

AKUKU TRADITIONAL REGALIA OF ANNANG CULTURE IN AKWA IBOM STATE

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Introduction

Ibom is derived from the biblical Gibbon, which means the mightiest of the mighty. The putative fathers of Akwa Ibom people, left home in Canaan and after several stopovers in Nubian region, they came to Congo basin, where they assumed the semi-bantu status. Benue trough and the Cameroun entered their present locale through several waves of migrations and, accordingly, all the ethnic groups in the state, Ibibio, Annang, Oron, Eket and Bolo are said to have been fully settled before 1200 AD.

The Annang people of Akwa Ibom State trace their ancestry to Bantu warriors and Zulu hunters in Central Africa. The migration from Central Africa took the Annang to the Cameroun region in the 3rd Century BC. The life of the Annang had been marked by centuries of struggle and survival amidst wild life and rustic nurture. They led a wild predatory life and were feared by their Igbo and Ibibio neighbours who described them as "ferocious", this is confirmed by Ukpong et al (2001). In the same vein, Udodata (2013) observed that in the Aro Kingdom particularly in the Ibom land, the Annang exercised great influence as custodians of the religious and traditional observances of the kingdom. They lorded over the other ethnic groups as priests of Ibritam, the famous Ibinukpabi oracle and as soldiers of the kingdom.

The Annang people, together with other Bantu, migrated from Central Benue valley moving through the northern section of the Cross River State to Eniong Creek. They eventually travelled through the present-day Eastern Ibibio land (Ikono) to settle at the present location of Abak and now spread to other places. Annang is the name of an ethnic group living in the south-south of Nigeria. It is a name derived from the characteristic behaviour of a certain group who cannot resist the least provocation and who are clothed with indignation or an inborn nature of intolerance. They have a war-like attitude and are vindictive in nature. Today, the Annang are in Akwa Ibom State. They are the second largest ethnic group in the State occupying its north-western part. They are bounded in the North by the Isogbi Igbo (Abia State), in the West by the Ngwa (Albia) and Ndoki (Rivers State) and in the South-East and North-East by the Ibibio.

Socio-Cultural Life of the Annang

Annang cultural, social and political organization started many years ago by their ancestors. The smallest social unit was the "Idip" consisting of a man

with his wives or a wife and children. Several "Idip" together made up a compound known as "Nto-ete" and a group of "Nto-ete" made up the extended family or "Ekpuk", which has been described as a group of patrilineal relatives tracing descent from a single male ancestor. A village was composed of several "Ekpuk", although each "Ekpuk" was self-governing under the authority of the "Obong Ekpuk" or image head. To be crowned as chief "Obong Idung", the qualification must be determined by age, wisdom and knowledge of the land. The Obong Idung must be the first son or the eldest son of the original founder of the area. He was the head of political and religious organizations including secret societies. All rituals and ceremonies were performed by the Akuku. The Akuku was the only one who could communicate with various traditional altars in the time of trouble for protection of villagers and forgiveness of sins committed by the people. His dressing singles him out as a man of authority and power to his people.

Also related to the Annang people is Ikot Ekpene. The name Ikot Ekpene literally means "bush of the farmers", or "farmlands" or land of our farms. Historians trace the origin and migration of these people from old Ibom lands to the present Abiakpo Ikot Essien between 14th to early 15th Century AD, when they moved southwards to their original settlement at Ikot Idem Etim Square, Abiakpo Ikot Essien. Ikot Ekpene village was founded by one family whose duty was to guard the then farmlands of one of the royal families of Abiakpo. This was done to ensure that there was more food and water supply in the village. Hence, they called the place "Ekpene" farmland.

The people of Ikot Ekpene flourished in their customs, beliefs and tradition from the 15th Century to 1902. They had organized family group heads that administered their affairs in a native pattern with its own custom and tradition. It was through the invasion of Ikot Ekpene Kingdom in 1902 by the colonial Royal West African Frontier Force (RWAFF) that Ikot Ekpene was finally defeated by a stronger British force. The conquest of Ikot Ekpene also signalled the destruction of the various deities, customs and beliefs held by the people. Due to the setting up of the colonial administration, the forests and altars were donated to the British by Obong Obiomkpe Akai in 1903. In 1904, an Army barrack was established at Ikot Ekpene Village. Then in 1907, the first official arrival of the Primitive Methodist from Equatorial Guinea signalled the rapid spread of Christianity in this kingdom.

Ikot Ekpene Local Government Area is located in the North Western part of Akwa Ibom State. It is a geographical residue of Ikot Ekpene Division of the Colonial era. It is made up of forty-seven (47) contiguous villages grouped into two (2) clans (Ikot Ekpene Urban and Amanyam). Indigenes of Ikot

Ekpene Local Government Area belong to the larger Annang ethnic nationality and they speak the Annang language. Ikot Ekpene is a long-standing administrative centre, having served as headquarters of Ikot Ekpene Urban District Colony (1914), Ikot Ekpene Division (1951) and Annang Province (1956). It is also on record that the introduction of the British type of Local Government was first experimented in Ikot Ekpene in 1951 before being adopted in other places in Nigeria and other parts of West Africa.

Ikot Ekpene is known as a regional centre of commerce, with notable exports of palm products, especially palm oil, kernels and raffia products including raffia fibres and its wine. Ikot Ekpene is also known for its technological innovations due to the emergence of Raffia City Hub. Its sobriquet is a synonym for its name. Raffia or raphia is the product of the raffia palm, *hookeri* which is very common in the rain forest usually identified as the palm belt in Nigeria. Raffia is a thin, transparent, colourless cord, pulled from the back of tender palm frond. It is the membrane, which serves as a protective cover for the back of the yellowish, tender palm frond. When peeled off, it is called raffia. It can be dyed into any preferred colour. In fact, raffia is a raw material for a variety of craftworks. It is in the light of these that Ikot Ekpene town in Akwa Ibom State is given a nickname "The Raffia City". Raffia fibre, which is processed locally from the leaflet of the raffia palm, is used to make shoes, hats, raffia tops, skirts, slippers, handbags etc.

Origin and Production of Akuku Regalia

One of man's basic needs is clothing for covering the human body. Over the years, man depended on the resources, plants and animals provided by his immediate physical environment for his clothing needs. Some of our ancestors are known to have used animal skins, barks of trees, leaves and grasses to cover parts of their bodies. In these modern time, scientists have come up with synthetic (man-made) fibres. Among known synthetic fibres are rayon, orlon, nylon and acetate. Also, scientists have succeeded in blending man - made fibres with natural fibres to produce fabrics.

The people of Akwa Ibom are known for their peculiar traditional dressing or outfits. It is unique and outstanding. In traditional African Societies, institutional beliefs, social norms and practices are amplified and given expression in various forms of clothing. From age grade to membership of secret societies (cults) or purely social institution, dressing is differently fashioned to depict sexes as well as age grades within a particular sex. The Akuku uses "Ntinya", a decorated traditional head gear which serves as a crown. The chief also wears "Ekon Efak Itam", a special cap with protruding

crown made of tiger's skin or any other powerful animal. At times he uses "Akaya" hat with a long robe by the side decorated with "Mbamba" (cowries). Dresses decorated with "mbamba" are expensive and worn only by special and reputed traditional rulers. Its volume of possession dictated or signified the wealth status of an individual. Quills "Nkoi ebiong" like a protruding needle is fixed on the hat to signify Akuku as a man of war.

Raffia hat was used and is still being used, albeit on rare occasions. Weaved shrubs or animal skins decorated with raffia cap are worn by high chiefs; and they call it "Iteng" in Annang. Nowadays, some Akuku use synthetic hat with animal skin sewn around it to show authority and status. Even some conical caps or the ones made with shrubs have some feathers attached to their tops. Feather is a scepter of honour, authority, flamboyance and festivity. The animal skin sewn around the cap is a symbol of "Nsei" which stands for a warrior. The chief's or Obong's attire includes "Ukara", a large loincloth of high-quality material like damask, brocade, wax or velvet with highly patterned shirt. Men use single wrappers, and wear a long-tailed chieftaincy dress on top of the wrapper with a bowler hat on their heads and a walking stick in their hands.

Akuku (Obong) is a title holder, a community leader and a man of authority as well as an elected head. He dresses to showcase his office and authority over his people. Even though nowadays, young men dress as chiefs without office. As elected head and leader, the Akuku ties his wrapper to the right-hand side, with "Akangkang", a sword which is always on the left-hand side. Most times, he uses "ebewek", a knife instead of sword. But now, knotting or tying depends on the individual. "Akaya" and raffia wrappers are used for cultural display. A white chieftaincy shirt is used to signify peace, purity and excellence. They use sandals and traditional shoes decorated with animal skins like lion, tiger and crocodile. Today, raffia and modern leather shoes are used. Other types of shoes are "Okpomkpon" and "Ikpa Ukot Nkwa" beaded shoes. They are often designed to match the clothes. Walking sticks were locally produced with different motifs such as cowries or images of a lion, snake, eagle, etc. carved on top of the walking stick. There was no particular time and place, but it was from their migration to the new environment, their forefathers started using it for identification, and what led to its use was basically their culture and tradition. The modification of the regalia is on its usage. Akuku can wear his regalia anytime to anywhere, on any occasion.

There is no textile factory in the state. As such, all materials for wrapper are produced outside the State. Materials for making Akuku are produced in

places like Lagos and Kano. The materials are sourced locally and is mass produced in factories.



Akuku John Udo Umana

Akuku Regalia Accessories

Among his (Akuku) accessories are the following:

- Beads (“Okpono”) is tied round the head with “Nsei” representing a warrior.
- “Nkwa Itong” is a necklace
- “Nkwa Ubok” means hand bangle
- “Ekon Etak itam” is a special cap with protruding crown made of tiger's skin.
- “Ikpa Ukot Nkwa” and “Okpomkpom” are beaded shoes.
- “Bokit” is a type of head tie for the waist
- “Kpaya” means a robe made of woven raffia
- “Bidak” signifies a white woven cap
- “Anyang” is a short broom which signifies conquest
- “Esang” is a decorated walking stick
- An aid-de-camp of a royal breed bears “Akpa eduat”, which is not an ordinary sword, but a symbol of authority.

The Akuku uses beads called “Okpono” on the cap with “nsei” in front as a symbol or sign of a warrior. “Bidak” is a white cap, and “Ekon Efak Itam”, are different hats or caps used by the Akuku. After wearing his chieftaincy

clothes, he puts on the necklace “Nkwa Itong” and the hand bangle “Nkwa Ubok”. As a leader, he uses robe made of woven raffia called “Ikpaya” or “Bokit”, this is tied loosely on the waist. He wears beaded shoes. A well decorated walking stick is held on his right hand side and on his left is a short broom. At his back is an aid-de-camp from the royal family who bears the “Akpa eduat”.



Traditional Chief Regalia

The Uses of Akuku Regalia in Religious Ceremonies and Rituals

Akuku can wear his traditional regalia to anywhere and also performs his constituted role as the royal father without any hindrance. “Usobo” or “Ofon Isin” is used by title holders or men in general. This clothing materials are used alongside the commonest traditional outfit made of woven or frilled raffia called “Ikpapa” of kings or Akuku. He can use his clothes to any religious gatherings. For ceremonies, long tailed long sleeves shirt is worn with the “Usobo”. The “Okpomkpom”, beaded shoes, cap and decorated walking stick are also worn. Assorted beads are worn on the neck.

Inam cult, Ekpe, Ekpo, Obon, Eking Society, Idiong, Mbiam and Nko Society are for the burial of persons who died of terrible diseases such as smallpox,

leprosy, tuberculosis, etc. They are as well used for traditional marriage and sacrifices. The cults or societies serve as law enforcement agencies and also for entertainment. Akuku (Obong) regalia serves as a traditional object which no other clothes can compete with. In their gathering, they do not entertain white man's clothes. Akuku regalia is worn to oversee the ritual. Akuku can be dethroned or banished for not exercising his role in the traditional way. Akuku regalia is worn as a way to show good example of dress culture to others.

Installation of Akuku

As symbols of authority, the Obong (Akuku) has and keeps the following regalia:

- "Ntinya" - Crown (closely fitting raffia cap)
- "Ekporikpo" - Royal stool
- "Ayang" - Royal broom
- "Nnuk Enin" - Elephant tusk
- "Okpoho" - Giant manila
- "Mme" - Ivory necklace
- "Akangkang" - Royal sword
- "Edet Ekpe" Leopard teeth
- "Ikpa Ekpe" - Royal leopard skin
- "Ekporikpo Ubong" - Royal throne
- "Ofong Ubong" - Royal robe - regalia
- "Ekuriku Ubong" - Mace
- "Esang Ubong" - Staff of office

The installation ceremony is conducted by delegates from the ruling families in the clan. In many cases, traditional rites and rituals must be carried out with the authority of the traditional headquarters of the Ikpaisong (Akuku). A council of elders from the ruling families is convened and there, the general conduct, or behaviour of the Akuku is reviewed. If he is an upright man and of impeccable character, he is collectively accepted, before the elders proceed with the installation. Afterwards, what the items stand for is being explained with the local names. In his palace is the royal throne, "Ekporikpo Ubong" where he sits on, and a royal stool is by his side. He wears on his head a strong close - fitting cap called "Ntinya" as his insignia. He puts on his royal robe regalia "Ofong Ubong" while on his seat. Worn on his neck is an ivory necklace called "Mme" to show affluence. Only well to do men wear "Mme" around their necks, wrists and ankles as bangle for adornment. He keeps royal sword as a sign of strength, bravery and authority. Chiefs or Akuku at their coronations are given "Akanagkaang" as insignia of office to equip them for any war against enemies or any other eventualities.

On his royal stool are leopard teeth ("Edet ekpe") and leopard skin ("Ikpa ekpe"), which portray power and affluence. Also on the stool is an elephant tusk "Nnuk enin" which signifies cease fire where and when there is war between two communities. A giant manila was the local money "Okpoho" which shows riches, affluence kept on the stool. Akuku must have a staff of office called "Esang Ubong" (kingly staff) as a sign of community support. The most unique and vital symbol is "Ekuriku or Ekpurikpa" (a special box or container for the paraphernalia of the throne (mace). The royal broom stands for blessing and cursing from the Akuku.

Akuku Types of Dressing for Children, Women and Men

The casual traditional dress worn by boys is wrapper (ubak ofong isin) which is smaller in size. It is tied around the waist with a short sleeve shirt, jumper or singlet worn on top. During ceremonies, the boys would wear full-length wrapper (ofong isin) with a long "siot". A beaded cap is also worn with a traditional long neck tie called "Okpomkpom". Beaded shoes are worn to complete the attire.

The casual outfit for girls is wrapper made from cotton, with cloths material known as George, and raffia that are traditionally woven fabrics slung over the shoulder. This is called "Nkono afara". This is worn with shorts made from woven raffia under the outfit. The accessories that go with this consist of several strings of beads called "Nkwa", tied around the waist, wrist, neck and ankles. This attire portrays the innocence and virginity of the wearer. During MBUPPO or "Nkuho" ceremony, the dressing is quite different. "Nkuho" is a ceremony which indicates the coming of age of girls - when a girl is to be invited into womanhood. The "Nkuho" costumes are made up of: "Ofong-Ukot-anwan" (a richly embroidered knee length wrapper), "Owok, mkpat-etim or Ekpaku" (a leg wear with or without tiny bells and jingles), "Mme" (a set of three strings glass beads worn around the waist), "Nkwa esit iton" (beaded necklace), and a set of beads called "Anana-ubok" (worn from shoulder to waistline over a bare skin), are also used.

Other adornments are "Nkono Ikpo", an embroidered velvet or brocade worn round the arm; bracelets, brass, staff and a symbolic hair style called "Utong-eku-etine" - consisting of several braids of hair stitched together to give a peculiar shape. This hair style is usually decorated with brass combs. An umbrella forms part of the outfit. "Nkuho's" skin is usually adorned with local plant juices and roots such as "Okukin, Mkpon Isong, Iduot and Nyie". Juices from these plants are used for writing, tattooing and printing of other decorative marks on the skin. Some people have facial marks called "Nki".

“Ofong isin” is tied by women around the chest over the breast or slung over one shoulder or across the neck. The mature women wear what is called the “Ufafak Ofong Isin” – which consists of two long wrappers, one tied over the chest and knotted over the breast and the other tied around the waist. The older women use “Nkpin” around the waist or “Uwawanga ye ndot” which is made up of a double wrapper tied over the blouse. They use head-gear called “Bokit” and expensive beaded, raffia shoes.

The older men tie a large wrapper called “Usobo” or “Ofong Isin” with singlet or short sleeve shirt and a knitted hat. The casual, footwear is made of rubber or leather slippers. A locally woven towel called “Ekpang” is slung over the shoulder to serve as hand kerchief.



Akuku Attire for Men



Akuku Attire for Women

Significance of Colours and Symbols of Akuku Regalia

- The white signifies faith and purity. And it is a religious symbol of light, purity, joy and glory. White represents the immaculate nature or character possessed by Akuku.
- The red stands for bravery, courage and charity. It is a symbol of fire and blood. Red depicts the courage displayed by Akuku especially when facing some trying challenges.
- The blue represents sincerity and piety. It stands for truth. By implication, blue depicts the honesty and transparency of Akuku.
- The green signifies hope and youth. A symbolism of nature. Green illustrates the agricultural prowess of Akuku.

- The purple is a symbol for royalty and high rank. It is a religious symbol of sorrow and suffering. Purple demonstrates the authority and power which Akuku wields.
- The black stands for grief and sorrow. It is a symbol of death. Black shows that the people in position of authority also mourn at times.
- The orange signifies strength and endurance. It is as well representing sunlight and anger. Orange depicts the perseverance of Akuku.
- The yellow represents honour and loyalty. Yellow stands for the dignity, respect and esteem which is commanded by Akuku.
- The bow and arrow, knife, and sword which are Akuku regalia accessories stand for strength, bravery and overall victory associated with Akuku even in the midst of formidable challenges.

The Influence of Modern Dressing on Akuku Regalia

Modern dressing is changing or affecting Akuku regalia. For example, the modern materials used in making wrappers in the present time is different from raffia fibres. Akuku dress tends to be undergoing adaptation in order to suit the new age. The synthetic fibre is now used for the mass production of Akuku clothes. Fashion designers put in new designs and artistic touches in sewing chieftaincy clothes. Modern day dressing is not only for identification, but also for affluence. So, chiefs do not want to look cheap any longer in their cultural outfits, hence, they deliberately embrace whichever designs that are trending.

Ways to Sustain the Production of Akuku Regalia

We must put value on what we have. Our children should be made to know the importance of traditional dressing. Our society should go back to our roots by patronizing what we have. The revival of our indigenous cultures will help to promote our heritage. Our past is what makes us. Cultural revival aims at identifying and redefining our identity, finding out where we came from, where we are and belong. We should introduce cultural education to bridge the gaps between the old and the modern ways of dressing. Adequate funding and skills acquisition in sustaining the production of Akuku regalia can be achieved through public private partnership. Private sector should fund and open up skill acquisition centres for youths to learn and sustain the production of clothes. Micro finance banks, cooperative societies, etc., can be used to raise funds. Government should use grants and other policies, e.g., N-power to fund local industries to survive.

Conclusion

Clothing is any article we put on our body to protect, beautify or adorn it. It

includes dresses, shoes, jewellery, hair-do and makeup accessories. Clothes are garments, dresses or articles worn on the body. Clothing is very vital for health. It is therefore a basic human need. This ethnographic research on Akuku clothing is to project the dress culture of the Annang people as well as promote their cultural identity. Findings in this study demonstrate the roots of Akuku clothing in encouraging, preserving and promoting the culture of Annang people.

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Oral Interview

S/N	NAMES	AGE	PLACE OF INTERVIEW	DATE	OCCUPATION
1	Chief John Udo Umana	70	Ikot Ekpene	18/01/22	Farmer
2	Dr. A. John Sampson	58	University of Uyo	06/01/22	Lecturer
3	Hon. Patty E. Ineme	61	Ikot Ekpene	18/01/22	Politician
4	Azorbo Ifure Ufford	57	University of Uyo	06/01/22	Lecturer