# AFRICAN CULTURE TRENDS AND FUTURE HOPE: HOSPITALITY AND DRESSING IN IKWERRE (EVO) CASE STUDY

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## Abstract

*The culture of hospitality and dressing for the African is a unique phenomenon of global concern. Hospitality and dressing are striking identities for the distinct African communities in Nigeria. In the pre-colonial era, the way an individual dresses in Evo community determines he status, occupation and religious affiliation. On the other hand, it is expected that a stranger is properly cared for when he or she visit the house of a native. These are as a result of the communal-centric nature of the people. In the pre-modern era, everyone cared for the welfare of a kinsman. Hence, there is a recent decline in the act of hospitality and modest indigenous dress styles today in Evo communities of Ikwerre ethnic group of Rivers state. This is as a result of forces of social and religious changes in the communities in modern times. This paper surveys the challenges of the decline in hospitality and inappropriate dressing styles in the culture of Evo people. Furthermore, its participation on the social vices that trends the society. Thus using a phenomenological approach, this paper addresses the drastic development that will be achieved, when this traditional ethos of hospitality and appropriate dress styles are reinstituted in Nigeria forestalling rape, abuse and molestation which will impact coherence and order in Nigeria and enhancement of national unity, peace and progress.*

**Keywords:** African culture, Dresses, Evo, Hospitality, Nigeria

## Introduction

Chukwuokolo J. Chidozie (2014) viewed the etymological derivation of the word 'culture' which is from the Latin word 'Cultura' meaning to cultivate. Citing Alfred North Whitehead, he suggests that culture does not mean an end state, an achieved state rather; it is a process of achieving through cultivation. He further cited B.W. Andah who saw culture as embrace of all of material and non-material expressions of people as well as the process with which these expressions are

communicated. Culture is therefore the totality of human experience in all ramifications.

E.E.Evans-Pritchard (1965) discusses culture in the ambit of Australian aboriginals and their religious concept of totemism. He opined that culture is a part of each member of the society which is a social order. Culture makes a man, person, a social being of mere animals. It is the personality as distinct from the individual organism. Man is a rational and moral animal, but the rational and moral aspect of him is what the society has superimposed on his organic part. John Mbiti (1969) suggests that African culture is the rhythm of his life. Kilani and Iheanacho (2013) suggest that culture is a very common issue of human concern and existence. Moreover, human being cannot live without culture or for culture to emerge without human being. Therefore, culture could be understood in two prism namely Substantive and Functional cultures.

Substantive culture describes meaning of something, a gesture or an action, values of things and the way of life of group of people. Culture also can be the understanding of the aim of living. Emile Durkheim (1858-1917) avers that every culture must add value to the life of man for it to be meaningful. Thus meaning to the life human being is their culture.

The functionality of culture addresses the social practice that is meaningful to the society. This aspect of culture, place more emphasis on the symbolism, rituals and reality. Since the structure of the society is based on the foundation of human and superhuman interaction, culture is used to explain the meaning of actions to the society. This why most practices of a indigenous people are gestured in symbolic structures of social relationship.

Owete and Iheanacho (2013) further stresses that culture is one of the universal basic fact of existence which is a part of humanity. Citing Haviland (2002:55), they suggested that culture evolves with the early Hominides who started making tools for butchering animals for meat. This is traced back to about 2.5million years ago which coincides with the appearance of Homo at that time. Similarly, major importance is placed on the way of life and success of human which is inevitable considering their insatiable need and interaction.

Robert Bocock (1992) viewing culture from the agricultural perspective opined that culture was developed from the ability of man in cultivating his

environment to meet his need of food in the sixteen and eighteen centuries. The early effort was regarded as the cultivation of human mind as well the field and plant.

As this activity progressed, culture was understood as the following: Share (culture could be shared among people), Learn not biological inheritance (culture can also be studied), Symbolic (culture is symbolic through the use of language), Integration (culture can be broken down into parts and functions), Continuity (culture can be passed from one generation to another generation), Dynamic (culture can be influenced by changes as a result development) and the element of culture includes: i) Language ii) Religion iii) Norms iv) Values v) Organization vi) Historical

Schultz and Lavenda (2012) assert that culture can be a set of learned behaviour and ideas that human beings acquire as members of the society. This agrees with the assumption of Owete and Iheanacho which suggest that human being use culture to adapt and transform the world which they live in.

Hence, culture is unique to humans since dependence for survival through interaction is inevitable, human use their instinctive knowledge to protect themselves, and food and shelter.

Iheanacho (2009) asserts that the world civilization has passed three phases and relationships till about 1990. But given the collapse of communism, the main contentions and controversies in the world now revolve around religion and culture – a fundamental aspect of living in which cultural globalization has brought significant alteration into African societies, like Nigeria. Cultural globalization is currently challenging, bringing about rapid and radical religious change and societal transformation from different aspects of our social system. Such phenomenon has induced changes in human perception. [66]

Uzorka and Ebisi (2014) supports the argument of Owete and Iheanacho as he states that culture in his view is dynamic, in terms of human language, Morals, technology and skills which are element of culture that can change with the

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[66] Iheanacho, Ngozi N. (2009) Globalization Challenges and Change Factors in the Religions of Africa: The Nigerian Experience Bassey Andah Journal Vol2 p 81

passage of time. Our culture can be learnt through social interactions and relationship beginning with families, through participation in cultural institutions like schools and religious affiliations. Thus, culture enhances the sharing of resources for thinking. Culture is indispensible of time and the environment.

In summary, Idang asserts:

> African culture is the ideal to have a bird's eye view of the ontology… which is the science that investigates everything. African culture exist in the spiritual and physical realm inseparably and linked together… viewing the world as a complex reality in which living things seen and experience spiritual dimension ( G. E Idang P144)

**Conceptualization of Hospitality in Ikwerre culture**

The Ikwerre people's ethno-historical origin has not been completely determined.[67] This has given rise to the various explanation of the Ikwerre origin by various groups and individuals. Hence, most of the historical description of the Ikwerre people may not be completely reliable. The focus of this paper is to shed light on the practice of hospitality in an Ikwerre culture during the pre-modern era and in this contemporary time. The people of Ikwerre ethnic nationality can be described as loving and accommodating following their cultural tenets.

The Evo division of the Ikwerre people see caring for other people and accommodating them likewise as a duty that their deities uses as merit for blessing during the pre-modern era. It was not common to eat alone, farm alone, live separately or worship separately in Ikwerre culture. The people practice communal living this knitted the love bond that they shared which was enshrouded by showing concern for kits and kinsmen in their diverse community.

They lived in knits of family unit called *Oro and Mgbu* where the whole family gather momentarily to discuss and solve the problem of their relatives. The

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[67] Wotogbe-Weneka .O W (2020) *Owumini* beliefs and practices of the aquatic spirit among the Ikwerre people of the Niger Delta , Port Harcourt: University of Port Harcourt Press.

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families were customarily governed by the eldest male member who was called *Ojiowhor*. He was considered the closest to the ancestors who oversees the affairs of the family in the spirit world.

Their patches of thatch homes enclosed with large farmlands and surrounding shrines where they practice their indigenous religion was the thrust of their love and unity in the families, communities and clans in general. During the farming season, each family assisted other families' members to cultivate their farmland which was a favour that was return to other kinsmen without grudges or a show of indifference. This is why before the eve of colonialization Ikwerre people were self-sufficient in food production. Notwithstanding that they practice subsistence farming; their food production was enough to feed the population. The people of Ikwerre engaged in crop farming, hunting, fishing and trading in towns and villages around them. Hoes and cutlasses were their common and primary farming and hunting implement. Their trading prowess which was borne out of their culture of hospitality engaged them in transacting businesses with the Igbo, Kalabari, Etche, Okirika and Ogoni people.

Hence, visiting a kinsman without partaking in a meals prepared in his house was seriously frowned at. Such person was considered evil or has an evil intention. It was customarily to visit and spend time with kits and kinsmen without entertaining fear of been harmed or poisoned. Visitor were not allowed to visit and leave without been taken care through partaking in a welcome kola nut shared with drinks, and a well prepared sumptuous meal to relax their nerves after a long day's work or journey.

This culture of hospitality among the people of Ikwerre gave rise to the confidence non-indigenes had why they flooded Port Harcourt and its environment since they were received and well taken care of.

## Conceptualization of dressing in Africa

Dressing in the African context goes beyond the ordinary covering of clothe on the body, it is enshrine in three main components: the material, the dressing style and the event or activities, which is the socio-cultural meaning of the dress.[68] For the Africans, every dressing must be meaningful and applicable to status in an event.

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[68] Otto, Charles T. & Joanes Bubolz E.  African dress: Action, form and meaning, *African Journal  p115*

Dressing is the act of covering the body. Dressing for the African is relative to identity of individual as a socio-cultural heritage. People dress according to their culture, dressing identifies status; the manner a single individual dress is completely different from the way those that are married are expected to dress. The African dressing is built from the socio-cultural framework of the people. The dressing of Africans incorporates the physiological differences in gender; the dress of a man is completely different from that of a woman. With the dressing identities royalty can be distinguished from a commoner in the society.

The occasion also determines the type of dress an individual is expected to wear; there is a specific type of clothing used for farm work as compared to the quality of dress people wear during ceremonies like marriage, worship and parties. The activity a person is engaged in determines the type of dress he or she may wear.

Dress is a cultural phenomenon in African as language, beliefs, values and norms, customs, roles, knowledge, skills and all other things. "Cloth and dress have been described as a mirror of the culture of the people in any society. Dress symbolizes the practices of the society, bounded by the same geographical location, sharing the same cultural values."[69] For the Africans, the type of dress you put on determines your personal worth in the society. You are addressed the way you dress.

As was mentioned above, people dress according to their occupation. As hunters dress in their hunting clothings, warrior and traditional rulers are adorned separately in the regalia that befit their status. In the indigenous religious tradition, there are dress that are worn by diviners and other religious adherents which is believed to be fortified with spiritual potency capable to wade off evil attacks. Such dress is a repository of supernatural powers made through divination. Such a dress for the African is a measure of relationship between human being and Supernatural forces.

Akinbileje (2014) further explains that "the African life is wrapped in religion (Hackett et al., 1998). This explains why the whole community faithfully carries out all rites and rituals connected with rites of passage such as in birth, puberty,

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[69] Akinbileje, Thessy Yemisi (2014) Symbolic values of clothing and textiles art in traditional and contemporary Africa; *International Journal of Development and Sustainability vol3 number 4*

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marriage, death and life after death. These ceremonies symbolize religious values which govern the family and society (Idowu, 1991; Ejizu, 2013)."[70]

The type of dress people wear in Nigeria is a simple way of identifying their distinct and unique cultural background. It is a special feature for defining self and cultural diversity. Dressing is not just a covering of the body; it speaks volume about the person wearing it. Thereby the indigenous religion of Evo people place a high premium on dressing as a highly priced cultural value and identity.

**Dressing in Evo culture**

In the pre-modern era in Evo, dressing style among females and male folks was a matter of concern. Every individual was expected to dress appropriately that befit their status, religious affiliation and the occasion. Indecent dressing was seriously frowned at, as people who were caught with dress that exposes their private parts were severely punished. The dress worn by the people, determined their cultural status.

Unmarried individuals especially girls appeared beautifully endowed on ceremonies and festivals to showcase themselves as ripe for marriage. They were often covered themselves properly with a long gown and skirt as they stay at home to help their mothers with home chores.

The married women dressed appropriately with two piece wrappers and a full blouse with a head tie to show case their status of respect and honour which was accorded them in the community. Thus, was a serious to look down or molest a married woman with no consideration on her age. Once a lady is married, she is given the respect every mother is given in the community. The issue of physical assault and sexual molestation was not common. It was a taboo for a woman or man to dress inappropriately exposing their private part in an attempt to seduce or lure an opposite sex. The value of chastity was demonstrated in decent dressing. A man that is matured and married dresses in attire fitting to his status as well as a woman. In this wise, the problem of rape was minimal. The cultural and religious ethos of the indigenous people of Evo gave rise to order that they enjoyed within the time. This was a consciousness that the deities and divinities in anger will punish offenders of taboo.

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[70] Ibid

**Trends of hospitality and dress in Evo**

The trend of sexual molestation, harassment and rape in the society is a phenomenon that is truncating the peace, unity and stability of the Nigeria society especially in Evo, Rivers State. The changing trend in hospitality and dressing in Evo is as a result of the challenges of globalization. "Globalization and its effect on the Nigerian culture have always worn a controversial mask"[71].

The major aim of globalization is to achieve homogeneity of cultures by fusing different cultures together to benefit the entire world. Following this above objective, Nigeria cultural ethos are suffering from a decline of dominance been affected by other western invading cultures. Although globalization as a double edge sword, having both positive and negative effects on the cultures of the Nigerian people especially Evo people, it has succeeded in destroying the value of communal relationship of kits and kin as well as the taboo of rape and sexual molestation in the Nigerian society.

As much as this foot is not handled, crisis that is capable of forestalling the peace unity and enhancing continuous inter-communal/tribal conflicts will be on the rise. Observing the causes of molestation in recent times, this paper see Sexual molestation and rape as "any sexual act, attempt to obtain a sexual act, unwanted sexual comments or advances, or acts to traffic women's sexuality, using coercion, threats of harm or physical force, by any person regardless of relationship to the victim, in any setting, including but not limited to home and work"[72]

More often, the perpetrators of these act of societal abnormality, have alluded to their motivation from the manner victims dress seductively. The trend of dressing with short skimpy clothes like body hugs, spaghetti that exposes the private and sensitive part of the body is prevalent. Modest and decent dressing among male and female members of the society is plunging the society into a community of irrational people.

The trending fashion today is common with attire worn by women that is so transparent that all their sensitive body parts are expose through a popular

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[71] Ugbam, et.al (2014) The Effects of Globalization on African Culture: The Nigerian
   Perspective IOSR Journal of Business and Management Volume 16, Issue 4.

[72] WHO: Sexual violence: prevalence, dynamics and consequences (online document accessed
   6/04/2021)

clothe called "see through". "The tight fitting eg. Jeans, skirt, hip star, petra, lactra that reveals the contours of the body"[73] is the fashionable clothe in recent time. For the men, an un-kept appearance of bushy hairs, beards, tattered jeans with holes makes them suspects of societal nuisance. These acts often times have generated conflict between the growing teenage group and security agencies that attributes such type of dressing to criminals.

It is important to note that globalization and modern forces of change in cultural practices in Evo have set up conflict as it pertains decline in hospitality. The advent of modernization, globalization and commercialization, came with the challenges of family independence in which each member of the family striving to make ends meet and sustain their immediate family members against the practice of communalism. This family unity disintegration is a major factor of conflicts in the communities. A lot of family members can no longer seek for the wellbeing of members of kin. There is a continuous strive for the greatest achiever than maintenance of peace and unity of the family for the greater good of the society at large. This is the fuelling foundation for the cry of disintegration of the Nigerian nation. If this trend of lack of teeming hospitality and decency in dressing in the society continues, the nation will continue to suffer from the problem of conflict, rape and sexual molestation/harassment.

**The future**

Hence, after considering the challenges the trend of hospitality and decent dressing decline is having on the peace stability of Evo and the Nigerian nation at large, it will be appropriate for the indigenous religious ethos that kept the society in order to be re-enacted. This value system kept the society in check as ordained by the deities. The rules that guided the society were basically for the peace and unity of the people. People cared for their kit and kin and strangers as well. Communal festivals and ceremonies that will ignite the inter/intra-communal relationship should be encouraged.

Carnivals that show the rich cultural values of the people in decent dressing and hospitality could be promoted regularly using the instrument of globalization known as the social media. Thus, when these recommendations have been applied, the modern people will have intimacy for the value of the rich African culture, and a deep and benefit from the ethos of the indigenous religion will

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[73] Special Bulletin(2019) Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria vol 10, public affairs directorate the office of the vice chancellor

help to curtail the widespread conflict, rape and sexual molestation that is trending in the societies.

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