

**HYBRIDITY IN CONTEMPORARY IGBO DRESS CULTURE: IMPACTS OF
GLOBALISATION ON PERFORMANCE COSTUMES**

Francisca A. Nwadigwe Ph.D.

Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University, Igbariam, Anambra State.

Email-af.nwadigwe@coou.edu.ng

Phone: 08063619024

Abstract

This study investigates the trend of hybridity in contemporary Igbo dress culture and artistic performances. The incorporation of Western clothing styles, introduced through colonisation and reinforced by globalisation, media, technology, and consumption patterns, has shaped the hybridisation of Igbo fashion and performance costumes. The study examines how hybridity influences Igbo dress culture as expressed in contemporary costumes within Nigeria's creative industries, focusing on textile materials, motifs, patterns, accessories, and design elements that reflect Igbo identity and values. Guided by Homi Bhabha's Hybridity Theory and Judith Butler's Performativity Theory, the research analyses how indigenous Igbo dress blends with Western styles and global fashion trends. Using a qualitative approach, it employs non-participant observation and content analysis to collect and interpret data. Findings reveal that Igbo dress culture has undergone significant transformations, with hybridisation persisting in the contemporary era. This evolution, visible in Igbo popular arts and cultural productions, highlights the pervasive influence of global capital, media, and technology on the Igbo environment, raising concerns about cultural preservation. The study concludes that while hybridity enhances creativity, it poses a threat to the continuity of Igbo dress heritage, as younger generations increasingly adopt and idolise hybridised trends promoted by Nollywood and the Nigerian performing arts industry. It recommends that policymakers, Nollywood producers, and artists in the Igbo creative sector actively promote indigenous dress heritage within their works, ensuring its visibility and relevance in global cultural markets.

Keywords: Hybridity, Igbo culture, Costumes, Performing arts, Globalisation.

Study Background

To the layman, hybrid is a specie of animals that are produced or birthed of different species to give or produce better species. From the perspective of science studies, this idea of referring to

hybrids in species grew out of the works of Charles Darwin. In the science of Biology, Darwin is known as the father of hybridity.

Charles Darwin who lived (1809-1882) was the initiator or pioneering personality in the research of hybridity which focused on biological hybridity. In 1859, Darwin's experiment and observation on hybridity of species proved that species could inter-breed and produce better and fertile species of offspring which also led to the development of new species (Darwin 502). Furthermore, from Darwin's concept of hybridity in Biology, scholars like Homi K. Bhabha, Gaytan Chakrovorty Spivack, Edward Said, Paul Gilloy and other scholars adapted the term while advancing the concept of the study of culture.

Homi Bhabha, in his book, *The Location of Culture* states that "hybridity emerges in the spaces between cultures where cultural mixing and encounters take place" (2-3). This definition, referring to spaces in-between cultures, can be translated as the gap where these cultural norms meet to synchronize or "borrow" from each other in order to strike a union or balance depending on two major principles which are: (1) Is there equality in the societies concerned? (2) Among the societies involved, is one oppressing the other which without choice is forced to imbibe the culture and nuances of the higher society? This is not far from Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's concept and idea of subaltern studies. According to Ameh Akoh:

In its general sense, the subaltern refers to the class of people who are oppressed and placed socially, politically and geographically outside of the hegemonic power structure of the colony and which in Gramsci's cultural hegemony, are denied a voice within the power structure of society. (10-11).

In such condition, the flow of communication is straightlined/vertical, orders flow from the upper/higher plain to the down/lower plain. Thus, hybridity may definitely be destructive to the less privileged society because it could lose all its identity or cultural originality. Hybridity could facilitate cultural extinction through its impact on the visible aspects of culture, like the dress culture, arts, performance and designs.

This study also applied Judith Pamela Butler's theory of performativity which posits that, "identity is performative", since performance is an essential part of a person, society, group or gender that is repeated and reinforced as time goes on. Furthermore, Butler's performativity theory highlights the essence of identity and power dynamics as they affects the everyday practices in performance, such as dress culture and individual rights and also negotiates identity of a people (34). Hence, in this study, hybridity will refer to those aspects of the Igbo dress culture that are not originally a part of Igbo dress forms or patterns but adopted or borrowed as part of the dress culture. Similarly, globalisation in this study refers to those factors or elements that affect the Igbo dress culture because of the new world order which reduced the world to a small entity called the global village.

Igbo Dress Culture

The Igbo are concentrated in eastern Nigeria where they are dominant, though there are Igbos in surrounding sub-regions. The Igbo are known for their traditional dress culture or attire which comprises of colourful clothes, caps, beads and accessories that uniquely identify them. On the Igbo dress culture and performance, the study focuses on those dress practices used or adopted by the costumiers or artistic directors of the various performances in the contemporary Igbo society as it affects the dress culture of the Igbo ethnic nationality.

The Igbo dress culture dated back to the earliest times in human society. Igbo dress culture obviously started with leaves and animal skins as covering for the body as obtained in the early man's civilisation. This is proved by the admiration the Igbo people ascribe to skins of animals in the nicknames and titles they answer such as *Ogbu Agu* (Tiger killer), *Ogbu Ehi* (cow killer), *Ogbu Odum* (lion killer), *Ogbu enyi* (elephant killer), *Ogbu Inyinya* (horse killer), and so on as symbols of valour and pride. The Igbo dress culture and patterns continued to evolve and with time they started using plants and tree resources to weave clothes. Indeed, Eve de Negri in her study of Igbo clothing asserted that:

... the Igbo clothes were weaved out of the fresh leaves of bamboo palm. The silky strands were pulled from under the leaves and spun and woven into different wears and artistic costume. "Ufa" tree, the silky threads obtained from the tree was spun and woven into cotton fabric of fine texture. (36-37)

In this technology, many plants were used. Some plants like the "Ogbo" plant is used to form clothing materials. These clothes which were jute-like and strong is called "Ikpachi". These jute-like clothing were tied by the people including men, women and children. The men wore theirs as loin clothes (iwa-ogodo), the women tied theirs around their chest region down to the length of their knees, at times, they tie the cloth from the waist down to their knee and use a separate piece to cover the chest while exposing the belly. The children, when they were not naked, tied it around the waist while the girls also tied it up to the chest region to cover their reproductive organs if they were approaching puberty.

The early trade with the Whitemen (foreigners), slavery and colonisation also affected the traditional clothing of the time, thus, it influenced the style and quality of clothing giving way to hybridised Igbo dress culture. This dress practice further tried to set up a structural stratification model of the upper and lower class. Those who had access, contact and communication link with the colonialists were adorned with the Whiteman's clothing, mixing it with the traditional mode of dressing to make a difference. As the years go by, technology has improved and more designs of clothes and production of clothing fabrics and materials of different types have been made in line with current and emerging trends.

The Research Problem in Context

The Igbo nation, like any other ethnic nationality, has continued to undergo remarkable changes in their patterns or way of life. They are ostensibly tending towards cultural hybridity without noticing or consciously analysing its overwhelming impacts on their way of life and, most importantly, the long-term effect on the Igbo dress culture and identity.

These changing trends of hybridisation are heightened by the rate of globalisation engendered through technology, communication media, and economic trends. The Igbo scholarship is not left out, because the scholars have not given sufficient research attention to the trend of hybridity in Igbo lifestyle and dress culture precisely. This trend of hybridity consequently threatens the Igbo cultural life and indigenous dress culture. Hence, globalisation is being misinterpreted and misapplied to mean throwing away or neglecting one's cultural life, which makes a people who and what they are.

Media Communication Patterns: Globalisation has actually affected the African dress culture through the media communication patterns. The straight line, top-down communication pattern flowing from the advanced countries has left the developing and underdeveloped nations at the mercy of the Global North nations that control the technologies and infrastructure of the international media space. This tends to flood the Igbo, Nigeria and the less developed countries with their own perceptions, culture, food and most importantly their dress culture. The youth are directly and indirectly influenced by this media hype and the cultivation effects leading to frequent change in their dress culture to tally or imitate what they see in the Western media through cable TV networks, YouTube, social media platforms, entertainment magazines, films and music videos. These youths hardly watch the local channels such as Nigerian Television Authority (NTA), Channels Television, African Independent Television (AIT) and others that show more of Nigerian cultural content.

Technology: The unprecedented pace in technological advancement has helped the trend of hybridity thereby making it possible for different designs of even indigenous Nigerian clothing materials to be recreated in all manner of shades, quality and combinations. Technology has helped in the production of many types of cloth designs with different patterns or motifs, which facilitate the hybridisation trend. These new designs and hybridised materials are often cheaper and affordable but most importantly, they lose the cultural significance and prestige attached to the fabrics. The local weavers are discouraged from weaving because the production costs are making their products more expensive, and this leads to lack of patronage. The lack of adequate patronage leads to lack of interest in the learning of the skills by the youths.

Economy: The poor economic status of the developing and underdeveloped countries also affects their patronage of local fabrics and encourages hybridisation. This is due to the high cost of local production which makes the indigenous products even more expensive. The average citizens are

continually struggling with poverty and tends to make do with what they can afford. In recent times, imported second hand (used and re-used) clothes have flooded the local markets and they enjoy high patronage because they are cheap. The patronage of these imported clothes encourages hybridisation of local dress culture, resulting in loss of value and non-patronage of indigenous fabrics.

Consumer Culture: The foreign consumer culture and love for imported goods and clothing is another factor that encourages hybridisation in Igbo dress culture. Based on colonial psychology, many people often prefer to buy foreign materials than the traditional ones. There is also a presumption that these products are trendy and possess higher quality than the locally produced versions. The idea of class stratification motivates the wealthy to prefer the expensive and imported goods because it is seen as status symbol. For instance, the Igbo chieftaincy red cap made in Czech Republic is brandished by the rich class as opposed to the one made in Nigeria. This forces local manufacturers to close down or resort to importation and imitation to the detriment of the uniqueness of Igbo traditional dress culture which is progressively going into oblivion.

As the wealthy patronises the imported dress materials giving rise to commercialisation of attire, dress and accessories, shrewd Igbo businessmen increasingly go abroad especially to China and other Asian countries to clone, design and import their own versions of Igbo attire thereby encouraging hybridity. Since these hybridised dress cultures have become trendy, cheaper and lucrative within the value chain, Igbo filmmakers now adopt them for their costumes, thus popularising the trend among their audiences who copy them as the vogue.

Methodology

This research study used the Content Analysis and Non-Participant Observation methods, which are qualitative approaches to data collection. The Content Analysis method involved the extraction of information from films/videos, advertisements, and online or internet sources. The sampling technique was purposive based on visual content and thematic relevance to the research problem. The random Non-Participant Observation method was further used to gather information from costumes used in performances and cultural productions as they pertain to dress culture and their hybridity impacts. The data were analysed using the descriptive and interpretative approach.

Hybridity in Igbo Performance Costumes

Globalisation with its driving components of communication, technology, consumer culture, economic and cultural imperialism encourages hybridisation in Igbo traditional dress culture. This is carried over to artistic performances especially in Nollywood films, arts and cultural production in the creative industry. These are also reflected in contents disseminated through the social media, television, photography, advertisement, festivals, stage production, musical videos and fashion

shows. In many Nollywood productions, it is common to see the Igbo dress culture being distorted in the films.



Fig.1: Reflections of hybridity in Igbo dress culture. Photo by Michael Okpala.

Nollywood Films

The use of the hybrid costumes in Nollywood productions is quite common because of the hybrid fashion influence on the costumes. The trend of commercialisation and the taste of the wealthy in the Igbo dress culture have impacted so much on the films produced in Nollywood. The trendy fashion is what the directors and costume designers adopt to costume the characters in their productions. This is obvious in the film, *Anyalewe*, a Nollywood Igbo production directed by Nkem Alu and released to the public in December 2024. The production shows Mama Anyalewe in a market scene, wearing a blue George wrapper on an English styled blouse, while selling in the market. The George wrapper she is wearing to sell in the market is not only improper but a violation of the essence of the George wrapper in the traditional Igbo culture. The George wrapper is not worn by everybody but women of a particular class and used for special occasions rather than the daily buying and selling in the market.

In some sub-cultures, she could be sanctioned by the class of women concerned. The adornment of the wrapper with ordinary English blouse is hybridisation. The accepted norm is that the George is worn with a lace blouse material/blouse and a big headgear to show wealth and class. But

hybridisation has caused it to lose its worth. Anyalewe's wife Olebara is also wearing the George wrapper as a casual wrapper to perform her household chores with a T-shirt blouse too. At times, there are arguments that fashion sense, taste and style change with time but not when a people's culture is involved. Dress and fashion are strong elements of a society's visual culture. Indeed, as argued by Roland Barthes, every image is a "cultural message" and meanings are constructed or negotiated, hence denoted meanings and their connoted interpretations are defined by culture and contexts of the viewer (37). The cultural use of the George wrapper in the Igbo context has not changed because it is celebrated and not worn by everybody in some communities. In the film, *Anyalewe*, the cultural context of the functionality of the George wrapper should have been reflected as it relates to Igbo culture.



Plate 2A: Misuse of the revered George wrapper as casual wear as depicted in the film, *Anyalewe* directed by Nkem Alu. Photo by Francisca Nwadigwe.



Fig. 2B: George material being used for domestic chores in the film, *Anyalewe* directed by Nkem Alu. Photo by Francisca Nwadigwe.

Another film, *Mpu ndi Uka*, directed by Prince Amaechi Anachebe in 2022 also shows a hybridised trend in the costume of the priestess, Ezenwanyi Mmiri who ties a horizontal lined blue and tint of white wrapper from her chest down to her knee, but also adorns the English necklace, pendant and earrings as she performs her roles in her shrine. The Igbo priestess is known to wear white or red wrapper sometimes with cowry or beads depending on the occasion. This traditional finesse and symbolism is totally lacking in the costumes of Ezenwanyi Mmiri as depicted in the film.

Advertisement

The Igbo dress culture and the influence of hybridity is impacting significantly on contemporary local advertisements, as opposed to what obtained in the 1990s as exemplified in the advertisement of Eco bank. It is important to note that hybridity was not very obvious then. The adverts reflected Igbo traditional Igbo costumes. The Igbo woman in the advert wears a white lace blouse, big scarf, and a double wrapper tied around her waist to show the bank is for all including the Igbo which her dressing represented. The Yoruba man in the advert is adorned with the *Aso-oke* and cap.

Furthermore, in the recent Indomie TV commercial Part 7, *Mama Do Good*, the woman in the advertisement is wearing a hybridised costume of Abada material sewed into a skirt, blouse, and its scarf to fit. Another Indomie advert on a billboard in Aba, Abia State also depicts the same costuming trend. This does not depict an Igbo woman if compared to the Eco Bank advert.

Furthermore, in the advertisement of DSTV celebration of “20 years of Magic-African Magic exclusive”, the costume of the popular actor, Chinedu Ikedieze (Aki) was a hybridised costume

consisting of a traditional Igbo red cap, a neck bead on a Senator suit. This is a caricature of the Igbo dress culture.

Musical Video Films

The musical video production is also not left out in the trend of hybridization in dress culture as reflected in *The Ogene Season I* (Episode 13) starring popular musicians, Flavour and Phyno, in the musical video. The Igbo costume in this video production is hybridised. The Isi-Agu style is combined with a plain, shiny Indian material as the long sleeve shirt of the Isi-Agu attire and worn on a woollen striped red, black, and white hat of the Igbo and a bead necklace. The ladies wear a strapless ball gown, traditional Igbo beads, well beaded hair and extra beads tied around the packed hair. This shows a hybridisation of their costumes and the adoption of mixture of more than two different cultures in the production's costumes.

Indigenous Festivals

There are many festivals of the Igbos but the New Yam festival is arguably the most universally celebrated. The contemporary New Yam festival costumes are so hybridised that the attire of the Chiefs, Cabinet Members, and Ozo titled men are prominently affected. In addition, the Igbo masquerade performances in the New Yam festivals are not left out. For instance, the Ijele masquerade of the Igbo has also undergone hybridisation in its costumes. The Ijele masks of the 1930s were costumed with a thicker material and a wooden carved form as the mask headpiece. The current Ijele mask is purely made of light materials and the carved piece are currently made with light materials of different colours of clothes showing a visible trend of hybridisation.

In the contemporary New Yam festivals, the Chiefs' traditional regalia represented with all sorts of attire to show affluence and reflect the fashion trend. For example, some wear the American baggy styled shorts and tops designed with different textile materials, shoes, with beads on the ankles, wrists, neck, and beaded headgears, sometimes resembling the Oba of Benin headgear. The Igbo chieftaincy red cap for titled men is usually adorned with the priceless feather of the eagle (Ugbene Ugo) unlike the hybridised red caps that are adorned with shiny materials typical of the traditional Asian fabrics and textile materials. It is worthy to note that the red cap and number of feathers attached to it symbolises the achievements and order of ranking of the titled man, similar to the pips in the ranking of the military and other armed forces.



Fig. 3A: The contemporary Ijele masquerade with hybridised features in the costumes.
Photo by Francisca Nwadigwe.



Fig. 3B: A hybridised version of Igbo Chieftaincy attire common in many festival events in contemporary times. Photo by Francisca Nwadigwe showing a Hausa style *Baban Riga* with an Igbo feathered Chieftaincy cap.

Social Media Skits and Content

The social media skits produced by Igbo content creators feature some of the most hybridised costumes and dress culture. It appears they seek to present a comic appearance and make people laugh, hence they tend to hybridise their characters' costumes. Some costume their actors in Western trousers and shirts with a traditional Igbo red or striped woolen cap.

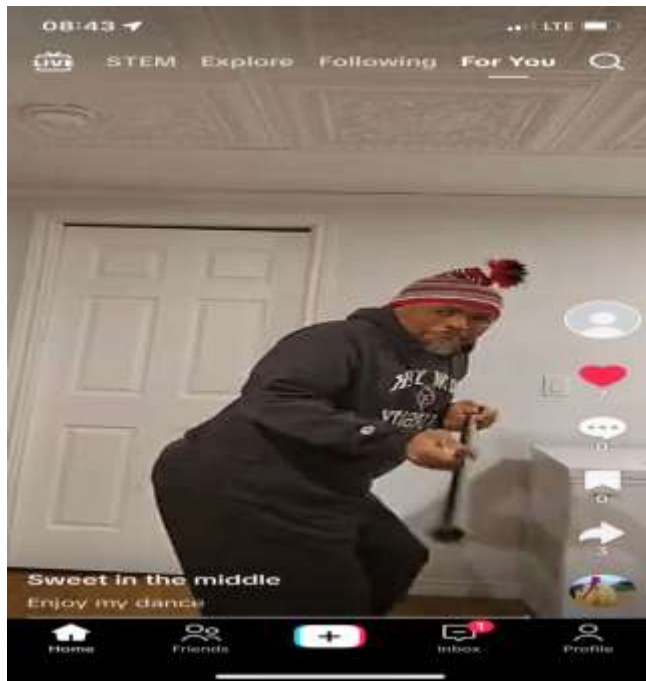


Fig. 4: A skit on Tik Tok featuring costumes comprising Western trousers and a shirt with an Igbo red cap. Performance and photo by Nicholas Akas.

Sometimes, the costumes are combined with Isi Agu (Tiger Head) material to give impression of an Igbo man or woman.

Stage Productions

Many contemporary stage production depicting Igbo cultural backgrounds are also reflective of the hybridisation trend through their costumes. In one of the stage productions observed by the researcher, an actor playing the role of Igwe (King) wore a costume made from an Indian lace material, styled like the Hausa-Fulani caftan with red cap and neck beads and the Igwe was referred to as Igwe Nnewi (Traditional Ruler of Nnewi). This is a good example of how the wealthy and royalty with their taste and sophistication encourage hybridisation of the Igbo dress culture. This tag must have been influenced by their observation of the Igwe's regalia which are mostly made from the exotic, shiny, stoned, beaded Indian materials.



Plate 5: Hybridisation of Igbo royalty costumes with exotic Asian materials. Photo by Michael Okpala.

Fashion Shows

The fashion exhibition shows mounted by both international and local designers to promote their designs and fashion to global markets, embrace hybridisation as a fashion trend. The driving force is to make their design trendy, accepted, and attract increased patronage. Similarly, Governor Soludo of Anambra State has been advocating for the patronage of traditional materials like the Akwa Ocha of the Akwete people. The Governor has continuously used it as a material for all his clothes. This is encouraging but it can also be observed that the Governor's design styles in the use of the Akwa Ocha attire are also hybridised. Furthermore, the fashion design of Chief Theresa Onuorah of Unubi, a contemporary Igbo musician, is also relevant in this study. Theresa Onuorah of the Ijele song fame is a female Chief, which is a 20th century introduction title now bestowed on a woman in the Igbo culture. She has also made a hybridised fashion statement through her dress culture to reflect her titled identity.

In her theory earlier cited in this study, Butler recognises that "individuals have urgency in performing and negotiating their identities" (140). Theresa Onuora has been able to make a fashion statement in her chieftaincy attire as a woman, designing for her gender a resemblance of the

chieftaincy attire with caps, feathers and beads but in an exotic style fashioned to match the outfit of the male chiefs and still reflect her status as a Chief in Unubi kingdom. The costume is clearly a hybridised attire.



Fig. 6: Theresa Onuora in her hybridised fashion style, carving out a unique visual identity for herself. Photo by Chioma Onuoha.

Conclusion

From the diverse samples presented, analysed and interpreted so far, the study concludes that the trend of hybridisation constitutes a threat to the preservation of the Igbo dress heritage, as the younger generation continues to imbibe and idolise the hybridised trend popularised by the Nollywood and Nigeria's performing arts industry. Similarly, the consumer taste of the contemporary Igbo should reflect their traditional goods and resources. Hence, more research studies should be conducted to help reinforce the Igbo cultural identity as depicted in dress culture. The Igbo should be seen and recognised as a major culture and not a sub-culture in the global space

since technology has made the world a global village. The Igbo scholars and researchers should help in projecting their culture through their writings and other technological inventions to sustain the dress culture in the 21st century global society. The commercialisation drive of Igbo businessmen should focus towards marketing their local resources and dress culture, after all, they manufacture and supply these goods and supply influences demand and consumer choice.

Furthermore, policy makers in the cultural sector, Nollywood film producers and artists in the Igbo creative industries should promote the Igbo dress culture and heritage through their works as marketed in the global space. Naturally, when individuals and groups connect with their cultural heritage, tradition and history their identity becomes closely tied to that culture.

Globalisation is not totally bad but the Igbo should turn it to advantage towards the cause of preserving their own cultural heritage as China and the Asians are doing with their clothes and technology in the global space. Similarly, the governments in the Igbo-speaking States should make policies to promote the local craftsmen and women to sustain and advance their arts and crafts. The Akwa Ocha and the Akwete communities should be brought to the limelight through making documentaries about their crafts of textile weaving. There should be a sustained synergy between these Akwete weavers and the Aba textile and garment industry in order to develop a global product with local cultural resources. The governments and organised private sector should improve the economy so that people will have a better and fulfilled life and be proud of their heritage. The local communities should be developed to encourage young people to stay in their villages and learn the different crafts of the Igbo people, earn a decent living from there, and discourage the *Japa* (emigration) syndrome. When individuals share their values and norms and even their beliefs in their cultural affiliation, their identity becomes more deeply appreciated and rooted in that culture.

The museums should be used to preserve some of the dress culture of the people as a reference point to the younger generation in upholding the Igbo heritage. The Nigeria Censors Board should not limit their work to political and sexual content but should also ensure that costumes and accessories reflect the proper dress culture in their films. For example, a Yoruba costume of Aso-oke being used to depict an Ijaw man as his traditional clothes is misleading to the audience and improper. Culture should be taught and reinforced in school curricula to help the young know and appreciate their heritage and dress culture as a means of socialisation. The cherished identity of the Igbo should not be allowed to slide to extinction and the performing arts and creative industries have a vital role to play in that regard. Policies to maintain indigenous cultural heritage should be encouraged from the kindred and community level. This is because when people feel a strong affinity and belonging to their cultural community, their identity becomes more intertwined with their cultural norms and values. The Nigerian Cultural Policy should be reviewed and updated frequently to keep abreast with current trends and challenges in the cultural sector.

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