

Symbols and Meaning in Dress and Identity Construction in Benin Chieftaincy

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Abstract

Benins are known for their unique culture which revolves around the revered tradition centred on the Oba (king). Renowned scholars like Nevadomski, Egharevba, Ena Eweka and Aisien have carried out extensive ethnographic research covering such areas as Benin arts and crafts, religion, traditional politics and culture on the people. In contributing to the existing literature in the area of Benin chieftaincy regalia. This article examines how costumes serve as a tool for identifying Benin chiefs in their various categories of chieftaincy groups. The aim is to clarify the confusion of identifying Benin chiefs bearing in mind the similarities that abound in the general traditional dress of the people. Using qualitative research methods, with relevant literature, interview and personal observation, findings reveal that the title of a chief contributes to the construction of the costume of the chief for different purposes.

Keywords: Dress, Symbols and meaning, Identity construction, Benin chieftaincy regalia, Cultural communication.

Introduction

Dresses are a powerful communicational tool for the cultural identity of the African people in general and the Benin people in particular. The dressing styles of the Benin people have continued to serve as a symbol for cultural identification, and also help to identify the people in their respective categories. It also helps in recognizing the personalities and status of an individual. It is a first-hand information carrier about a person in any given circumstance. In traditional African society, the dressing of

the people has continued to serve the purpose of identity and cultural communication. The influence of the white man on the dressing pattern of Africans was an improvement of the dress that was available to the people because the people were already been clothed before civilization by the Europeans, whether with leaves, raffia and other body adornments and body markings as identify to the people's culture. Significantly, to the African people, dresses communicate and provide knowledge about the personality, sex, status and occupation of the wearer. It has continuously served as a visual tool in mirroring and identifying a society.

In designing dresses for a cultural purpose, many things are to be considered by the designer before embarking on any type of design. The personality of the wearer, the age of the wearer, the position the wearer occupies in society and many other things need to be considered before embarking on a design. This is because designs help to tell you more about the wearer, the purpose of usage and the personality of the wearer. Most traditional dresses are designed for cultural representations and identifiers. In making a costume for performance purposes, the costume designer needs to put into consideration the context, aesthetics as well as the purpose of designing the costume to give a true definition to the costume. The costume is a unique part of a people's identity and cultural symbol, as an element of culture. It is a product of the people's culture and a symbol that expresses the values of the people. It expresses a people's mode of dressing thereby preserving and promoting the thought pattern of such people. To Bailey and People, the issue of cultural knowledge brings about an understanding of cultural symbols, that:

Symbols are things that represent, connote, or call to mind something else... we can speak to inquiring strangers about our value and explain to them ... but it is nearly impossible to tell someone why a particular gesture, a way of walking, a style of dress, or a certain facial expression carries the meaning it does rather than some other meaning, "we just know". "Everyone knows," for such things are common knowledge and maybe even common sense to people who have a shared understanding of the symbols. ...Symbols represent many qualities and abstract values simultaneously. They do so by expressing their meanings in a material form that is easy to represent, think about and become emotionally attached to. (32)

Cultural dressing has continued to provide vital information about people and also help to understand the symbolic representation of the colours used by the wearer in the traditional environment. Eze and Akas affirm that costumes “are used as a form of symbolic expression of oneself as well as a communicative tool that interprets its sociological effects at any given time” (23). Costumes help to identify people in different levels or positions of life such as their social status, economic status, political status, marital status and hierarchy status. Thus, costume becomes a significant cultural element in understanding and appreciating the culture of a people.

In Benin society, there are dresses for every Benin man or woman and there is also specific dress for title holders and other members of the society. These various dresses have special designs that are specific to the individuals. There are also special designs or inscription that identify a Benin chief and differentiates them in their hierarchy that most people pay less attention to. All chiefs in Benin are of different hierarchies and based on their hierarchy, their regalia are created to identify them at special cultural events such as festivals, coronations and other ceremonies. Against this backdrop, the researcher investigates the costume of the Benin chief, how it is designed and whether there are special designs for the chiefs based on their hierarchy. This study contributes to knowledge in the area of Benin chieftaincy costume. In the process, the words costume and dress may be used interchangeably because of their similarities in meaning which also fit into this discussion.

The Concept of Traditional Dress

In the early life of the African people, they in one way or another covered themselves with raffia, body markings or tattoo, painting and leaves. The African people at large and the Nigerian people did cover themselves before the coming of the white man. Lyndersay claims that:

Except in puberty, complete nudity is rare. Not only in West Africa but also the rest of the world, the reason why man has felt the need to cover the body after puberty, be it with animal skins, matted fabric or bark cloth, woven cloth, beads, leaves or paints and dyes will forever constitute a source of controversy, which the first controversy originated from Adam and Eve story in the bible that the sole purpose of mankind for covering nakedness is shame or modesty. The second misconception is that the original form of dress was purely functional and only meant to protect the body against

insects or the elements- cold and damp weather, the sun's rays or high wind. (8)

The dressing is said to have been in existence in Benin long before the 1897 punitive expedition, although, with development and civilization, there has been a continuous change in the pattern from time to time. The dressing is an important cultural element that has continued to provide a unique identity to the people. Dress to the people is used for different reasons such as aesthetics, adornments or embellishment, ritual and many more purposes. According to Lyndersay, "man has always satisfied an elemental need; the need to aesthetically adorn his possessions - his body and his material objects" (15). It is also used to give interpretation to a particular event or occasion. Every ethnic group in Nigeria has designs as well as symbolic representations and colours that are peculiar to their culture. The Benin people, for instance, are known specifically for their white and red colours which are symbols of authority, power, ritual and royalty. They are also identified with the *Iwu* design which is the body markings of the Benin people and the *Ada* and *Eben* symbol of identity.

In traditional society, there are different types of dressing for different events. There are occupational dress, religious dress, secular dress, ceremonial dress and ritual dress. These dresses are meant for different events. Thus, a ceremonial dress may not fit into an occupational dress, nor will a ceremonial dress fit into a ritual dress. So, the event determines the nature of the dress of an individual. These various dresses also have accessories that are appropriate for the occasion and the personality. The belief is that the Oba is the owner of all coral beads which he distributes to title holders and chiefs. According to Lyndersay, "two important elements of the dress stand out when you examine the numerous sculptures in bronze from Benin. One is the importance attached to beads in the royal court and the other is the tremendous varieties of headdresses used" (85). Because of the way Benin society is structured with so much importance in the hierarchy and social stratification in society, the dressing for every Benin man and woman is designed to reflect their social status and their position. There are dresses appropriate for the royal class, the title holders, ordinary Benin indigene, men, women, boys and girls which helps to identify them in different ways.

Chieftaincy Institution in Beninland

The institution of chieftaincy in Benin is a traditional political system of government founded on the traditional norms and values of the Benin people. It is an institution that has the Oba at the apex of authority and underneath the Oba are traditional leaders and title holders from the districts and Benin metropolis who are assigned different duties as given to them by the Benin monarch for the advancement of the people's culture and tradition. Akatey, according to oral tradition on the origin of chieftaincy institutions, explains that: one of the stories at a point in time when a group of people settled at a particular place and began to structure their society, they thought it prudent to nominate or elect someone who will be their leader. Most often they look out for somebody who was outspoken, proactive and had leadership qualities. With time, it gradually metamorphosed into a well-structured system which today has become the institution of chieftaincy with the creation of stool as symbols of kingship and authority (2).

The creation of the institution aimed to promote the culture of the Benin people and most importantly, to assist the Oba in decision-making following the people's tradition as well as protecting the right of the citizen and preserving the culture of the people. The creation of kingship brought about chiefs who are obligated to assist the monarch to administer the state. Eweka observes that: with the kings, came the chiefs (Ekhaemwen) who had to assist the monarch to administer the state. Then grew the complex chieftaincy institutions which were, as a result of the forces of history, designed to cater for the daily needs of the state and people. The various guilds, therefore, provided the much-needed goods and services to sustain an organized government (xxv).

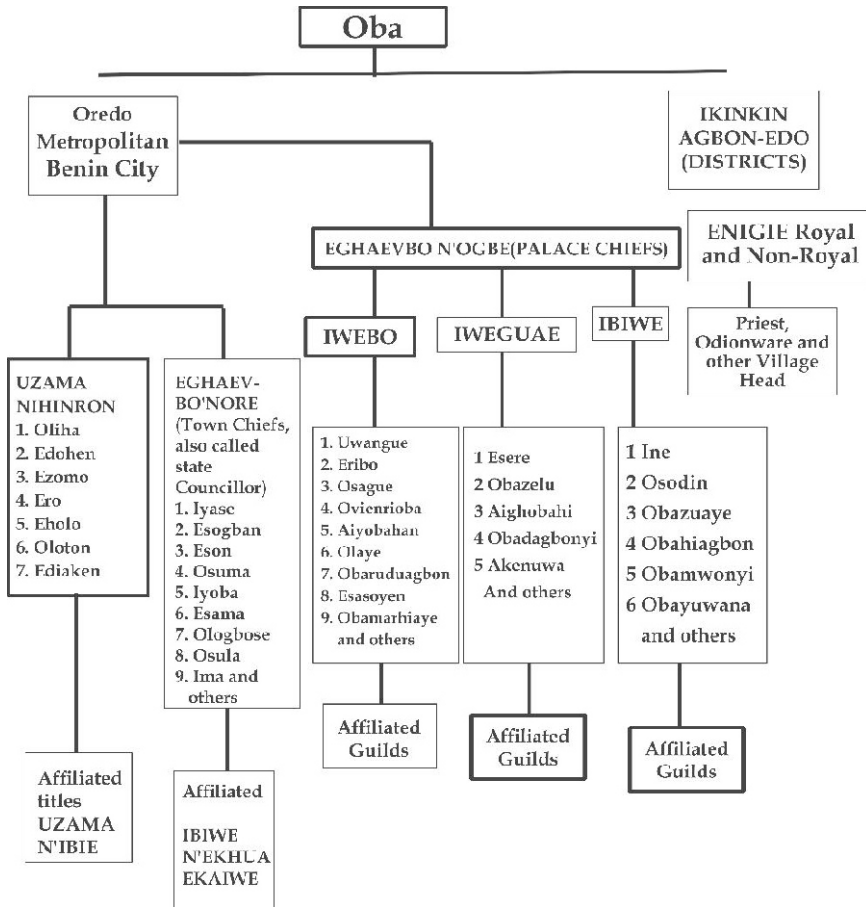
Chieftaincy institution assists the Oba in the proper administration of the affairs as it affects the traditions of the people. The institution has been in existence from time immemorial since the Odionwere administration when the leadership position was given to the oldest man among the people and later gravitates to the Edion who later became (Uzama). Before Benin started to experience a well-structured political system of administration, the elders assisted in the management of the political affairs in the state. Because of the organised way they manage the state affairs, these elders later became Edion and were constituted naturally to Ekhaevhen (kingmakers) who were rewarded with hereditary titles because of their significant contributions to the traditional administration of the Benin political system. The Edion who

later became Uzama during Oba Ewuare 1 administration became the first category of chiefs in the Benin kingdom and were given special duties.

The creation of titles started right from the Ogiso era according to Egharevba's account, though the various titles were not documented in the subsequent administration, the chiefs that were recognised were those chiefs who played a vital role in assisting the young Oba in the 2nd dynasty to govern the state. These chiefs were rewarded for their selfless services and thus given the position of Uzama Nihiron (kingmakers) who are seven in number including the Edaiken. Because of the great power these chiefs possess, they became a threat to Benin monarch, leading to the creation of another category of chieftaincy, to curb the excesses of the Uzama chiefs. The Iyase title meaning Iyonasewa was created to supersede other titles. The creation of this title created an opening for the creation of town chiefs known as Eghaevbon'Ore. The desire to look for those to be in charge of the royal family's domestic needs led to constituting the third category of chiefs to take care of the Oba and his household's personal belongings. The desire was conceived during the reign of Oba Esigie. The Eghaevbon'Ogbe category of chieftaincy was created, they are known as palace chiefs who have different responsibilities in the palace of the Oba of Benin. The creation of this title became necessary due to the desire of the Oba to look for trusted hands that could handle the newly imported beads to the kingdom. The children of Eghaevbon'Ore were given the special preference to function in this position because of their noble birth. There are three palace societies in this group, the Iwebo, Iwegue and Ibiwe palace societies. They all function within their respective societies and do not interfere in the society in which they do not belong and they are not allowed access to the society in which they do not belong aside from the Oba who is the head of all titles and positions. The three categories of chiefs began to exist side by side without any interference from within. These three categories have various responsibilities and thus function within them. After these chiefs have been confirmed by the Oba, they are thereafter given responsibilities as it pleases the Oba to function effectively.

Organogram of Benin Chieftaincy Titles

Below is the administrative diagram of the political structure in Benin capturing the various categories of chiefs and district heads starting with the Oba as head of administration.



Organogram of Benin Chieftaincy Titles

Source: Enawekponwen B. Ewaka, 1992; and Victor O. Edo, 2007

Categories of Chiefs in Benin

There are different categories of chiefs (Ekhaevhen) in Benin from high-ranking chiefs to low-ranking chiefs. There are chiefs from the districts known as Enigie with other traditional leaders and there are chiefs from metropolitan Benin, who are functionally residents in Benin City. They are recognised by the Oba and they made up the three categories in the chieftaincy institution. The Uzama, Eghaevbon'Ore and Eghaevbon'Ogbe.

They all have responsibilities assigned to them by the Oba. According to Eweka,

If the categories of chiefs are not by design, it may have been by the inherent nature of Edo that the title group system may well have developed from groups identity which characterized the structure of the City State itself, which developed from a cluster of hamlets and villages: later to be known as Benin City from which Empire and the dominions evolved over the years (32).

Chieftaincy categories as described by Omo N'Oba Erediauwa, in a press conference on 24th February 1982 as follows according to Eweka,

- The Enigie (district head)

This category of chiefs is in charge of villages, they have many villages under them that they control, and they also have Odionwere, the chief priest and other traditional leaders that assist the Enigie in the various villages under their jurisdiction. This title is created only by the Oba and district heads are assigned by the Oba. History has it that the district heads are the brothers of the Oba who are assigned by the Oba. The other category of chiefs are divided into the following groups, they are known as city chiefs, they include

- The Uzama headed by Oliha
- The Eghaevbon'Ore headed by Iyase
- The Eghaevbon'Ogbe headed by Uwangué
- Other titled chiefs

The Uzama Chiefs

The Uzama category of chieftaincy has seven hereditary chieftaincy titles and they are referred to as kingmakers and are also called Uzama Nihinron. This category has other affiliated titles known as Uzama N'Ibie. They are responsible for the crowning of the Oba. However, chief Usoh one of the chiefs interviewed explained that the Uzama Nihinron in this present Oba Ewuare II administration, are no longer referred to as kingmakers. Their primary responsibility is not altered as they still control their domain and perform other duties assigned to their titles. They rule over some sub-sections of the kingdom (Chief Usoh in an interview with the researchers). They rule over the villages they live in and have some

attributes of kingship. Eweka citing Bradbury attests to the fact that although the Uzamas had some kingship attributes:

They were not Oba's equal; they could not sit in his presence. In another sense, they were his peers. Like the Oba and unlike the Eghaevbo, they were hereditary territorial rulers in their own right. Their territories consisted only of the villages of hamlets in which they lived. In some cases, one or more villages, but in the internal affairs of these territories the Oba ought not to interfere. (36)

The Uzama titles are passed on to the eldest surviving son after the successful completion of the burial or obsequies of his father.

Uzama Costumes: Long Gown like a Cassock with Long Cape (Eziokherhe)

The Uzama have their special costumes designed only for the special seven chiefs. They also use different attire for different functions such as Otue-Ugierhoba, Otue-Iguoba, Ugie-Erhoba, Igue-Edohia, Emobo, Igue-Iron, coronation, and other ritual performances. The Uzama make use of a robe with a cape that reaches the ground which is designed as a long robe. This costume is also accompanied by round neck beads (Ikele) and hand beads (Ivie-obo) and any footwear of their choice for a ceremony. The colour varies from white and red, the use of colour is determined by the nature of the event whether ritual or ceremonial. As mentioned earlier, this costume design is peculiar only to the Uzama chiefs as it cannot be worn by any other category of chiefs in a chieftaincy institution. The exclusive use of this costume by this category of chiefs distinguishes them from other categories because they are rulers in their domains.



Fig.1: The Uzama Chiefs on their Long Cape during a Cultural Ceremony
Source: NTA Documentary on Benin Costume 2015.

The Eghaevbon'Ore

The Eghaevbo n'Ore (town chiefs) are state counsellors whose positions were created by Oba Ewedo to curb the excesses of the Uzama at its creation. The Eghaevbo n'Ore is headed by Iyase a position that was created higher than other positions. The Iyase title and Esogban title were created as senior chiefs. According to Edo, "the Iyase title was created to reward one of the Ewedo's henchmen whose intelligent counselling helped Oba Ewedo in asserting his supremacy over the Uzama chiefs" (94). Ewedo having successfully gained control of the city proceeded to curb the power of the Uzama by creating the Iyase, Esogban, Uwangu, Osodin, Uso and Isekhurhe titles with particular reference to the Iyase title. This new set of town chiefs enjoyed royal honour. After about two centuries of the existence of these positions, the political structure was again altered by the then Oba Ewuare I. This was to balance power among them. More titles were created as Eson and Osuma constituted into Ikadele n'Ore and other titles subsequently were created and thus expand this category of chiefs making them more than twenty-eight. Hierarchy abounds in this category of chieftaincy and responsibilities are duly awarded.

Eghaevbo n'Ore Costume: Long Gown like a Cassock with Short Cape (Eziokherhe)

This style of dressing was introduced by Oba Akenzua. The Oba introduced the robe with a cape for special identification. This style of the costume was designed for chiefs with portfolios, not for all the classes of chiefs. It cannot be worn by the Uzama category of chieftaincy as well. The intention of Oba Erediauwa introducing the long robe without a cape, was for this particular costume to be used only by the senior chiefs, but because of poor supervision, junior chiefs began to wear the costume as well.



Fig. 2: Eghaevho Chief on a Gown cape with Round Neck Bead
Source: NTA documentary on Benin Costume 2015

Ehaengbehia

The Ehaengbehia is full regalia made with red scarlet, (Ukpon-Ododo) which has been in existence right from the 5th century or more. This costume is sewed by a special guild in the palace called Ewebo. It is not a common style of dressing for the chiefs. It is a special ceremonial costume used by senior chiefs in Eghavbon'Ore and Eghavbon'Ogbe categories. These particular regalia is constructed by members of Iwebo society only. It is used during Ugie or a special visit of a high chief to the Oba. The costume is designed in a similar way for all the chiefs entitled to use it. Thus the quality of the material used distinguishes personalities concerning affluence. The red scarlet (Ododo) is the only colour used in constructing Ehaengbehia costume and it is sewn once in a lifetime

because it is expensive to produce and not a regular costume (interview with chief Edebiri).



**Fig.3: Ehaengbehia Costume used only by Eghaevbo,
Source: Owens P. Eromosele, 2021**

EghaevboN'Ogbe

The need to create a set of people that will look after the newly introduced beads to the kingdom led to the creation of the Eghaevbo n'Ogbe category of chiefs. Oba Ewuare 1, having received the new set of beads which was brought by the Portuguese, needed people of like minds and of royal birth to be in charge of taking care of the beads. The children of Eghaevbo' n'Ore constituted the Iwebo palace society. Titles were installed on some of them which eventually gave birth to the nucleus of palace chiefs known as Eghaevbo n'Ogbe that cut across three palace societies, Iwebo, Ibiwe and Iwegua located in the palace of the Oba giving different responsibilities. The six senior members of the Eghaevbo n'Ogbe are Uwangué, Eribo, Esere, Obazelu, Ine and Osodin (Edo 96). This set of palace society works directly for the Oba; The EghaevboN'Ogbe was created to secure the palace and make sure things are in order within the palace, thus they are palace functionaries. Though they may perform other responsibilities

within the palace which non-members of the society do not know. Titles given to members of this palace society are both hereditary titles and non-hereditary titles (Eromosele 12).

Eghaevbo n'Ogbe Costume

The costumes that are specific to the Eghaevbo n'Ore are also used by the Eghavbo n'Ogbe. They make use of the long robe with a short cape and use Ehaengbehia costume as seen in figures 2 and 3.

Other Titled Chiefs

There is another category of chiefs known as Ukor and EkhaevbenUkor. The Ukor are junior chiefs without portfolios, they do not have titles but are regarded as chiefs, and thus they cannot perform some specific duties and wear some special costume in the traditional sense like the recognised chiefs have their haircut (Uguakpata), and the Ukor are not permitted to do the haircut. The EkhaevbenUkor are chiefs that have been given a name by the Oba and are now recognised with a title. These chiefs graduate from the Ukor category to Ekhaevbenukor (Ukor Chief). But they are meant to accept this name within a space of three days before they can fully be members of that group. The OkhaevhenUkor or Eghaevbon'Ogbe chief is then given a special accessory that goes with his title. It is also to be noted that the Oba can also elevate an ordinary palace functionary to Eghaevbon'Ogbe without first becoming either Ukor or OkhaevbenUkor (interview Mr Omoregie)

Other Titled Chiefs Costume

These chiefs as well as the Uzama, Eghaevbo n'Ore and Eghaevbo n'Ore can use the general regalia associated with chieftaincy. There are no special costumes to identify them apart from the regular chieftaincy dressing style. There are three general dressing styles for all chiefs. These styles are used by all the categories of chieftaincy whether of high ranking or low ranking. It is a general costume that may not identify these chiefs according to the category of chieftaincy they belong. These are:

i. Ukpe-Eyon (Wrapper Tying)

The Ukpe-eyon is a general dress for every Benin man whether titled or not. It is a very large wrapper that is tied around the waist for the titled men. A Benin chief would tie his wrapper (feyon) and use a lapel (Egbele) on one side of the waist to differentiate him from an untitled Benin man who either ties it around the waist without a lapel or ties over the

shoulder. The colour is either white or red depending on the event. A chief who is on special assignment for the Oba uses white colour and round neck beads (Ikele).

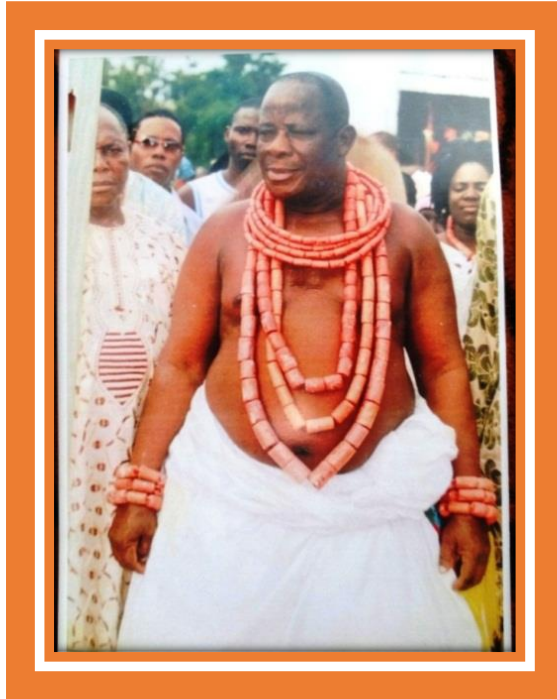


Fig.3: Chief Nehezena Tying a White Wrapper (Ukpen-Eyon) at a Ceremony
Source: Owens P. Eromosele 2021

For special occasions, if a chief has been recognised by the Oba and thus given a title, he has the privilege to dress in those accessories and costumes given to him by the Oba. He is then regarded as chief with a portfolio (Ukor). This chief can use two cross beads (Eguan), leg beads, hand beads, eagle feather, head beads (Udehai), round neck bead (Ikele), hand bangle (ikoro), a lapel, eben and the special hair cut (Uguakpata).

ii. Long gown like a cassock (Eziokherhe)

The chiefs also use long gowns like cassocks. This gown was first designed by Ajayi Uyioghan was a then designer for the catholic priest for centuries. The designs for the chiefs were made to be a little different from that of

the catholic priest. It was introduced by Oba Erediauwa to simplify the robe that comes with a cape and for flexibility and comfort. The regalia was designed to be broader in shape. It is a flowing gown which has a short dart at the middle up to the chest level. This gown-like costume is also used by the Oba but with a different design. The Oba's regalia has a unique long dart that reaches the ground which makes it different from other chiefs. The bishop-like gown regalia is worn by all title holders that cut across low-ranking to high-ranking chiefs. The costume is accompanied by round neck beads (ikile) and hand beads (ivieobo).



Fig 4: Chiefs on Cassocks without Cape and Special Round Haircut (Ughuakpata)

Source: NTA Programme on Benin Costume 2015

Skirt with Blouse (Ebuluku and Ovbiewu)

The use of skirts and blouses (Ebuluku and Ovbiewu) was introduced during the reign of Oba Akenzua 11. This mode of dressing comes with different designs that reflect the Benin identity. The blouse could be designed either plain patterned or designed with an inscription of an *Iwu* mark (traditional body markings of the Benin people done during the ancient time as a form of identity), or Ada and Eben (a cultural symbol of the Benin people). Although the skirt and top inscribed with Ada and Eben costume design are now mostly used by Benin untitled men, youths and children for cultural identification, the *Iwu* inscription generally is

mostly used by the titled men (chiefs). This style of costume is also accompanied by accessories peculiar to the position of the wearer.



Fig. 5: Chief Eduwu Ekhatör- The Obasogie of Benin on *Iwu* Blouse
Source: NTA Programme on Benin Costume 2015

Benin Chieftaincy Dress/Regalia as Identity

Dressing is an important aspect of the Benin chieftaincy mode of identity. As important as a dress to the Benin people so also it is an important visual identity for every chief in Benin chieftaincy. There are general dressing patterns or styles for all chiefs irrespective of the class, title or status of the chief and they also have specific dresses that identify them in their category of chieftaincy. This specific dress is used during special cultural ceremonies and for special assignments or purposes. Thus, the type of dress worn by a chief at any point in time is determined by various factors such as ceremonial, ritual or casual. The colours which include red and white are also determined by the occasion. The dominant colour for all kinds of ceremonies is white, except for specific ritual functions which

demand red colour. The chiefs may attend a particular ceremony but would have different duties to perform, which dictate the kind of dress the chief puts on at that particular event.

Chieftaincy Accessories

Accessories are body ornaments that are worn by individuals for beautification and identification. An accessory is also a powerful communicational element in identifying a category of chief from another in Benin chieftaincy. Citing Noyster, Okpu attests that "an adornment is generally an accessory or ornament worn to enhance the beauty or status of the wearer, and that they are often worn to embellish, enhance or distinguish the wearer. These embellishments are often used to define cultural, social or religious status within a specific community (22). In Benin chieftaincy institution, so much importance is attached to accessories as a means to identify the various categories of chiefs. Apart from the Ikele (round neck bead) that is specifically worn by title holders, other accessories and body adornments are specially given to the high-ranking chiefs. These chiefs in the high-ranking category are said to have been honoured by the Oba and are given other body adornments to identify them in their category or hierarchy.

These are cross body beads (Ekpaen), white eagle feather (Igoghohon), Ada and Eben, round neck bead (Ikele), full body regalia (Ehaengbehia), head bead (Odihi), Ede is a long cap used by Ekhaevhen'ukor, brass bangle (Ikoro), round haircut and more.

Conclusion

This article has identified the various categories of chiefs and the different districts in the Benin kingdom regarding their kinds of dress. It was discovered that costume is a vital part of Benin's chieftaincy identity from one class to another in the various categories of chieftaincy. The use of costumes and the choice of colours for the chiefs are determined by different circumstances. Colour and costumes are used to represent different ceremonies and purposes which play a vital role in the institution of chieftaincy. There is a general costume that cut across all chiefs which is the long robe without a cape, Ukpen-eyon, i.e., skirt and blouse. There is also costume specifically for the high-ranking chiefs in Uzama, Eghaevbon'Ore and Eghaevbon'Ogbe which are the long robe with a short cape meant for the Eghaevbos and the long robe with a long cape for Uzama and a special costume Ehaengbehia for the Eghaevbos. It was also

found that regardless of the largeness of the institution, the costume is a major cultural element that identifies a chief in Benin society. The position of a chief can be ascertained in different cultural events from the way the chief is dressed. The use of costumes for the chiefs aesthetically projects the position of the Benin chiefs as title holders and reflects the royal nature of the Benin kingdom with the use of colours because their costumes are dominantly red and white colours with significant meaning to the Benin identity.

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