

RED CAP IN IGBO TRADITIONAL DRESSING AMONG
ENUGWU-AGIDI PEOPLE OF ANAMBRA STATE

Johnson Edwin
Chief Ethnographer
National Museum, Asaba

Abstract

Culture is a way of life of a given people. Every tribe in Nigeria is uniquely different from each other by virtue of certain definitive customs and traditions which delineate it from others. This could be in areas of belief system, arts, eating habit, language and even dressing pattern. Because of the saliency of these aspects of cultural variations, it is therefore, quite easy to identify or recognize people from different ethnic groups by their dressing mode. In the case of the Igbo people of South Eastern Nigeria, there is something characteristically unique of the Igbo sartorial elegance, and that is the distinction which marks the wearer of red cap in Igbo society. Red cap in Igbo society is symbolic and communicative of a cultural tradition which is highly esteemed. The objective of the study is to highlight the social significance of red cap in Igbo culture, using Enugwu-Agidi community as a case study. The study also examined likely integrative role of red cap as a result of cross-cultural assimilation and the possibilities of national integration and cohesion. Data were sourced through both primary and secondary methods. The study concluded that red cap wearing among Igbo of Enugwu-Agidi extraction is not just a fashion accessory to traditional Igbo men dressing, but a valuable identity symbol which can indeed be an avenue for cultural exchange leading to greater unity in the country. The paper will serve as a resource material for future researchers and may present an avenue for further research in this area.

Introduction

There is something particularly definitive about the way we dress. Dressing says many things about us, like who we are; where we are coming from, our background etc. Most importantly, it talks about our tribe, race, and religious beliefs. In short, dressing tells a lot about our culture. Culture according to Nwosu (1978) refers to the totality of peoples' way of life. It is the distinctive way of life of a people, their complete style of living. Culture can be elaborately explained as being all inclusive, comprising all aspects of life, technology, economy, social system and structure, political education, language and religion. Culture refers to aspects of human-made elements including tools, dress, and media in addition to values, attitudes, and norms. Dress is a significant part of almost every culture (Margareth, 1960). Culture can be viewed as a complex whole that includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, customs, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by members of a society (Linton, 1936). Linton emphasized that culture is a complex whole – a network of behaviours related to all aspects of life. Dress is shaped by and reflects many characteristics in any culture, so dress is a complex map of cultural characteristics.

As a system, culture involves patterns of learned behaviour which are characteristics of the members of a society (Hoebel, 1958). Socialization is an ongoing process through which culture is learned and assimilated. Parents, families, schools, peers, workplaces, etc. are agencies through which the individual is socialized to conform to the norms of the particular society in which he or she is being nurtured. The norms and values of a particular society is relative to that society and that is why there often exist differences across cultures in dress, language, food preferences, and other behaviours in part because these behaviours are learned – not knowledge that is innate, instinctual, or determined by genetic programming.

Factors that Influence Types of Dress Worn in a Culture

Benedict, (1959) drew what she called an “arc of human potential”, to indicate that every culture makes choices from among a wide array of possibilities for any form of behaviour. Each culture, then, makes choices of different language sounds, foods, dress materials and designs, and other behaviours.

In any culture the following factors shape choices for dress and other behaviours:

- climate and natural resources
- religion, ideology, ritual
- technology
- culture contact and diffusion of ideas
- social and political organization
- history
- aesthetic rules

Consequently, in every cultural group, there are dominant norms and values governing how people dress. The Igbo people from South Eastern Nigeria as a cultural group clearly typifies these norms and values.



Map Depicting the Location of Igbo States in Nigeria

Historical Overview of the Igbo People

The origin of Igbo people has not been conclusively established. Though many scholars have made postulations as to the origin of the Igbo people, amongst which Isichei, (1981) argues that Proto-Igboid migration would have moved down the Niger from a more Northern area in the Savannah and first settled at Nsukka present day Enugu State dated as far back as 2500 BC. This would seem to suggest that Igbo people have lived in those areas for several centuries in the past. However, there are majorly two dominant theories as to the origin of Igbo people. The first perspective is that the Igbo people descended from Eri, a divine figure who, according to Igbo folklore, was sent from heaven to begin civilization. The second account presents Eri as one of the sons of Gad (as mentioned in the book of Genesis in the Bible) who travelled down to establish the present-day Igboland.



Igbo People in their Native attire

Today, Igbo people are seen as a distinct cultural group in the South Eastern part of Nigeria. They inhabit an area referred to as Igboland, which is divided into two sections along the lower River Niger. They live in most or all parts of five states: Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo, as well as minor parts of Delta, Rivers and Benue states. Small Igbo communities are also found in parts of Cameroon and Equatorial Guinea. With a population of over 40 million throughout Nigeria, they are one of the biggest and most influential tribes. The Igbos are well-known for their entrepreneurial endeavours, both within Nigeria and around the world.

From time immemorial, Igbo people have a shared traditional belief that there is one creator, called 'Chineke' or 'Chukwu' who has an array of other lesser deities through which he can be approached. These deities and spirits can be in the form of natural objects, most commonly through the god of thunder called 'Amadioha'. Other gods include 'Ala', the feminine earth spirit, 'Anyanwu' (meaning 'eye of the sun') a deity believed to dwell on the sun, and 'Idemili', the water goddess whose symbol is that of a python. After

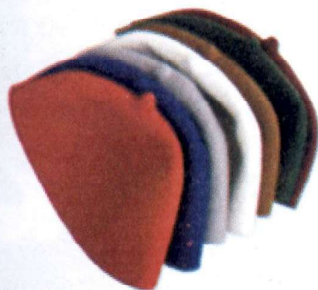
Nigeria was colonized, most Igbos (more than 90%) became Christians, which is still the predominant religion today. Though Christianity is widely practiced amongst the Igbo people, there is still quite a number of adherents of traditional religion who still maintain the old way (Isichei, 1981). Sometimes dressing can be a reflection of some of these diversities within the same culture.

Historical and Geographical Background of Enugwu-Agidi Town

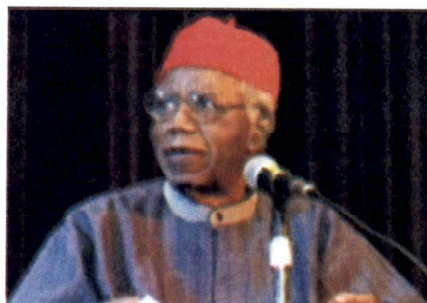
The town Enugwu-Agidi in Njikoka LGA of Anambra State is one of the communities where Igbo culture is widely practiced. The town is about 22 kilometres east of Onitsha. It belongs to the Umu-Nri (children of Nri) clan, made up of Nri, Enugwu-Ukwu, Nawfia, Enugwu-Agidi, and Oruora, which no longer exist. In other words, these towns belong to the same ancestral root, the ancient divine kingship of Nri (Eze Nri). Enugwu-Agidi lies to the Western axis of Awka Metropolis, the capital of the state. The town is bordered by five major towns, Nawfia, Abagana, Awka, Nawgwu and Achalla Isu Ana. Ten villages make up the town, namely; Achala, Egbedeani, Etiti, Ifite, Igbolo, Irunebo, Iruobieli, Iruoma, Normu and Ogwugwu. Enugwu-Agidi has a speculated population of about four hundred thousand people who are engaged productively in different spheres of human endeavour. Though the town had agrarian antecedence, but over time, it diversified and made inroads into other entrepreneurial ventures especially the timber business. The indigenes of the town are culturally oriented people and take pride in displaying Igbo culture. Traditional Igbo dressing with its complimentary cap-wearing is often seen richly arrayed in all ceremonies in the town.

The Red Cap as part of Igbo Dress Culture

Every culture has its signature traits. These traits are what distinguish it from other cultures. In the case of Enugwu-Agidi town, costumes are part of the delineating traits which are distinguishable. The costumes of every culture have their own uniqueness. The contents of the costumes have many attributes, just as each has its own meaning. In Igbo culture, there are different types of attires, and each has some cultural, historical or even mythological meaning attached to it. One aspect of an Igbo man's attire is the cap. There are different kinds of caps and hats and what may be called head cover.



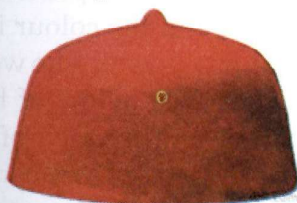
Varieties of caps



Late Prof. Chinua Achebe in Red Cap

Some of these caps are worn just for wearing sake. Some are worn when it is time for work either to prevent the scorching sun, the rain or other rough weather conditions. Some caps are worn for special occasions and so on. But generally, caps or hats are worn by Igbo people as occasions demand. In the case of Enugwu-Agidi, the general norms and values regarding dressing exist especially as regards red cap wearing.

The Red Cap Phenomenon



Igbo Traditional Red Caps

The red cap is a piece of head clothing worn by titled men or chiefs in Igbo land. The red cap is made with hard wool and animal furs and dyed with the red colour. It symbolizes authority, leadership and affluence. The traditional red cap is reserved for highly esteemed men in the society. In Enugwu-Agidi for instance, red cap is not an all-comers' affair; only the achievers are allowed to wear it. This was confirmed by Mazi Ugochukwu Nwankwo, an indigene of the town who revealed that in time past, a man has to come of age and attain certain milestones in life before the community can confer chieftaincy title on him after which he can be permitted to wear the red cap. That is to say, the red cap is the cap that is worn by matured and accomplished Enugwu-Agidi people.



Researcher conducting interview

Symbolic Significance of the Red Cap in Enugwu-Agidi

In trying to understand the significance of red colour in red cap production, Mr. Silas Otikpa, a business man from the town explained that the colour red is distinctive. According to him, red colour, depicts valour, accomplishment, integrity and honour. Generally, red means attraction and the colour is as good as any distinctive mark of honour. Furthermore, any person who wears the red cap is regarded by the community as a venerable fellow of high accomplishments and distinguished in the council of worthy men of the town. And as such, he is entitled to all the rights and privileges of a man in the society. His respect is guaranteed and his position is always noted. Therefore, the colour red can be said to be a colour of distinction which sets an achiever apart from ordinary men.

Utilitarian Value of Red Cap in Enugwu-Agidi

In Enugwu-Agidi, red cap is ceremonial and celebratory. During festive occasion, it is always observable that some men turn out in gorgeous dresses complimented with the red caps. Usually, such men are given a pride of place in the gathering by showing them special treatment because of their mark of distinction which is the red cap. This was confirmed by Chief Solomon Mgbeodinma, a transporter, who said that as a chief, each time he goes for occasion especially in Igbo land, they always accord him special treatment because of his dressing. Ichie Nwafor Okeke, a retired civil servant, from Enugwu-Agidi corroborated this view, saying that as a red cap chief himself, wherever he goes fully dressed, he expects respect even outside Igbo Land. According to him, even non-Igbos know that red cap automatically means a chief has come visiting.

The Socio-Cultural Significance of Red Cap

In most South Eastern Communities like Enugwu-Agidi, the traditional Igbo red cap is like a crown which is bestowed on men who have served the community well and have fulfilled some laid down rites and customs befitting the award of a title like the *Nze*, *Ichie* or *Ozo* as the case may be. The cap is presented by the highest-ranking traditional ruler usually in a huge feast in the presence of the king makers and the entire community. The bearer will be accorded some respects thereafter by the members of the community as a member of the ruling class and disrespecting such a person is tantamount to disrespecting constituted authority.



Conferring of Chieftaincy Title on an indigene

In effect, the social importance of red cap chiefs in a community like Enugwu-Agidi cannot be over emphasized not only on account of the financial contributions made by the honorees to the development of the town but also due to cultural worth and significance of the process.

The red cap as part of popular Igbo people's costumes has a role to play in the society. Traditional title holders are also parts of the traditional structure which helps to bind the society together. Red cap chiefs serve as role models for growing youths who naturally want to emulate the achievers in the community because of the encomiums they receive and the high esteem in which the community holds them. Indeed, such is the case with Enugwu-Agidi community where the town union Secretary Mr. Jude Nwankwo revealed the roles that red cap chiefs play both in social control and the infrastructural development of the town. This therefore, proves that the red cap wearers have both traditional and developmental functions in the town.

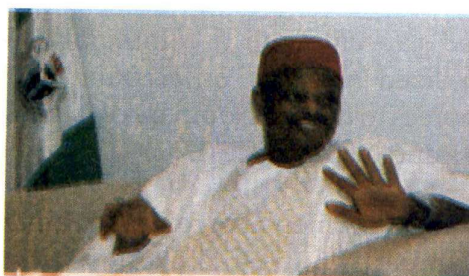
Ethnographic Interpretation of Red Cap in Igbo land

Dress such as clothing, make-up, tattoos, shoes and caps are artifacts made by people and used by people. The red cap is an ethnographic material. Artifacts reflect multiple aspects of a culture such as *mentifacts*, *sociofacts*, and

the technological knowledge of a culture that shapes manufacturing processes and types of materials used. For the indigenes of Enugwu-Agidi, the red cap is more like an article that is in constant usage. In most cases, the people are only concerned with how to access the product which is always through purchase. Furthermore, because red cap falls within the purview of daily usage, so much so that the Igbo tribe is now associated to it as an article of fashion, which complements Igbo people sartorial elegance, it can be termed as ethnographic.

Cross-Cultural Appropriation of Red Cap among Non-Igbo People

Another term related to changing cultural aesthetics or norms is cultural appropriation. The concept of cultural appropriation is highly debated. There are also arguments such as appreciation versus appropriation where individuals will argue that their adoption of a particular style or aesthetic is not wrong because they merely appreciate that part of another culture (Getz, 1991). In the case of red cap phenomenon, the non-Igbos have borrowed the practice and made a political capital out of it. Mallam Rabiw Kwankwaso, the erstwhile governor of Kano State had appropriated the practice of red cap wearing as part of his political identity. The Kwankwasiyya Political Movement which he initiated in Kano has followers all adopting the red cap as a signal of their loyalty to the movement.



Mal. Rabiw kwankwaso in Red Cap



Members of the Kwankwasiyya Political Movement in Red Caps

Influence of Western Culture on Igbo Dressing Pattern

Acculturation to Western influences has impacted so much on the dressing patterns of Nigerian Ethnic constituents especially the younger generation. Even, among the Igbo people of South Eastern Nigeria, this impact is still being felt, as younger people take to western kind of dressing most of the time. It is often rare, mostly during festive seasons and celebration that young Igbo men put on their native dressing accompanied by the matching red cap. In these occasions, especially, in urban settings, due regard is not given to the significance of the red cap but merely as a fashionable corollary to traditional dressing. This fact is corroborated by Mr. Nnamdi Okafor, a tailor resident in

Enugwu Agidi who testified that only elderly men come to sew native dresses and that the younger generation prefers jeans and t-shirts.

Integrative Role and Cohesion

Culture and historic interactions between the various ethnic components in the country are keys to achieving sustainable development and unity. The culturally sensitive urban environment is an open field for inter-tribal dialogue through socio-cultural exchange. Such exchanges are made possible by means of associational cultural elements like dressing. Indeed, many Igbo people who live in the Northern part of the country have adapted to the northern dressing styles evidenced in the ceremonial use of 'Agbada' 'Babban Riga'. Such adaptive approach promotes social cohesion and cultural pride through participation in the local community and urban spaces. Likewise, other non- Igbos have also borrowed a leaf and sometimes appear in Igbo costumes and regalia complemented with red cap as an added fashionable accessory.

Understanding and considering the cultural aspect of society is critical to adapting development approaches to local contexts and ensuring successful outcomes. Artistic rights, heritage, cultural identity, cultural life, and the integration of cultural expression, encapsulated in interactions, are fundamental realities and essential tools which stimulate dialogue and provide legitimacy for collective and participatory collaboration among the various ethnic constituents in the country. Traditional dress culture and fashion can be a vehicle to bring about desirable changes in the society which can lead to integration and unity in the country. Appreciating each other's dress culture and respecting the symbolism attached to it will go a long way in setting the pace for national integration and cohesion.

Conclusion

Generally, in Igbo Land the red cap symbolizes authority, tradition and culture. It is mostly worn by chiefs in the Igbo land and it also represents institution of leadership and power in the Igbo culture. Among the Enugwu-Agidi people, red cap is not usually worn by just anybody but by certain classes of people that are traditionally permitted to wear it. A chieftaincy aspirant is expected to start making appearances with his red cap once he receives a chieftaincy title. People that wear red caps are seen as people who have fulfilled certain obligations in the community. In Enugwu-Agidi, red cap wearing men are known as *Ozos*, *Ichie*, *Nzes* and many other names. These men are expected to abide by every rule in the community and must not engage in acts unbecoming of their status and integrity, that is they are not expected to be unscrupulous.

Recommendations

Efforts should be made by relevant authorities to use education as a tool of impartation of cultural appreciation, especially respect for other peoples' culture or way of life. This will help to enlighten people and widen their horizons, which in the long run changes people's psychological predisposition and affects their social and mental behaviour and interaction with people of other cultures.

Relevant authorities should also make effort to identify similarities and differences to ascertain changes and developments that have taken place across various Nigerian cultures over time and space. With this, cultural differences could be taught in schools. And it may enhance the positive orientation of one culture and another, which will, in turn, foster peaceful co-operation of people with different backgrounds and improve positive interactions amongst people in the country. Lastly, everyone who puts on red cap should be mindful of its value and try as much as possible to live up to the edifying values associated with such distinguished piece of clothing, among the Igbo people of South Eastern Nigeria. Again, such symbolic apparels with so much cultural importance should not be abused by just anybody, but rather be worn only by people who understand what they stand for and will act in accordance with the rules or codes that such wears demand by virtue of customs and traditions.

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Informants

S/N	NAMES	AGE	OCCUPATION	DATE	PLACE OF INTERVIEW
1	Chief Ugochukwu Nwankwo	52	Business man	28/12/2021	Enugwu-Agidi
2	Ozo Silas Otikpa	59	Business man	28/12/2021	Enugwu-Agidi
3	Chief Solomon Mgbeodinma	50	Transporter	29/12/2021	Enugwu-Agidi
4	Mr. Nwafor Okeke	67	Civil servant (RTD)	29/12/2021	Enugwu-Agidi
5	Mr. Jude Nwankwo	42	Teacher	30/12/2021	Enugwu-Agidi
6	Mr. Nnamdi Okafor	45	Tailor	2/1/2022	Enugwu-Agidi