packed in four and decorated with beads. They also had red coral beads on the neck, wrists and earrings. This is to mention just a few cultural dress patterns in the Port-Harcourt carnival also referred to as CARNIRIV.

However, owing to trans-cultural influences, the participants in CARNIRIV displayed both native and contemporary dresses during celebrations. The cultural groups used native dress patterns in different styles. On the other hand, in the Caribbean or freestyle, participants used modern fashion in different styles. Figure 4 shows a group of young females that participated in the Caribbean or freestyle with Western or modern dress patterns.



Figure (4): Young females in pink, sky blue, purple, green/ white costumes in the freestyle group, CARNIRIV, 2014

Source: De ArtLord Gallery, Port-Harcourt (2020).

Figure 4 shows females in flamboyant costumes made with silk and cotton fabrics in prominent brilliant colours such as pink, purple, sky blue, green, and white. They created a single file or row and dressed in short skirts around their waists with a brassiere that covered the bust in different colours. Their skirts had waistbands in white combined with fabrics in purple, yellow and orange colours. The down parts of skirts had gathered ends, and the lengths stopped on their thighs and before the knee levels. They also used other fabrics designed like wings and attached to the costumes on their backs with two symmetric oval shapes trimmed at the edges in pink or green silk materials, hanging over their shoulders at the back with ropes. The leading lady of the row wore a purple headdress decorated with crystals and a skirt in pink decorated with lines and dots in multiple colours.

Some female participants in the Caribbean or freestyle groups in CARNIRIV 2014 wore short pants in green and gold colours. They also used pieces of silk fabrics in green and gold colours that covered the busts without blouses. They wore headgear designed in similar forms, which had crowns with feathers. The crowns on their heads are in gold colour and decorated with feathers in green colour, and each one of them wore either shoes or sandals in different colours such as black, white, gold and brown as footwear. The young men were not left out; a young man used traditional cloths as a background, wore a plain black shirt with short pants in orange colour and wore black sandals as footwear in fig.5. He had a fish-like costume resting on his back. It was designed as pink polyester materials with lines and dots in yellow and black that outlined the eyes, fins and scales of the fish. This costume could be described as a mixed or cross-cultural dress pattern as his outfits portray Western culture, while the costume and background of the event have an artistic touch.



Figure 5: A young man with the fish costume in CARNIRIV, 2014
Source: De ArtLord gallery, Port-Harcourt (2020)

Discussion

The carnival hosted in Port-Harcourt, the Rivers State capital, gave rise to elaborate preparation in creating costumes and dress patterns to attract tourists and citizens. It is noteworthy that different cultural troupes and Caribbean or freestyle groups participated, and each dancing troupe had its costume. Against this backdrop, it has become essential to examine, ascertain and analyze the dresses used in the Port-Harcourt carnival. The typology of dress patterns included native attires and modern styles which were more like tourists attraction than cultural attires that promote the cultural values of the people.

Today, festivals like carnival participants have changed their dress patterns to more Western moods to attract tourists. The quest for tourism is one that attracted the cultural diversity in the Port-Harcourt carnival. As a result, the expression of this desire brought in various dress patterns that included the use of varied fashion styles in the Caribbean or freestyle groups. The Caribbean or freestyle groups displayed many costumes like shirts, skimpy dresses, pants, trousers and T-Shirts as modern fashion styles among others. These dresses and fashion styles displayed by the Caribbean or freestyle had no specification about the symbolic importance to the people of Rivers State; instead, they used them to reflect the Western fashion styles and depicted beautiful scenario that rouses excitement as a clear perception of modernity for the moment of festivity in Rivers State. However, few dress patterns in the cultural groups had symbolic importance and uniqueness that can function as non-verbal communication to observers in the Port-Harcourt carnival.

According to Ajayi (2019), "Each cultural group is equal to every other cultural group. Preserving and promoting one's cultural heritage is a human and group right." The native dresses used in cultural groups in the Port-Harcourt carnival can promote and preserve their heritage.

Conclusion

In conclusion, carnivals are valuable, festive platforms for promoting the cultural heritage and identity of the people. They are a veritable and exciting way of bringing indigenes together in colourful cultural outfits to celebrate, re-enact, express, and showcase their cultural identity and values to the world. However, few indigenous cloths and dress patterns were used in CARNIRIV before the modernization of fashion styles came into play. It is hoped that festival costumiers would incorporate more indigenous dress patterns for participants. It would define that culture and defend it from much of the foreign moods of fashion in cultural festivals, particularly in the Port-Harcourt carnival. Cultural dress patterns can function as body covers in a festival and also communicate messages about the people's historical, cultural, and moral values to the world.

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