

Genesis 3 and Evolution of Costume among Asarama People of Rivers State (Niger-Delta), Nigeria

Ucheawaji G. Josiah
Phone: 07030591247
E-mail: goddey032003@yahoo.com
Religious Studies Department,
Babcock University,
Ilisan Remo, Ogun State, Nigeria

Abstract

The inception of sin as revealed in Genesis 3 is tied to the emergence and evolution of costume: *chagoroth* (that is, loincloth, in Genesis 3:7) and *kathnuth* 'or (garment of skin in Genesis 3:21). However, through the centuries, humans had faced the changing patterns and designs of costume. This is typical of the Asarama people of Rivers State, Niger Delta. This paper therefore examines and submits that the pre-colonial male costume consisted of *Mkpopu* (George) used by 'free born' male elders tied mainly for identification purpose. Latter additions were *Ekut-ikpo* (towel-like clothe) and *Alo* (foreign wax). The pre-colonial female costume were *Asi-ebon-iiba* (double waist-beads) tied around the waist without any dress on top. Others were velvet and *Ikaki*, *Tawul-irak-ebon* and *Dembesi* (English damask). The Colonial/post colonial male costume were *Mkpopu* though used by females also at this time, *Etibor*, *Owokor*, *Atoro-onyedua* (nicknamed *okirika*) and trousers were added. The Colonial/post colonial female costume was made up of a pair of trousers, and *Atoro-onye-dua* or *etomelek-ekene-isim* aided by modernism. The evolution of costume in Genesis 3 is made evident among Asarama people of Rivers State, Niger Delta

Keywords: Asarama people of Rivers State, evolution of costume, Genesis 3, pre-colonial, colonial/postcolonial eras

1. Introduction

During the pre-sin period on earth the first couple were naked although nakedness at that point never brought shame (Genesis 2:25). Nevertheless, ever since the fall (Genesis 3), humans have designed and adorned themselves with costume (Running: 1982) the word costume here means fabrics used to cover the body. At the inception of sin, the generic man (humanity), realized their naked state and made for themselves *chagoroth* (that is, loincloth, Genesis 3:7), this they made to cover their shame. When they heard the sound of God walking in the garden, in the cool of the day, they both hid themselves among the trees of the garden. When God called on the masculine man, he responded "I heard your voice in the garden, and I was afraid because I was **naked**; and I hid myself" (Genesis 3:10). Notice, this statement was made after they had sewed for themselves loincloth (Genesis 3:7).

Consequently, in verse 21 we are told of God making for them *kathnuth* 'or (garment of skin) and clothed them. But, why would God make for man *kathnuth* 'or (garment of skin)? What was wrong with *chagoroth* (that is, loincloth) made by man for covering? Here we see a seeming evolution of clothing from one stage to another which however, calls for an appraisal. Hence, this paper examined the progression of clothing in Asarama community using the text of Genesis 3 as a platform. The paper employed majorly, the oral interview method whose respondents' data are presented in a tabular form at the end of the paper, though not precluding the descriptive method to study. In this work, Asarama and Obolo are used interchangeably to represent the same people. This is so because Obolo is the language of the Asarama people.

2. Analysis of some Key Words in Genesis 3 in relation to Costume

2.1 'êrōmmim

'êrōmmim is from the word 'êrōm an adjective meaning 'Naked' or 'nakedness,' describing a state of nudity. 'êrōm is used ten times to designate spiritual and physical nakedness. As used for example of Adam and Eve in Genesis 3: 7, 10, 11 (Laird Harris: 1980). To be "Naked" in the Old Testament comes from various derivatives of Hebrew 'ur, 'arah, 'arom (adj.) and 'erwah (noun). In the New Testament the adjective is the Greek *gumnos*; the noun: *gumnotes*, with verb: *gumneteuo*, as shown in 1Corinthians 4:11. Both the Hebrew and Greek forms

mean “without clothing,” So in Genesis 2:25; 3:7. A very common use of “naked” is also “without proper clothing” (Job 22:6; 1 Corinthians 4:11, etc.). The Jews objected vigorously to exposure of the body (even athletes insisting on a loin-cloth {compare 2 Maccabees 4:12, 13}). A keen study of the texts of Isaiah 20:2-4; Lamentation 1:8; Hosea 2:3; Nahum 3:5, reveals a connection between nudity and shame. It shows that compulsory nudity was the extreme of shame and humiliation. No wonder the scriptures emphasis on Israel's high sexual morality (Bromiley: 1987).

2.2 “*leh th^e’ enah*”

“*leh th^e’ enah* - translated “Fig leaves.” This was first mentioned in Genesis 3:7. It is also mentioned in Deuteronomy 8:8 as one of the valuable products of Palestine (Bromiley: 1987). It was a sign of peace and prosperity (1 Kings 4:25; Micah 4:4; Zechariah 3:10). Figs were used medicinally (2Kings 20:7) and pressed together and formed into “cakes” as articles of diet (1Samuel 30:12; Jeremiah 24:2). The fig-tree of Palestine produces two and sometimes three crops of figs in a year. Firstly, the *bikkurah*, or “early-ripe fig” (Micah 7:1; Isaiah 28:4; Hosea 9:10), which is ripe about the end of June, dropping off as soon as it is ripe (Nahum 3:12). Secondly, the *kermus*, or “summer fig” which begins to be formed, and is ripe about August; and thirdly, the *pag* (plural “green figs,” Songs of Solomon 2:13). It has its Greek equivalent as *olynthos* (Revelation 6:13). It is also known as “the untimely fig” or “winter fig,” which ripens in sheltered spots in spring (Masterman in Bromiley: 1987). It is the leaves of this medicinal plant that the first pair used for clothing. It follows therefore to infer at this juncture that clothing materials should be such that will enhance human health apart from the covering purpose.

2.3 *Chagoroth*

Clothing is employed in connection with covering of the body for warmth or reason of modesty (Nick: 1965). *Chagoroth* rendered by translators as *girdle*, *loincloth*, or *apron* (Sayce in Bromiley: 1987), has its Greek equivalent as *simikrintion* (Hasting: 1981; Acts 19:12), which was a wrapper of coloured cotton in shape and size, resembling a “bath-towel,” that is the *ogodo* used by the Igbo people of the south-eastern Nigeria; the *bante*, used by the Yoruba people of the south-western Nigeria, and the *iba*, used by the Obolo people of Rivers State, the south-southern region of Nigeria. Such costume was worn by fishermen, potters, water carriers, sewyers, craftsmen and by other artisans. Following the local situation of traditional Igbo, Yoruba and Obolo peoples of Nigeria whose aforementioned cloth, (similar to the *Chagoroth*) covers only the lower private part of the human body, it therefore follows to claim that such situation which exposes the body might have probably informed the introduction of the *kathnuth* ‘or that is, “garments of skin” designed by God for proper covering of nakedness.

2.4 *kathnuth* ‘or

‘*ôr* -skin, hide.

This word is used both of men's and animals' skins. It indicates the skin of man fifty-five times. While it can designate the outer covering of the body (Job 10:11; Lamentation 3:4; Ezekiel 37:6, 8), it also at times is used metonymically to indicate the whole body (Exodus 22:27; Job19:26). Various characteristics of the skin are mentioned. Men cannot change its color (Jeremiah 13:23). After talking with God on Mount Sinai, the skin of Moses' face shone (Exodus 34:29, 30, 35).

This word is used forty-four times to indicate the skin of an animal. With the exception of the harpooning of the skin of leviathan (Job 41:7) this word always designates the hide of animals after skinning. These hides were used for garments (Genesis 3:21; 2Kings 1:8). Hides were also used as coverings for the tabernacle (Exodus 25:5), and also for the ark and the sacred utensils (Numbers 4:6). The hides of sacrificed animals were disposed of variously depending upon the kind of sacrifice. The hides of the sin offering for the priest or the whole community were to be destroyed (Exodus 29:14; Leviticus 4:11, 21; 8:17; 9:11; 16:27). The hides of other sin offerings and the burnt offering were assigned to the priests (Leviticus 5:13; 7:8).

But God took skins of animals and made clothes for Adam and Eve so that they could cover their bodies. It is instructive to note that the Hebrew word translated “coats” or “tunics” or “garments of skin” (Genesis 3:21), means literally “covering robes.” Although, (Nichol: 1978) observed that God provided Adam and Eve with durable clothing suitable for the hard labour that lay ahead, and as a protection against the extremes of heat and cold that followed the fall, the clothes that God made for the first couple were not primarily for adornment, nor even for keeping warm; their chief object **was to cover the nakedness of the body**. Accordingly, (Butterweck:

1995) observes that the provision of the *kathnuth* 'or that is, "garments of skin" by God in Genesis 3:21 ended the '*ērōmmim* (*nakedness*) in Genesis 2: 25. This implies that proper covering is intended by God and should be followed as the norm. Moreso, the evolution of dress of any kind should follow the principle of proper covering. Nevertheless, there are three common, general words for clothing or garments in the Hebrew land. They are: *begeh* used for all kinds of clothing in general as seen in Lev. 13:56 (Navon: 2004), *simlah*, used in Genesis 35:2 (Nielsen: 2013) and *salmah*. The last two are thought to be the same word via transposition of the "l" and the "m" and both have a sense of "to clothe"

3. Brief History on the Origin of Asarama People of Obolo Community

This Obolo people are located in the Niger Delta, Rivers State in Nigeria they are otherwise known as the Adoni people their common language also called "Obolo". the following villages make up the Obolo community , Asarama, Agutu-Obolo, Uyangala, Ngo, Ama-ikut, Ebukuma, Okot-ette, Uyaeada, Egedem, Agana, Ekede, Ama-daka, Ama-iko, Okolo-ile, Ibono, Ataba, Ilotombi, Orong-ijah, Demma, and Ajakajak. All these villages have a common culture and language. According to various elders of Asarama community like Dede Fubara-boye Joseph, Dede Sanderson mark Otikor, Dede Loveday Uneh and others, Asarama people by nature are warriors. Their war-likeness was exhibited in their character during the migration process to their present settlement.

It is held that the Asarama people migrated from Izon (Ijaw) land. The Midwest of Nigeria particularly from a place called **Sasarama** to a place called Agba-aya-ma from whence they later, through conquest took over the place called Okpong-unon. From Opong-unon, they migrated to Sarama-ototo, from whence they moved to Okupo. And from Okupo they sojourned to Oka-ama from where they finally settled in Asarama. Asarama is said to have been located by a man called Iranti, a hunter who crossed over the creek from Oka-ama for hunting and eventually came across a stream of drinking water which eventually attracted the whole villagers from Oka-ama to it for settlement.

The name Asarama also could be an adulterated form of the original place Asarama in Ijaw land. Asarama community is believed to be the oldest/chief of all Obolo communities. As the Asarama people moved from Ijaw land , they came along with the deities Yok-Obolo and Aman-Obolo (both are consorts). These deities are believed to be the father as well as mother respectively of all Obolo people. Nevertheless, it is generally believed in spite of the fact that Asarama community is directly and frequently associated with Yok-Obolo, and Aman-Obolo, that these deities own all Obolo (Adoni) people of Rivers State.

3.1. Male's Dress Culture during the Pre-colonial Asarama

According to Dede Edwin Adam, an elder in Asarama town of Obolo community of Rivers State, wrapper has been the major clothing article of the Asaram people for both males and females. He goes further stating certain style of cloth tying in the community. He holds that the cloth called *Mkpopu* (George) was used for male elders, who were 'free born'. This cloth he adds was tied with the style known as *utong-ikwi* (it is tied to the right hand side by free born while slaves tie to the left side of the waist), mainly for identification purpose.

Nevertheless, elder Loveday Uneh holds that such tying differentiates between the royal highness and others of the community rather than free born and subjects. However to elder Sanderson mark Otikor, gathering from an interview granted to him on the 29th April, 2007, clothing article in pre-colonial Asarama, was *Ekut-ikpo* (towel-like cloth), *Alo* (foreign wax), was later added then the elder's cloth called *Mkpopu* (George). All these clothes he holds were tied with the shirt called *Afonte jijini* or *Afroko*. He further States that in Asarama community, they were neither trousers nor pant. In the place of pant, the traditional Asarama people especially the elders, do what is called *Ibaja-iba* or *Igobo-iba* with the towel-like material called *Ekut-ikpo*. It is worthy of note, that the young boys and girls neither tied neither cloth nor wore shirt until a certain age.

For the men, Dede Loveday Uneh identified the process involved in the covering of boys who are of the age of wrappers tying as period of *Njaja-Ekut*. This period was a time when the young boy was of the age of covering his nakedness. At this stage, the father of the boy or the mother or any relation, where the parents of the boy are late, will present drinks to the elders, and give them *Mkpopu* (that is, a piece of George) then one of the elders will tie it at the boys waist signifying that he is of the age of maturity. Then shoe or slippers could be worn by the boy having been authorized by the elders of the family to do so.

As elder Edwin Adam would say, "any youth then who had not been authorized to tie cloth or put on shoes, that went ahead to do so, was bewitched and rendered useless for challenging the elders especially where he refuses to pay a fine given him for such acts". With reference still to the olden times, elders Otikor, Adam and Uneh

hold that trousers came later to be added to the cloth-tying culture of Asarama people. The trouser that came during the period, they admit was called *tajanini* tied with rope in place of belts, the leg without double turn-up as the present ones have. The trouser was spacious from top but tight at the foot edge. Moreso, Dede Loveday Uneh posits that the shirt called *Etibor* (woolly and heavy and is long-sleeved) and *Oworkor* short-sleeved before this present time, had collars as against what we have now. All these were available for the covering of the Asarama males during the pre-colonial period especially when the males are at the prime of manhood.

3.2. Female's dress culture during the pre-colonial Asarama

According to some elderly women of Asarama community like mama Atespirimie Zillah T., Celestina Justus and others, there was no skirt nor dress for women in Asarama community during the pre-colonial periods. The women had a unique dress-culture as did the men. For the young ladies who had not attained the age of marriage, what is called *asi-ebon-iba* (double beads) was tied around the waist without any dress on top. When these young ladies grow into womanhood, especially at their menstrual ages, they are confined in a place. This confinement is known as *Uwo-Ekut*. The aim of this confinement is to teach the young ladies who are coming into womanhood, how to tie wrappers. *Uwo-Ekut* literally is translated as "house of wrappers". At the time of confinement, this young ladies tie one yard of a cloth called "Okpoko-Esuu" (Lagos cloth) above the knee. It is worthy of note that before this confinement, a lady is not authorized to tie any cloth, if found covered with cloth, it suggests that such lady has had sexual intercourse before her marriage, hence, such covering of shame. This culture indeed could be said to have enhanced morality in the society.

Nevertheless, when a lady has successfully passed through the training of wrapper-tying, she is released and at this time, she comes out of the confinement with several wrappers tied with the help of rope so as to hold each wrapper to the waist. The foregoing is what is being called *fanti*. The major types of wrappers tied when coming out of this confinement are called *velvet* and *Ikaki*. In the place of pants or undergarment, the use of *Tawul-irak-ebon* was adopted. Moreover, the type of wrapper called *Dembesi* (English damask) was used by women only at this period.

3.3. Male's dress culture in the colonial/post-colonial Asarama

It is observed that in traditional ancient Asarama community according to elder Edwin Adam, tying of *Mkpopu* (*George*) as well as *Igobo-iba* (modern napkin) by both elderly males and females was obtainable but now *Mkpopu* tying has no restrictions. Even young boys and girls of tender age could tie it. More so, trouser wearing as elder Uneh put it "has almost taken away our wrapper tying culture" he adds that the unique dress culture of Asarama people has been bastardized with the introduction of civilization in Asarama community. Still maintaining the traditional dress culture of Asarama people, *Mkpopu* has become the general clothe used by all males and females, old and young. These clothes could have different colors but same quality and make.

Today, youths and elders put on *Etibor* and *Owokor* with either a pair of trouser or *Mkpopu* below. These shirts do not have collar presently, as did early times. It is important to note that the traditional Asarama people in order to maintain their culture of using bath-towel for what they call *Ibana-iba* or *Igobo-iba*, till present, when elders die (either male or female), the eldest son or daughter as the case may be, is called up to dress his or her parent with the bath-towel though this act is not observed by all in the community. The use of *Atoro-onyedua* (nicknamed *Okirika*) need not be forgotten. These clothes both trousers, long sleeves and short sleeves were gotten already sewn and brought to the market where the people go and get the clothes in vogue. This, without mincing words influenced the traditional cloth-tying culture of Obolo people of Rivers State.

3.4. Female's Dress Culture in the Colonial/Post-colonial Asarama

Wrappers still remain the major article of covering in Asarama community for the females. However, the addition of the top need not be overlooked. Presently, ladies tie especially the common *Mkpopu* (*George*) double with blouse as dress for the top. According to mama celestial Justus, ladies from kula in Kalabari community of river State during and after the Nigerian civil war were putting on trousers, so also Asarama ladies copied as they lived among them. In essence, as modernity grew, wears changed in Asarama community. In spite of the fact that civilization brought the idea of women putting on a pair of trousers in Asarama community, the elders still frown at women on trousers, perhaps due to the fact that the trouser had not been an article of dressing in the community from the onset.

Moreover, the idea of wearing gowns came up in Asarama community during the period of colonialism. It came when wears already sewn were brought for sale. These cloths called *Atoro-onye-dua* or *etomelek-ekene-isim*. It is

in a rhetorical question form translated “who was it measured on before sewing?” In other words, the attire came to them already sewn. It was during this period of colonialism that Christianity came to Asarama and people were converted, so the young ladies who when at home, as it were, covered their lower part with beads, do go to church with a long gown (*Atoro-onye-dua*) which also is pulled off on getting back home from the church, thus, going back to status quo - beads wearing on the waist. However, as the people got more civilized, the use of beads for covering was abandoned, more so, the covering of the breast with wrappers was transformed into wearing a dress with bra on the top and tying of wrappers below with head-gear on the head.

4. Conclusion

It should be noted that clothing in Asarama community of Rivers State borders on tying of wrappers for both males and females. There were certain wrappers used by both sexes such as- *Alo* (foreign wax), *Mkpopu* (George), *Ekut-ikpo* (towel-like material). However, the females had theirs as *Dembesi* (Englishh damask), *Esu* (Lagos cloth) heavy in nature. Trousers, gowns, blouses, were not original wears of Obolo people of Rivers State. They were later additions to the article of covering in Asarama dress culture during the colonial as well as post colonial periods. Before tying cloth for both males and females, there must be processes to follow; for ladies, confinement process while for men presentation of drinks to elders was necessary. To ancient Obolo people, covering was only important when one has reached maturity stage for the males and females alike. In other words, when one’s eyes are open and they know they are naked (Genesis 3:7) then they could cover. In light of this, one could see clearly Butterweck’s analysis when he explains that the knowledge of *erummim* (nakedness) in Gen.3:7, leads to God intervention in providing the *or* (skin) which ends the *arummim* of Genesis. 2:25. From the above, we could conclude that just as in biblical account, the African traditional Obolo culture on costume has evolved through history. Trousers as Stated had never been men’s wear from inception. It was a borrowed culture from the colonial invaders. Cloth-tying had been the culture of Obolo people of Rivers State before the introduction of other articles for covering. Clearly, the transition from *chagoroth* (loincloth) to *chathnuth* ‘or (that is, garment of skin for proper covering) is evident in Genesis 3 and remains instructive for evolution of costume in Asarama community of Rivers State, Nigeria.

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Table 1: Particulars of some Respondents Interviewed in Asarama Community of Rivers State, Niger Delta Nigeria

S/N	NAMES OF RESPONDENTS	AGE	OCCUPATION	ADDRESS	DATE OF INTERVIEW
1	Eld. Edwin Adam	84yrs.	Craft-man	Asarama town	Dec.19 th ,2007
2	Mama Ogbotabo	78yrs	Craft-woman	Asarama town	Dec. 19,2007
3	Elder Sanderson Mark Otikor	81yrs	Fisher-man	Asarama town	April,29 th ,2007
4	Mama Atespirimie Zillah T.D	82yrs	Craft-woman	Asarama town	April 28,2007
5	Chief Mbu Ebiriene	78yrs	Crowned chief	Iyong-Orong, Asarama town	Dec. 31 st 2007
6	Mama Selina M. Otikor	76yrs	Clergy woman	Asarama town	April 29, 2007
7	Mama Celestina Justus	65yrs	Craft-woman	Asarama town	Dec. 28,2007
8	Eld. Loveday Uneh	71yrs	Fisherman	Asarama town	Jan. 4,2008
9	Dede Fubara-Aboye Joseph	68yrs	Chief-priest of Yok-Obolo	Asarama town	Dec.21, 2007
10	Chief Kurukuru Owen	58yrs	Crowned chief	Asarama town	Jan. 4, 2008
11	Mr. Paul N. Reuben	66yrs	Fisherman	Asalakiri Asarama town	Dec. 16 ,2007
12	Chief Lasbery L. A	75yrs	Crowned chief	Asarama town	Dec. 16,2007
13	Eld. Sunday Ebeke	76yrs	Fisherman	Asarama town	April 30,2007
14	Eld. Frankline E.	77yrs	Fisherman	Asarama town	April 30, 2007
15	Eld. Waribelega	76yrs	Fisherman	Asarama town	Dec. 17, 2007
16	Chief Manoah O. Ogogo	68yrs	Crowned chief	Asarama town	Dec. 18,2007
17	Eld. Udung Uboada	76yrs	Fisherman	Asarama town	Jan, 3 2008
18	Sir Inye Nathaniel	63yrs	Civil servant	Asarama town	Dec.18,2007
19	Eld. Clement Simeon	72yrs	Fisherman	Asarama town	Jan. 6 2007
20	Eld. Sunday Sunju	69yrs	Fisherman	Asarama town	Dec. 20,2007
21	Mr. Sivalnus S. Otikor	50yrs	Civil servant	Asarama town	Dec,20,2007
22	Chief Tallick A	71yrs	Crowned chief	Asarama town	Jan,3,2007
23	Eld. Levi. H. Usende	69yrs	Fisherman	Asarama town	April,28,2007

The Author: Ucheawaji G. Josiah, (PhD in view, 2008- date, Emphasis on Old Testament Studies), University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Oyo State; (MA, Old Testament Studies, 2008), University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Oyo State; (BA, Theology, 2005), Babcock University, Ilishan Remo, Ogun State. Member of the Society of Biblical Literature USA, 2012 till date; member of the Nigerian Association of Biblical Studies (NABIS), 2012 till date; member of the Nigeria Association for the Study of Religions (NASR) 2013 till date.