Genesis 3 and Evolution of Costume among Asarama People of Rivers State (Niger-Delta), Nigeria

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Abstract
The inception of sin as revealed in Genesis 3 is tied to the emergence and evolution of costume: chagoroth (that is, loincloth, in Genesis 3:7) and kathnuth ‘or (garment of skin in Genesis 3:21). However, through the centuries, humans had faced the changing patterns and designs of costume. This is typical of the Asarama people of Rivers State, Niger Delta. This paper therefore examines and submits that the pre-colonial male costume consisted of Mkpopu (George) used by ‘free born’ male elders tied mainly for identification purpose. Latter additions were Ekut-ikpo (towel-like clothe) and Alo (foreign wax). The pre-colonial female costume were Asi-ebon-iiba (double waist-beads) tied around the waist without any dress on top. Others were velvet and Ikaki, Tawul-irak-ebon and Dembesi (English damask). The Colonial/post colonial male costume were Mkpopu though used by females also at this time, Etibor, Owokor, Atoro-onyedua (nicknamed okirika) and trousers were added. The Colonial/post colonial female costume was made up of a pair of trousers, and Atoro-onye-dua or etomele k-isim aided by modernism. The evolution of costume in Genesis 3 is made evident among Asarama people of Rivers State, Niger Delta

Keywords: Asarama people of Rivers State, evolution of costume, Genesis 3, pre-colonial, colonial/postcolonial eras

1. Introduction

During the pre-sin period on earth the first couple were naked although nakedness at that point never brought shame (Genesis 2:25). Nevertheless, ever since the fall (Genesis 3), humans have designed and adorned themselves with costume (Running: 1982) the word costume here means fabrics used to cover the body. At the inception of sin, the generic man (humanity), realized their naked state and made for themselves chagoroth (that is, loincloth, Genesis 3:7), this they made to cover their shame. When they heard the sound of God walking in the garden, in the cool of the day, they both hid themselves among the trees of the garden. When God called on the masculine man, he responded “I heard your voice in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; and I hid myself” (Genesis 3:10). Notice, this statement was made after they had sewed for themselves loincloth (Genesis 3:7).

Consequently, in verse 21 we are told of God making for them kathnuth ‘or (garment of skin) and clothed them. But, why would God make for man kathnuth ‘or (garment of skin)? What was wrong with chagoroth (that is, loincloth) made by man for covering? Here we see a seeming evolution of clothing from one stage to another which however, calls for an appraisal. Hence, this paper examined the progression of clothing in Asarama community using the text of Genesis 3 as a platform. The paper employed majorly, the oral interview method whose respondents’ data are presented in a tabular form at the end of the paper, though not precluding the descriptive method to study. In this work, Asarama and Obolo are used interchangeably to represent the same people. This is so because Obolo is the language of the Asarama people.

2. Analysis of some Key Words in Genesis 3 in relation to Costume

2.1 ‘ērōmmim

‘ērōmmim is from the word ‘ērōm an adjective meaning ‘Naked’ or ‘nakedness,’ describing a state of nudity. ‘ērōm is used ten times to designate spiritual and physical nakedness. As used for example of Adam and Eve in Genesis 3: 7, 10, 11 (Laird Harris: 1980). To be “Naked” in the Old Testament comes from various derivatives of Hebrew ‘ur, ‘arah, ‘arom (adj.) and ‘erwah (noun). In the New Testament the adjective is the Greek gumnos; the noun: gymnotes, with verb: gymneteuo, as shown in 1Corinthians 4:11. Both the Hebrew and Greek forms
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mean “without clothing.” So in Genesis 2:25; 3:7. A very common use of “naked” is also “without proper clothing” (Job 22:6; 1 Corinthians 4:11, etc.). The Jews objected vigorously to exposure of the body (even athletes insisting on a loin-cloth {compare 2 Maccabees 4:12, 13}). A keen study of the texts of Isaiah 20:2-4; Lamentation 1:8; Hosea 2:3; Nahum 3:5, reveals a connection between nudity and shame. It shows that compulsory nudity was the extreme of shame and humiliation. No wonder the scriptures emphasis on Israel's high sexual morality (Bromiley: 1987).

2.2 “leh th’enah

“leh th’enah - translated “Fig leaves.” This was first mentioned in Genesis 3:7. It is also mentioned in Deuteronomy 8:8 as one of the valuable products of Palestine (Bromiley: 1987). It was a sign of peace and prosperity (1 Kings 4:25; Micah 4:4; Zechariah 3:10). Figs were used medicinally (2Kings 20:7) and pressed together and formed into “cakes” as articles of diet (1Samuel 30:12; Jeremiah 24:2). The fig-tree of Palestine produces two and sometimes three crops of figs in a year. Firstly, the bikkurah, or “early-ripe fig” (Micah 7:1; Isaiah 28:4; Hosea 9:10), which is ripe about the end of June, dropping off as soon as it is ripe (Nahum 3:12). Secondly, the kermus, or “summer fig” which begins to be formed, and is ripe about August; and thirdly, the pag (plural “green figs,” Songs of Solomon 2:13). It has its Greek equivalent as olynyph (Revelation 6:13). It is also known as “the untimely fig” or “winter fig,” which ripens in sheltered spots in spring (Masterman in Bromiley: 1987). It is the leaves of this medicinal plant that the first pair used for clothing. It follows therefore to infer at this juncture that clothing materials should be such that will enhance human health apart from the covering purpose.

2.3 Chagoroth

Clothing is employed in connection with covering of the body for warmth or reason of modesty (Nick: 1965). Chagoroth rendered by translators as girdle, loincloth, or apron (Sayce in Bromiley: 1987), has its Greek equivalent as simikrintion (Hasting: 1981; Acts 19:12), which was a wrapper of coloured cotton in shape and size, resembling a “bath-towel,” that is the ogodo used by the Igbo people of the south-eastern Nigeria; the bante, used by the Yoruba people of the south-western Nigeria, and the iba, used by the Obolo people of Rivers State, the south-southern region of Nigeria. Such costume was worn by fishermen, potters, water carriers, sewyers, craftsmen and by other artisans. Following the local situation of traditional Igbo, Yoruba and Obolo peoples of Nigeria whose aforementioned cloth, (similar to the Chagoroth) covers only the lower private part of the human body, it therefore follows to claim that such situation which exposes the body might have probably informed the introduction of the kathnuth ‘or that is, “garments of skin” designed by God for proper covering of nakedness.

2.4 kathnuth ‘or

‘ôr -skin, hide.
This word is used both of men's and animals' skins. It indicates the skin of man fifty-five times. While it can designate the outer covering of the body (Job 10:11; Lamentation 3:4; Ezekiel 37:6, 8), it also at times is used metonymically to indicate the whole body (Exodus 22:27; Job19:26). Various characteristics of the skin are mentioned. Men cannot change its color (Jeremiah 13:23). After talking with God on Mount Sinai, the skin of Moses' face shone (Exodus 34:29, 30, 35).

This word is used forty-four times to indicate the skin of an animal. With the exception of the harpooning of the skin of Leviathan (Job 41:7) this word always designates the hide of animals after skinning. These hides were used for garments (Genesis 3:21; 2Kings 1:8). Hides were also used as coverings for the tabernacle (Exodus 25:5), and also for the ark and the sacred utensils (Numbers 4:6). The hides of sacrificed animals were disposed of variously depending upon the kind of sacrifice. The hides of the sin offering for the priest or the whole community were to be destroyed (Exodus 29:14; Leviticus 4:11, 21; 8:17; 9:11; 16:27). The hides of other sin offerings and the burnt offering were assigned to the priests (Leviticus 5:13; 7:8).

But God took skins of animals and made clothes for Adam and Eve so that they could cover their bodies. It is instructive to note that the Hebrew word translated “coats” or “tunics” or “garments of skin” (Genesis 3:21), means literally “covering robes.” Although, (Nichol: 1978) observed that God provided Adam and Eve with durable clothing suitable for the hard labour that lay ahead, and as a protection against the extremes of heat and cold that followed the fall, the clothes that God made for the first couple were not primarily for adornment, nor even for keeping warm; their chief object was to cover the nakedness of the body. Accordingly, (Butterweck:
3. Brief History on the Origin of Asarama People of Obolo Community

This Obolo people are located in the Niger Delta, Rivers State in Nigeria; they are otherwise known as the Adoni people. Their language also follows the same pattern as the Adoni language. The following villages make up the Obolo community: Asarama, Agutu-Obolo, Uyangala, Ngo, Ama-ikut, Ebukuma, Okot-ette, Uyaeada, Egedem, Agana, Ekede, Ama-daka, Ama-iko, Okolo-ile, Ibono, Ataba, Ilothombi, Orong-ijah, Demma, and Ajakajak. All these villages have a common culture and language. According to various elders of the Asarama community like Dedee Fubara-Boyce, Joseph, Dedee Sanderson of Otikor, Dedee Loveday Uneh, and others, the Asarama people by nature are warriors. Their war-likeness was exhibited in their character during the migration process to their present settlement.

It is held that the Asarama people migrated from Izon (Ijaw) land. The South of Nigeria particularly from a place called Sasarama to a place called Ochaga-aoyama from whence they later, through conquest took over the place called Okpong-unon. From Opong-unon, they migrated to Sarama-otoro, from whence they moved to okupu. From Okupu they sojourned to Oka-ama from where they finally settled in Sasarama. Asarama is said to have been located by a man called Iranti, a hunter who crossed over the creek from Oka-ama for hunting and eventually came across a stream of drinking water which eventually attracted the whole villagers from Oka-ama to it for settlement.

The name Asarama also could be an adulterated form of the original place Asarama in Ijaw land. The Asarama community is believed to be the oldest/chief of all Obolo communities. As the Asarama people moved from Ijaw land, they came along with the deities Yok-Obolo and Aman-Obolo (both are consorts). These deities are believed to be the father as well as mother respectively of all Obolo people. Nevertheless, it is generally believed in spite of the fact that Asarama community is directly and frequently associated with Yok-Obolo, and Aman-Obolo, that these deities own all Obolo (Andoni) people of Rivers State.

3.1. Male’s Dress Culture during the Pre-colonial Asarama

According to Dedee Edwin Adam, an elder in the Asarama community of Rivers State, wrapper has been the major clothing article of the Asarama people for both males and females. He goes further stating that style of cloth tying in the community rather than free-born and subjects. However to elder Sanderson mark Otikor, gathering from a man called Iranti, a hunter who crossed over the creek from Oka-ama for hunting and eventually came across a stream of drinking water which eventually attracted the whole villagers from Oka-ama.

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hold that trousers came later to be added to the cloth-tying culture of Asarama people. The trouser that came during the period, they admit was called tajanini tied with rope in place of belts, the leg without double turn-up as the present ones have. The trouser was spacious from top but tight at the foot edge. Moreso, Dede Loveday Uneh posits that the shirt called Etibor (woolly and heavy and is long-sleeved) and Owokor short-sleeved before this present time, had collars as against what we have now. All these were available for the covering of the Asarama males during the pre-colonial period especially when the males are at the prime of manhood.

3.2. Female’s dress culture during the pre-colonial Asarama

According to some elderly women of Asarama community like mama Atospirimie Zillah T., Celestina Justus and others, there was no skirt nor dress for women in Asarama community during the pre-colonial periods. The women had a unique dress-culture as did the men. For the young ladies who had not attained the age of marriage, what is called asi-ebon-iba (double beads) was tied around the waist without any dress on top. When these young ladies grow into womanhood, especially at their menstrual ages, they are confined in a place. This confinement is known as Uwo-Ekut. The aim of this confinement is to teach the young ladies who are coming into womanhood, how to tie wrappers. Uwo-Ekut literally is translated as “house of wrappers”. At the time of confinement, this young ladies tie one yard of a cloth called ‘Okpoko-Esuu’ (Lagos cloth) above the knee. It is worthy of note that before this confinement, a lady is not authorized to tie any cloth, if found covered with cloth, it suggests that such lady has had sexual intercourse before her marriage, hence, such covering of shame. This culture indeed could be said to have enhanced morality in the society.

Nevertheless, when a lady has successfully passed through the training of wrapper-tying, she is released and at this time, she comes out of the confinement with several wrappers tied with the help of rope so as to hold each wrapper to the waist. The foregoing is what is being called fanti. The major types of wrappers tied when coming out of this confinement are called velvet and Ikaki. In the place of pants or undergarment, the use of Tawul-irak-ebon was adopted. Moreover, the type of wrapper called Dembesi (Englishh damask) was used by women only at this period.

3.3. Male’s dress culture in the colonial/post-colonial Asarama

It is observed that in traditional ancient Asarama community according to elder Edwin Adam, tying of Mkpopu (George) as well as Igobo-iba (modern napkin) by both elderly males and females was obtainable but now Mkpopu tying has no restrictions. Even young boys and girls of tender age could tie it. More so, trouser wearing as elder Uneh put it “has almost taken away our wrapper tying culture “he adds that the unique dress culture of Asarama people has been bastardized with the introduction of civilization in Asarama community. Still maintaining the traditional dress culture of Asarama people, Mkpopu has become the general clothe used by all males and females, old and young. These clothes could have different colors but same quality and make.

Today, youths and elders put on Etibor and Owokor with either a pair of trouser or Mkpopu below. These shirts do not have collar presently, as did early times. It is important to note that the traditional Asarama people in order to maintain their culture of using bath-towel for what the call Ibaana-iba or Igobo-iba, till present, when elders die (either male or female), the eldest son or daughter as the case may be, is called up to dress his or her parent with the bath-towel though this act is not observed by all in the community. The use of Atono-onyedua (nicknamed Okirika) need not be forgotten. These clothes both trousers, long sleeves and short sleeves were gotten already sewn and brought to the market where the people go and get the clothes in vogue. This, without mincing words influenced the traditional cloth-tying culture of Obolo people of Rivers State.

3.4. Female’s Dress Culture in the Colonial/Post-colonial Asarama

Wrappers still remain the major article of covering in Asarama community for the females. However, the addition of the top need not be overlooked. Presently, ladies tie especially the common Mkpopu (George) double with blouse as dress for the top. According to mama celestial Justus, ladies from kula in Kalabari community of river State during and after the Nigerian civil war were putting on trousers, so also Asarama ladies copied as they lived among them. In essence, as modernity grew, wears changed in Asarama community. In spite of the fact that civilization brought the idea of women putting on a pair of trousers in Asarama community, the elders still frowned at women on trousers, perhaps due to the fact that the trouser had not been an article of dressing of the community from the onset. Moreover, the idea of wearing gowns came up in Asarama community during the period of colonialism. It came when wears already sewn were brought for sale. These cloths called Atoro-onye-dua or etomelek-ekene-isim. It is
in a rhetorical question form translated “who was it measured on before sewing?” In other words, the attire came to them already sewn. It was during this period of colonialism that Christianity came to Asarama and people were converted, so the young ladies who when at home, as it were, covered their lower part with beads, do go to church with a long gown (Atoro-onye-dua) which also is pulled off on getting back home from the church, thus, going back to status quo - beads wearing on the waist. However, as the people got more civilized, the use of beads for covering was abandoned, more so, the covering of the breast with wrappers was transformed into wearing a dress with bra on the top and tying of wrappers below with head-gear on the head.

4. Conclusion

It should be noted that clothing in Asarama community of Rivers State borders on tying of wrappers for both males and females. There were certain wrappers used by both sexes such as- Alo (foreign wax), Mkpopu (George), Eket-ikpo (towel-like material). However, the females had theirs as Dembesi (English damask), Esu (Lagos cloth) heavy in nature. Trousers, gowns, blouses, were not original wears of Obolo people of Rivers State. They were later additions to the article of covering in Asarama dress culture during the colonial as well as post colonial periods. Before tying cloth for both males and females, there must be processes to follow; for ladies, confinement process while for men presentation of drinks to elders was necessary. To ancient Obolo people, covering was only important when one has reached maturity stage for the males and females alike. In other words, when one’s eyes are open and they know they are naked (Genesis 3:7) then they could cover. In light of this, one could see clearly Butterweck’s analysis when he explains that the knowledge of erummim (nakedness) in Gen.3:7, leads to God intervention in providing the or (skin) which ends the arummim of Genesis. 2:25. From the above, we could conclude that just as in biblical account, the African traditional Obolo culture on costume has evolved through history. Trousers as stated had never been men’s wear from inception. It was a borrowed culture from the colonial invaders. Cloth-tying had been the culture of Obolo people of Rivers State before the introduction of other articles for covering. Clearly, the transition from chagoroth (loincloth) to chathnuth ‘or (that is, garment of skin for proper covering) is evident in Genesis 3 and remains instructive for evolution of costume in Asarama community of Rivers State, Nigeria.

Reference


### Table 1: Particulars of some Respondents Interviewed in Asarama Community of Rivers State, Niger Delta Nigeria

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S/N</th>
<th>NAMES OF RESPONDENTS</th>
<th>AGE</th>
<th>OCCUPATION</th>
<th>ADDRESS</th>
<th>DATE OF INTERVIEW</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Mama Ogbotabo</td>
<td>78yrs</td>
<td>Craft-woman</td>
<td>Asarama town</td>
<td>Dec. 19, 2007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Elder Sanderson Mark Otikor</td>
<td>81yrs</td>
<td>Fisher-man</td>
<td>Asarama town</td>
<td>April 29th, 2007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Chief Mbu Ebiriene</td>
<td>78yrs</td>
<td>Crowned chief</td>
<td>Iyong-Orong, Asarama town</td>
<td>Dec. 31st 2007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Mama Selma M. Otikor</td>
<td>76yrs</td>
<td>Clergy woman</td>
<td>Asarama town</td>
<td>April 29, 2007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Eld. Loveday Uneh</td>
<td>71yrs</td>
<td>Fisherman</td>
<td>Asarama town</td>
<td>Jan. 4, 2008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Dede Fubara-Aboye Joseph</td>
<td>68yrs</td>
<td>Chief-priest of Yok-Obolo</td>
<td>Asarama town</td>
<td>Dec. 21, 2007</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>Chief Kurukuru Owen</td>
<td>58yrs</td>
<td>Crowned chief</td>
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<td>Jan. 4, 2008</td>
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<td>12</td>
<td>Chief Lasbery L. A</td>
<td>75yrs</td>
<td>Crowned chief</td>
<td>Asarama town</td>
<td>Dec. 16, 2007</td>
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<td>13</td>
<td>Eld. Sunday Ebeke</td>
<td>76yrs</td>
<td>Fisherman</td>
<td>Asarama town</td>
<td>April 30, 2007</td>
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<td>14</td>
<td>Eld. Frankline E.</td>
<td>77yrs</td>
<td>Fisherman</td>
<td>Asarama town</td>
<td>April 30, 2007</td>
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<td>16</td>
<td>Chief Manoah O. Ogogo</td>
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<td>Asarama town</td>
<td>Dec. 18, 2007</td>
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<td>18</td>
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<td>21</td>
<td>Mr. Sivalnus S. Otikor</td>
<td>50yrs</td>
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<td>Asarama town</td>
<td>Dec. 20, 2007</td>
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<td>22</td>
<td>Chief Tallick A</td>
<td>71yrs</td>
<td>Crowned chief</td>
<td>Asarama town</td>
<td>Jan. 3, 2007</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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