

**CONTEMPORARY INFLUENCE ON BENIN TRADITIONAL MODE OF
DRESSING: A STUDY OF BENIN TRADITIONAL MARRIAGE CEREMONY**

BY

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**BEING A PROJECT WORK SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF
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DECLARATION

I declare that this research was written by me and is as a result of my research effort under the supervision of **MRS. OWENS EROMOSELE**. I further wish to declare that to the best of my knowledge and belief, this work has not been previously presented in any form whatsoever for any application for a Bachelor of Arts (B.A) degree in Theatre Arts or the award of any other degree elsewhere.

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CERTIFICATION

This is to certify that this project was carried out by Waribugo Tari Blessing under my supervision.

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Date

DEDICATION

I dedicate this project to God Almighty.

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ABSTRACT

This study examined Contemporary Influence on Benin Traditional Mode of Dressing: A Study Of Benin Traditional Marriages Ceremony. The objectives of the study were to find out the modes of dressing of the Benin people, examine the symbolic meaning of Benin traditional mode of dressing in contemporary times, as well as the contemporary influences of Benin traditional marriage of dressing, and to study the impact of contemporary dressing in the traditions of the Benin People. The problem the study sought to investigate was the importance of Benin traditional dress in marriage ceremony, symbolic meanings Benin traditional dresses portray as well as how the contemporary ways of dressing in traditional Benin ceremony reflect the people's cultural identity. The research method adopted in carrying out this study is the qualitative method of research. Pictorial representation of bride and groom's costumes as well as their respective parents were presented and analyzed respectively. Findings reveal that costumes communicate meanings and beauty of the Benin people. It reflects their social status, cultural heritage, occasion/event as well as sex. It also reveals that in the traditional marriage ceremony of the Benin people, the bride and groom as well as their parents wear costumes to identify their respective roles in the marriage ceremony. Based on the findings it was recommended that the family being the bedrock of every individual should inculcate the value of one's cultural heritage into a child so that when he/she grows, he/she will remember their root and preserve their cultural heritage and also encourage them to always remember their identity no matter the height they have attained in life. It is also proposed by this researcher that parents should start very early with their children in the aspect of appreciating their culture by always wearing them traditional costumes in special events and also teaching them the core cultural values of their culture so that the people's culture will not go into extinction.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the Study

In contemporary society and primordial times, dressing speaks volume about the culture and traditions of a people. It interacts and communicates ideas, beliefs, meanings and values of the people being portrayed. This also means that in Benin culture, clothes are not just ornaments of covering nakedness but also for exchanging meanings. According to Bewaji, “clothing is a significant form of African art which plays vital roles in the cultural milieu of the people” (15). The way a person dresses tells about the culture he/she is representing and it has majorly been considered by art historians or ethnologists in their stylistic forms and aesthetic peculiarities (Banjoko, 84), apart from their essence and relevance to the society. Dress is a form of art which evolves from the society since it is all encompassing in the people’s way of life.

Cloth or dress has been described as a mirror of the culture of the people in any society (Perani and Wolff, 25). They symbolize the practices of the society, bounded by the same geographical location, sharing the same cultural values. In the cultural context cloth serves basic needs as clothing and shelter. However, the function of dress has been according to Perani and Wolff (25):

1. Beyond basic role in shelter and protection, cloth and dress have overlapping mediating functions including
2. Measurement of self and personal worth;

3. Indicator of occupation;
4. Measurement of social value;
5. Standard of economic value;
6. Definition and negotiation of political power;
7. Religious signifier and repository of supernatural powers;
8. Indicator of culture and change (Perani and Wolff, 28)

The Benin dress culture stretches back to antiquity. It is observable in the archaeological and ethnographic archives spans a time frame of no less than six hundred years before 1897. Its forms and patterns have ranged from aesthetic nudity among children and slaves to the very lavish and overpowering heavy regalia of the King (Oba) and the senior nobility. Its contents included beads, clothes, body marks, bangles, anklets, raffia works and a great deal more. It was one of Africa's richest dress cultures (Edoja, Agbontaen-Eghafona & Ojo, 44).

It is in view of the above that this study analyses and justifies contemporary influences on Benin traditional mode of dressing: a case study of Benin Marriage ceremony dwelling more on the mediating and communication functions of clothing, with reference to dresses used by the performer (groom and bride) in a Benin traditional marriage.

1.2 Statement of Problem

Several researchers have written on the impacts of traditional modes of dressing on people. However, one aspect that seems to be under-researched, is the impact of contemporary dresses in marriage especially that of the renowned Benin culture on people. This research thus seeks to cover the literature gap while adding to the body of existing knowledge in the discourse. The study seeks to answer questions such as: What is the importance of Benin traditional dress in marriage ceremony? Is there a significant difference between the Benin traditional dresses in ancient times and in contemporary times? What symbolic meanings do Benin traditional dresses communicate and how does the contemporary way of dressing in traditional Benin ceremony reflect the people's cultural identity?

1.3 Aim and Objectives of the Study

The aim of this research is to examine contemporary influence on Benin traditional mode of dressing: a study of Benin traditional marriages. It therefore established the following objectives:

1. To find out the modes of dressing of the Benin people
2. Examine the symbolic meaning of Benin traditional mode of dressing in contemporary times
3. Examine the contemporary influences of Benin traditional mode of dressing in marriages

4. To study the impact of contemporary dressing in the traditions of the Benin People

1.4 Research Methodology

This study adopts the qualitative research methodology. Pictures of contemporary Benin Traditional marriages will be presented and qualitatively analyzed and thereafter interpretations and conclusions would be drawn from the analysis. It is also going to reveal literatures that are relevant to the study.

1.5 Scope of the Study

This study examines the contemporary influences on Benin traditional mode of dressing: a case study of Benin Marriages. In this study, only the costumes of selected individuals, the bride and groom-- and not the general costume of all participants-- formed the scope of the study. The uniqueness of the Benin traditional marriage as a choice also stems from the fact that the components of its traditional seem to be representative of most of the components of the other sub-cultures in Nigeria.

1.6 Significance of the Study

This study shall be significant to:

1. **Edo youths:** The findings and recommendations of this study will help youths in Edo State understand the pattern of dressing in the Benin culture and how these patterns can be used to symbolically communicate meanings and such meanings could be interpreted and understood.

2. **Future Researchers:** This study would also be significant to future researchers as it would increase the body of knowledge of available literatures on the current discourse.
3. **The Researcher:** This study would also be beneficial to this researcher as it would increase her body of research knowledge and qualify her to bag a Bachelor of Art degree from the University of Benin.

1.7 Limitations of the Study

The limitations of this study are:

1. **Time Limitations:** Due to the need to complete the research on time and submit to school authorities before deadline, the researcher did not get the liberal time needed in covering this study.
2. **Limited Knowledge of Benin Culture:** The limitation of the knowledge of Benin Culture which was very expedient in carrying out this study. However, the researcher relied on primary and secondary data to complement her existing knowledge of the Benin culture and to carry out this study holistically.

1.8 Operational Definition of Terms

Contemporary: This refers to the present day, modern age or existing influences of Benin dresses on people.

Influence: This refers to the impact or effects of Benin traditional marriage dress of the bride and groom on people.

Benin: In this study, Benin refers to the Edo people of South-South, Nigeria.

Benin Dresses: This refers to the different attires worn by the Benin people especially during their marriages.

Traditional Marriage: This refers to the native marriage of the Benin people where a man comes to pay for the bride price of a woman for the two to become husband and wife.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Meaning of Costume in Traditional society

Costume is a product of a culture. Costume is one of indicators which is indicating the human life as a means of nonverbal communication. Ceremonial celebrations and entertainments in a society or social group are important factors in determining the style of clothing. Celebrations, entertainments and recreations would supply a different time zone and format from daily life. Therefore, clothing behavior is shaped and varied by the types of time and format. Birth, marriage and death are the most important periods of human life and, called as transition periods. In marriage period, especially women's clothing behavior is very interesting in all folk cultures. The traditional marriages in Benin are strictly devoted to traditional costumes. The traditional men and women's clothing has a rich variety among these families.

Overtime, scholars from different backgrounds have tried to give the meaning to costume in different ways. But according to oxford advanced learners dictionary (online), "costume are worn by people from a particular place or during a particular historical period" to reflect their culture or events. According to Oshinebo and Abodunrin "the term costume can be referred to as wardrobe and dress in general, or to the distinctive styles of a particular people class or period in other vein costume can be seen or referred to the artistic arrangement of accessories in a picture, status, poem or play, appropriate to the time, place, or other circumstances represented or described, or to a particular style of

clothing worn to portray the wearer as a character or type of character other than their regular personnel at a social or cultural event such as a masquerade, a fancy dress party or in an artistic theatrical performance”(142).

Costume is an essential feature of any traditional marriage and with makeup constitutes total visual appearance of the couple in the marriage or the actor in the production. Costume is an important fact of living; therefore, it is not mere covering for an individual, thus, its essence is rooted in the fact that the individual wears it, moves and speaks in it and is continually within the attention of the audience. Costume assists characterization so that in a traditional marriage, the audience can determine age, social status, personality, nationality, dislikes etc before the character utters a word.

Costume also helps to establish the relationship between individuals and their traditions. The importance of costume in traditional societies can no longer be over emphasized. The reason being that costumes has come a long way; it plays a significant role in our daily life. There is no culture, tribe and country that does not have a costume. A people without costume would not be identified assuredly. The costume of a people identifies them in the culture they belong. People wear dresses not only for the comfort but for the information they want to give others about themselves because it is a unique central element. Different countries, diverse cultures, each having their own costumes. Costumes reflecting their identity.

2.2 Significance/Functions of Costume

Costumes have come a long way. It plays a significant role in our life. Costume speak louder than words. One of the distinctive features of human costume is that a group of people share particular pattern of costume and the development of these complex and varied cultural patterns characterize human society .Costume could be referred to as non – verbal communication, but yet it communicates. It carries messages and conveys vital information about people; when you meet an individual or group of people for the first time, you can easily form an impression of that person from the information convey to you by his/her appearance. That is; the social background, the kind of job they do, and even what kind of person they are The costume used in a play is used to determine genre. It enhances the aesthetic value of a traditional society. The genesis of costume started from when Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit in the Garden of Eden; when they discovered that they were naked, they took leaves to cover themselves. Back to theatre costumes are the personal aspect of the visual element. Visually, the performer and the costume are perceived as one; they merge into a single image on stage (Corson, 2) people wear clothing not only for comfort but for the information they want to give others about themselves. Clothes have always signaled a number of things regarding the wearer which includes their occasion, position, sex, occupation, relative flamboyance, season, religion, hierarchy, rank or social status, measurement of self and personal worth, indicator of occupation, measurement of social value, standard of economic value,

definition and negotiation of political power, religious signifier and repository of supernatural powers and indicator of culture and change, etc

In the traditional society, clothes send us signals to those in everyday life, but as with other element of theatre, there are significant differences between the costumes of the traditional society, everyday life and theatrical costumes. The flashy clothes which are worn during traditional marriages are encoding means of cultural richness as a means of non-verbal communication also. The most recent model of folklore seeks to sustain a living tradition, if endangered, supporting the conditions necessary for cultural reproduction.

2.3 Functions of Costume

Costume is an aspect of human physical appearance, and like other aspects of human physical appearance it has social significance. All societies have dress codes, most of which are unwritten but understood by most members of the society. Lambert (12) observes that the dress code has built in rules or signals indicating the message being given by a person. This message include indications of the person's social class, occupation, ethnic and religious affiliation, attitude, marital status, sexual availability and sexual orientation. Clothes convey other social messages including the stating or claiming personal or cultural identity, the establishing, maintaining, or defying social group norms, and appreciation comfort and functionality. For example, wearing expensive clothes can communicate wealth, the image of wealth, or cheaper access to quality clothing. All factors apply inversely to the wearing of inexpensive clothing and similar goods.

Costume can convey a social message, even if none is intended.' Costume is used to serve as class distinction. In assorted societies, people of lower rank reserve momentous items of clothing or decoration representing themselves as symbol of their social rank.

Modern scholars believe that costume provides a mark of identity and a means of nonverbal communication (Chavarria, 12)". In traditional societies, costume functions almost as a language that can indicate a person's age, gender, and marital status, place of origin, religion, social status, or occupation. In modern industrialized societies, clothing is not so rigidly regulated and people have more freedom to choose which messages they wish to convey'. Nevertheless, clothing can still provide considerable information about the wearer, including individual personality, economic standing, even the nature of events attended by the wearer.' When a woman who usually wears blue jeans puts on a frilly, flowered dress, she may be stating that she wants to look more traditionally feminine. Clothing performs important social and cultural functions.' A uniform, for example, may identify civil authority figures, such as police and army personnel, or it may identify team, group or political affiliations.

Costume can convey a social message, even if none is intended.' Costume is used to serve as class distinction. In assorted societies, people of lower rank reserve momentous items of costume or decoration representing themselves as symbols of their social rank. In American Indian tribes, their chief or leader wore elaborate headgear. In Ancient Rome, the wearing garments dyed with Syrian Purple ranking Hawaiian chiefs could wear feather mantles or carved whale teeth. Only the Sheikh of Arabia could wear

gold. In Africa, only the people from the royal family were allowed to adorn themselves with beads. In many cases in history, there have been elaborate systems of sumptuary who could wear what. In fresh societies (including most modern status people from demanding high-status garments, but the high cost of status garments most of all limits purchase increased by display. The combination of social apartheid may also narrow costume choice

2.4 Types of Benin Traditional Costumes

The Benins from time immemorial spun different materials to make their fabrics. Hence they say "Siou" meaning spinning. They interlaced the warp and the weft of different yarn-like materials spun on a local loom called 'Ayonayadukpon' to produce a woven fabric. In most cases, women used 'Ayo' to weave different fabrics in Benin but the men used the Ayo to weave for the Oba in the palace." The Benin traditional fabrics are as follows:

Ukponoru (cotton fabric)

Ukponokhuen (fabric made from bark of Okhuen tree)

Ukpon Isa (fabric made from raffia palm) Ukponohian (fabric made from leather)

Ukpon Ivie Adagho Ukponoru;

The Benins spun cotton into threads (Siou) and used these threads to produce woven fabrics. Basically, the men produced woven fabrics within the courtyard for the Oba. The Ukponoru (cotton woven fabric) served as an outer layer of the fabrics worn by the Oba and high-ranking chiefs in Benin.

Ukponokhuen (Ikele): The fibres from the bark of Okhuen trees were extracted and beaten thoroughly by the weavers. As a result of this, threadlike materials were achieved. These threads were dried and interlaced into warp and weft on a local loom called 'Ayonayadukpon' to form a woven fabric. They called the fabric made from bark of Okhuen tree, 'Ikele'. This Ikele was used for making different shapes of clothes as well as leisure chairs "Agailovbie". It was also used for making an underwear for the Oba and the chiefs. Ukpon Isa: The fibres from the "Omen" raffia palm were spun and woven into a fabric. Dancers and masquerades mostly wore this. The female dancers combined this dress with beads called "akpolo" of different types. They were normally coloured plastic or moulded beads worn around the waist.

Ukponohian: These are leather fabrics. The Isekpoki specialized and still specializes in leather works in Benin. They make bags, foot wears and leather dresses for the Oba and the children. Ohian (leather) from reindeer, lion, tiger and pythons were used as dresses for the Oba, children, wives and even prominent chiefs.

Adagho: This was specifically meant for the 'Ohen' (priest and priestess). This was made of Ukponoru or Ukponokhuen. It had different accessories like beads, cowries, and coins etc. applied to it. It was never to be washed because of the belief that it was spiritually fortified. The 'Ohen' (priest and priestess) wore it when he was going before the shrine or into the 'Ogwa'. The 'adagho' helps the 'ohen' to be spiritually lifted and hence he can divinate. An example of this type of Ohen; is the 'Ohen Okhuaeh'.

The Edionmwan or Edionwan (elders): The Edionmwan or Edionwan normally throws about ten yards of fabric to wrap his body, leaving one arm out and the other one wrapped into the cloth covering diagonally. He wears a long bead on the neck and probably beads around each arm. Hence, with this dressing and grey hair they are easily recognized. The Edionmwan tie cloth round the waist to ankles. They wear a long bead round stretching from the neck to the navel. This bead is called 'Udeguogho'. They also wear gathered skirt tied on one side. This could be with or without a blouse. It is worn without a blouse when it is casual but with a blouse for outing. It was formerly made of Ukponoru, Ikele, Ukponohian etc. Presently, synthetic materials like the bag of rice mixed with light foam are used for landing it to enhance the largeness of the waist when it is covered with Tgbegbe' in Eypn (fian eyon). Laces, velvet (evbu), white poplin often yards may be used for eypn. The Chief ties this style called 'eypn' when he is going for a ceremony like marriage, a ceremony in the palace or when he is being honoured.

The Ighele: The Ighele (youths) wear Asokosagba, which is a loose knicker that goes up to the knees with two ropes to fasten it to waist. They can also tie short wrapper round their waist, and use the cloth to wrap their bodies and tie the loose ends round the neck. A good example of Asokosagba is what the Omuada (Scimitar bearer) wears in the palace in the present day.

The Evbinrobaevbo or Ibieka: The Evbinrobaevbo or Ibieka (children), tie cloth round their body and neck. They could go stack naked or wear small pant to cover their nakedness. This pant is called 'Ovbibebe'. The young girls tie cloth or 'Akpolo' just

covering their stomach to their private part. A strip of cloth covers their breast and tied at their back.

The Women: The women (Ikhuoba) mostly tie cloth from chest level to the ankles. They wear beads round their neck and their wrists. Originally, the woman placed and still places a folded two yards of fabric (light material) longitudinally on her left shoulder. It is significant to note that Benins used a lot of motifs drawn from events, found objects from the environment, materials for worship, and even geometric motifs as designs. This implies, that the Benins combined and still combine different lines in their formation of designs. Their immediate environment influenced and still influences their choice of motifs.

CHAPTER THREE

Benin People and their Culture

3.1 Historical origin of Benin kingdom

The Ancient Benin Kingdom Benin City, the capital of Edo state of Nigeria was the heart beat of the ancient Benin Empire. Oral traditions and myth have it that the Benins migrated from Egypt. Egharevba buttresses this when he said that "wrapper with apron are generally in use from the beginning. Perhaps, they were introduced from Egypt or the Sudan in the early days" (pg. 50). Benin Kingdom as it used to be known was a Kingdom whose empire spread all over West Africa. Omoruyi, referencing Burton, opines same when he said "the territorial limits of ancient Benin Kingdom were bounded on the East by Niger, on West by Port Novo, and on the south by the sea" (101). The Benin Kingdom is socially stratified into different groups. The diversity of these groups creates room for different types of apparels worn by the Benins.

Omoruyi corroborates this when he said "some thousands of years ago, the Benins were known to have a kind of constitutional monarchy in which one ruler was always the head. The ruler had subordinates who helped the king in the day-to-day affairs of the state". The stratified nature of the Benin Kingdom was also attested to by Roth's reference to Dapper, when he said, "the Benins have many strange varieties of clothes of which not one is similar to another-but all are made of cotton. The rich people do wear two, some even four garments, the one shorter than the other, the one over the other

worked with needle so that the under garment is visible through the other one. The poor people only wear a single piece of cloth over their naked body. The women wear on the lower portion of their bodies a blue skirt reaching to the ankles, some wear small pieces of cloth across their breast, while they wear copper bangles round their arms. The boys and girls go naked as youths but those in the King's court even at maturity go naked until they are presented with clothes by the king" (21).

This observation is also buttressed by Trowell, referencing Nyendeal, who says that "almost all the children went naked, the boys till they were ten or twelve years old, and the girls till they arrived at puberty. Until this time, they wore nothing but some strings of coral twisted at about their middle, which was not sufficient for purpose of decency. The women wore necklaces of coral very nicely arranged, their arms were covered with bright copper or iron rings as were also the legs of some of them, and their fingers were as thickly crowded with coppers as they could possibly wear them" (204). However, Ebharevba, opines that "right from the time of oranmiyan, the loose shirts called jumpers formed part of the royal style of dress and these were afterwards converted to the coral robes" (45). He stated that a distinctive dress for the oba and royal family, and for most prominent chiefs, is usual among most nations and the Benins are no exception.

3.2 Benin Arts and culture

The Kingdom of Benin has produced some of the most renowned examples of African art. There are an estimated 2,400 to 4,000 known objects including 300 bronze

heads, 130 elephant tusks, and 850 relief plaques. The art of the Kingdom of Benin, not to be confused with the Republic of Benin, is most widely known for its bronze plaques. The majority of the bronze plaques are at held the Berlin Ethnologisches Museum, British Museum, National Museum of Nigeria in Lagos and Benin City, Weltmuseum Wien, Field Museum of Chicago, Metropolitan Museum of Art, and the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Most of the ancient art of Benin is royal and honors the Oba, or king of the Benin Kingdom.

The general aesthetic principles of Benin art, according to Kathryn Gunsch are triadic symmetry, frontality, alternation, and decoration in the round. Triadic symmetry in the royal arts of Benin commonly appears, for example, as two figures flanking a central figure on a carved ivory tusk. Figures appear frontally in Benin art with feet firmly planted and their torsos and heads facing the viewer (20). Alternation refers to the patterns on ivory saltcellars that alternate figures and animals surrounding the object. And finally, ivory tusks and saltcellars serve as examples of Benin artists' preference for decoration in the round.

Oba Oranmiyan, who was from the Kingdom of Ife, founded the Benin Dynasty in 900 ce. The caster Iguegha was also from the Kingdom of Ife and was one of the first to create the emblematic commemorative portrait heads of the Oba. William Fagg, a historian of African art, classified the art of Benin into three distinct periods: Early, Middle and Late. The Early Period began in approximately 1400 ce, during which time the stylistic influence of the Kingdom of Ife was most evident in the naturalism among

commemorative heads. Early period-style heads are lightweight and feature high collars under the chin. Oba Ewuare the Great was known as a promoter of the arts and in 1440 he was the first king to commission large objects in bronze. He is also known as the first art commissioner for an Oba's elaborate regalia, consisting of coral beaded crowns and costumes.

The fifteenth and sixteenth centuries are considered the Golden Age of Benin and are also the beginning of the Middle Period. The Middle Period ushered in heavier commemorative heads with more elaborate detail. Many scholars have noted that the reason the commemorative heads became heavier is because the Kingdom of Benin had access to more copper from the slave trade with the Portuguese. This assertion has since been contested by other scholars (Gunsch, 20). Fagg characterizes the Middle Period with a uniformity of style and iconography, as shown by the plaques. Commemorative heads from the Middle Period also feature a hole in the top. This allowed the head to hold up a tusk on an altar.

Oba Esigie ruled from 1517 to 1550 and at the end of his reign, he commissioned a set of bronze plaques. These plaques depict moments in history and therefore serve as a record of Benin's chronology. Esigie also commissioned a cast bronze idiophone for the Ugie Oro festival. There was increased interaction with the Europeans during this period and many Benin ivory carvers created oliphants (ivory hunting horns), salt cellars, and other objects for European royalty.

Europeans continued to encroach on the Benin Kingdom during the nineteenth century, when Benin opened up its tropical forests to colonists. This marked the beginning of the Late Period during which time brass casters began placing wing-like finials on either side of the cap of the commemorative heads and the metal work became much thicker. Fagg contends that the heads became more elaborate during the reigns of Oba Eresonyen and subsequent kings because they served as an over-compensation for the loss of the Oba's power (Fagg, 45). The Late Period came to a head during the Benin Punitive Expedition of 1897, during which the British ransacked Benin City, looted thousands of precious objects, and displaced Oba Ovanramwen. A new ruler, Oba Eweka II, was instituted in 1914 and he established the Benin Arts Council in the mid-1920s. Eweka II taught Ovia Idah, a noted ebony carver. During the 1950s and 1960s, Felix Idubor and Festus Idehen both became successful sculptors that combined classical Benin techniques while also incorporating their own modern influences. Since the Benin Punitive Expedition of 1897, brass casters shifted their focus to making objects for tourists, which caused a range in quality (Nevadomsky and Osemweri, 75).

Triadic symmetry and frontality continued to be used with plaques created in the twentieth century. Plaques from this period lack *horror vacui* (fear of leaving empty spaces), typically feature the rope of the world around the edge, and are crude rather than aesthetic (Nevadomsky, 44). Commemorative portrait heads also changed in modern times: they shift from heads to busts, the patina of the sculptures are brighter, and the facial features are softer. There are also examples of brass casters commemorating

modern events; for example, a bronze sculpture of Oba Akenzua II meeting Queen Elizabeth II was created by Philip Omodamwen as found in the collection of the High Priest Osemwegie Ebohon in Benin City.

It is worthy of note that culture affects the whole human existence. It shapes humans into who they are and what they do, at every particular time. This is why it is being passed from one generation to the other. Culture is usually passed down through stories, folktales, folklores, socialization, use of symbols and signs. Culture is said to be the way of life of the society. It takes a major role in the way people think, it affects the way humans perceive life, it has a great influence on the way people dress, cook, dance, build houses, speak, sing and, behave. Culture even affects the way ceremonies are being done. For example, Indians cremate their dead people, in accordance with their culture, while the Benin people bury their dead.

3.3 History of dress of the Benin people, pre-colonial to post-colonial

Dress in Benin has a demonstrably long history that predates European contact. The characteristic royal regalia of the Benin king testify definitely to this, but the earliest physical evidence of the use of cloth or fabric in Benin comes from Connah's archaeological excavations of the Clerk Quarters site around Alaka (the location of a former palace). The excavation yielded remains of mass burial, bronze, jewellery, bead and fragment cloth (Connah, 57—67). Radiocarbon dating obtained for the site put its antiquity somewhere about the middle of the thirteenth century. The laboratory analysis of the fabric suggested that many of the fragments were spun from cotton fibres. There

were also indications that others were made of raffia (Ben-Amos 22). The fabrics excavated were mainly plain weave and ‘several fragments contained open lace intersection and long floats of yarn on the fabric surface which were obviously part of a delicate design’ (Connah, 236).

European reports upwards from the sixteenth century made frequent mention of cotton growing and cloth weaving as a common preoccupation in the Benin kingdom. Cloth was one of the major articles of international trade with the Portuguese and Dutch up to Costa da Mina, as well as ‘overseas’ (Ben-Amos, p. 23). The cloth mentioned by the travellers and in ship records does not seem to be the court cloth of today. Two types of cloth were clearly recognized and the Dutch merchants identified them as Benin cloth — Mouponoquia and Ambasis of four and three stripes respectively (Ryder, p. 94). These were dyed either a plain indigo blue or blue with white stripes. Accounts by travellers such as Landolphe, Burton and Punch in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries described what they saw as court weaving.

Landolphe, who visited Benin in 1778, was the first to mention that special kinds of cloth were woven within the palace for the use of the Oba and his court. Burton similarly saw ‘fine cotton work open and decorated with red worsted — a work confined to the ladies of the palace’ — and C. Punch described in a letter what he called needlework tapestry that was ‘in pieces perhaps six feet long or more with life sized figures worked with needle on the open work cotton material. They were made by the king’s boys’ (cited in Ben-Amos, 24).

A variety of colours were obtained from leaves and barks: red from cam wood (ume), hues of black and green from a leaf mucuna flagellipes (akhu-ekpu), and blue from indigo. As early as 1702, Nyendaël noted, ‘The inhabitants are very well skilled in making several sorts of dyes as green, blue, black, red and yellow. The blue they prepare from indigo which grows here abundantly, but the remaining colours are extracted from certain trees by friction and decoction.’

According to Benin oral tradition, weaving as an art started in the pre-monarchical era, i.e. before AD 1170. It is believed to have been organized into a guild as far back as about 940 AD. The weavers of this time used raffia (isa) and cotton (orru) as threading materials. Naturally, items made from these fibres were used to cover up the body. The art of cloth making, just like several other forms of trade and craft in pre-colonial Benin, was highly organized in keeping with the tradition of compulsory state service which required that all professionals and craftsmen in various trades be members of specific guilds (Agbontaen, 84). Accordingly, the weavers, the costume makers and the bead workers, all had their respective guilds. Benin oral tradition further suggests that a number of monarchs, starting with Oriagba of the Ogiso dynasty, but certainly including Oba Ewedo c. 1255 AD and, still later, Oba Ohen c. 1334 AD, encouraged at different historical periods the growth of the weavers’ guild in Benin (Omoriegbe 17).

The weaver’s guild was known as Owinnan’Ido. Quite understandably, all the dressmaking guilds, which comprised the weavers, the costume makers and the bead workers, were affiliated to the Iwebo, that is, the palace society that looked after the

Oba's beads, regalia and wardrobe, including the maintenance and production of artistic works and decorations in the palace. Okao was the title of the head of the guild of male weavers, while the head of the female weavers bore the title of Okasieto, but characteristically Okao took precedence over Okasieto whenever the male and female weavers were gathered together (Dark, 67). The guild of weavers lived on their own street, Owinna, just like the brass casters, the wood carvers, and other groups of artisans and craftsmen. The women in the guild were responsible for preparing the dyes and the carding and spinning of the thread. There were two types of thread, cotton orru and ikhian. Although early European travellers had noticed and documented a flourishing cotton industry in Benin, it seems that cotton growing had virtually died out by the beginning of the twentieth century and may be found only in the fringes of the city. Bradbury in the 1950s, like Talbot before him in the 1920s, recorded that cotton was being grown and woven only in certain areas to the north of Benin, particularly among the Etsako and the Ishan peoples. The women from these areas brought the raw cotton orru to the market in Benin for the senior male members of the guild of weavers to purchase. Thereafter the women weavers removed the seeds and spun it into thread (Ben-Amos, 24). Of the second type of thread, ikhian, used by the Benin, we learn from Dark that it was 'obtained from the bark of bush which is soaked in water and shredded into fibre which is then spun like cotton on spindle' and that the 'Oba was the only one who used this thread to make his clothes; chiefs and the Oba's retainers wore strands of it around their necks on ritual occasions' (Dark, 67).

Traditional looms used by the guild members were of the vertical type associated with women's weaving in contemporary Nigeria. Ben-Amos (24) cited Landolphe to the effect that "somewhere in the eighteenth century most houses in Benin had a cotton-spinning machine for making cotton or straw rugs (mats)". The looms, the report went further, were not permanent, but constructed anew each time an order was made. The construction of the loom, *ido*, was quite simple. It consisted of two vertical posts with cross bars around which the warp threads were wrapped. A heddle stick, *erhan ido*, raised the warp threads to create a shed, and a beater, *abokpo*, was used to pack the weft, *ihue*, into place. The warp thread was continuous, creating a solid colour background from the decorative motifs. These were created mainly by brocading, inserting decorative yarns in addition to regular wefts during weaving (Ben-Amos,).

Other important items identifiable in the Benin traditional dress kit were beads. As Egharevba (57) informs us, "coral or stone beads constituted a distinctive dress for the king, the royal family, and the most prominent chiefs in the kingdom. Beads were very visibly the most important aspect of palace costume". The king of Benin bestowed gifts on his chiefs with beads and it was not allowed for a chief to see the king without a necklace of beads around his neck. "A chief who violated this rule was charged with indignity and abuse of office" (Egharevba, 60).

That beads have been part of Benin clothing for centuries is evident in ancient records. The accounts of Egharevba (p. 56) and de Negri (210) suggest that the use of beads in Benin can be traced back to as early as AD 1170. Early art works produced by

the guilds show aspects of this interesting craft. Most ancient sculptures and other works of art have carefully detailed necklaces, collars, pendants and many other forms of jewellery. Until relatively recently, the significance of beads in Benin dressing was further demonstrated every year in the performance of an annual ceremony called 'ugivie' or 'the coral beads ceremony'. It was last held on 21 May 1923. During such ceremonies, non-titled elders known as the Ibierugha, belonging to the iwebo society that looked after the Oba's wardrobe appeared in fine beaded dresses and paraded the streets of Benin (Egharevba, 55). There were various types of beads and beaded wares in Benin. They included beaded headbands, head dresses, long shirts known as *akpa* made completely of beads, and many other types of designs.

In the post-colonial era, the most spectacular outfit of the Oba perhaps is his ceremonial regalia, *akpa*, a heavy net shirt of beads with every knot finished with a large coral bead, and weighing in all about twenty pounds. Together with this, he wears a round belt of coral (*ukugbalila*), a closely meshed high coral with collar (*odigba*), a closely meshed coral crown with beaded cone (*erhu- ede*), a beaded headband (*udaha*), numerous rolls of beads not rising over the chin, and many strings of beads so tightly strung that the large pieces stand out from his neck in circles about a foot in diameter. Bracelets encase the arms from wrists to elbows, and anklets cover the legs from ankles almost to the calves. These anklets, sometimes made of coral, were mostly of ivory. Normally, the Oba would have his feet painted with kaolin, a strictly ritual symbol

signifying prosperity and purity rather than body adornment. Sometimes, he wears sandals all covered with beads.

All women in the palace were grouped into three distinct categories, namely, the existing wives (iloi) who have given birth, new wives (iloi) who are yet to have children, and the maids who, though regarded as iloi, were not wives and did not visit the Oba's bedchamber. This category of iloi was carefully differentiated from the others by a distinct hair-do known as okuku.

The routine wear of the king's wives consisted of simple and unsophisticated dresses, that is to say, wrappers covering their bodies from the chest the ankles. There were special costumes for occasional outings. These were usually made from hand-woven fabrics, and sometimes adorned with motifs made from bronze in a rhythmic form. Such motifs as the tiger, the leopard or the king's image were sometimes woven on to the fabric not only to serve as decorative elements on the dresses but also to symbolize the strength of their husband — the Oba. This outfit is their typical costume on ceremonial days and it is strictly forbidden to all other women in the entire kingdom. No iloi is expected to be seen outside without adorning her exposed parts with various kinds of coral beads. They sometimes decorate their hairdo with beads, especially on occasions such as the Igue festival. This makes them distinct from the wives of commoners. The Oba's wives and mother were also profusely decorated with beads from their heads to their feet.

Also part of the palace costumes were some minor decorative items for the Oba's children, which made them different from children outside the royal house. Up to as recently as the latter part of 1930, it was taboo for a princess to use earrings because girls outside the royal family used them. The use of enormous brass coils as anklets was exclusively reserved for the princesses. When a teenage princess attained the age of puberty she became entitled to a special form of okuku hairstyle. Although this was primarily decorative in purpose, it was also a symbol of maturity, an indirect but eloquent way of announcing the presence of a possible wife for the noblemen of the court. Because the male sex was believed to be stronger than the female, the princes were decorated with tribal marks. Their costume comprised of a white satin cloth, simply tied around the waist but extending downwards to the ankles. The exposed torso, the belly in particular, was decorated with the body scarification known as iwu.

Next in rank to the Oba and the members of the royal family are the chiefs and noble men. The chiefs are easily recognized by their imposing costumes and regalia. Two costumes that seem to be more distinctive and more generally characteristic of the nobility were the eyon and iyeruan. According to Benin traditions no chief may appear in the Oba's presence or even within the palace without the eyon. It is the commonest of the chiefs' costumes. In the same way, a chief does not appear on festive occasions without the more impressive costume called iyeruan. The eyon and iyeruan are identical in style except that iyeruan is more elegant in its outward extensions. Moreover, unlike the eyon which is made with white fabric, the iyeruan can be made of any colour but white. In

addition to the eyon and the iyeruan is the far more prestigious costume, ehiangbenhia, which is reserved for chiefs who have acquired the highest chieftaincy rank and are the Oba's favourites.

Beads constituted an important part of the chiefs' outfits. The chiefs profusely made use of necklaces of coral beads generally threaded with rope so that they tapered down beyond the navel. Some, however, were threaded with wire to achieve the rigid round necklace. Of course in this as in other matters there are chiefs and there are chiefs; the number of coral necklaces worn by an attendant of the king denoted his status. The more distinguished, the more favoured, the more politically successful obviously had more to wear than others. The king controlled and dispensed the use of beads in the kingdom. The guilds that produced them did not produce them for a general market where any chief or some unusually ambitious commoner could buy them. Rather, they were strictly articles of the king's patronage. Once a year, during the festival of the Oba revealing himself to his people through the major streets of the city, he personally conferred upon his officials the honour of beads, which was likened to receiving a British knighthood (De Negri, 212). No chief may appear before the Oba without his necklace made of coral beads. Losing a coral bead was once punishable by death (De Negri, 212; Egharevba, 90). The chiefs are allowed the use of corals especially for decorative items like the necklace, and they may also have their cloths adorned with beads.

At the base of the hierarchical structure were the ordinary citizens of Benin. They were the Oba's subjects or slaves; they lived for the Oba, worked for the Oba and prayed

for the Oba. In the traditional life of Benin, everything was done for the glorification of the Oba. The costume of commoners was simple and most elementary, and even in their ceremonial lives the costumes were quite modest. The itobi, a simple derivation from a combination of the traditional loin cloth, and inner skirt for women, ebuluku, were the routine outfits in their domestic life. Ebuluku, in its classical form, is made from a short wrapper less than half a yard long, which was then wrapped around the middle of the body and held in place with a rope. The rest of the body remained bare without any ornamentation. Their attire for public appearances and on ceremonial occasions was relatively more elaborate compared to the itobi. It consisted of an extremely long wrapper that loosely and leisurely flows from the left shoulder down beyond the ankle and almost covering the entire toes. It is then spread open behind the body passing beneath the right armpit and in two skilful almost simultaneous movements, thrown towards the left above the shoulder. This gives little freedom to the left arm, which only moves when the wearer proudly re-adjusts his costume.

In more general terms, however, the use of wrappers seems to have been a widespread basic fashion throughout the entire population. Traditionally, for the male, the chiefs and nobles as well as commoners tied their wrappers below the waist leaving their chest bare to reveal the Benin body tribal marks (iwu). In a similar way all mature females, be they of the royal household or commoners, tied their wrappers to cover their bodies from the breasts down to the ankles.

Iwu, a particular form of body scarification, is a significant element in the Benin ethnography of self-presentation. It was once a highly valued fashion and a source of pride among the women folk. A woman preparing to leave her father's house for her husband's place normally had to wear her unique family iwu. The scarification was mostly displayed in the exposed part of the belly and chest. Furthermore, the iwu scarification, which was elegantly decorative in character, was to fulfil another social function at a latter date, namely, the identification of kinsfolk, slaves or freeborn. Thus during the slave era, they became the identification mark of large family units in Benin City. It was believed that this would facilitate recognition of such sons and daughters should the possibility of reclaiming them occur.

As for children, those who worked in the palace or lived there went about naked and free except with a string of agate beads and anklet of brass. Even this was more a matter of social control than anything else for, as we learn from de Negri, 'Clothes were at one time forbidden on children until the king bestowed upon them a cloth' (1964, p. 216).

3.4 Benin marriage ceremony: An overview

In Benin Culture for traditional marriage, the first visit by the would-be groom is expected to be undertaken by him alone. But if his wish is to go with anyone of his friends or family members, he is absolutely free as there is no law preventing him from doing this. The only reason he is expected to present himself alone to the would-be bride's family is a sign of independence. Such move when undertaken alone would boost

the confidence of the in-laws that they are giving their daughter to an independent man with a mind of his own. During the visit, the visitor approaches the girl's father and formally introduces himself to him and makes known his intentions. At this stage, the girl's father would set a new date for them to visit with members of his family. The two families must meet to discuss issues relating to lineage tracing so one would not marry someone from the same bloodline. It is noteworthy that just as the practice has been amongst traditional worshipers; it is still so till date. Both families would call for another form of checking in the family shrine. This one is to determine whether there is any form of bad blood, curses and ailments associated with any of the families. In Benin culture, any of the families can halt the process at any point in time if they discover anything not acceptable or appealing to them (Egharevba, 49).

Families can equally seek other ways to settle such issues by consulting the deity to know if the gods are willing to be appeased or if they are not. This can also guide them in talking a final decision on the matter. The bride's family if satisfied with the checks takes further steps and carries out due consultations with the immediate and extended family members, and then fixes a date for the traditional marriage proper. Accompanying the letter or note informing the groom's family of the fixed date will be a list of requirements for her bride price. Items in the list can always be adjusted if well negotiated. Traditional Marriage Traditional marriage preparations begin in earnest once the both families are satisfied with the checks (underground and surface). The bride's family is believed to be the ultimate decider of the traditional marriage rites since they

are the ones giving their daughter's hand in marriage to the groom's family. Once the groom's family are prepared, they then show up at the bride's family house with items on the requirements list on the set date. Benin Traditional Council sets a standard for families of what they are expected to collect from intending in-laws before releasing their daughter to join them. The expected items as documented by the council (which various families are at liberty to moderately determine the quantity and quality the groom is to bring) are;

- i. Salt
- ii. Sugar
- iii. Honey
- iv. Palm Wine
- v. Palm Oil
- vi. Yams
- vii. N 25 for bride price (Agbontan, 70)

The Benin Traditional Council when documenting the items did not set any quantity the bride's family should expect from the groom. There is no established law stopping anyone from demanding for large quantity since families are at liberty to self-regulate on that ground. However, families are expected to be reasonable so as not to discourage intending grooms.

According to Aikhionbare, "the groom in the company of friends, family and well-wishers approaches the bride's family with the items on the set date and time. The

bride's family commissions the oldest male of the family (popularly known as 'Okaegbe') to welcome their intending in-laws to the family. It is also expected that the groom's family would commission someone as a spokesperson who will speak for them throughout the period". The person is also known as 'Okaegbe'. But the 'Okaegbe' is that of the groom's family. The host 'Okaegbe's' major task is also to welcome the visitors and formally usher them into the occasion by way of saying sweet words. He then moderates the activities of the day. At every point in time, he announces the major points of the occasion. He gives an opportunity to the groom's family to make their intention known. Represented on stage by their appointed "Okaegbe", the groom's family present their intentions. In most scenarios, the Okaegbe is expected to be choosy when using words. He sometimes would say in a comic way that they were passing by and saw a very beautiful 'Adodo' (meaning flower) and then reached a unanimous decision to come in and seek the permission of the people on whose compound it was sighted, before plucking it. Cited in Dede (40), the response or the "laid down way to respond to such statements by the groom's family is to first, introduce some form of joke by responding that there are so many 'Adodo' in the family garden. He further adds that they will inform them of the need to bring all forward so their visitor can identify the exact one they wish to pluck".

Akhionbare posits that such response is preceded by calling all the girls in the family out for the groom to identify his bride. In Benin traditional culture, the girls are usually covered with a veil. Another symbolic act that will follow is that the groom

would be asked, ọnọ na nọ a (is it this one) and the groom would respond eo (no) (14). This is usually repeated up to five times just to be sure the groom would not because of their persistence change his mind. It symbolises perseverance on the part of the groom. Dede further holds that the bride is usually adorned with a beautiful hairdo to stand her out from the rest of the presented maidens. The hairdo is popularly known among the Benins as Okuku; a traditional hairdo that is used to distinctly mark out the bride from the maidens.

CHAPTER FOUR

Interpretation of costume in Benin marriage ceremony

4.1 The importance of costume in Benin marriage ceremony

Costume is very important in Benin Marriage ceremony. Costumes may be wears or adornments worn by a particular group of people or persons for the purpose of aesthetics, social values and cultural display. It may be in form of body decorations, paintings, ornamentation, coiffure, attire and incisions. In the primitive time, people painted bodies, filed teeth, tattooed and carved up their bodies in the name of costuming.

Edo brides are known for their elaborate beaded bridal wear – complete with a crown (okuku) and accessories 9ivie). The hair – the most important part of the look, is made into a high bun hairstyle known as Eto-Okuku, typically created with black gel. Coral beads are then sewn into the hair or extensions in to the form of a crown, called Okuku. Many brides buy wigs ready made with the hair and crown. The coral bead accessories highlight the royal look. Beaded necklaces are called ivie-uru, hand beads – ivie-ebo, earrings – emi-ehorivie, a beaded clutch – ekpa-ivie and a poncho like cape/beaded top called ewu-ivie. Many also wear slippers or shoes covered with beads. For the complete look, brides wear different fabrics of wrappers – some wear embellished George, some opt for velvet or lace of different colours – anything looks great with beads. Edo Traditional Wedding Couple Outfit With attire is a beautiful complete set of African attire made for couples i.e Bride & Groom. They are mostly used for weddings and celebrations. Edo Bride Traditional Wedding Outfit is specially used for weddings and

special events. This beautiful piece is made of Lace materials. It also comes in George, Atiku, and Velvet fabric. The complete set for the bride comes with:

Two Wrappers

Okuku Oloi (Headgear)

Ivie (Beads)

On the other hand, Edo marriage traditional outfit for men is a traditional outfit of the Edo (Benin) people in the southern part of Nigeria. It comes in a short-sleeve shirt, skirt, and Cap (Eru). It is made from original materials with soft fabric that you can wear for hours without getting exhausted. It is made from Cashmere, Atiku, or Lace fabric and is mostly used for weddings. It adds elegance to the groom which makes him feel special and royalty. It is suitable for all African events and special occasions. The complete attire includes:

Shirt

Skirt

Cap (Eru)

Ivie (Beads)

The Shirt comes in short sleeves.

The ivie (beads) used by the bride and the groom in Benin marriages is for adornment, beautification, show of social status, ethnic reflection and embellishment. The Okuku (Headgear) for the bride aside its aesthetic symbolism also serves as a foundation for display of beads while for the man, the eru (cap) serves as an honour to his status.

Also, for the man, the shirt and skirt reflects the Benin culture and origin and for the woman, it is often about beauty, and cultural reflection of elegance and royalty.

4.2 Pictorial analysis of Groom's costume and cultural interpretation



Figure 1: Benin Groom's attire (Source:

As seen in figure 1, the costume of a Benin groom is usually a white Shirt, Skirt (ebulukute ovbiewu) Cap (Eru) and Beads (Ivie). It is also popular to choose a carved walking stick that makes a groom look like a true gentleman and symbolizes high social and cultural status. A man in Edo culture has some options to choose from. Usually, as part of traditional attire of a Benin man, he wears a white T-shirt or shirt. You also can find options with other patterns. The white t-shirt and skirt symbolizes purity while the beads symbolize royalty. The cap of the groom is usually made out of velvets material that matches or ties together the whole outfit of the bride. It could be plain or given very elegant and beautiful embroidery, which could be light or heavy and in any case, it symbolizes leadership position in the Benin cultural sense.

4.3 Pictorial analysis of Bride's costume and cultural interpretation



Figure 2: Benin Bride on wrapper tieng with necessary accessories. Picture sourced

from

Figure 3: Edo Bride's Costume

As seen in figures 2, the Benin marriage attire worn by brides during traditional marriage ceremony is so rich. It represents the true identity of the african queen with beaded accessories. The Edo brides have their hair made into a unique hairstyle known as Eto-Okuku. Coral beads are then sewn into the hair to a crown. Many opt to buy a ready-made wig which comes with the hair styled and the crown sewn in.

Brides also tie beautiful wrappers made from a variety of fabrics including velvet, lace and george. Over the wrapper tied at their waist, some Edo brides wear the Ewu-ivie, a beaded cape or blouse. They also adorn their necks with coral beads known as Ivie-uru and wears the Ivie-obo on their hands. To complete the regal traditional Edo wedding look, brides wear beaded earrings – Emi-ehorivie, and carry a handbag made out of coral beads as well. The beads used in adorning the ear rings, eto-okuku, hand bags, wrappers, etc speak volume of the culture of Benin. It quickly reminds anyone who understands the Benin culture that the bride is from Benin. The costumes also indicate loyalty, fertility and marriage rites.

4.4 Pictorial analysis of Groom's Mother costume



Figure 4: Groom's Mother's costume in Buba, white velvet wrapper and other accessories. Picture sourced from

The groom's mother in Benin traditional marriage is expected to wear ivie (beads) for adornment, beautification, show of social status, ethnic reflection and embellishment. The number of wound beads does not really matter depending on her ability to afford them, carry them and is convenient with them. Also, she puts on buba top and white velvet wrapper.

4.5 Pictorial analysis of Groom's Father Costume



Figure 5: Groom's Father's costume

The groom's father in Benin marriage often wears a white t-shirt and a white skirt. This is often complemented with some beads wound round the neck and sometimes the

wrist. Just like the groom, the white shirt and skirt represent peace and fertility. The beads worn must be red in colour and not white or any other colour as red indicates the Benin origin.

4.6 Pictorial analysis of Bride's Mother costume



Figure 5: Bride's Mother's costume and other accessories

The bride's mother in Benin Marriage is expected to dress elegantly with representation of Benin costumes. Although nowadays, some people do not have regard for traditional costumes in their choice of costumes for traditional marriages, it is expected the bride's mother must wear hard gear that are beaded such as the style seen in figure 5. She is also to wear blouse and wrapper and not gown.

4.7 Pictorial analysis of Bride's Father Costume



Figure 7: Bride's Father's Costume

The bride's father is expected to wear trouser and a top with beads. Beads as in other cases mentioned are compulsory and the beads must be red in colour. The beads are

to be wound round the neck and the wrist. The number of beads to be wound is at the discretion of the bride's father.

4.8 Summary of Chapter

This chapter is a pictorial representation of the bride, groom, bride's parents and groom's parent's Benin traditional marriage costumes. The significance of the costumes which includes but are not limited to headgear, cape, walking stick, wrapper, beads, etc were highlighted in this chapter and their cultural significance were mentioned. The analysis shows that costume play major role in traditional marriages for the bride and groom and for the Benin society at large.

CHAPTER FIVE

5.1 Summary

This study examined contemporary influence on Benin traditional mode of dressing: a study of Benin traditional marriages. The objectives of the study was to find out the modes of dressing of the Benin people, examine the symbolic meaning Benin traditional mode of dresses in contemporary times, examine the contemporary influences of Benin traditional mode of dressing in marriages, and to study the impact of contemporary dressing in the traditions of the Benin People. The study was qualitative in nature and thus select pictures of bride and groom as well as their respective parents were presented and analyzed. In the process of this research, a lot of literatures were reviewed. The research made use of data collection methods which include the library mode, internet based method and observational research method which served as a guide to the researcher.

5.2 Findings

Findings from the study showed that:

1. Costumes communicate meanings such as social status, elegance, cultural heritage, occasion/event, economic status, mood, etc.
2. Benin traditional marriage requires the bride and groom as well as their parents to wear Benin costumes

3. Benin costumes usually entails but is not limited to red beads, head gear, cape/gown, white skirt and shirt for the groom, traditionally fixed hair styles and clothes, etc
4. The media through cultural commodification and westernization is negatively eroding the core traditional costumes of Benin traditional marriages

5.3 Conclusion

This study concludes that westernization and colonization were very good development in the lives of Africans, however, they had their disadvantages as well. The advantages were enormous because it helped the people to live a better and fulfilled life. Westernization however, by the colonial masters led to the deteriorating of Benin culture. This has led to a situation whereby the Benins lost the values of some of their cultural heritages. In the case of costumes, so many inherited costumes have been vanished due to lack of regard and value towards them and more attention has been diverted to foreign costumes due to the brain wash given to Africans towards their locally made products. Africans now regard their products to be inferior and substandard. However, the influences on Benin traditional marriage costumes are not only based on foreign materials alone but also on materials from other culture groups and cultures of neighboring states especially in the styles of dressing. Another problem too is cultural commodification, through the media, Benins now “buy” western cultures and this affects their use of costumes in marriage.

5.4 Recommendations

Based on the conclusions of the study, it is recommended that the family being the bedrock of every individual should inculcate the value of one's cultural heritage into a child so that when he/she grows he/she will remember their root and preserve their cultural heritage and also practice what the custom demands especially in terms of traditional costumes. However, all the blames cannot be totally apportioned to some parents due to the fact that so many parents left the village setting at a very tender age, therefore, some of them do not know what the tradition and custom is all about, therefore it is advisable that parents should try to take their children home sometimes in order to get them acquainted with the culture and tradition of the people. To buttress this point, it is important that Benin parents show their children the importance of these traditional attires by buying and sewing it for them so that by the time they grow they are already acquainted with it and when the need arises for them to show case their culture they won't find it inferior to be worn especially during traditional events such as traditional marriages.

Furthermore, societies and community members should instill a working rule on every child depending on the association they belong to insisting that in every traditional marriage, that the couples are expected to dress in the core traditional costume of the people. Failure to adhere to the rule will attract the consequences of disobedience, and by so doing the Benin traditional marriage costumes will come back to lime light and the culture promoted. Due to the power which the age grades and groups hold in the Benin

societies, they will be able to revive the Benin traditional marriage attires by scrutinizing the costumes to be worn on the traditional marriage day, if any one goes against their requirements he or she will be sanctioned and made to meet the requirements before the marriage ceremony is performed. In addition, traditional rulers should promote informal education where by young people can learn the skills of their parents so that the skill of production of locally made items such as the traditional marriage costumes and some other Benin traditional attires will not die away.

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