

Changing Meanings in Patterns of Efik Women Hair Styles

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Abstract

This paper examined selected Efik women's hairstyles from the past comparing them to modern day trends. The key questions the study sought to answer were: Have there been changes in styles and materials used in designing Efik women's hair? Have the meanings associated with these hairstyles changed overtime? The paper uses historical methodology; primary sources are pictures of hairstyles while secondary sources are history books, journals and literature review to arrive at conclusion concerning Efik women hairstyles. Current trends show that there have been some changes in patterns and evolutions in materials used. Meanings are also changing. Whereas in old times, hairstyles could tell age, social class, marital status, occupations and spiritual affinity. This is hardly the case now.

Key words: Efik women, changing meanings, hairstyles.

Introduction

Humans throughout civilizations and cultures have always accorded the hair a very special place. From ancient civilizations of the Sumerians, Egyptians, Greeks, Phoenicians, Assyrians, and Romans to the medieval period into the fifteenth century to the present, the art of hair design has been part of human civilizations. Men and women have styled their hair with various materials and in varying styles, simple or elaborate to even outright clean shaven. Many books exist which have documented these hair patterns across civilizations and cultures. Fashions in hair varied according to prevalent values, and beliefs of the time.

Everyone wants to be beautiful and hair does add to beauty. The Bible, in 1 Corinthians refers to the hair of women as a crown of glory. Great honour has always been accorded to the hair because it is part of the head; the head is often seen as the seat of power, great seductive powers are associated with the hair. Apart from beauty, hair designs or styles do carry meanings across various cultures.

According to Barbara Jackson and Lydia Eagle, 'Egyptian tombs from as long as 3500 BC reveal symbolic hair designs'. Richard Corson in *Stage make-up* buttresses this point

Drawings taken from paintings, sculptures or photographs illustrate the varying hairstyles from Early Egyptian civilization to the present. These hairstyles indicate the period hairstyles, which show the general styles and basic silhouettes...in any period it will be found that social class is reflected in the hair styles as well as the dress (235)

In Efik culture hair designs in olden days revealed the social status, the age, the spirituality, the marital status, as well as the occupation of the individual. Even certain hair styles are associated with some events such as war, magic, burial, marine rites and not just for the aesthetic purposes alone.

Hair designs are part of a culture of people. Culture has been said to be dynamic. Different factors such as migrations, globalization, education do change the context of a people's way of life. Hair designs and styles are cultural artifacts that are prone to change. The Efik hair designs and their associated meanings may also have changed with time.

Statement of the Problem

Oftentimes researchers that write on Efik women hair designs only document the styles without explaining if there have been changes or not in designs. Therefore this study will try to fill this gap by seeking to discover if there have been any changes in the traditional hair designs of Efik women in the last 20years. The study specifically asks the following questions;

1. Have there been changes in styles and materials used in designing of Efik women hair?
2. Have the meanings associated with Efik women hairstyles changed?

Study Area

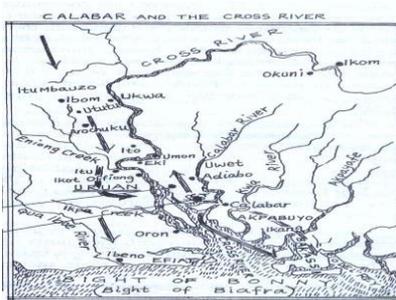


Figure 1: Efik settlement in Calabar and along Cross River: Efiks are found in Calabar, Odukpani, Akpabuyo and Bakassi LGAs of CRS and some parts of Akwa Ibom

According to E. U. Aye in the Efik People

The people generally known as Efik and their kinsfolk today occupy the basins of the lower Cross River and down to the Bakassi Peninsula, the Calabar River and its tributaries; the Kwa River, Akpayafe (or Akpa Ikang) and Eniong Creek. They had arrived at their present abodes on the eve of the fifteenth century AD.

The Efiks of Cross River

The origins of the Efik people has been a very controversial subject amongst historical scholars and historians and even the Efik people themselves. Different accounts abound, some school of thoughts say they are of Igbo origin while others say they are of Ibibio stock. According to E. U. Aye in his book *The Efik People*

In 1964 the Enquiry into the Dispute over the Obongship of Calabar gave rise to local theories of Efik origin by the various Efik Houses that contested for the much-coveted stool of the Obongship of Calabar. The Adakuko group gave that the Efik people were a nomadic tribe in the Sudan", The

Okoho group that "the Efik originated from a place called Niger', but without mentioning a specific location. From the Ambo group we were informed that the Efiks were an oriental tribe whose home was Palestine. Ntiero Family placed them as a Bantu tribe in Central Africa and Obutong group held that Eburutu was an eponymous legendary hero from whom all the Efik people, to whom the name Eburutu applies, descended?

While these bits of Efik traditional history hold their own in their own right, it will not be quite safe to regard them as reliable material for the history of the Efik people. One great event in the history of the Efik people occurred in 1846, on the occasion of the arrival in Old Calabar of the Presbyterian Mission from the Jamaican congregation of that Church, pioneered by the Rev. Hope Masterton Waddell. The Mission did not come out of its own accord, but was invited by the Efik rulers of the mid-nineteenth century. On the second year of the Mission life among the Efik people the Rev. Huger Goldie, a member of the second batch of the missionary team who arrived in Old Calabar as reinforcements, was to prove a most valuable member by his outstanding scholarship. Goldie's main occupation was to study the Efik language in its various manifestations. As a scholar in Hebrew, Greek and Latin; the three ancient languages that gave Christianity its prop, a qualification necessary for some of those ordained ministers of the nineteenth century, Goldie took up his work with sincerity and commitment, and it was he who saw in the Efik language, after over twenty years of hard study, as one of the northern tongues?, i.e. Nilo-Hamitic, a member of the great Semitic family, which "forms by far the greater part of its vocabularies as the Semitic class does, from the root of the verb. (VII)

Finally, Goldie noted:

The Efik very much resembling in idiom that of the

Semitic tongue, can frequently more clearly express the import of sacred writers than can the English.
(301)

Methodology

The paper uses the historical methodology to establish facts and arrive at conclusion concerning hairstyles. The paper systematically and objectively evaluates and interpretes evidence. Primary and secondary sources are used. Primary sources are pictures. Secondary sources are history books, articles, research reviews as well as interviews and literature review.

Meanings in Hairstyle of Efik Woman

Introduction

Women in Efik families are nurtured with great love and care. They are treated with great respect and honour and are regarded as a source of pride. Gender equality is practiced amongst the Efiks, women can own land and inherit properties. First daughters are involved in decision making within their families. The Efiks are known for their passion for living and for their great aesthetics sense. They enjoy merriment, gaiety and festivities. Their dressings, clothes, make-up, shoes and hairstyles portray these values. Amongst women hairstyles are varied and have deep significance.

According to Eve de Negri in *Nigerian Body and Adornment*,

Calabar area hairstyles are elaborate and varied in their symbolism. Age groups, marital status and levels of society are demonstrated by the choice of hairstyles. In Calabar hairstyles are also decorative.
(17)

Young Girls



Figure 2



Figure 3

Girls could wear their hair in varying styles either braided naturally or designed with black thread or fiber attached to make the hair fuller. The length of hair varied according to functions or events.

This Calabar hairstyle is divided into sections, either cut into very little bits or big ones and simply matted or braided. This hairstyle is used daily or casually. Hair could be braided naturally or with fiber. The length often varies.

The **Oto** is also another day to day pattern. The hair is cut into tiny section and threaded at the bottom, the top is left like tiny balls, it loosely done and therefore called Oto – named after a wateryam dish that is often cut into tiny balls. Oto is used mainly by young girls and pre-adolescents girls. This hair design also shows the girls are virgins with budding breasts as depicted by the hair patterns – Oto balls.

Mmon-Mmon - this is an elaborate hair pattern worn by young maidens... it is more ceremonial. It is divided into sections and threaded – it called mmon-mmon. The string or thread is pulled to allow the hair stay 'puffy puffy rolls'. Many decorative lines like stars or other numerous patterns are drawn on the scalp. Hair fiber such as wool or attachments can be added according to the taste of the individual. The hair can be pulled into various shapes like cones, horns or whatever pleases the stylist. Mmon-mmon shows that the girls are

delicate and need proper care

The Nkuho Hair Styles



Figure 4



Figure 5

The Nkuho or ‘The Fattening Period’ was a period of transition, where young girls were prepared for womanhood. It was the coming of age ritual for girls. Depending on the social status and wealth of parents, a girl could be in Nkuho for 1 year to seven years.

Nkuho is a kind of school like the Swiss Finishing School for girls. The girl is fattened to look like a water pot (Abang) not only in her physical body but her mind. She was given total education in many spheres of social and marital life. She had different tutors – females who took her through a wide array of subjects including folk arts, culinary arts, dances, music, poetry and ballads, arithmetic, bible studies, English, clothes, fashion, hair designs, home management, house-keeping, romance, history, domestic and marital etiquettes. She is taught how to walk, seat and talk. Particular attention is paid to her beauty therapy make-up, skin care, hair and clothes, especially if she is from a royal or wealthy family. The Nkuho has a variety of hair designs to choose from starting from her daily hair stage which she often uses though her Nkuho period of seclusion.

This simple hairstyle, shown in the illustration below the hair is divided into sections, attachment or fiber can be added to make it full. Thread is

used to strengthen the base, the hair is shaped like an orange, mango, or apple and made to stand erect. Plastics brass, wooden comb or headband can be used to decorate it. This hair signifies that the girl is virgin and breast is shaped like firm tantalizing and ready for marital functions.



Figure 6

At the time of completion of Nkuho, the girl had a variety of choices to make. Usually her hairstyle would be influenced by the wealth of her parents and her social status.

This hairstyle has a distinct centre like the penis showing the girl is now ready to enjoy marital bliss. The hair is braided with fiber and decorated with headscarf or brass comb. The surrounding is cut into tiny sections, braided and curled.



The Princess Hairstyle at the Completion of Nkuho

Note the back hair is long and falls on her arm

Figure 7

Hair Designs for Brides



FIGURE 8

Marriage rite is richly celebrated in Efik cultures. It is a time for display of rich make-up, dressing patterns, jewelry, shoes and hair designs for the woman. Skin care is often elaborately done. Efik culture prepared women for the institution for months or years through the fattening institution.

Hairstyle for women is a very important part of the marriage rite in Efik culture. Bride hairstyles are elaborate,

decorative and symbolic. The bride's hair is often divided into five sections, the front, the sides, the centre and the back. Fibre is attached to natural hair and plaited or braided. The front is made to fall and cover half of two third of the forehead. The sides are made to fall after the ears 2-4 inches each side. The back design

has



FIGURE 9



FIGURE 10

different rows or steps, the back is usually made to be long – 10 inches to 12 inches below the shoulders or sometimes shorter. The centre – the Etinghe with the penile shape is made to be about 4-10 inches high depending on the wealth, social status or whether it is the Adiaha – first daughter or second daughter. First daughters hold special place in families. There is great honour and

pride for the Adiaha. The first daughters have back hair very long even as long as the buttocks and the etinghe, centre very high on the head. The hair is often decorated with brass combs, an individual could use between 10-25 combs depending on status or wealth. Sometimes some brides could go without ornaments but this is rare. Families could be mocked for not using the brass combs.



FIGURE 11



FIGURE 12

Ceremonial Hair Styles

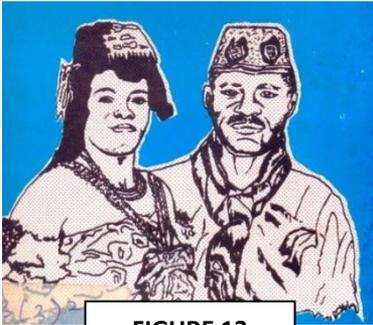


FIGURE 13



FIGURE 14

Efik people are rich in culture. They are gay and fun loving, they live life to the fullest. They love to celebrate and do merriment. Ceremonies are many, some secular, others have sacred functions. Ceremonies include, marriage, burials, chieftaincy, festivals - like Nyoro Ekpe,

Mbok – wrestling matches, boat regatta and even fishing competitions. Some associated with Ndem – Marine deity workshop. Even end of year festivities, usio-isua and later church functions.

Ceremonies provided a time for the Efik people to dress and display their rich cultural artefacts, costumes, opulent music, jewelry, dances, food as well as glamorous hairstyles.

The woman in the painting (Fig. 14) has braided hair and added fibre as well as ornamental brass combs. The hair is divided into four sections, front, sideways and back. This hairstyle is often used by royalty and wealthy. It is glamorous and sophisticated.

Fig. 15 shows ceremonial hairstyle used by younger women. The hair is divided into three to five sections, fibre may or may not be added. It is threaded and twisted and made to fall by the sides of the head, forehead and the centre Etinghe which suggests active sexual life. This hair can be designed in various styles.



FIGURE 15

Mature women can braid their hair in various forms to fall on the forehead, sideways and centre. They can add fibre if they wanted or not. Sometimes they use head scarves to conceal part and allow part of the hair show through the scarves, scarves can be made of silk, damask or other luxurious materials. This hairstyle gives pride, respect and honour to elderly female.

Modern Efik Women Hairstyles

Many factors have brought some changes to hair designs and styles of the Efik woman. These include Education, Christianity, migrations, media, globalization, generational difference, sexual orientation, feminism, economic power and consumer culture. These have brought



FIGURE 16

new mindset and values to today's Efik woman. Today's Efik woman is a collage of many cultures.

Hair designs are cultural products produced by cultural workers. Roland Meighan in his book, *A sociology of Educating* has noted that cultural workers reproduce culture in the form of language, values attitudes, images, rules and information within the cultural apparatus. Wright Mills explains that the cultural apparatus is a complex set of institutions such as schools, media, laboratories, they represent all organizations in which artistic, scientific and intellectual work is done. Inside the cultural apparatus standing between men and events, the images, slogans, meanings that define the worlds in which men live are organized, maintained and revised, lost, cherished, debunked and celebrated.

Efik hair designs have been reproduced by cultural workers such as media, churches, artisans and schools. Though the language, information and rules they use they are debunking and bringing new meanings to cultural products as well as celebrating and cherishing new icons. New meanings and interpretations are given to cultural products.

According to Mabel Essien Ita

Today some brides do not want to do the Etinghe hair style and fix all those combs, neither do they want to make it as long as it used to be for the Adiaha... some churches associate these hair patterns with marine worship... so women are having freedom to wear their hair anyway they want to and give them new meanings

Uduak a hair stylist buttresses this point



FIGURE 17



FIGURE 18

We have been in this business for over 32 years, there are changes in Nkuho hairstyles and bridal designs of the Efik women. Those Nkuho designs that used thread at the base are now considered as old school. For the bride hairstyles some people use their natural hair... some do not even use any brass combs... they say they will be possessed... so they use other decorative things like roses, flowers. Others use gel to pack the hair & wrap attachment (fiber) around instead of brass combs.

There are also changes in young girl's hair styles that used thread – the mmon-mmon and oto are almost non-existent. Thread is considered as 'bush' or in common parlance 'old school' – that is outdated and old fashioned. These hairstyles still exist in remote villages amongst the rural populace and amongst some of the born again sects. The Calabar type now is modified – many young girls braid with heavy fiber to make the hair fuller and more glamorous.



FIGURE 19

There is much change in day to day, ceremonial and even burial hairstyles. Meanings attached to hairstyles are now different. Some hairstyles are named after famous musicians, food, cars, dances, footballers, phones etc.

There are also changes in materials used, no longer are women restricted to fiber and thread, materials used now include beads, ivories, dyes, gels, stones, foil. Hair is also cornvowed, permed and lots of fiber are also being used. Efik women are copying from all other cultures in Nigeria and outside.



FIGURE 20



FIGURE 21



FIGURE 22



FIGURE 23

Conclusion

Current trends in Efik women hairstyles have shown that there have been some adaptations in patterns and evolutions in materials used in hair designs. Meanings are also changing. Whereas in old times hairstyles could tell age, social class, marital status, occupation, spiritual affinity – this is hardly the case now. The bridal hair designs still maintain much of their original form (the archetype), while some threaded styles used for ceremony and day to day are fast becoming extinct. The shaven hair or low cut that was once associated with mourning is now used for daily hair or ceremony. There is need to fully document as well as encourage the preservation of some of these styles which tell us about our past.

Interviews

Mabel Essien Ita, Retired Vice Principal Jan 2015 (73)

Uduak (Watt market) Hairstylist, Jan 2015 (33)

Shola (cultural centre) Artist/Hairstylist, Jan 2015 (40)

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