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Social Change and Dress among the Kalabari of Nigeria

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Introduction

The Kalabari people of Nigeria have been exposed to non–Kalabari ways of life and cultural artifacts (both African and non–African) for several centuries as a result of internal Nigerian trade routes (Alagoa 1970) and Portuguese explorations, which opened Kalabari ports to European trade in the late 1400s. As prominent middlemen in the transatlantic slave and palm oil trade, the Kalabari have participated in a global economy and have experienced many changes in their daily lives. Their involvement in the world economy is shown by their profuse use of dress[1] and textiles from such other places as India, England, and the rest of West Africa. Through dress and textiles, the Kalabari provide a visible symbol of their invisible worldview.

To demonstrate the role of dress in understanding social change in Kalabari life, I briefly review Kalabari history before the 1880s and provide a background for the changes occurring from the 1880s to the 1980s. Next, I describe daily life in the 1880s and 1980s in order to analyze change and relate it to Kalabari traditional dress. A key concept in this analysis is *cultural authentication*, whereby borrowed items are selected, characterized, incorporated, and transformed to create a new combination (Erekosima 1979; Erekosima and Eicher 1981 and 1995).

Setting

The Kalabari comprise about one million people in an estimated total Nigerian population of 90 million. In the last century, they have shared with other Nigerians massive demographic, political, economic, and social

changes. These changes have occurred as Nigeria has gone from precolonialism to colonialism, to independence, and then to postindependence.

The islands the Kalabari call home are at the southernmost part of Nigeria, about four degrees above the equator. The River Niger (combined midcountry from the Niger and the Benue Rivers) flows south into the Atlantic Ocean and forms a large delta area of tributaries and islands. Here the Kalabari live on islands among miles of mangrove swamps, where they experience two seasons, dry and rainy, with temperatures from 70–90° Fahrenheit.

The Kalabari are members of the Ijo-speaking group, one of 250 linguistic groups within Nigeria. As others who are now known as Nigerians, they lived under British control from the time of the Berlin Conference agreement in 1885 until independence in 1960. Kalabari express religious beliefs that encompass Christianity and an indigenous belief system (sometimes both simultaneously). A high proportion of Kalabari men are monogamous, although polygyny is practiced when affordable. Kalabari men, once primarily traders and fishermen, now participate in a widened set of occupations; many Kalabari women have joined them in employment outside the home. Many Kalabari work and live not only in nearby Port Harcourt, the capital city of Rivers State, but also migrate to other Nigerian cities such as Lagos, Kano, Kaduna, and Enugu. Whenever time permits and finances allow, they revisit their communities of origin.[2]

Kalabari History Prior to 1880s

Written records of the Kalabari date to the first contacts with them as traders in the 1400s. New Calabar (also called Elem Ama and Old Shipping) on the Rio Reall was one of the major trade centers for West Africans, Portuguese, Dutch, and English (Barbot 1746; Duarte Periera, 1937; Ryder 1965; Alagoa 1972, 135). Prior to this time, the Kalabari were probably never self-sufficient, but dependent on trading salt and fish for other foodstuffs and materials (Jones 1963, 9).

In addition to their reputation as traders, the Kalabari are also known for their loyalty to a lineage system that includes both consanguineal and adopted members. The basic descent group is called *wari* or "war canoe house." Adoptions pragmatically expanded the human resource base of the *wari*. Historically, the actual war canoe was a vessel for trade and war, large enough for 40 to 80 men, headed by a powerful man and his subalterns. Both slaves and freeborn manned the canoe. The head of the *wari* controlled trade between foreigners and traders from the hinterland by not allowing either to meet. Europeans exchanged goods first for slaves and later for palm oil, both coming from the Nigerian hinterland. As

adopted slaves or freeborn men became experts in trade, they were sponsored by their chief to become independent traders and heads of war canoes of their own. In short, Kalabari slaves, originally from neighboring ethnic groups such as the Igbo, could be adopted into the family after proof as successful traders (Jones 1963; Horton 1969). Thus, the Kalabari developed an "expanded" family system (Erekosima 1989) and encouraged competition among the lineages who sought control of the river for trade and stimulated continuous inter– and intraethnic rivalry and conflict.

Marriages, whether monogamous or polygamous, involved a choice between large and small bridewealth. In an *iya* marriage (large bridewealth), children belonged to the father's lineage. In an *egwa* marriage (small bridewealth), children remained with the mother's lineage. In this Kalabari kinship system, individuals recount, often several generations back, complex sets of relationships for both mother's and father's forebears, depending on the bridewealth conditions (Talbot 1926; Horton 1969). Textiles played a role in bridewealth for both traditional and Christian marriages, as quantities of cloth were given by the prospective husband to his intended. Generally, only successful Kalabari traders who were chiefs were polygynous, since only they could afford the resources, including cloth, for more than one wife. A large inventory of cloth was a highly visible measure of wealth and relationships (Eicher 1988).

Also significant in an understanding of the Kalabari is their independent character, often noted by early travelers on the West African Coast. The Kalabari not only established and perpetuated a trade monopoly based on geographical position (Jones 1963), but also refused to take goods on trust (credit) from the Europeans, an act thereby reinforcing their independence (Hutchinson 1858, 101; Dike 1956, 125-26). This image of autonomy was emphasized by British Consul Hutchinson (1858): "In New Calabar the King and chiefs walk on the deck of any ship with an air of independence, similar to that assumed by a wealthy capitalist on the Stock Exchange at home" (as quoted in Geary 1927, 83).

Independence, the Nigerian historian Dike (1956, 161) pointed out, exhibited itself throughout the Delta, for inhabitants showed selectivity in responding to outside contact:

> The impact of Western European commercial enterprise on the Delta States, after three centuries of continuous contact, was more evident on the material than on the ideological plane. European institutions and dogma had remarkably small influence and traditional religious and political beliefs, though unwritten, still dominated the daily life of the nineteenth–century Africans.

For the Kalabari, one distinctive lifestyle was reflected in the material plane: their dress. They chose to incorporate borrowed items to create an ensemble uniquely identified as Kalabari. Just as they incorporated human beings to expand their kin groups, they incorporated material artifacts to expand their material resource base. From European tradestuffs, they chose such goods as cowrie shells, beads, iron bars, and much cloth from West Africa, Europe, and India (Adams 1823). They were seen as "very particular." For example, Dapper reported in 1668 that when the Kalabari selected gray copper armlets used for exchange purposes, they often rejected "two to three hundred out of one barrel," accepting them only if they were "oblong with a rounded curve and very well made" (Talbot 1926, 1:241).

Documents of the mid-1800s report Kalabari selectivity in dress and textiles. Rev. Waddell ([1863] 1970, 420), during his 1850 visit to New Calabar, commented on details of dress and demeanor: "Barboy, on whom we called, an intelligent man, was dressed in a long blue velvet shirt with red facings, in which he looked majestic." Count de Cardi (1899, 507), who traveled from 1862 to 1896 in West Africa, wrote that: "Another chief of no mean capacity is Bob Manuel, of Abonnema, exceedingly neat, almost a dandy in appearance. . . ." Consul Hutchinson (1858, 101) said: "All the people met in the town have an air of sturdiness in their walk, not to be seen elsewhere except at Lagos and Akra." De Cardi (1899, 508) contrasted the Kalabari with other groups in the area because the Kalabari covered their bodies and had a preference for Indian madras:

> Owing to some peculiarities in their dress, the New Calabar chiefs are very different to the chiefs in other parts of the Delta. They never appear outside of their houses unless robed in long shirts (made of real india [sic] madras of bold check patterns, in which no other colour but red, blue and white is ever allowed to be used) reaching down to their heels; under this they wear a singlet and a flowing loin cloth of the same material as their shirts.

Talbot (1932, 279) gave further information about the source of madras and its use in Kalabari life:

> Injiri—the local pronunciation of the word India—a cloth, the trade name of which is "real india" and which was first introduced to these regions by the Portuguese, was for many years the finest material obtainable and therefore became the dress of Kalabari chiefs and is still worn on ceremonial occasions.

Talbot reasonably credits the Portuguese with introducing madras, for historical records indicate that the Portuguese had reached and traded in Bombay and Madras by the same time they touched base in the Rio Reall. This attribution is complicated by the fact that the word "Portuguese" has been used by riverine people to designate anyone not native to the area, whether European or other Africans, such as Sierra Leonians (Alagoa 1988). If Talbot's argument is accepted, the tradition of this textile in Kalabari life could date to the early 1500s. Although there was (and is) a potentially wide range of colors and patterns available for madras, Talbot describes the Kalabari as being discriminating about these.[3]

This preference for madras appears to have been related to their indigenous belief system that has been described by Horton (1960, 1962, 1963, 1965, 1969, 1970). Three categories of spiritual beings are pivotal within the Kalabari worldview: water people (*owu'amapu*), the community deities (*am'oru*), and the ancestors (*duein*).[4] Dress and textile arts of the Kalabari are related to these philosophic beliefs, especially the interplay between power and creativity as represented by gender roles, a theme first noted by Horton in his article on the Kalabari Ekine Society (1963) and later elaborated by Erekosima (1979).

The water people (*owu*) are associated with controlling the many rivers and tributaries that surround the Kalabari environment. Any activity involving economic pursuit, such as successful trade, is generally attributed to the water people, who are said to govern an individual's good and bad fortune and innovation. For example, the *owu* are accountable for the imported textiles and dress items brought to the Kalabari world by trade, as well as for ingenious uses of these items in new ensembles (Daly, Eicher, and Erekosima 1986).

The community deities (*am'oru*), representing collective life, bear good will to the Kalabari, generate welfare, and refine the culture. The Kalabari tutelary deity, *Owame-kaso*, is female, representing creativity (ibid.). *Owame-kaso* is said to wear an emblem of refinement, "print" cloth (a cotton textile printed with figurative motifs), which she prohibits the Kalabari to wear.[5] Because they do not want to anger her, the Kalabari assiduously observe the prohibition and wear Indian madras (*injiri*) and a range of other "nonprint" textiles (Eicher 1988). Thus, textiles as symbols of Kalabari participation in world trade were incorporated into their belief system.

The ancestors (*duein*) represent kinship existence in the Kalabari world. Cloth, coral and gold jewelry, and ceremonial hats of leading elders become emblematic property of the kin group at the death of the elders, who then join the ancestors (*duein*). Sociopolitical power in Kalabari terms rests in the hands of adult males. Technically only males become ancestors

at death. Sociopolitical status is represented by men's dress, which includes a variety of hats that focus attention on the head and forehead, where power is said to reside (Erekosima 1989).[6]

Kalabari Life in the 1880s and the 1980s

The 1880s

I will use the first and last decades of the century from the 1880s to the 1980s to analyze change in Kalabari life.[7] The 1880s are important because overcrowding, overpopulation, and internal rivalries forced major migrations from the island of New Calabar. The control of economic, political, and religious life came increasingly from the outside.

Scanty descriptions of the physical environment indicate a relatively simple, indigenous technology with dependence on natural resources for shelter and food. With the exception of Kalabari chiefs' houses at the turn of the century, native materials were used to construct ordinary housing of thatched roofs with walls of sticks and mud or palm mats and poles. Chiefs built large two-story houses (often with large verandas) of imported materials, such as zinc and colored glass, and frequently filled them with imported English furniture.

As the Kalabari had more contact with outsiders, exposure to imported tradestuffs, such as clothing and certain household items, increased (Jones 1963, 74). When exports shifted from slavery to palm oil, ships waited longer in harbors for their puncheons to fill, up to five months as compared to one month needed for loading slaves; this delay allowed Kalabari traders more time to interact with the outsiders (ibid.). English traders did not ordinarily go ashore, but invited the Kalabari to visit and trade with them aboard ship. These occasions provided the Kalabari with opportunities to hear and learn English, observe European dress, and request favored items of dress. Some items were given as gifts: the pullboys of the canoes were given cloth; chiefs were given other items of dress. In addition, a specific pattern of madras became named for the Kalabari trader who first bought and traded it in the Kalabari community. Cloth so named bestowed additional prominence on the family; today, many patterns still retain names originally given to them.[8]

Involvement in a world economy by the Kalabari was indicated by the source of imported textiles and design of garments. For example, there were: wrappers worn by both men and women, made of cotton madras, silk, and velvet from India; printed woolen flannel from England; and handwoven cloth from the Gold Coast, Yorubaland, and the adjacent Igbo town of Akwete. Male garments appear patterned after Englishmen's clothing of the middle nineteenth century (Case 1987).

By 1884, during the reign of the Kalabari ruler Amachree IV, migrations to Buguma, Abonnema, and Bakana were complete, and New Calabar was left deserted. Competition for control of trade was developing from forces outside the Kalabari when the charter of the Royal Niger Company was established by England in 1886, lasting until 1899. This charter excluded any trader not a member of the Company, African or English, from trading on the River Niger. With the establishment of the Nigerian Protectorate, the presence of the English became increasingly pronounced. In 1900, when King Amachree IV died in Buguma, the English were clearly in political control. This control was visibly symbolized by the completion in 1904 of permanent buildings for the colonial government at Degema, across the river from Abonnema.

The English were not only controlling trade and government, but also trying to control religious beliefs by introducing Christianity. Missionaries sought converts within Kalabari communities, but had little success before 1890. However, they gained many converts from 1890 to 1912, which consequently spurred the development from 1912 to 1918 of a revolutionary Kalabari interpretation of Christianity. Syncretism and revival of traditional beliefs followed from 1918 on (Horton 1970).

Missionaries apparently had little impact on Kalabari dress in any of the periods of influence because the Kalabari men already "covered their nakedness," a usual missionary concern. (In the case of women, the impact of missionaries may have been to influence them to wear blouses). Most importantly, the items of Western dress worn by the Kalabari were not imposed upon them by political force or religious zeal. Instead, the Kalabari themselves exercised considerable choice based on the items available to them through trade.

Throughout this period of time, competition among the war canoe houses continued. Rivalry through warfare decreased as the British increased commercial, political, and religious control of the Kalabari world. However, lineage competition continued through display of power and wealth in dress, textiles, and household furnishings obtained in trade. According to oral testimony by Kalabari informants, families treasured the family heirlooms of textiles, coral, and gold that they kept to display at the death of a chief. (During the twentieth century, the practice of conspicuous display at a funeral was expanded to include any prominent elder, and this has continued into the 1990s [Eicher and Erekosima 1987; Daly 1987]).[9]

Written descriptions of Kalabari dress are augmented by photographs. A few published photographs are found in a history on Southern Nigeria (Anene 1966). Additional unpublished photographs, displayed on the sitting room walls or in family albums, can be found in Kalabari homes in

Port Harcourt and Kalabari communities. Sometimes, either handwritten inscriptions or typed captions with dates are found on the back or front of the photograph. Some photographs have been duplicated for extended family members to display—thus copies of the same photograph are frequently seen.[10] Both photographs and written descriptions appear more frequently for Kalabari males, who, as traders, chiefs, and house heads, were in contact with male outsiders, who photographed and recorded their observations. The few images of women available show them photographed with a male, (presumably a husband), wearing a "wrapper" (a rectangular piece of cloth wrapped around the lower torso, in a common West African style) with a blouse or another textile on the upper torso. Because photographs are more available for the males during the century of my analysis, I emphasize male attire in this chapter.

Anene's (1966) analysis of Southern Nigeria from 1885 to 1906 includes photographs showing how Kalabari men borrowed and combined foreign items of dress to create a uniquely Kalabari ensemble. Three selections (two undated and one dated 1905) allow comparison and contrast of Kalabari dress with that of the Efik king (Obong) of Calabar[11] and the king of Okrika. In the first photograph (fig.1), the seated Kalabari Chief Young Briggs from Abonnema is wearing an *attigra* gown (that comes from the Igala area north of the Kalabari in Nigeria) with an elaborately decorated crescent hat called an *ajibulu*. The full-length gown, tailored from handwoven cloth, is still worn by Kalabari chiefs on formal occasions. Standing beside him, his son wears an ankle-length gown called a *doni*, fashioned of fabrics such as damask, with no collar but with a front opening requiring four studs. Under the *doni*, he wears an *etibo* (a knee-length shirt with neckband and no collar) and a madras wrapper.

In contrast, Prince Archibong II, the Efik ruler from 1864 to 1867, sits bare-chested and enthroned, with a wrapper around his waist and a crown on his head (fig. 2). Being bare-chested in public is not appropriate for a Kalabari man, as de Cardi (1899, 508) observed when he noted that Kalabari men would not leave their houses unless fully dressed. The photograph of the king of Okrika (fig. 3), who was deported in 1896, shows him wearing a rumpled gown and a crushed and dented top hat. Neither the style of the gown nor the disheveled appearance show any similarity to Kalabari dress displayed in photographs of that time. Fastidiousness of dress and person, a mark of Kalabari appearance today (Daly, Eicher, and Erekosima 1986), was presumably also a similar requirement in the late 1800s, for de Cardi commented that Bob Manual was "almost a dandy" (1899, 507) and Waddell used the adjective "majestic" to describe Barboy (Talbot 1926, 1:256). Neither description applies to the king of Okrika's photograph.

Figure 1. Chief Young Briggs of Abonnema, coast *warrant chief*, with his son, Chief Frank Briggs. The elder chief wears an *attigra* gown and a decorated *ajibulu* hat. His son wears an ankle-length *doni gown*. Photo made in 1905, courtesy of A. Fombo in J.C. Anene (1966), *Southern Nigeria in Transition, 1885–1906* (p.413).

The ensemble worn by Kalabari males separated them from their neighbors, for the items assembled from their history and the range of their trading contacts resulted in a distinctive appearance. The *attigra* gown came from within Nigeria; but the shirt originated in Europe. Hats and textiles emanated from England and India. The photographs discussed above were dated in the 1880s and later, but we can infer that the apparel and accessories represented ensembles developed and recognized as Kalabari well before those dates. In view of the adroit trading practices of the Kalabari in the early and mid-1800s, such ensembles must have been well-established symbols of successful Kalabari trading at the peak of their commercial achievements.

The Kalabari signified their awareness and knowledge of the outside world through items of dress. Descriptions of Kalabari life at that time reveal a strong commitment to their communal values, as the Kalabari rejected missionary attempts at conversion and resisted increasing control by the English in political and economic matters. Kalabari dress represented their independence of thought and action and their view of a tripartite cosmology of the water people, community deities, and ancestors.

Figure 2. Prince Archibong II, the obong of Calabar, circa 1865. The obong is photographed wearing a wrapper and crown but bare-chested. Courtesy of A. Fombo in J.C. Anene (1966), *Southern Nigeria in Transition, 1885–1906* (p.337).

The water people were seen as responsible for foreign trade, and good fortune in life associated with that trade which included cloth and items of dress that the Kalabari found appealing to wear in combinations unique to them. The community deities specifically designated one trade textile, *injiri* (madras), to be worn by the Kalabari, and another type, "print," as the property of the tutelary deity. Kalabari ancestors were respected by the act of amassing fortunes from trade that included dress and textile items to display in order to indicate lineage prestige.

The 1980s

At the visible level, life in the 1980s differs from life in the 1880s for the Kalabari. Buguma, Abonnema, and Bakana are large and prominent island communities found alongside several smaller but viable Kalabari island settlements. Port Harcourt, a multiethnic city, is a work base for many Kalabari businesspeople, professionals, civil servants, and traders, who maintain a home in their village and return frequently on weekends. Some traditional modes of life are found in the island communities, but many Western conveniences exist alongside them.[12] For example, houses include

Figure 3. The king of Okrika on his deportation in 1896. Courtesy of A. Fombo in J.C. Anene (1966), *Southern Nigeria in Transition, 1885–1906* (p. 412).

elaborate and modern two-story dwellings with air-conditioning, a few two-story dwellings from the early 1900s, and simple mud-walled houses with traditional thatching or aluminum roofs.

From Monday morning until Friday noon, island residents go about their everyday work and children go to school. Beginning at Friday noon, motor launches from Port Harcourt arrive more frequently than during weekdays. Family and *wari* persist as significant foci in Kalabari life, to which the Port Harcourt resident returns on weekends, especially for such major events as funerals, traditional masquerades, or chieftaincy installations. Crowded boats bring those who have come to participate in a funeral ceremony, the most common weekend social activity, which begins by a display of the corpse on a "state" bed, an initial wake on Friday night, a burial by Saturday noon, a family parade through the community, and a final dance a week later (Eicher and Erekosima 1987). Jammed into the boats along with the passengers are crates of Coca Cola, Sprite, hard liquor, yams, and rice for traditional hosting of family and friends during these occasions. The Port Harcourt workers not only reinforce kinship bonds on their weekend visits, but also provide financial support that keeps much of the community economy afloat.

Dress of travelers usually indicates the purpose of their visit home, for Kalabari traditional garb is socially mandatory for adults in all social strata when attending traditional events. There are wide variations in income and social standing, but no matter what the income level, Kalabari adults wear Kalabari dress when needed. Less fortunate individuals may have only one Kalabari outfit; more fortunate often have a large wardrobe to select from. Thus, women wear a blouse and double wrapper set called *bite sara*, the most frequent example being a white eyelet blouse with madras wrappers (Iyalla 1968; Daly 1983, 1984); men, the knee-length, shirt-like garment called an *etibo* with a madras wrapper beneath it; or perhaps an upper-torso tailored garment called a *woko* of gabardine, worn either with matching gabardine trousers or with a madras wrapper. If dressed in Western style upon arrival in their home community, both men and women change to traditional attire to pay respect to families in mourning, to stroll around the town, and to attend church services on Sunday. No matter how limited or extensive one's wardrobe, Kalabari men and women take pride in being turned out properly in Kalabari dress for weekend activities (Daly 1984; Daly, Eicher, and Erekosima 1986; Erekosima 1989).

Kalabari men's dress indicates a hierarchy that parallels age-grade and political status. The rules of dress for these ensembles are as follows: *asawo* or the "young men that matter" wear the shirt called an *etibo* with an *injiri* wrapper; the *opu asawo* (gentlemen of substance) wear the outfit called a *woko* with either a wrapper or matched trousers and appropriate accessories of hat, cane, and jewelry; and *alabo* (the chiefs) wear the gown called a *doni* with shirt and wrapper, plus a hat and cane. The king wears a madras gown with a matching madras wrapper called an *ebu*. *Attigra* gowns are by custom reserved for chiefs and the king, to be worn at ceremonies (Erekosima and Eicher 1980; Erekosima 1982; Erekosima 1989, 1995). When finances are meager, clothing may be borrowed, when possible, or approximated. For example, for young or impoverished males, a white European-style dress shirt may be used in place of a white *etibo* for a top garment. However, a madras (*injiri*) wrapper will always be worn with either shirt or *etibo*. The ensembles of *woko, doni, ebu*, and *attigra* with appropriate headgear can be borrowed from the corporate store of family heirlooms for ritual occasions, such as required for participation as a family mourner in a funeral. Adult males recognized as *opu asawo* and *alabo* will have the necessary finances to own the garments and accessories required for their position and the occasions when they are called upon to wear them.

When in mourning, the immediate family of the deceased (males and females, children and adults) meet special dress requirements for taking

the body home from the mortuary to lie in state for the initial wake, for the burial, for the last wake, parade, and funeral dance (Eicher and Erekosima 1987). Other adolescent males and females, not yet married, not yet adults, thus not yet part of the adult social structure, sometimes wear western dress, such as jeans, trousers and shirts, western style "frocks," skirts, and blouses, depending on current fashion and the occasion. At large funeral wakes, youth occasionally wear western styles for the event to dance to loud, popular music from stereos; others choose to wear traditional dress. In contrast, adults almost without exception wear traditional garb to dance traditional steps to the beat of traditional drums or to stereos playing traditional music. Family members and close friends of the deceased, youth and adults, dress in traditional dress for the church funeral service, burial, family parade, and final dance.

How is change related to the way the Kalabari dress? Signs of change indicating involvement in an industrial world are displayed in the island communities by new community buildings and personal homes. Kalabari people had access to a wider range of jobs in the 1980s than in the 1880s and to more creature comforts in housing and transportation. Many Western-style material possessions in Kalabari life are available and prized, both in Port Harcourt and in the island communities; possession of such conveniences varies according to personal wealth. Thus, change in many areas has been eagerly embraced and internalized; aspects of Kalabari life resemble life in larger Nigerian, West African, and Western worlds. With new occupations and modern ways of living in the 1980s, the Kalabari wear Western dress when interacting with the Western world.

However, the Kalabari exhibit their link to traditional Kalabari beliefs about the water people, community deities, and ancestors when they wear Kalabari dress to attend funerals, masquerades, chieftaincy installations, and other island celebrations. These occasions allow the Kalabari to express their loyalty to community and kin and to reaffirm their Kalabari identity.[13]

Dress and textile items involve material goods that entered Kalabari life through the process of trade over a period of time extending back to the late 1400s. These items both glorify Kalabari commercial prowess of that time and exemplify cultural authentication, the process whereby borrowed objects become transformed and indigenously meaningful. Where beliefs and practices stem from the Kalabari past (with Western ideas either rejected or modified extensively), the arts of dress and textiles visibly symbolize Kalabari beliefs and identity.

The continuity of their worldview is represented by the continuity of male traditional dress in the 1980s. *Attigra* and *doni* gowns, *etibo* shirts, and *ajibulu* hats, for example, are almost duplicate examples of 1880s garments. Although Kalabari men and women of the 1980s have traveled far

Figure 4. An example of an *attigra* gown worn with an *ajibulu* hat during a masquerade performance in the 1980s. This chief carries an elephant tusk and fan and has a circlet of leopard's teeth. (Photograph by Carolyn J. Eicher.)

beyond the boundaries crossed by their forebears who were traders, when they return home they wear the ensembles of dress and display the textiles that echo the past and reinforce their pride in being Kalabari.[14] They have incorporated items from worldwide sources, placing them in creative juxtaposition, making a composite not English, Portuguese, Dutch, or Indian, but Kalabari.

Curtin (1984, 1) has observed that most changes within a society come from external stimulation, with trade and exchange providing perhaps the the most important stimuli, for "no human group could invent by itself more than a small part of its cultural and technical heritage." This observation has meaning for the Kalabari material world of the 1980s. However, as Dike (1956) observed, European influence was "remarkably small" in the area of African traditional and political beliefs. The Kalabari use their traditional dress ensembles of culturally authenticated items, assembled from years of trade, as visible symbols of an invisible worldview.[15]

Acknowledgments

Among the many interests that J. Allan Beegle has had in teaching, research, and his personal life is a concern with the topic of rootedness as expressed by ethnic identity. My doctoral research under his direction

dealt with the topic of Finnish ethnic identity in the "cutover" area of the Upper Peninsula of Michigan, where much outmigration had occurred.

Although the weather was severe and making a living was precarious, many families declined to migrate and some, we found, returned to live in what they called "God's country." We thought the heritage of being Finnish would prove to be a significant reason to stay or return, but the data did not support that hypothesis. Nevertheless, I gained experience as a fieldworker and went on to other endeavors. Among these endeavors has been a research involvement since 1963 in Nigeria, where dress and adornment serve as a visible ethnic identifier along with such other identifiers as language. My teaching and research at Michigan State University and at the University of Minnesota have focused on dress as a significant variable in everyday life. It is a pleasure to come full circle to focus on ethnicity again in this chapter.

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Notes

1. I define dress as presented in a paper by Eicher and Roach-Higgins (1989) as follows: "an assemblage of body modifications and supplements displayed by a person in the presentation of self. This self is located within a physical body that has a visible appearance and a continuity often referred to as an identity."
2. This migration does not easily dissolve or weaken ethnic identity and loyalty for Kalabari or other Nigerians. Commitment to and identification with ethnic roots and the home community persist for migrants, as equally for those well-educated, successful, and with prominent jobs, as for those subsisting marginally. Cities are seen as places of transitory existence; "home" is the village of one's forebears; kin groups expect the successful individual to come home regularly, to build, improve, and maintain a house, and to support kinfolk. This observation is based on my familiarity with Nigeria as a whole, as well as with the Kalabari people. Migration to urban areas for work is common, but the loyalty to one's home appears to remain paramount in one's life and extends to one's offspring as well, even though the offspring may not have been born in the home village.
3. DeCardi noted their color preference for red, blue, and white madras in the late 1800s. These same color preferences existed in the 1980s, slightly widened, as I was told by exporters in India whom I interviewed in 1988. They reported that Kalabari preferences are limited to nine specific colors (indigo, red, burgundy, white, beige, orange, green, yellow, and black), combined in a limited number of particular plaid patterns. The marked preference of the Kalabari for madras is noteworthy. Even though other West African peoples, such as adjacent Rivers groups and the Igbo, wear madras, they also wear many varieties of printed textiles.
4. Horton uses the terms *village heroes* for *am'oru*, *ancestors* for *duein*, and *water people* for *owu'amapu*. Erekosima translates the word *am'oru* as *community deities* instead of village heroes, as he maintains this interpretation is more accurate, and its meaning more accurately includes the female tutelary deity, *Owame-akaso*. The first published reference using the modified terminology can be found in Daly, Eicher, and Erekosima (1986).

5. Barley (1988, 82 n.59) incorrectly assumes that this prohibition against using printed textiles has broken down because the photograph of King Amachree IV "shows the king seated on a chair covered with a textile that depicts large flowers." The textile Barley describes is what the Kalabari call "damask," which has floral textile designs woven in the fabric and does not belong to the Kalabari category of cotton "prints."
6. Headgear of the carved figures in the ancestor shrines in the major family compounds is most often a hat, sometimes a masquerade headdress that was owned by the lineage (Barley 1987; Erekosima 1988).
7. Documentation for the 1880s comes from written accounts by both non-Africans and Africans (including Kalabari), Kalabari oral history and testimony, and photographs.
8. A thorough documentation of cloth names has yet to be undertaken. Daly (1984) discusses "named" cloth and the works by Renne (1985); Erekosima and Eicher (1981); Eicher and Erekosima with Thieme (1982); Eicher, Erekosima and Liedholm (1982) also refer to the naming of the Kalabari cut-thread cloth. I have been shown many cloths used by the Kalabari that are identified by name, a common practice throughout West Africa. Other West African groups name cloth by describing or commenting about the pattern, giving such names as "polo" (the English equivalent of the American candy called "Lifesavers") or ministers' houses (a social comment referring to a pattern seen as the shape of a house). Among the Yoruba, the cloth name may be in the form of a proverb (Boyer 1983). I am not familiar with other groups who name cloth after a person or lineage, as is done among the Kalabari. A discussion of naming of motifs of wax-printed textiles for the West African market can be found in Ruth Nielsen (1979).
9. Field data collected in 1988 indicates that the practice of display of family heirlooms of cloth and ornament most probably began first with chiefs. According to accounts given to me in 1988, large displays of cloth and other personal possessions were heaped on the corpse of a chief, with a majority of the possessions buried with the corpse. Later, the practice of display was apparently extended to other deceased elders and the burying of possessions terminated (Eicher 1988).
10. Dates in parentheses for each photograph are exactly as I found on them. At this point, I am accepting the date presented as accurate.
11. The Obong of Calabar is from the Efik ethnic group who live in what is called "Old Calabar," to the east of New Calabar and the Kalabari ethnic group. Apparently Dutch and English traders provided a confusion in place names. The Efik and Kalabari are not related.
12. A description of one community, Buguma, provides an example of changes in material resources from the 1880s to the 1980s. The island town (estimated population of 200,000) is known as Buguma City, to emphasize its increasing urban amenities. Before the 1980s, there were no motor vehicles. Now a few cars travel the main road (having reached the island by tortuous road and ferry), along with minivans and motorbikes that provide a land transport alternative to some nearby villages. Two western-style hotels were built in 1984; at

the same time, construction of the new King Amachree IV Memorial Hall began on the town square. Opposite the Memorial Hall is the drum house of the prestigeful men's society known as Ekine, and in the middle of the square is a towering sculpture of the founder of Buguma, King Amachree IV. Along with a bank, post office, and police post are three large Christian churches (Baptist, Anglican, and African), a smaller Faith Tabernacle Church, ten prayer houses, and a shrine to Owame-kaso (the tutelary goddess). Educational facilities include a nursery school, several primary and four secondary schools. After secondary school, whenever possible, children are educated for contemporary professions and occupations, and often sent to a university in Nigeria or abroad. A government hospital, one private clinic, and several native doctors provide medical attention. Dwellings vary from modest mud and thatch roofed structures to several-story cement block or concrete structures that are as up-to-date as finances allow; some posh by any standard, with modern, convenient bathrooms, kitchens, appliances, and furniture. Municipal facilities for piped water and electricity exist but rarely function. Water is usually carried from town wells; only residents with private generators for their compounds enjoy a constant and steady supply of electricity. Those without generators use kerosene for lamps and cooking, hot charcoal for irons, and foot-pedaled sewing-machines. For women, making a living includes petty trade, hairdressing, catering for small food stalls and bars, and cutting designs in madras, a textile art traditional only to the Kalabari. Both men and women teach; both own shops that specialize in imported textiles, small household and personal supplies, and foodstuffs. Primarily men perform commercial services, such as watch and shoe repair, photography, and tailoring traditional Kalabari dress. A few men and women specialize in making traditional, ceremonial headgear.

13. Two subcategories of Kalabari identity are also displayed in traditional dress: lineage and gender distinctions, both of which existed in the 1880s, and have been mentioned briefly. Textiles used in wrappers appear as symbols of lineage. A trader's name is identified with his lineage, and some names of textiles are lineage names, such as Wokoma or Owunari. Thus, the continued use of such named textiles constantly reinforces the pride of the designated lineage. In addition, a lineage gains prestige at special events when ceremonial dress is worn: the textiles and accessories display its socioeconomic power. Similarly, textiles displayed on funeral beds and walls symbolize lineage identity and power.

    Gender distinctions have also been mentioned in the discussion of position of the male. Women's dress also has a ranking system that indicates biological and procreative roles as so defined by the Kalabari. Erekosima (1982, 1984, 1989) analyzes men's dress and sociopolitical position. Daly (1983, 1984) analyzes stages of female development and dress. Discussion comparing Kalabari gender differences as shown through dress can be found in Michelman (1987), who analyzes body, dress, and dance of both males and females.

14. This observation is similar to one from Loomis and Beegle (1975, 22) regarding the significance of the local community: "Although Americans move about much more than their parents, the most meaningful interactions generally transpire within the confines of the local community."

15. When this chapter was first presented at the symposium honoring Professor Beegle in Athens, Georgia, in 1988 and later in a review by Nan Johnson, the question arose whether or not the "sartorial imperialism" was inevitable in regard to the traditional dress of the Kalabari. The answer to this question has two parts. First, the term "sartorial imperialism" implies domination or compulsion and does not apply to Kalabari dress. Instead, the Kalabari, as I indicate by the historical data in this chapter, exercised voluntary choice in their selection of cloth and apparel, in both design and style, from those items available through trade. Second, the continued use of what the Kalabari themselves call "Kalabari dress" has continued vigorously into the 1990s. I predict it will continue because both Kalabari men and women talk about Kalabari dress and wear it with much pride when strolling in their island communities on weekends, for funerals, chieftaincy installations, or other celebrations. My field observations during the decade of the 1980s indicate that adolescents and adults wear Western dress during their periods of schooling and when engaged in work situations in Port Harcourt. When they play traditional roles in funerals or other rituals, they wear Kalabari dress.

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THE CALL OF
CHANGE, (
MIGRANTS

Gaston J. Labad

Introduction

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