

## GENDER DISTINCTIONS IN THE MAU OGIEK PEOPLE'S INDIGENOUS DRESS, KENYA

**Njeru** (Family name) **Sophia** (Given name) (**Dr**) (Corresponding author)

Department of Art and Design, Maseno University, P.O.BOX 333-40105, Maseno, Kenya, +254 722306924,  
[sophianjeru2010@gmail.com](mailto:sophianjeru2010@gmail.com)

**Abong'o** (Family name) **Susan** (Given name) (**Dr**)

Department of Art and Design, Maseno University, P.O.BOX 333-40105, Maseno, Kenya, +254 729419760,  
[abosu\\_2004@yahoo.com](mailto:abosu_2004@yahoo.com)

**Okumu** (Family name) **Caleb** (Given name) (**Prof**) (**Deceased**)

### *Abstract*

The Mau Ogiek people are an ethnic minority, forest-dwelling hunters and gatherers who inhabit the Mau Forest Complex in Kenya. The purpose of the study was to describe the gender distinctions in the people's ethnic dress. The gender boundaries occur in the non-material culture, roles, construction, function, conservation and preservation of dress. The men must fasten *oguriet op poinet* on the right hand shoulder. The men mainly provide animal skins and sinews while the women construct and mend the dress, such as *oguriet op inderit*, *menegupet* and *leginjus* for the whole family. Men construct dress namely *ingerut* and *morogiit* for their hunting, gathering and security roles. The women and men wear dress mainly for modesty and protection respectively. *Oguriet op poinet* is unisex but with slight variations between the genders. This article provides a cross-cultural point of view in gender practices of indigenous dress to an African ethnic group.

**Key words:** Dress, Gender, Gender Distinction, Mau Ogiek people

## 1.1 Introduction

Gender is a dynamic concept. Gender patterns change just as culture changes. Gender roles refer to society's evaluation of behaviour as masculine and feminine. The roles are socially and culturally determined or constructed. Gender roles for men and women vary greatly from one culture to another and from one social group to another, even within the same culture. Masculine roles involve hunting and fishing, among others and feminine roles include cooking, child care and house care and so forth (Akintunde, 2005). The *lamba* (handwoven cloth) of the Madagascans is used to cover a baby carried on one's back (Gifts & Blessings, 2011). Gathering and hunting were among the earliest occupations of Africans. There were guilds of hunters in forests, which possessed monopoly rights to hunting, using bows, arrows, clubs and traps. The hunters provided animal skin for constructing articles of dress such as bags, shoes and clothing (Ugboajah, 2005).

Dress is an element of material culture and it is both a noun and a verb. As a noun, dress is an assemblage of all outwardly detectible body modifications and all supplements added to it by a person in communicating with other human beings. The definition is gender-neutral. As a verb or process, dress refers to the act of altering or adding to appearance (Barnes & Eicher, 1997; Kaiser, 1997). From womb to tomb, the body is dressed in gendered garb. Each society has its own rules regarding which dress should declare gender roles. Gendered dress encourages each individual to internalize gendered roles (Eicher & Higgins, 1997). The male-female attire may seem identical, in that it may not have a gender-specific shape, but on close observation will show differences. The patterning on the cloth or other pliable material, such as animal skin, makes the distinction (Barnes & Eicher, 1997; Kefgen & Spencht, 1986). In practically every society the world over, there is a marked distinction in the typical dress of men and women, and strict taboos are often maintained against wearing garments assigned to the opposite sex (Horn & Gurel, 1981). Even commonly worn or carried articles of dress may reflect a profound meaning. For instance, a bag may reveal in its design and quality the gender of the owner, among other factors (Geinaert, 1997). Gender, especially femininity, is worn through clothes. The separation between genders runs through codes of dress and decoration in complex ways (Craik, 1994). Even in societies where little or no clothing is worn, some form of body adornment serves to distinguish between the sexes. For example, hairstyles, body painting, tattooing and jewellery (Kefgen & Spencht, 1986).

The Mau Ogiek are an ethnic minority forest-dwelling hunters and gatherers who inhabit and claim the Mau forest complex in Kenya their ancestral land. The people's social, economic and political organization was as effective as any other in Africa. One's responsibilities, obligations and duties were determined by one's gender, age and intellect (Ng'ang'a, 2006). The women collect edible wild fruits, fetch water and firewood, cook, and raise the children. The men hunt for hyrax, bushbucks and birds, engage in beekeeping and collect edible herbs and wild fruits if they fail to make a kill. Further, the men provide leadership in the family. The term Ogiek means "caretaker of all" plants and animals (Ogiek Peoples' Development Programme [OPDP], 2010). The community has faced several evictions from the forest, first by the colonial administration and later by successive independent governments. The Mau Ogiek people are referred to by other ethnic groups using derogatory terms such as *Dorobo* or *Il-Torobo* to mean "a poor person, a person who has no cattle and who therefore lives on the meat of wild animals" (Ng'ang'a, 2006). The population (of

the Ogiek by 2009) stood at 78,691 or 0.2% of the total Kenyan population (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics [KNBS], 2010). Despite the challenges, the people have held on to their culture, both material (dress) and non-material.

## 1.2 Literature Review

Literature on African material culture, for instance, dress is mainly written by foreigners who misrepresent Africans, it is largely Eurocentric and ethnocentric and portrays Africa as one country<sup>1</sup> with one category of 'African cloth' (Bickford, 1993). Some terminologies used to designate African dress include mutilation and deformation (Eicher & Higgins, 1997). Even in the twenty-first century, African material culture has been described as primitive. Woloszynska in describing African style in interior design states that: the primitive exuberance of tribal basketware, pottery, and carving looks .... Cane and wicker seating ... will add a colonial touch ..... (Woloszynska, 2000). However, social scientists contend that to understand a culture fully one must suspend ethnocentrism and foster cultural relativism. Cultural relativism thus is the idea that any element of culture, such as dress, is understandable only in relation to the rest of its cultural context and to a particular time, place and set of circumstance (Calhoun, Light & Keller, 1994). Africa's transformation can only be achieved by African scholars in such disciplines as Clothing and Textiles taking up the call for Africans to tell the African dress story (Asante, 2005). The effort shall aid in 'decolonization' and promote African renaissance, hence, asserting an understanding of the indigenous social reality informed by local experiences and practices (Dei, 2000) presented by Africans from an African perspective.

Gender distinctions are a crucial part of dress, whether they are made on biological or social grounds (Barnes & Eicher, 1997). In ethnic societies, the differences in dress for the two genders are often very clear and distinctive (Synder, 1984). Hindu women in India wear the traditional *sari*, blouse and petticoat. On the other hand, men in the rural areas wear the *dhotti sakaccha*-style by passing a part of it between the legs and tucking it up behind the waist. The *dhotti* covers the body from waist to leg. *Dhotis* are invariably of thin white material and lack the lavish decorative border and designs characteristic of women's *sari*. In addition, the *dhotti* is shorter than the *sari* in length (Joshi, 1997). Standards of modesty vary within a society based on gender and age among other factors. The role theory (Ervin Goffman 1922-1982) focuses on the role an individual plays in the larger drama of society. Different roles have different dress expectations (Kaiser, 1997). The dress enables the wearer to undertake one's specific gender role. The men, who are hunters and gatherers, must don specific dress for the roles.

Non-material culture/mentifact entails human creations, such as social habits or rules, customs, values, attitudes, beliefs, meanings, symbols, knowledge, language and systems of government within the community that are not embodied in physical objects. Material culture that is strongly embedded in non-material culture will remain stable (Calhoun et al, 1994). Knowledge, specifically indigenous knowledge means knowledge consciousness arising locally and in association with a long-term occupancy of a place. Indigenous knowledge emanates from the cultural heritage and histories of peoples, daily human experiences and social interactions. The knowledge is thus personalized, that is, there are no claims of universality (Dei, 2000). Hence, indigenous dress is

personalized and specific to people who have developed it over time and in their locality, such as the Mau Ogiek who inhabit the Mau forest complex.

To understand the role of dress in a given society, an analysis of the creative act of making it is essential. Usually the production of objects that are to be worn is itself gender-specific, directly related to the meaning or importance of dress in a society. The weaving or embellishing of textiles or the working of metals to make ornaments may all be gendered (Barnes & Eicher, 1997). The male weavers among Guatemalan Indians typically generate quantities of repetitive items, such as yard-goods, linens and blankets. Women on the other hand, are likely to weave highly individualistic garments or decorative cloths. Gender integration occurs in the case of tourist products and which may be termed generic garments such as shawls, skirt lengths and utility cloths. Despite the gender integration the activities of each gender are more clearly delineated. Thus, the women may then weave the cloth and men stitch the seams or knot the fringes. Alternatively, the women may do one type of embroidery and men another (Pancake, 1997).

Among the Maasai of Kenya the production of dress is done solely by women. The women design beadwork and art exhibiting distinctive skill and artfulness, while the warriors model them. The girls and young women make attractive beadwork of armbands, shoulder straps, leg bands, sword belts and waist strings/belts for their lover warriors to express their love and admiration. The women also design and pattern their own beadwork earrings, necklaces and embroidery of their clothing and for tourists. Mothers design colourful waist beads for their daughters, while the elderly women become the custodians and guardians of beadwork apprenticeship (Marecik, 2005).

Gender distinction exists in the tools used to construct dress. The vertical (broad) loom is used mostly by women, while the horizontal (narrow) loom traditionally was used by men (Ademuleya, 2011). Taboos thrive even in occupation/roles within traditional African societies. Some jobs were exclusive to men while others were only for women. Taboos that had calamitous consequences were attached to the trade/role such as bronze casting (Okoli, 2011) from which jewellery is produced.

Women use clothing to cover the body in various degrees, but with attraction as the major purpose (Horn & Gurel, 1981). At ceremonial dances Manghetu women wear the *negbe* attached to their buttocks which is intended to attract the male eye (Fisher, 1987). Further, Hindu women use dress for sexual attraction and sexual attractiveness in reverse, and it tells when sex interest should be active or inactive. The dress “thus anointed with unguents of ground *haridrā* (turmeric) and *kunkuma* (saffron), wearing bright garments ... beautifully dressed and ornamented and anointed with perfume ..., she goes to bed”. The dress is prescribed for married women on completing the menstrual period as they are sexually available to their husbands (Leslie, 1997; Horn & Gurel, 1981). On the other hand, during the menstrual period a Hindu woman should not massage her body with ointment or oil and should not wear ornaments or flowers on the hair (Leslie, 1997).

Gender boundaries are observed in the types of dressing, which include body modifications, body enclosures and attachments to the body or to body enclosures (Kaiser, 1997). Some items of dress may be unisex but with some subtle variation between the genders. Benin *Oba* (king) and royal women both wore *ododo* (wrap skirt) made of richly embroidered cloth. *Ododo* was wrapped right to left around the waist and pulled up in the front to be tucked at the left hip, forming an

asymmetrical flap. The only difference was in the length. The men's wrap was knee-length while, the women's extended to mid-calf or to the ankles (Hill, 2011).

According to Matuszkiewicz (1999), to conserve means to protect something, especially an important cultural resource, such as dress, from harm, loss, change or decay. Diverse techniques may be employed to conserve material culture. Conservation can be done by passing the dress down the generations, by institutions such as M.R.M.R.M Cultural Foundation a non-profit organization, ethnic minority community-based organizations, cultural festivals namely the Lake Turkana Cultural Festival in Turkana, community museums specifically Loiyangalani Desert Museum in Turkana (Micheni, 2008a, 2008b; M.R.M.R.M Cultural Foundation, 2005; ICG, 2003) and schools and colleges music and drama festivals held annually in Kenya to showcase ethnic dances. During the festivals dancers perform songs from different ethnic communities, donning their indigenous dress.

To preserve refers to keeping something protected from anything that would cause its current quality or condition to change or deteriorate or cause it to fall out of use (Matuszkiewicz, 1999). Fisher (1987) observes that, African communities have established over time indigenous techniques of preserving their material culture. The people of Zaire and Cameroon stain ivory with a mixture of charcoal, tree sap or pigments from cam wood and oil. The process preserves the ivory, prevents it from cracking and gives it a deep golden brown colour which they prefer. However, Matuszkiewicz (1999) observes that, preserving material culture in museums or galleries (in storage or display) is complicated by their particular material characteristics and their cultural significance. Further, all preservation treatments are constrained by the professional ethic of minimizing intervention, to maintain the present condition of material culture (Matuszkiewicz, 1999).

### 1.3 Discussion

#### 1.3.1 Gender Distinction in Non-material Culture Expressed in Dress

Folkways influence the material and style of dress. The Mau Ogiek women wear *leginjus* (a one-piece "vest"/bodice or skirt) made from sheared sheep skin. The vest has to be fastened on the left shoulder and extends to below the calf. *Leginjus* may also be worn as a wrap round skirt, overlapping right over left and it is secured by a thin *legetiet* (leather belt). The top of the skirt is folded down to cover the belt. The women also wear *kauya* (beaded, male bushbuck skin skirt) in the same style as *leginjus*. *Oguriet op inderit* (hyrax pelt cloak) is then donned on top of the vest, which is fastened at the chest again with a leather strap which is inserted through a loop. The length is the same as the vest.

*Mureret* (initiated female) when graduating wore *tuoleg* (a series of bells, four or six in number, the latter is stressed upon) which must be suspended on the right shoulder and underneath the left hand. In addition, *mureret* donned *ingongonoit* (beadwork headband), which must have a visor of four beaded strands. *Ingarepait* (brides' necklace) must have four or six beadwork strands and the latter is preferred. Three strands to the left and to the right have the same colours respectively. Large flat beads are fastened at the tips of the strands.

The men's cloaks both *oguriet op inderit* and *oguriet op poinet* (bushbuck pelt) are one-piece garments which are passed under the left arm and are fastened at the right shoulder, thus the

opening is on right hand side. The same style applies to *kecher* (boys') and *rwaganig* (newly initiated males) cloaks. The cloak overlaps back to front and is secured by *annuet op chogeet* (a leather belt). The belt is never worn for decorative purpose but to serve the functions of suspending the scabbard and securing the cloak. *Rotwop chok* or *rotwetop chok* (sword) and *rungut op metit* (club) are suspended at the waist on the right side. Old men may also wear *menegupet* (vests) of leather from *moita* (animal skin) which is fastened in the same manner and direction as *oguriet op inderit*. The *motoget* (honey bag) and *morogiit* (quiver) are carried by men. The two are suspended by straps across the chest from the right shoulder, thus they lie on the left side.

In relation to mores the men when on their own only cover one side, that is, the left while the right side may be exposed. The men lack the shame of nudity or body exposure. This is because men generally stay on their own thus they have limited interaction with their girls or women. According to the people's culture the women by-pass men on the left side. By having the opening on the right hand, the men conceal their private parts from the women. Men's cloaks and vests cover the wearer to mid-thigh. On the other hand, women are not allowed to expose their bodies, and especially the legs. Thus, *oguriet op inderit* and *leginjus* cover the wearer from the chest and extends to below the calfs. *Kauya* also covers the calfs.

Clothing customs are used to distinguish the genders. Further, specific gendered dress is constructed and worn in funerals, weddings, rites of passage and religious ceremonies. Men's and women's earrings and necklaces are different in relation to the style. The former wear *ilmintoisieg* (earrings) and *ingongonoit* (necklace cum headband when one is initiating a child, both sons and daughters) while the latter don *mwenigg op itig* (earrings) and *gariig* (necklaces). For a customary wedding the bridegroom must don *oguriet op inderit* (hyrax pelt cloak) and the bride in *kauya*, *leginjus*, *oguriet op inderit* and *ingarepait*.

In initiation ceremonies the initiates' fathers don *ingongonoit*. On the other hand, *torusieg* (girls-initiates) wore *ingongonoit*, *tuoleg*, *ng'oisit*, *mungenig*, *kauya* and *leginjus*, while *torusieg* (boys-initiates) don *oguriet op poinet*, black he-goat cloaks and *indurotoit* (white clay soil paste). *Mutiriot* (teachers) in *tumdo op werik* (boys' initiation rite) must wear *oguriet op inderit*.

To construct the hunting tools the *poisionig* (married men irrespective of age) and *rwaganig* gather together in a secluded place in the forest and light a fire. It is a taboo for women to visit the site as it is believed that they may touch the tools and when men go hunting they may fail to make a kill. Failure to make a kill means the family is denied food.

### 1.3.2 Gender Distinction in the Construction of Ethnic Dress

Gender distinction relates to the specific roles the Mau Ogiek men and women play in fabricating their ethnic dress. The *poisionig* and *rwaganig* hunt for hyrax and bushbucks which provide skin and *anwet* (yarns) for constructing dress in addition to, *impiniit* (indigenous awls). The pair construct some articles of dress which are specific to them in addition to hunting and gathering tools which are part and parcel of their dress. Such items of dress are *kweog* (sandals), *rotwop chok* (sword), *chogeet* (scabbard), *ingerut* (arrows of various types), *guiyang'nta* (bow), *pineet* and *inaing'omiit* (indigenous match stick), *tenget* (spear) and *long'et* (shield). The *poisionig* and *rwaganig* also hunt birds such as *merewet* (haut lop Turacos), *tiangweretiet* (francolins), *taywet*

(guinea fowl) and *tependepet* (doves) whose feather are used in constructing *ingerut*. It is only men who are *kotongik* (iron smiths) and specialize in making *ingerut* and *tenget*. When *tumdo op tipiik* (Female genital mutilation [FGM]) was allowed, it was the duty of *rwaganig* to decorate the *tiet* (uninitiated girls) dressing them in *mungenig* (armband), *ng'oisit* (apron), *ingongonoit* (head band) and *gelteet* and *chepkuleit* (headdress).

The women construct and mend the various types of cloaks, vests, skirts, bodices, belts, *motoget* (honey bag), *rosiet* (headdresses), *gesenta* (baby carriers), *mwenigg op itig* and prepare the cosmetics such as *oweyet* (jelly) for themselves and their families. The girls construct their own dress, which they wear to dances, *tumdo op tipiik* (girls' initiation rite) and on their wedding day. The girls also construct yarns which are used in fabricating the ethnic dress. The production of dress by women and girls may be done individually at home. Alternatively, it may be carried out informally with others, especially when they wish to train young girls on its construction.

### 1.3.3 Gender Boundary in Types of Dressing

In body modification the *rwaganig* were allowed to braid their hair but the *mureret* and women maintained clean shaven heads. The male initiates apply *indurotoit* (white clay soil paste) thus changing the colour of the body.

Body enclosures include women's such as *kerepeita* and *ng'oisit* (girls' aprons), *mungenig* (armband), *gelteet* and *chepkuleit* (headdress for girls' initiates), *leginjus* (vest), *kauya* and *leginjus* (skirts) and *khanga* or *leso*. Men's wear includes *menegupet* (vest) and *njoriboit* (men's cloak for hunting). Only *poisionig* and *rwaganig* wore *kweog* (sandals) and *rosiet* (hyrax, colobus monkey skin hats).

Attachments to the body or to body enclosures include men's wear namely *ilmintoisieg* (earrings), *annuet op chogeet* (belt), *motoget* (honey bag), *long'et* (shield), *rungut op metit* (club), *morogiit* (quiver), *chogeet* (scabbard), *guiyang'nta* (bow), *mukwanjit* (walking stick), *tenget* (spear), *ingerut* (arrow), *rotwop chok* (sword), *pineet* and *inaing'omiit* (indigenous match stick). Women's wear includes *mwenigg op itig* (earrings), *legetiet* (belt), *kariat*, *gaying'aniat* and *ingarepait* (necklaces), *tuoleg* (a series of bells), *ngotiot* (fly whisk), *gesenta* (baby carrier) and *sait* (indigenous wrist watch).

### 1.3.4 Gender Distinction in Functions of Dress

The functions of dress relate to its use or why it is worn. Dress is worn to perform gender roles. Hunting and gathering tools are part and parcel of men's dress. These implements include *guiyang'nta*, *chogeet*, *ingerut*, *pineet* and *inaing'omiit*, *morogiit*, *rotwop chok*, *tenget*, *orpagait* and *motoget*, knives (*rotwet*) and *long'et* among others. In addition, *oguriet op poinet* was used for camouflage which confused the bushbucks thus men could easily kill them. In earlier times, a married woman while cooking and serving food to her husband had to don *mwenigg op itig*, *gariig* and bangles. *Oguriet op inderit* which is also worn by women is used to cover the baby when breastfeeding, thus it provides privacy to the mother. The mothers also own *gesenta* (baby carriers) for carrying a baby at the back. The baby carrier, rectangular in shape, is constructed from bushbuck

skin with no fur to ensure comfort to the baby. The baby is then covered with *oguriet op inderit* that is fastened at the chest.

**Protection:** The hunters-exclusively men, need to protect themselves from wild animals, the harsh forest environment and enemies. It was only men who wore *kweog* (sandals) and *oguriet op poinet* (specifically male bushbuck pelt cloaks) for protection. *Njoriboit* (hyrax or bushbuck pelt cloak) was only worn during honey harvesting. The wearer covered the whole head with it to protect oneself from bee stings. The community also faced frequent attacks from their enemies, especially the Maasai. The *rwaganig* hence provided security and wore dress such as *ingerut* (arrows), *guiyang'nta* (bows) and *tenget* (spear) to fight the enemies.

**Modesty and immodesty:** Cloaks, capes and vests provided modesty to the wearer, especially women. Young *tiet* (girls) wore *kerepeita* (bushbuck skin apron) to cover their genital area. *Leginjus* covers the *tyepoosa* (married woman) or *mureret* (initiated female) from the chest to below the calf, as women are not allowed to reveal their legs. In addition, *leginjus* (skirt version) and *kauya* (skirt) were worn for modesty. The skirts extend to below the calf. On the other hand men's *menegupet* covered the wearer from the chest to mid-thigh. Further, *oguriet op inderit* and *oguriet op poinet* are of the same length as *menegupet*. The males have no shame of body exposure, when they are together. However, they must cover their private parts and have no shame in exposing their thighs even in the presence of women. By wearing *gariig* (necklaces), *mwenigg op itig* (earrings) and bracelets women tried to sexually and physically attract men as these items enhanced their beauty. Hence, a married woman while cooking and serving food to her husband had to don the articles of dress so as to remain sexually attractive to her husband at all times.

**Perform rituals:** During the eclipse (the darkness occasioned by the eclipse was considered evil) old women would wear their special dress called *kauya* and *leginjus/moloindo* and would go outside carrying leaves of *septet* (cider). The women prayed to *Tororet* (God) to "break the eclipse" and restore light. Specific dress is worn during *tumdo op tipiik* and *tumdo op werik* (initiation ceremonies for girls and boys respectively) and mourning. When *tumdo op tipiik* existed the girls wore *khanga* skirts on the night before their initiation, which was characterized by vigorous dancing all night long. The *khanga* was chosen as it is flexible thus it provided freedom of movement. The girls also donned *ng'oisit* (bushbuck, goat or dik-dik pelt apron) at the rear on top of the *leso*, tied *mungenig* (armband) on the upper arms and wore *gelteet* and *chepkuleit* (headdress) which was adorned in a similar manner to *mungenig*. During mourning a widow removes her *mwenigg op itig* (earrings) and *gariig* (necklaces). A date is set for a ceremony on when she can wear them again in the presence of her brother-in law.

**Secure dress:** *Legetiet* and *annuet op chogeet* (women's and men's belts respectively) were worn to secure various articles of dress. A thin version of the former holds *leginjus* (skirt) in place. The skirt is wrapped around the waist, secured by the belt and folded down. *Annuet op chogeet* is tied on the waist and on top of *oguriet op inderit* or *oguriet op poinet* to secure them.

**Adornment:** The girls' and women's *oguriet op inderit* (cloak), *leginjus* ("vest"/skirt), *kauya* (skirt), *mwenigg op itig* (earrings) and *ngotiot* (fly whisk) are embellished with glass beads of diverse colours and sizes. Girls' *ng'oisit*, *kerepeita*, *mungenig*, *gelteet* and *chepkuleit* are also decorated



with bicycle light bulbs, small plastic lids of different colours and shiny garlands. *Rwaganig* dye leather cloaks with red ochre.

**Gender Identification:** Sometimes the dress was used to conceal or misrepresent a child's gender. Thus, the boy child was dressed in girls' skin to hide his gender. The misrepresentation was done to protect the boy from witches who mainly targeted boys.

**Socialization/Enculturation:** Dress plays a role in the enculturation of the younger members of the community in different ways. Girls join women to learn on the construction of indigenous dress as part of their role to provide dress for the family. Eventually the girls make their own dress, and it assures the women that the girls will dress themselves and their families in future. On the other hand, *kecher* and *rwaganig* are socialized by men to hunt wild animals and birds, which provide raw materials for constructing ethnic dress. The *rwaganig*'s socialization entails being taught the production of various articles of dress that are exclusive to men, such as *tenget* and *morogit*. In addition they are taught how to mend worn out item of dress, such as *oguriet op inderit*. The younger generations are also socialized on the people's non-material culture which greatly influences their dress.

**Shape the Body and Keep Hunger Pangs at Bay:** Indigenous dress is worn to enable women who have recently given birth to get back to their original shape and size. Soon after delivering a child *legetiet* (leather belt) is tied tightly around the waist to make the abdomen firm and to reduce its size. The belt may be tied directly to the skin or worn on top of the garments. Probably the women desire to keep their husbands sexually and physically attracted to them even after child birth. The women also wear a thin version of *legetiet*. The belt is very tightly wound round the waist on top of *leginjus* or *kauya* such that one cannot feel hungry and can go the whole day without food.

**Tool for counting, blessing, encouragement and bestowing authority:** During *goito* (wedding ceremony) the bride wears *ingarepait* and she knots the strands as promises of beehives are made to her. Later she counts the knots. The bride is also smeared on the entire body with *oweyet* (jelly) as a blessing. During *tumdo op werik* the initiates get encouraged and enticed with gifts of *oguriet op inderit* by their fathers' age-mates. The *rwaganig* on graduation are bestowed the authority to defend and protect the clan from enemies. Thus, they are given *rungut op metit*, *rotwop chok* and *mukwanjit* to symbolize the duty.

### **1.3.5 Gender Distinction in Conservation and Preservation of Dress**

To conserve the dress, the people pass down the dress from generation to generation. A son may also inherit a *taet* (brass bracelet) from the father. The people hold cultural festivals and nights. The women of diverse ages and from the different blocks compete in festivals within the community and they don their indigenous dress. By practicing their cultural rites, such as boys' circumcision and customary weddings which have specific dress, then the ethnic group is able to conserve their culture. The individuals are encouraged to wear their gendered ethnic dress.

Each gender has a specific role in the preservation of dress. The men sharpen *orpangati* (machete) and *tenget* (spears). The women spread the skins of hyrax or bushbuck or cowhide in the sun every so often to rid them of foul smell. The leather is then folded and placed at the head of the bed or in a suitcase. The leather is never hanged, as hanging weakens it and leads to loss of shape. The cloaks

are kept away from the rain as well. Despite the gender boundaries, gender integration occurs with subtle variations.

### 1.3.6 Gender Integration

Shaving of hair is very symbolic among the people. *Rwagetap lakwet* is the first shaving of a child at between one and two years irrespective of the gender. The shaving is a symbol that the child has entered into the world of kin and neighbours. During *tumdo op tipiik* and *tumdo op werik*, the *mureret* and *rwaganig* hair is ritually shaved by their mothers or selected women. The shaving is a sign of cutting off childhood and becoming new persons; men and women. In the same rites both initiates dress in girls' dress at one stage. Hence, the boys' initiates dress in *leginjus*, *kauya*, *ingongonoit* and *gariig*. In addition *ingongonoit* is a headband and headband cum necklace for *mureret* and a father who is initiating his children respectively. The difference is that for the former it has a visor of four strands, while the latter does not have it. Further, the *mureret* wore hers till marriage, while the father only during the entire initiation ceremony. It was worn as a necklace and headband during the day and at night respectively.

In the functions of dress, *oguriet op nderit* (hyrax pelt cloak) is worn by both genders to provide warmth to the wearer. Further, both genders wear vests, namely *menegupet* and *leginjus* (men's and women's respectively) with slight variation. The men's is rectangular made from *evirit* (dik-dik) skin while the women's is rectangular with a V shape at the hem and it is adorned with glass beads of diverse colours. The women's vest was previously constructed from bushbuck skin which was replaced by sheared sheep skin. In earlier days both men and women practiced *gempirr itig* (ear piercing) of the upper and lower earlobes and wore different styles of earrings specific to them. Small bamboo discs were inserted in the holes in the upper earlobe for adornment. The latter were stretched by varying the sizes of *nguloleit* (round wooden discs). The women and men suspended *mwenigg op itig* and *ilmintoisieg* (women's and earrings respectively) from the lower earlobes.

*Oguriet op poinet* (bushbuck pelt cloak), specifically men's wear for hunting, occasionally may be worn by women. The men's cloak has the fur intact, while the women's has no fur. The cloak also differs in terms of fastening. The men and women fasten on the right hand shoulder and in front at the chest respectively.

Applying cosmetics such as *oweyet* (jelly) and practicing *lotet op kelegg* (removal of at least two lower front teeth) was done by young people, both male and female. *Taet* and *segeriet* (brass and cowrie shell bracelet respectively), *pirir orog* (children's necklace) are unisex. *Morogiit* (quiver) is constructed especially by both old men and women.

## 1.4 Conclusion

Gender issues have existed in Africa since time immemorial and have served the people well. Each society or culture in African has its own roles regarding gender, for instance, which dress should declare and enhance the performance of gender roles. It is highly recommended that gender issues in Africa should be given a positive perspective. This means, feminine and masculine roles complementing each other and uniquely contributing to a free society, devoid of discrimination and injustice based on gender.

The Mau Ogiek's ethnic dress is used to express gender distinction, in the articles and the construction of dress. Men's and women's earrings are different in terms of style and are called *ilmintoisieg* and *mwenigg op itig* respectively. The *poisionig*, *rwaganig* and *kecher* construct articles of dress exclusive to their roles of hunting and gathering honey, while the women and *mureret* fabricate cloaks for the entire family. Gender distinction may be very subtle, in that *oguriet op poinet* may also be worn by women but in their case the fur is removed.

African culture has made and continues to make immense contribution to the world culture and civilization. The contribution may be sustained by conserving in museums in African and by Africans documenting the material culture, such as dress. African visual arts namely dress is displayed in museums in Europe and America. First interest by non-Africans is obtained from those museums then the people visit Africa to study the various African people.

## References

- Ademuleya, B. A. (2011). Understanding the value and appreciation attached to old *aso-oke* by the Yoruba of Ondo. *Journal of Black and African Arts and Civilization*, 5(1), 129-140.
- Akintunde, D. O. (2005). The question of gender in African culture. In S. A. Ajayi (Ed), *African culture and civilization* (pp. 345-353). Ibadan: Atlantis Books.
- Asante, M. F. (2005, October 2). The truth is: Early Egypt was a black civilization. *City Press*, p. 5.
- Barnes, R. & Eicher. J. B. (Eds.). (1997). *Dress and gender: Making and meaning*. Oxford: Berg Publishers.
- Bickford, K. E. (1993). *TEXTILE crafts*. Retrieved October 21, 2005 from [ephost@EPNET.COM](mailto:ephost@EPNET.COM).
- Calhoun, C., Light, D., & Keller. S. (1994). *Sociology*. (6<sup>th</sup> ed). New York: McGraw-Hill, Inc.
- Craik, J. (1994). *The face of fashion: Cultural studies in fashion*. New York: Routledge.
- Dei, G. J. S. (2000). Rethinking the role of indigenous knowledge in the academy. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 4 (2), 111-132.
- Eicher, J. B., & Higgins, M. E. R. (1997). Definition and classification of dress: Implications for analysis of gender roles. In R. Barnes & J. B. Eicher (Eds.), *Dress and gender: Making and meaning* (pp. 1-7). Oxford: Berg Publishers.
- Fisher, A. (1987). *Africa adorned*. London: William Collins Sons & Co. Ltd.

- Geirnaert, D. (1997). Purse- proud: Of betel and areca nut bags in Laboya (West Sumba, Eastern Indonesia). In R. Barnes & J. B Eicher (Eds.), *Dress and gender: Making and meaning* (pp. 56-75). Oxford: Berg Publishers.
- Gifts and blessings: The textile arts of Madagascar. (2011). Retrieved July 25, 2011, from <http://africa.si.edu/exhibits/malagasy>.
- Hill, D. D. (2011). *An abridged history of world costume and fashion*. Boston: Prentice Hall.
- Horn, M. J., & Gurel, L. M. (1981). *The second skin* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed). Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company.
- International Crisis Group [ICG]. (2003). *Myanmar backgrounder: Ethnic minority politics*. Retrieved November 19, 2009, from <http://www.crisiweb.org/home/index>.
- Joshi, O. P. (1997). Continuity and change in Hindu women's dress. In R. Barnes & J. B Eicher (Eds.), *Dress and gender: Making and meaning* (pp. 214-231). Oxford: Berg Publishers.
- Kaiser, S. B. (1997). *The social psychology of clothing: Symbolic appearances in context* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed revised). New York: Fairchild Publications.
- Kefgen, M., & Spencet, P. T. (1986). *Individuality in clothing selection and appearance: A guide for the consumer* (4<sup>th</sup> ed). New York: Macmillan Publishing Company.
- Kenya National Bureau of Statistics [KNBS]. (2010). *2009 Kenya population and housing census: Population and household distribution by socio-economic characteristics*, Vol 2. Nairobi: KNBS.
- Leslie, J. (1997). The significance of dress of the Orthodox Hindu woman. In R. Barnes & J. B Eicher (Eds.), *Dress and gender: Making and meaning* (pp. 198-213). Oxford: Berg Publishers.
- Marecik. (2005). *Maasai women beadwork*. Retrieved October 21, 2005 from <http://www.worldbank.org>
- Matuszkiewicz, B.T. (1999). *Conserving aboriginal bark paintings*. Retrieved July 24, 2009, from <http://www.nga.gov.au/conservation/objects/bark.cfm>.

Micheni, M. (2008, June 22a). Turkana's cultural treasures find a safe home at the desert museum. *Sunday Nation*, p. 2.

Micheni, M. (2008, June 8b). Turkana festival holds great promise. *Sunday Nation*, p. 11.

M.RM.RM Cultural Foundation. (2005). Retrieved December 29, 2005 from <http://www.craftretrival.org>

Ng'ang'a, W. (2006). *Kenya's ethnic communities: Foundation of the nation*. Nairobi: Gatũndũ Publishers.

Ogiek Peoples' Development Programme [OPDP]. (2010). *Ogiek Home*. Retrieved August 25, 2010 from <http://www.ogiekpeople.org>.

Okoli, K. O. (2011). Taboos and gender stratification: Elizabeth Olowu, the pioneer female bronze caster. *Journal of Black and African Arts and Civilization*, 5(1), 159-172.

Pancake, C. M. (1997). Gender boundaries in the production of Guatemalan textiles. In R. Barnes & J. B Eicher (Eds.), *Dress and gender: Making and meaning* (pp. 76-91). Oxford: Berg Publishers.

Synder, L. A. (1984). *The effect of sex, ethnic group and the endorsement of masculine/feminine personality traits on the perception, use and ownership of selected sportswear apparel*. (Doctoral thesis). University of North Carolina.

Ugboajah, P. K. (2005). Traditional African economic system. In S. A. Ajayi (Ed), *African culture and civilization* (pp. 86-113). Ibadan: Atlantis Books.

Woloszynska, S. (2000). *The art of interior design: Selecting elements for distinctive styles*. London: Octopus Publishing Group Ltd.

## APPENDIX



Figure 1: Woman in *oguriet op inderit*, and *taet*.



Figure 2: Fastening of *oguriet op inderit* and *menegupet* by men.



**Figure 3:** *Rungut op metit* and *rotwetop chok* are suspended on the right hand side.



**Figure 4:** *Morogit* and *motoget* must lie on the left hand side.



**Figure 5:** *Gelteet* .



**Figure 6:** *Motoget* .



Figure 7: *Rungut op metit* for *rwaganig*



Figure 8: *Morogüt*



Figure 9: Boy-initiates in girls' dress, *kauya*, *ingongoit*, *gariig* and *leginjus*



Figure 10: Woman holding *ngotiot*.



Figure 11: *Leginjus* bodice style



Figure 12: Woman wearing *mwenigg op itig*