

A REVIEW OF MATERIAL AND NON-MATERIAL CULTURAL ASPECTS OF EBIRA PEOPLE OF KOGI STATE, NIGERIA

Sadiq Adeiza Shehu
Department of History,
University of Maiduguri, Borno state
shehusadiqadeiza11@gmail.com
Samaila Simon Shehu
Department of History
University of Maiduguri, Borno state
samailasimonshehus@unimaid.com
Sadiq Lawan
Department of Visual and Performing Arts
University of Maiduguri, Borno state
sadiqlawan6@gmail.com

Abstract

Culture has been described as the totality of people's way of life. Long before now the Ebira people had culture that is associated with them, this paper look at various definition of the term culture by different scholars and the components of culture, the material and non-material culture Furthermore, the paper also examines the origin of Ebira (Anebira), concepts of Ebira culture (Anebira) and what culture entails for the Ebira people. The main thrust for this paper is what cultural identity is all about and why cultural identity is considered important amongst the Ebira people, also what are the characteristics of cultural identity of the Ebira people? The paper also looks at unique cultural elements amongst the Ebira people such as, hair styles, folklore, local music, Ebira native names, tribal marks, festivals, marriage rites, cuisines, delicacies, clothing, and language.

Key Words: Ebira, Cultural Identity, People, Language

Introduction

Culture has been defined as a way of life, there are many definitions of culture, and are based on differences in people's orientation. Culture not only forms an individual, but also forms society in general. It classifies, stratifies, as well as specifies various social groups by making them look different from each other. The Ebira, pay much attention to their cultural identity, therefore culture is a collectives of the derivatives of experience, more or less organized, learned or created by the individuals of a population, including those image or embodiments and their interpretation (meanings) transmitted from past generation, from contemporaries or formed by individuals themselves (Obasi, 1987). Culture can also consist of patterns explicit and implicit of and for behaviour acquired and transmitted by symbols, constituting the distinctive achievements in artifacts; the essential core of culture consists of traditional (i.e. historically derived and selected) ideas and especially their attached value; culture system may on the one hand, be considered as products of action, on the other, as conditional elements of future action (Obasi, 1987). Ododo (2014) defined culture as a summation of all the elements and ingredients that define a people, these elements can be appreciated through the people's shared beliefs and values like their beliefs system, customs, practices and social behavior. A group of people with shared beliefs and practices are identified by the particular place, class, or time to which they belong. This identity is more expressed through the people's arts. Music and related intellectual activities. These form a body of knowledge, enlightenment and sophistication on the people acquired through education and exposure to the arts. Culture therefore is a set of attitudes that characterizes a group of people. Viewed all together, culture regulates the health of a society. Therefore, in people culture particular language is used to determine the level and degree of understanding of a people's identity and their set objectives; Ebira language as an aspect of culture that is central to all the people that speak Ebira language. Man uses language as a medium of communication, learning and transmission of culture and social interaction from one generation to other, consequently, language and society exist together. Language is the embodiment of human cultural identity. It is the womb for the communication of civilizations, customs, traditions, habits, wisdom, value and lifestyle amongst this paradoxical co-existence of language and cultural identity can be expressed as a metaphor. The metaphoric expression is the affirmation that to know a people is to appreciate, to understand and know their language.

Components of culture

The world book Encyclopedia (1990), defines culture as a society's arts, beliefs, customs, institutions, inventions, technology, values and language. Culture is also seen as the characteristics of a particular group of people defined by everything from music, arts, language, religion and social habit (Ododo, 2014). For archaeologists and other behavioral scientists, culture is the full range of learned human behavior patterns. Taylor (1874), defined culture as a complex whole which includes knowledge, art, customs, beliefs, morals and other capabilities acquired by man as a member of society. Wilkina (1976) defined culture as learned behavior which includes ideas, techniques and habits which are passed on from one generation to another and which are virtually a set of solutions to problems that in the course of time others have met and solved before.

Ebirim (2000) outlined the attributes of culture as the follows: Language, Values, Beliefs, Knowledge, Attitudes, Skills and techniques, Ideas, Habits, Ways of doing things, Customs, and traditions, Behaviour patterns, Morals, Distinctive symbols, Artifacts, Material and non-material objects, Tools and implements, Institutions, social, political, economic and institutional practices, Methods of thinking, eating and talking, Occupation, Music and song, Celebrations and festivals, modes of communicating and transportation, Design of houses, Food eaten by people and greeting, Do's and don'ts of a society and sanctions Laws, folkways, and mores and techniques, devices and contrivances for example, hunting and fighting instruments.

The above mentioned aspects do not comprehensively cover all the components of culture; however, they serve as a vital guide in the context of this discourse particularly when one refers to culture generally as "the totality of way of life of the people". Agada (2004) stated that, culture consists of two aspects, namely material culture and non-material culture.

Material culture: These consist of objects which people have learned to make and use to satisfy their needs in society. The material aspect of culture relates to certain aspects of culture which products of industry, art and technology. These objects are directly observed as cultural products of any society; they include, style of building, cooking utensils, farming implements, weapons of warfare, which are all found in any particular society. If these are found in other societies, it might be in varieties or other models or forms of the same things.

Non-material culture: These consist of knowledge, attitude, values, morals, philosophy, language etc. All of which are shared and transmitted within any given society. They are not visible but they are made manifest in the behavior of people.

Schaefer (2010). See culture as "the totality of learned socially transmitted customs, knowledge, material objects and behavior. It includes ideals, beliefs, values, and artifacts of groups of people" Culture is seen as a social mechanism in Ebira society, because the society is made up social institutions, activities and forms that have values, beliefs, norms, whether in the family, education and religion. The Ebira people and culture like many other cultures are basically grouped into two main aspects; the Material and Non-material culture. The material aspects of Ebira culture has to do with artifacts or objects that make use of; they are artifacts or objects that the Ebira attach meanings to, like food, medicine, tools, clothing, housing amongst others as well as technology. On the other hand, non-material culture is concerned with values, beliefs, customs, rules, norms, moral ethics, material tradition, language, dressing styles for men and women as well as the accepted system of government/organization.

Characteristics of culture

The characteristics of culture are as follows:

- a) **Culture is adaptive:** man can adapt to conditions of his culture. In most times, man's act s conforms to his culture and also reacts to it without being consciously aware of it. All communities have ethics, norms and values which citizens should share and adopt as accepted by way of life.
- b) **Culture is integrated:** Culture should be able to fit together in order to solve society's problems. It will be useful as an entity to unify members of the society and be used to resolve conflicts. It promotes relationships among people and ensures homogeneity in an organized society.
- c) **Culture is universal:** Every Culture in any society has a particular culture that is associated with the identity of the people. Due to these facts, there are different cultures

amongst different peoples and societies. Consequently, there are simple cultures, accepted norms and fundamental values which are similar and practiced widely in every society. There are some characters, behaviors, ethics and culture that are practiced irrespective of geographical boundaries and this is called cultural universals. For instance; language, religious activities, meetings, singing, dancing, businesses and funeral ceremonies.

- d) **Culture is shared:** Members of some society share culture as a result of interactions, socializations and communication. This is shared by many people; the old, young and all who have something in common within an organized society.
- e) **Culture is Exclusive to man:** Humans have unique cultures and this distinguishes them from animals; culture is a phenomenon created and practiced by man alone in an organized group. As manmade culture, so culture made man.
- f) **Culture is Dynamic:** Culture can change from time to time. All changes in human culture happen not only from one generation to the other but within the same generation as a matter of change and continuity, these changes can be seen in peoples dressing or fashion, building, language patterns of life as well as attitudes.

Origin of Ebira (Anebira):

The origin of the Ebira people appears to be a controversial issue. This study however takes the position that, the Ebira came from Wukari (Jukun land) where the constituents of the Kwaraara confederation in present day Taraba state, Nigeria (Sani, 1994) Oral tradition has it that Ebira migrated out of Wukari as a result of Chieftaincy disputes to settle in Kogi central, which happened to be the ancestral home of all the Anebira. The Ebira are today grouped into six (6) in the north central Nigeria they include:

1. The Ebira Tao (Ehi) in Kogi State
2. The EbiraIgu (Koton-Karfe) in Kogi State
3. The Ebira Panda (Wmaisah) in Plateau State
4. The EbiraEtunu (Igara) in Edo State,
5. The EbiraAgatu in Benue state
6. The Ebira in Abuja (Sani, 1994),

Only the Ebira in Agatu in Benue State are unable to speak the Ebira dialect. The remaining five groups speak the same language with some slight differences in intonation and accent.

The Concept of Ebira (Anebira)

Culturally and traditionally "Anebira" (meaning a derivation from bira) it also means togetherness, oneness and the people themselves, in Ebiraland, in the words of Ahmadu (2004), who defines Ebira as "signifying a sense of corporate existence, those people who speak the language or dialect called Ebira and recognize themselves as one but share consciousness in which all members acquire and participate. He also refers to the people as being of good character or attitude as well as good behavior in culture and tradition of Anebira from which they receive their identity and which give their lives meaning and purpose (Adiva, 1989).

It is a legacy and an identity that helps to legitimize the recognition of Ebira (Anebira) and their corporate existence. A legacy of Anebira uses to perfect their identity and sovereignty it is a unifying and motivating clarion call of all Anebira in all possible ways to imbibe and be proud of their cultural identity as a people in the passage of time and history.

Why is cultural identity important?

A strong cultural identity is important to a child's mental health and wellbeing. Having a strong sense of their own cultural history and traditions helps children build a positive cultural identity for themselves, gives them a sense of belonging and self-esteem and supports their overall wellbeing.

In this sense, cultural identity is the totality of these activities, symbols, feelings and relationships and artifacts that gives meaning to the Ebira people as a whole. Identity makes culture pervasive, touching every aspect of Anebira (Ebira,) It becomes very essential for Ebira people in the following terms:

1. It defines Anebira as a people.
2. It provides or gives orderliness to the life of Anebira.
3. It gives meaning to the life of Anebira.

4. It becomes a means of communication in Ebiraland.
5. It becomes a source of knowledge for Anebira.
6. It becomes an agent of development in Ebiraland.

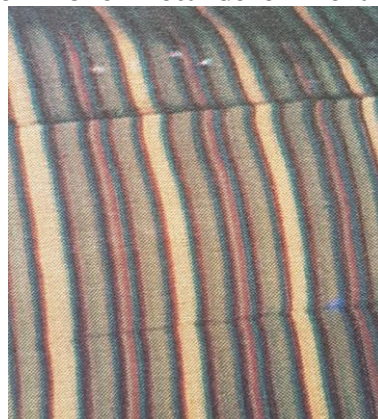
Cultural identity refers to the feeling belonging to a group. It is part of a person's self-conception and perception and is related to nationality, region, and social class (Okene, 1995). The cultural identity of the Ebira's can be seen in their clothing, language, hair style, local music, dance, native names, folklore, marriage rites, cuisines and festivals.

Language: language is the major aspect of cultural identity amongst the Ebira people, children as young as seven years old or even less than that, who are born in the Kogi central (village) speak Ebira fluently because the language has been made an integral part their lives and thus forms their unique, however, language is a potent communication tool that embodies the culture, history and identity of a people. Language distinguishes one group of people from the other. Through language a people can assert their pride and uniqueness. For a language to survive it must make conscious effort to infiltrate others languages just as it acquires lexicons from some other but must project their core values of the language upon which the social and cultural bearing of the people is founded.

Clothing: The Ebira possess vast local cloths- weaving industry, which is popularly known as Okene clothing. The Ebira clothing occupy preeminent space and consciousness in their community and is another essential aspect of their cultural identity, these cloths are found in almost every major town in Nigeria today. In Ebiraland it is very much part of the women's life; while mothers were weaving, daughters watch and learn the artistic skill. This is how the skill of weaving is handed down from mother to daughters. The traditional woven fabric showcases a repertoire of stylized motifs put into a wide range of arrangements in the traditional attire. Despite the strain of modernization, the art of weaving the traditional Ebira fabric has succeeded in portraying the magnificent achievement of weavers with the display of large numbers of spectacle intricate woven structures evolving the spirit or feeling of the Ebira people cultural identity.



**Cloth in the process of being woven on a vertical loom by
Mrs. Aminat Jimoh in Okehi Local Government Area of Kogi State**



**Oremeyi Sani designed cloth woven
called Ita' Shagari cloth**



Cloth woven finished Product ready for marketing by Mrs Barikisu Jimoh

Hair style: The Ebira also possess a unique and peculiar set of hair styles as part of their cultural identity which helps in enhancing the physical beauty and fashion of Ebira women. In Ebiraland today, there exist exciting hair styles such as the weaving of the *kokosi*, *ishuku*, *shade*, *ovahirema*, *oturosa* and others hair styles that distinguish Ebira women from women of other cultures also these hair styles are for different occasions and situation (Ododo, 2014). These are all important cultural features that tell and distinguish the Ebira from other cultures. Some of the mentioned hair styles gained popularity amongst women of other tribes because of their unique nature and creativity. These hair styles are considered elegant and capable of bringing out the inherent beauty of women all around the nation.



**A young girl Medinat Sule with a hair style called ishuku from Okene
Local Government Area of Kogi State**



**A young girl Ohunene Sadiq with hair style called Ovahirema from Okene
Local Government Area of Kogi State**



**A young lady Ahuoiza Ohida with hair style called Oturosa from Okene
Local Government Area of Kogi State**

Local music: there used to be an instrument of music amongst the Ebira's that is made up of a hollow box which is fitted with six metals pieces that are flat in nature which emit different musical notes, which is called Agidibo. It is usually played during parties to mark naming ceremonies, birthday, death of an important person etc. but presently such musical instrument cannot be found any more (Ododo,2014). But for this musical instrument it was used by the Ebira's in the past.

Cuisines and delicacies: the staple food of the Ebira consists of pastes made from cassava and yams. These paste are called "*uka* and *iya*" are made from dried cassava and boiled yam respectively. Other staples include the "*Apapa*" (bean bread) which is used to entertain visitors; they have local origins and acquire national as well as international status due to packaging. Others are *epeichakoro*, *epeahuba*, *epeebatu*, *ikieza*, *Iheahea* and many others (Ododo, 2014). All these amount to aspects of the Ebira cultural identity.



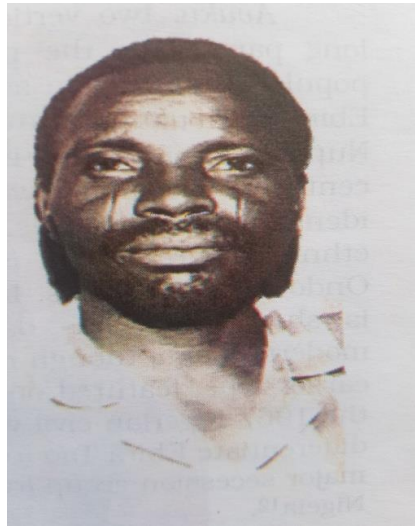
Omeiza Bello, taking one of the delicacies called Apapa (bean bread)

Folklore: Cultural identity can also be manifest in folklore, spiritual and verbal aspect of culture that can be transmitted orally that is through the means of oral tradition, thereby passing on relevant facts and information from one Ebira generation to another generation, with constant variations shaped by memory. For example, as part of the Ebira culture, there exists a boisterous folktale tradition in the evenings were children together under the moonlight to listen and learn set morals, myths, legends, animals tales, jokes and riddles, engaging in issues of life with tradition and culture of Ebira as well as proverbs through story telling (Ododo, 2014). The important thing about folktales is that as they are narrated, children with their impressionistic minds hear and remember them and consciously or unconsciously use them as a compass to navigate their daily dealing.

Ebira native names: names are a symbol of identity worldwide. Names are used to distinguish between sexes except in cases of unisexual variety. In traditional Africa society names go a long

way to tell where one comes from, it locates one's place of origin and cultural identity for instance, the Ebira's have native names which part and parcel of their cultural identity, names like *Adeiza, Omeiza, Otuoze, Eneze, Ohova, Ohunene, Obasa, Oyiza, Ozovehe, Ozavize, Adaava, Ozaomata, Ahuoiza* and so many others. Ebira have names that could embody parents' desires in life and can also give psychological boost when associated with memorable experiences,

Tribal marks: These are considered to physical identification marks that are mostly on the face and in some cultures all over the body. These tribal marks can be tattooed on the skin or by scarification. Tribal marks can go a long way to tell where one comes from; the Ebira's have tribal marks, it also known as *avuku* which are part of their cultural identity. Wherever one sees such marks, people can easily tell that is an Ebira man or woman. These marks are most commonly imposed on the Ebira native in his/her early childhood. The marks are in the form of two vertical lines reminiscent of the Roman numeral two (II) and are strategically placed on both sides of the cheek.



A man wearing Ebira facial marks on both side of the cheek, popularly called “*avuku*”.

Marriage rites: Traditional marriage in Ebira land has undergone many social changes as a result of the coming of Islam and Christianity. However, despite the changes, the general trend remains virtually unaltered. Marriage is not just a romantic or love liaison of beauty or handsomeness; when a young man betroths a young girl, the matter does not end there. The families of the lady will embark on a series of investigation on the upbringing, background, family history and so on, of the intending groom to unravel any history of madness, terminal diseases or criminality in the man's family. This is with a view to deciding whether the intended groom and his family have had a tainted reputation in the society. The family of the man will also carry out the same investigation on the prospective bride. After such research, if their findings are appreciable, an approval is given to the man to visit the bride- to be from time to time to further get to know themselves properly.

After some a date is chosen for the formal introduction of both families and this is called “*Ise Ewere*” which means what has been in secret is now in the open, during the introduction for the first time, there is usually the presentation of gift items made by the family of the groom to the family of the bride. The date of the traditional marriage will be fixed by both families, the following items must be sent to the house of the bride on this day or the day before the ceremony: 42 (tubers) big yams, salt, a tin of red oil, a tin of groundnut, 5 big dry fish or bush meat and a bag of rice. On the day of the traditional marriage, women in the man's family are seen singing and dancing carrying tubers of yams on their heads to be lady's house and other in term the singing and dancing continues at their arrival at the lady's house where the ceremony kicks off. On the day, the amount to be collected as bride price is also agreed upon by the parents of the bride and it depends to a large extent, on the financial strength of the man. Apart from the bride price there are other things like “*Oze meiyi*” that mean I am attracted to you her” which a certain amount of money is attached to, and “*Otanuvoge*” that is joining hand together”. The ceremony is usually colorful with display of dances by maiden groups mostly the bride's

friends and by women groups. A religious leader and the parents of the couple offer prayers for them to bless their marriage and a certificate is thereafter given to the couple by the religious leader. Thereafter, the lady is escorted by her friends and other women to her husband's with her belongings; the father and mother of both couples grace the occasion as well.

Festivals: In Ebiraland there are many festivals, each with its unique features which are associated with sociological evolution. The three most prominent ones are *Eche-ane*, *Eche-ori* and *Ekuechi*. The *Eche-ene* this is an annual masquerade festival celebrated in rotation from one district to other in Ebiraland, between April – June, it is during the festival that betrothed girls were given away in marriage to their suitors. That is why the festival is called “*Eche-ane*” meaning women festival. Masquerades, carrying long canes, come out primarily to entertain people and receive gifts in return.

The next one, is the *Eche-ori* is a new yam festival celebrated in Ebiraland, during this festival, traditional worshippers make sacrifices in the secret groove of “*ori*” (deity) high up in the mountain to show gratitude for protection and provision of bountiful harvest. The worshipers carry long canes with which they whip (*flog*) one another in turns without anyone exhibiting any sign of pain. This is a mark of strength or manhood. Another important attraction of the festival is the delightful “*Echori*” music in which female singers feature prominently. Only after this festival can one eat or sell new yams in the market. The last and final festival is the *Ekuechi* festival (traditional masquerade) this is a night festival which marks the end of the Ebira calendar year and the beginning of a new one. Which is also the most cherished the *Ekuechi* or night masquerade festival. The *Eku* (masquerade) cult originated from Okehi (Uhuodo). Oral tradition had it that Ododo of Okehi and Obaji of Eika were blood brothers. Obaji was the elder brother of Ododo. When Obaji fell sick and it was apparent that he was going to die, Ododo felt that it was improper for Obaji to be older than him both in this world and the spirit world. He told his children that he was he was going to die and instructed them to quickly bring up his image in the form of a masquerade. In other words, Ododo reincarnated as a spirit and assumed the physical form of masquerade.

Ekuechi festival is an annual commemorative anniversary of the great work of Ododo and Obaji. The “*Akatapa*” masquerade in heralding the beginning of the festival often says “*Irayiododoosigu, Irayiakatapaosigueeehi*” which means “the year of *Ododo* has ended, the year of *Akatapa* has ended and here is another year”. Since *Ekuechi* is an all-male affair, *Unehe* which is Eve of the festival is designed to accommodate and satisfy the cultural thirst of women folk. In the night of this Eve *Unihe* day, men and women will come out in their colourful attires to watch the traditional *ikede* singers who will mount the rostrums at different locations of the town to pour out melodious songs accompanied with beating of drums and much dance. The actual night festival in which masquerades sing and dance to entertain people from dusk to dawn takes place, the following day after the eve. It is restricted to men only so all women stay indoors throughout the duration of the festival. All dead relatives are believed to return to earth on a visit this night.

Ekuechi celebrated in sequential order starting from Okehi (Uhuodo) and followed by Eika, Adavi, Okengwe (including Okene and Ihima) and Eganyi in that order. It is pertinent to mention here that when Okehi celebrates its *Ekuechi*, every other community in Ebiraland joins in the celebration. This is a mark of honour given only to Okehi as the originator of the *eku* cult.



One of the popular masquerade at the festival called eku Oba

Conclusion

All communities and societies have a cultural identity which was handed down by their ancestors to younger generation; culture therefore, has been part and parcel of man way of live. This paper, is concluded by successfully showcase our cultural identity. There for, our cultural identity defined who we are, Ebira cultural identity cannot be separated from them, the Ebira were unique in expressing their culture in various way such as, hair styles, clothing, marriage rite, festival, folklore, tribal marks, Ebira native's names, cuisines and delicacies and many more. Our backbone is our cultural identity; In fact, remove cultural identity from us we become culture less society.

References

- Adiva, J. R (1989). *The verbal piece in Ebira*, Dallas: Them Summer Institute of Linguistic. International.
- Agada, J.C (2004). *Basic Concept in Sociology of Education to African religion*, Oxford: Heinemann Educational Publishers.
- Ahmadu, E.D (2004). *Who are the Ebira?* Beth Academics Publisher limited Maiduguri.
- Ebirim, D.C (2006). *Social Studies Education and Nation Building*, Owerri: Springfield Publishers, PP.23-28.
- Obasi, E.C (1987) *Introduction Sociology for Nigerian Teachers* Owerri: Keybeecee Publication.
- Ododo, S.E (2014). *It's Only Bent, not Broken: Society of Nigeria Theatre Arts*, University of Maiduguri, Nigeria, PP. 26-34.
- Okene, A.A (1995). "The Transformation of Ebiraland 1880 – 1960". Kano: Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, History Department, Bayero University Kano.
- Sani, H. A (1994). *Sociology of Ebira Tao People of Nigeria*. Okene: Tutu Press.
- Schaefer, R. T (2010). *Sociology.12th Edition*. New York: McGraw- Hill Companies.
- Taylor, E.B. (1874). *Primitive Culture*, Boston: Estates and Lauriat African.
- Wilkins, E.J. (1976). *An Introduction to Sociology*, Plymouth: Macdonald and Evans Publishers.