

Adaptation of Orlu Okorosha Festival Symbols as Motifs for Apparel Costumes of Cultural Identity

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Abstract

The thrust of this paper is to design an innovative distinctive apparel costumes for cultural identity of Orlu Okorosha festival in Imo State using its symbols as motifs. The festival is characterized by the appearance of masquered indifferent masks, dressed in foreign apparel costumes which never reflected their cultural symbols. However attention has not been given to documentation on fabrics by adapting okorosha symbols as motifs by previous studies. This exploratory study has created and designed innovative apparel costumes by using its relevant symbols as motifs to embellish fabrics for cultural identity of Okorosha festival. Sketches, compositions and designs illustrations were employed to transfer patterns on fabrics using various textile production techniques. Samples produced were analyzed using contextual descriptive approach and taken to field trips for the end users to choose and model. The resultant selected apparel designs emerged better with desirable characteristics than the foreign blankets and gorges being replaced. The findings indicate that Orlu people accepted and agreed to mass production of these apparel costumes that is intended to give them a unique identity which they have been craving for. The study recommends among others that textile designers should revisit the use of indigenous symbols as motifs in the embellishment of textile fabrics meant for cultural events to promote identities and tourism.

Keywords: adaptation, innovation, Orlu Okorosha, symbols, identity

1. Introduction

Orlu Okorosha festival exists among the Igbo cultural areas to which Orlu people belong. The festival is celebrated to entertain the society as well as check some nefarious activities by the masquerades dressed in different mask and foreign costumes which do not reflect cultural symbols as motifs. Orlu Okorosha festival is a human activity which focuses on great social

equality, solidarity and togetherness thereby allowing the whole community to share a common experience value. The festival has not been provided with known traditional costume for cultural identity. The passion for foreign textiles by Orlu people has made them oblivious of the need to crave for an indigenous costume produced using the festival symbols as motifs.

Festival is an occasion for feasting or celebration

especially on a day or time of religious or cultural significance that occurs at regular intervals. It could be yearly, bi-annual or seasonal festival which is often a re-occurring programme of cultural performances, displays or competitions (Nwizu & Ewurum, 2018). Orlu Okorosha cultural festival celebration occurs once in every four years by the adult male indigenes of the communities or whose maternal homes are from that town. The community-owned Okorosha masquerade require its membership through initiation into Adulthood of the male folk before acceptance into the group for recognition and protection of the group's prestige.

A symbol is seen as an object, word or caption that represent another thing (usually abstract) even if there is no meaningful relationship (Chidi-Duru, 2018). Symbols could mean different things to different people, that is why, it is impossible to hypothesize how a specific culture will symbolize something. A symbol is a sign, mark, picture, objects and number that has a fixed meaning to represent idea or concept in art or design. Symbols can be words, colours, patterns, dress or costume, all of which stand for something other than intrinsic property. Symbols are used to express ideas, communicate meanings and convey emotions in human history (Isiguzo 2015; Akinbileje, 2014).

Every form of objects both natural and artificial has been unconsciously transformed into symbol by man, which shows that everything can assume symbolic significance in his cultural environment through man and owing them with psychological importance and expressing them in creative visual art works. With particular reference to Orlu Okorosha festival, symbolism has found spontaneous expression in the songs, objects, musical instruments and masks used for the celebration of the festival.

Motif is a technical name for a design or pattern derived from an object or element which is developed and repeated as decoration. According to Cyril-Egware (2016), motif is the principal idea or elements of a work of art or design, the subject matter of object from which the pattern is derived. The motif in an artwork or design is repeated in the whole body of the work to form a design in an orderly manner being as a unifying factor in the design. Motifs are derived from various natural and man-made sources which could be from realistic forms, highly stylized and simplified as compositions

or solo. Cultural symbols are usually identified and manipulated as motifs to create composition through mental creativity on how they can be used as embellishments on fabric from the perspective of the mind of the designer. Once this expression is accomplished from the imagination, perception and organization of symbols as motifs from cultural heritage which gives rise to identity. Indeed symbols that are connected with cultural festivals are useful instrument for cultural identity through its use in costume designing.

Cultural identity is that established way of life, shared by certain people which defines them and also differentiates them from other people. Identity talks about characteristics, feeling and belief that distinguish people from others. Identity makes culture pervasive, touching every aspect of life and civilization (Ndebilie & Cyril-Egware, 2017). Identity according to Anumihe (2012) recognizes and gives an important attachment as the totality of these activities; relationship, feelings, symbols and artifacts that give meaning to the well-being of the people. Cultural identity in this context can therefore be seen from the perspective of producing a new costume to replace the non-existing indigenous cultural costume for OrluOkorosha Festival.

Costumes are clothes worn for activities to enhance the wearer and help reveal its character by giving physical clues to his personality, age, background, race, wealth and culture (Cyril-Egware, 2015). Costumes are principal media through which identity is expressed and symbolized all over the world. Textile fabrics are given functional roles for use as costumes depending on the type of motif or symbol created on it as surface embellishment using any technique of fabric decoration. According to Ogu & Ndebilie (2018), costume is a reflection of the cultural environmental factors that influence its adoption at a given time which is subject to change. Costumes of a people can be used to depict where they come from and for what occasion they are attending. Cyril-Egware & Ndebilie (2017) sees costume as a viable medium for perpetrating the conceptualized ideas of oneness in a group when used for celebration of festival in a cultural environment. The type of cultural festival contributes in determining the outlook of the celebrants from the style of costume worn for the festival. Ogu & Ndebilie (2017) are also of the view that

consume serves as one sure means of cultural identification among members of the society. It usually captures cultural character as well as the personality of the people in several symbolic and distinctive ways.

Orlu people are not known for textile production. Their festival costumes have lost relevance and dynamism because foreign textile fabrics have enveloped it (**Plates 1-4**). The period of colonial rule influenced their local costumes such that they passionately preferred the use of foreign costumes to celebrate Orlu Okorosha festival. Indeed, people without cultural identity are non-existence in that society, hence this paper deems its penitentt to create innovative cultural costumes by using the relevant festival symbols as motifs to embellish the fabrics meant for cultural identity of Orlu Okorosha Festival.

1.1 Pictures of Foreign Textile Fabrics Being Replaced



Plate 1. Plain Blanket

Courtesy: Ndebilie, C. (2014).

Photograph taken during field trip at Amike town.



Plate 2. Floral Blanket

Courtesy: Ndebilie, C. (2014).

Photograph taken during field trip at Amike town.



Plate 3. Blue Plain George

Courtesy: Ndebilie, C. (2014).

Photograph taken during field trip at Amike town.



Plate 4. Dark Red Plain George

Courtesy: Ndebilie, C. (2014).

Photograph taken during field trip at Amike town.

1.2 Okorosha Festival in Orlu

In spite of the widespread practice of Christianity today in Igbo land, Orlu people still hold fast to this unchristian ancient festival that involves masquerading. Among the Igbo, masquerades are used to invoke ancestral spirits-gods, in other words, visitors from the world of the dead or certain legendary heroes. Many masquerades have little purpose other than entertainment. Okorosha festival is a masquerade dancing festival, called *mmeme* Okorosha. Orlu people have reverence for their masks and masquerades and as such, do not allow individualized ownership or control of it. Okorosha cultural festival according to oral interview with Chief Nduka Aloy on (30th October 2014), was introduced into Orlu from Oburu-Otoo in Ohaji Egbema Local Government Area of Imo State.

Three local government areas namely Orlu,

Nkwerre and Oguta are involved in Okorosha cultural festival. In Orlu local government, the people of Orlu town, Amucha, Eziachi, Umuna, Amike, and Umueze, engage in this cultural festival. It is usually organized during Christmas and New Year periods to encourage the home coming of sons and daughters of the town for the celebration of the festival, which is purely for entertainment. Okorosha festival is characterized by appearance of masquerades with different secular masks that entertain people with dance and songs which convey messages, both good and bad, to the admiration of the people. Displays by the masquerades are often determined by the person behind the mask (the masquerader). Egornu (2013) and Wikipedia (2014) noted that the performance of Okorosha masquerades are thrilling, encapsulating and quite often leave the spectators thrilled and awe-struck. This mystifies the personality of masquerades. In most Igbo cultures, the person who wears the mask or the masquerader conceptually loses his human identity and assumes as it were, the image of the spirit he represents. The maskers who are the masquerades must be physically strong to endure the heat, cough, laugh, weight of the heavy mask and suffocation once he is in the costume (Onunwa, 2005).

Okorosha festival is exclusively men's affair. Women can only be there as spectators who cannot enter the dance square to appreciate the masquerades or dancers with money. This festival attracts spectators from far and near, who come to witness and appreciate the cultural heritage of the Orlu people. Each performing mask in Okorosha team has its unique functions. The songs composed and danced by the Okorosha masquerades signify actions, attitudes or events that happened in the community or neighbouring environments (Obi Peter, 5th September 2013).

Christianity and westernization have brought glaring changes in the Okorosha festival celebration. All the ritual practices that make Christians to discourage their members from participating have been removed. Orlu people now celebrate the festival as an entertainment festival by formally inviting friends, well-wishers and the general public through printing of posters and invitation cards. Also, the use of charms by the masquerades has

stopped. Western education also influenced the use of only Igbo names given to the masquerades. Modern names like *Senator*, *Abel*, *Negro*, *Expo* and *Naija* were not part of the historical origin of the Okorosha phenomenon.

There are new beautiful designs of Okorosha masks which are procured as readymade from other neighbouring states as a result of modernization. Most of the clothing items used during the Okorosha festival are not produced locally. The most common ones-*gorges*, blankets and *ankra* wrappers used by both masquerades and titled men are imported textile fabrics. This usually appears in assorted bright colours with geometric and floral designs. Okorosha festival songs are composed from activities or events which are mostly negative that happened within the community or neighbouring villages or towns. The victims are ridiculed with their names openly mentioned in the songs. This has reduced obvious crimes and social vices in the Orlu society.

1.3 Adaptation of Okorosha Festival Symbols as Motifs

Orlu people have passion for foreign acculturated textile fabrics which they use as costumes for the celebration of Okorosha festival thereby resulting to the existence of different in-harmonized costumes among the celebrants. This development has provoked the need for identifying and adapting some relevant Orlu Okorosha festival symbols as motifs to produce innovative unique fabrics as traditional costumes meant for cultural identity. The methods employed to generate primary data include participants as observer, group discussion and oral in-depth interview with chiefs and elders of various communities that celebrate Orlu Okorosha festival. Pictures of some identified symbols were taken and used for studio production of sample fabrics. The symbols are derived from masks, indigenous objects and musical instruments used in Orlu Okorosha festival celebrations. Pictures of some selected identified symbols include cowries, pottery drum, wooden drum, horsetail, traditional fans, beads, horns, masks, iron gong (Plates 5-13).

2. Pictures of Some Adapted Orlu Okorosha Symbols



Plate 5. Cowries (EgoAyoro)



Plate 6. Pottery Drum (Udu)

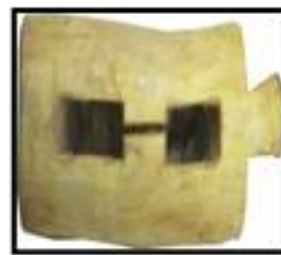


Plate 7. Drum (Ekwe)



Plate 8. Horse Tail (OduInyinya)



Plate 9. Local Hand Fan (Akupe)



Plate 10. Mask (Ekpo)



Plate 11. Beads (Mgbaji)



Plate 12. Horns (Odu)



Plate 13. Gong (Ogene)

These symbols were manipulated by sketching and arranging them on paper to achieve creative composition as motifs for units of design

(Figures 1 to 15).

2.1 Sketches of Some Adapted Orlu Okorosha Symbols

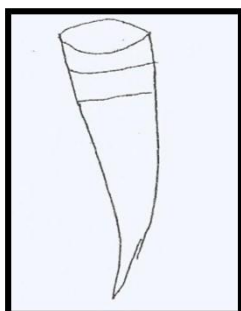


Figure 1. Horn (Odu)

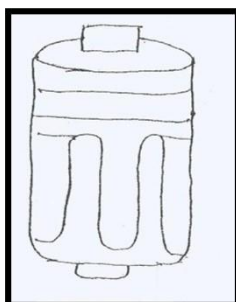


Figure 2. Drum (Ekwe)

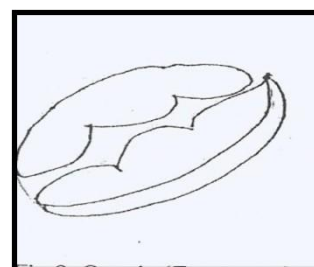


Figure 3. Cowries (Ego Ayoro)

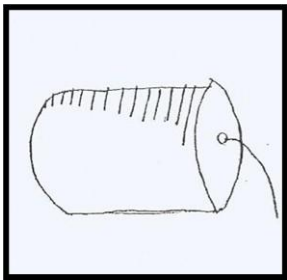


Figure 4. Bead (Mgbaji)

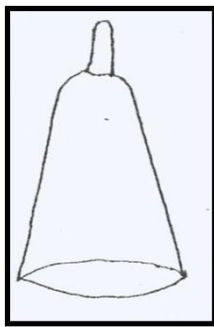


Figure 5. Gong (Ogene)

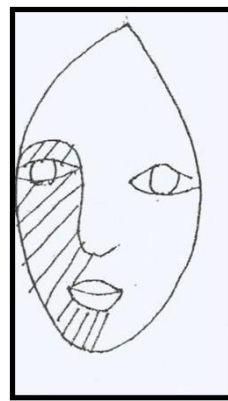


Figure 6. Female Mask (Ekponwanyi)

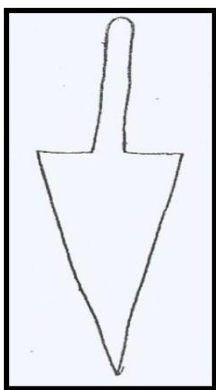


Figure 7. Wooden Knife (NmaOsisi)

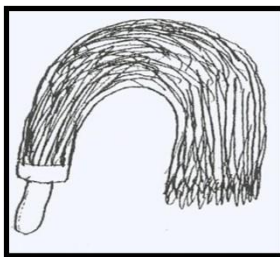


Figure 8. Horse Tail (Oduinyiya)

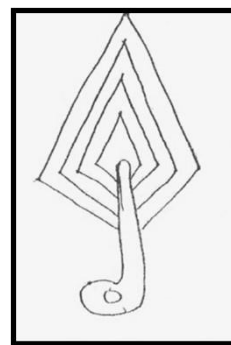


Figure 9. Hand fan (Akupe)



Figure 10. Pottery drum (Udu)

2.2 Compositions Created from Some Adapted Symbols as Motifs

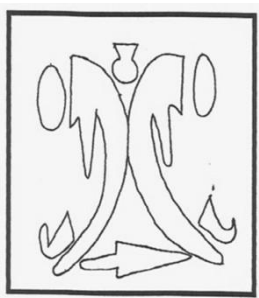


Figure 11. Design 1 Title: Kingship Stability



Figure 12. Design 2 Title: Trinity in Mask

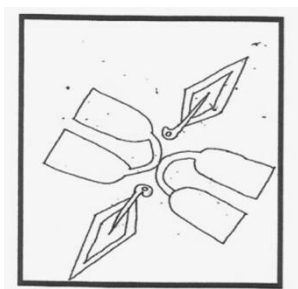


Figure 13. Design 3 Title: Togetherness



Figure 14. Design 4 Title: Revolving of Wealth



Figure 15. Design 5 Title: Kings Drum

2.3 Production Process of Sample Fabrics and Apparel Costumes

This research is exploratory as such the created compositions were transferred to sample fabrics using various textile production techniques with surface embellishment. Some of the motifs were dyed using batik method and synthetic dyes of different colours on sample sized fabrics. There were also some motifs that were transferred to fabrics using screen printing technique. The produced samples were taken to field trip selection and approval by the Orlu Okorocha celebrants (Selected chiefs/elders/youths) who are the end users. The selected and approved samples were produced on five (5) metres of fabric (**Plates 14-19**).

2.4 Some Selected Produced Sample Fabrics



Plate 14. Kingship Stability
(OcheEzeEnweghiNkwaghari)

Medium: Batik

Artist: Ndebilie Chinyere

Year: 2014

Size: 39cm x 37cm



Plate 15. Trinity in Mask (AtoNimeOtuEkpo)

Medium: Screen Printing

Artist: Ndebilie Chinyere

Year: 2014

Size: 36cm x 32cm



Plate 16. Togetherness (*Idi naOtu*)

Medium: Batik

Artist: Ndebilie Chinyere

Year: 2014

Size: 42cm x 39cm



Plate 19. Kings Drum (*IgbaEze*)

Medium: Batik

Artist: Ndebilie Chinyere

Year: 2014

Size: 38cm x 38cm



Plate 17. Revolving of Wealth
(*UbanaErughari-Erughari*)

Medium: Screen Printing

Artist: Ndebilie Chinyere

Year: 2014

Size: 40cm x 40cm



Plate 18. Revolving of wealth
(*UbanaErughari-Erughari*)

Medium: Batik

Year of Production: 2014

During the field trip, oral interviews were conducted for the selection based on colour because the samples were produced on several colours and different compositions used as design.

Generally, the celebrants chose the mask compositions as the ones suitable for the Masquerades, the designs bearing musical instruments were selected for use by the drum beaters and flag bearers/choral singers while motifs of traditional objects were selected for use by the titled chiefs/elders. There was a field trip modelling by the above categories of celebrants with some selected produced apparel costumes (**Plates 20-25**).

2.5 Models of Some Accepted Apparel Costumes



Plate 20. OkoroshaOjoo dressed in Trinity in Mask (*AtoNimeOtuEkpo*)

Medium: Printing and Applique

Artist: Ndebilie Chinyere (2017)

Source: Field Trip costume modeling



Plate 21. Titled man dressed in Kingship
Stability (*OcheEzeEnweghiNkwaghari*)

Medium: Batik

Artist: Ndebilie Chinyere (2017)

Source: Field Trip costume modeling



Plate 24. Flag bearer dressed in Togetherness
(*IdinaOtu*)

Medium: Batik

Artist: Ndebilie Chinyere (2017)

Source: Field Trip costume modeling



Plate 22. Titled man dressed in **Revolving of
Wealth** (*UbanaErughari-Erughari*)

Medium: Screen Printing

Artist: Ndebilie Chinyere (2017)



Plate 25. Titled man (Drum beater) dressed in
Kings Drum (*IgbaEze*)

Medium: Batik

Artist: Ndebilie Chinyere (2017)

Source: Field Trip costume modeling



Plate 23. Titled man dressed in **Revolving of
Wealth** (*UbanaErughari-Erughari*)

Medium: Batik and applique

Artist: Ndebilie Chinyere (2017)

Source: Field Trip costume modeling

2.6 Analyses of Results

The six (6) selected apparel costumes were analyzed from the visual content and cultural symbolism of the motifs using contextual descriptive statistics of interpretation of each plate having title in English and Native language. Some of the apparel costumes were given surface embellishment using beads, sequins, mirror and found objects. The pattern arrangement of the motif was systematically done with the basic element and principles of design. The motifs were repeated in a design many times to bring out the aesthetic and modern outlook associated with cultural

costume. Lines, textures and other shapes/forms incorporated in the composition as minor motifs bring about effects that are attractive due to the rhythmic nature of the motifs.

Cowries as a symbol is an object used to portray wealth and prosperity but in this context, it is used as mask adornment against evil spirit or charm. The usage of cowries for fabric embellishment of Orlu Okorosha costume symbolizes revolving of wealth. The arrangement of the composition depicts that in **Figure 14**. The horn symbolizes wealth, power, authority, royalty and leadership. The coral beads are symbols of wealth used as decoration objects for jewelries, kings crown and surface embellishments on fabrics. The hand fan is part of royal traditional attire which portrays the user as a titled man. The stylized masks represent the ugly and beautiful male and female masks symbolizing the three categories of masquerades. Some of the horns and gongs used also depict that all the masqueraders hear, speak and dance the same music. The pottery and wooden drums are instruments used to provide music in Orlu Okorosha festival as well as communicate information among the members.

The various colours used in the production of new apparel costumes for Okorosha festival have symbolic significance. Red and white used for the masquerade costume (**Plate 15**) are believed to hold sacred and protective powers. It is an indication of supernatural power and ability to invoke danger as well as symbol of authority bravery and honour. Orange is a royalty colour which stands for dignity and a symbol of virtue of knowledge and wisdom while green indicates fertility of the land. Coffee brown colour used in Kings drum apparel costumes symbolizes the colour of the land on which the festival celebration is taking place. All the colours used in various designs are highly dignified colours for recognition of social status as such as suitable for use as apparel costumes colours for Orlu Okorosha festival cultural identity.

The new apparel costumes in different colours were modeled and the resultant effect emerged as beautiful and attractive costumes with desirable characteristics that caused sensational feelings in the mind of the users. The models give the celebrants a show of excitement, fulfillment, dignity and pride of usage of costumes bearing their festival symbols as

motifs for cultural identity they have been craving for. All the celebrants interviewed accepted the new unique sophisticated costumes as a good venture with the chiefs/elders ready to sponsor the mass production of the selected designs for use in the forthcoming Orlu Okorosha festival to promote tourism.

3. Conclusion

Today, there exists accepted indigenous apparel costumes among the Orlu Okorosha festival celebrants which makes them bear distinguishable characteristics of identity. The festival brings social reformation hence should no longer exist with acculturated costume of western influence. Maintaining the use of traditional fabrics as costume will erase the indelible marks of alien influence on Orlu Okorosha costume as well as encourage patronage, pride of usage and solidarity for cultural preservation. The acceptance of mass production of indigenous fabrics can lead to establishment of small-scale textile industries, thereby creating employment and skill acquisition for self-reliance of youths in Orlu. This paper is therefore advocating for incorporation of indigenous symbols as motifs for costumes production thereby creating cultural identity for various festivals in Orlu for tourism development.

4. Recommendation

The following suggestions are made in order to sustain and preserve the production and usage of this viable innovation for prosperity.

- Orlu chiefs and parents should give proper orientation to the youths on the need to use traditional costumes for celebration of cultural festivals.
- Cottage textile industries or craft / skills acquisition centres should be established for production of indigenous textile fabrics and other related traditional craft accessories for use as costumes.
- Government should ensure strict regulation of importation of allied textile products into the country to encourage greater creativity, patronage and marketing of indigenous textile fabrics.
- The traditional masquerade cultural institutions should be over-hauled by re-branding of the negative excesses of

the masquerade system for acceptance by the society.

Museum /cultural centres should be built in all local government areas to preserve cultural artifacts for easy accessibility by local textile designers.

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