



Tie-Dye Attires Of Borno Kanuri People As Element of Cultural Identity In Postcolonial Nigeria

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Abstract. The sustenance and continuity of indigenous cultural identity has been a major concern and pursuit for post-colonial Africa. Decolonization, revival, and sustenance of national and ethnic identities are explored through the components of culture. Africans, including Nigerians, are greatly influenced by culture in their daily living, especially costumes. Nigerian cultural attires vary among ethnic groups and the peculiarity is relevant in identification, communication and association. This study examined the indigenous attire of the Kanuri people of Borno State in Nigeria, to evaluate the function of cultural dress in the decolonization process and identification of peoples in a globalized world. Textiles made from the tie-dye resist technique, in specific colors, have been adopted by the Kanuri as their peculiar traditional dress. The study purposively selected the female Kanuri *Dongashou*, used for wedding eve celebrations (*Wushe-Wushe*). Observational schedule, photographic documentation, and non-formal structured interviews were the instruments used during fieldwork to collect primary data. From results, the Kanuri people have established an identity through their cultural attires not only in northern Nigeria but globally. The survival and acceptability of the attires as a cultural factor had been possible due to the simplicity of the tie-dye technique, availability of cost-efficient materials, general affordability of the attires, and skills-transfer through generations.

Keywords: Attire, Cultural Identity, Kanuri, Postcolonial Nigeria, Tie and Dye.

1. Introduction

Culture in human's existence, summarizes ideologies, belief systems, traditions, and customs. Significantly, Africa, apart from its important geographical location, is diversely

rich in cultural heritage which comprises arts, crafts, artifacts, folklores, oral history, beliefs, ideologies, religions, poetry, music, dance, costumes, and fashion. These are handed down from generation to generation as a practice. Oyeniyi (2022) states that the beauty of Africa lies in her cultural values, dance, music, language, and attire. Africans are usually identified by their attires. Nigeria is not an exception as it comprises of many states, different local government areas and ethnicities, all with different unique cultural representation especially in the area of clothing. The culture of Nigeria is shaped by Nigeria's multiple ethnic groups of about 371, according to Vanguard (2017), while Scout for SDGs (2022) enumerated that Nigeria has over 521 languages, over 1150 dialects in the ethnic groups. Countries and their Cultures (2022) revealed that every ethnic group in Nigeria has its own tales and stories of where its ancestors came from, however, archaeologists found evidence of Neolithic humans who inhabited what is now Nigeria as far back as 12,000 B.C.E. The first recorded empire in present-day Nigeria was centered in the north at Kanem-Borno, near Lake Chad. Borno State with the slogan "Home of Peace" is the home of diverse cultural societies, traditions and landscapes, which is not only appreciated and enjoyed by indigenes but also non-indigenes. Borno was the heartland of the Kanuri-speaking royal empire of Kanem-Borno, which was renowned throughout Africa and beyond. The Bornu Empire lasted from 1380 to 1893 A.D. according to Vincent (2017) and Pulse (2021). Unverified legend claims that Bornu's most dominant culture, Kanuri, can be traced to Yemen, however, little is actually known of the earliest phases of the Kanuri culture. Modern-day Kanuri are the descendants of the Sayfawa Dynasty of the Kanem Empire which as a result of civil war, rebellion and outright invasion by

the Bulala, the Kanuri people were forced out of Kanem in the fourteenth century A.D. and after nearly ten decades of bitter conflict, the Kanuri established a new empire southwest of Lake Chad. Currently, the majority of the Kanuri live in the Borno province of North Eastern Nigeria (Pulse, 2021).

Borno State is in the north-east geopolitical zone of Nigeria, bordered by Yobe State to the west, Gombe State to the southwest, and Adamawa State to the south while its eastern border forms part of the national border with

Cameroon, its northern border forms part of the national border with Niger Republic, and its northeastern border with Chad, being the only Nigerian state to border with three countries. (Wikipedia, 2022), Borno State has 27 local government areas, namely: Abadam, Askira/Uba, Bama, Biu, Bayo, Chibok, Damboa, Dikwa, Gubio, Guzamala, Gwoza, Hawul, Jere, Kaga, Kala-Balge, Konduga, Kukawa, Kwaya Kusar, Mafa, Magumari, MMC, Marte, Mobbar, Monguno, Ngala, Nganzai and Shani.



Figure 1: Africa Country Map by Onlinemaps.blogspot.com
Source: <https://www.pinterest.com/pin/382594930814322089/>

Figure 2: Map of Nigeria showing the 36 States and Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Abuja.
Source: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/260023562_Possible_determinants_and_spatial_patterns_of_anemia_among_young_children_in_Nigeria_a_Bayesian_semi-parametric_modelling

Figure 3: Map of Borno State by Thlama B. P., (2017)
Source: https://www.researchgate.net/figure/Map-of-Borno-State-of-Nigeria-showing-the-study-area_fig1_318447088

2. Kanuri Culture and Attires

The indigenous Kanuri people are the dominant ethnic group in Borno State in northern Nigeria. However, dialects of Kanuri are spoken within and outside Nigeria in countries such as Chad, Cameroon, Niger, Libya and Sudan. This attests to the fact that the Kanuri are also migrants, predominantly farmers and business men and women. They also engage in some other vocations for their livelihoods like cloth embroidery, fishing, mat-weaving, tie-dyeing, calabash decoration, body decoration (henna), cap embroidery and construction works. The Kanuri also speak Hausa language though the Kanuri are unrelated with the Hausa, however, Kanuri language is losing ground due to the gradual encroachment of Hausa as a lingua franca in the entire northern Nigeria.

Garments worn by Kanuri people according to Muhammad and Mohammed (2012) has its origin in the culture and traditions of the people as it depicts the belief systems, political

metaphysics, and the general consciousness of the people, including their creative impulses. Muhammad and Mohammed further reveal that the advent of urbanization, westernization and the intermingling of cultures brought about inevitable changes which occurred in the culture and traditions of the Kanuri people. Wearing long, voluminous, roomy garments, preferably with caps, has witnessed changes due to contact with foreign cultures.

Kanuri language has different names for their cultural attires, which is meant for different purposes. Kanuri male garments as mentioned by Muhammad and Mohammed (2012) are *Kulwu Kajibe*, *Kulwu Nashibe*, *Kulwu Indi Dawu Tiloa*, *Kulwu Dawungasho*, *Kororopci*, *Tawuski*, *Gamaje Ambuka*, *Gamaje Diwadiwa*, *Gamaje Sore*, *Dankiki Kumbam*, *Dankiki Janaaaa*, *Yange Darwali* and *Yange Cirtanaa*. While Adam (2016) and Haruna (2021) listed the following styles mostly worn by the female *Dongasho*, *Gana Kauwa*, *Gambara*, *Kajiya*, *Mai Tabarma*, *Murzan*, *Asal*, *Raka*, and *Bugai*,

Gana Kwuwa, Gambara Kaajiye. However, the most dominating style for men presently is the Kulwu also known as Kantalas, as revealed by Oyeniyi (2022). The meaning of Kantalas is cotton in the Kanuri language, and this garment is called Kantalas because it is full of hand embroidery design known as Kulwu needlework which is strictly produced with cotton yarns manually sorted and spun by the Kanuri women. After the Kulwu needlework has been designed on fabrics, it is further sewn as a robe, which consist of trousers, a long sleeve undershirt, and an open stitched sleeveless gown. Kantalas designed with Kulwu is usually worn by the nobility and celebrities in Borno and neighboring communities, however it is now adopted and worn by others such as politicians and wealthy Nigerians.

3. Methodology and Theoretical Framework

This paper is based on a qualitative research method, being art-historical, ethnographic, socio-cultural and visual-artistic. The methodology depended largely on field investigation as source for primary data collection and bibliographic search for secondary sources. The fieldwork comprised of scheduled participant, covert and overt observations of the different dress styles at the *Wushe Wushe* (traditional wedding ceremonies), professional studio processes of the production of the Kanuri Tie-Dye materials, and the production sessions of the attires. Structured questions were used for oral interviews of the models, producers of tie-dye cloth and fashion designers and artists. Specific textile studios were purposively selected as case studies. Photographic documentation was recorded and also some photos accessed and collected from the internet.

By adopting the creative exploratory method and investigations that occur in studios, galleries and other places where artists and designers work, the practice-led aspect of the research method involved the studio experimentation of tie and dye using blue and black, which was the foremost color of the Kanuri attire before the advent of factory produced colours. The findings of the fieldwork carried out at Bulamari Dyeing Centre, behind the Shehu Palace in Maiduguri, Borno State showed that the production of the tie-dye materials are carried out without strict compliance to technical or industrial rules, in the bids to produce large quantities of cloth for local consumption. This infers that the use of these attires is popular and in high demand. The

dyers have no standard measurement for their dyes, Caustic-soda and Hydro - sulphite chemicals which is being referred to by the local dyers as Sugar and Salt. They measure according to instinct and imagination of the desired result. The dyes are poured into the boiling water in the drum pot and followed by the chemicals. It was observed that in the production of the Kanuri fabrics, the local dyers were engaged in dyeing plain colored fabrics using Ox-blood, Brown, Golden Brown, Ash, Green, Orange and nude colors. When contacted to know why, it was revealed that those colors are considered as matured and more patronized. However, according to Ogboli (2022), the choice of this colours by the dyers can be traced to the fact that the colours are natural and local plants had been used for sourcing of these colours even in the pre-industrial times. The practice had continued till date using synthetic dyes. For example, orange and brown were extracted from Kolanut and is referred to as *ruwan goro* in Hausa. These colors have become identified as the traditional colors for the ethnic attires.

The studio production was categorized into five stages:

Stage 1: Fabric De-sizing and Preparation:

This stage involves the washing away or removal of factory starch used for industrial finishing of the white fabric to enable the proper penetration of dye solution. The fabric is kept in a neat environment to strain the excess water, thereafter folded, then tied for pattern creation and set aside.

Stage 2: Preparing the Dye Solution:

Preparing of dye solution involves the heating of water, wearing of hand gloves, nose mask, apron to prevent the face and skin being affected by the corrosiveness of the chemicals. Measuring of dyes and chemicals into the dye bath and pouring of hot water to the measured dyes and chemicals to produce the dye solution.

Stage 3: Dyeing the Fabrics

The dyeing stage adopted for this study is the dipping method. The prepared fabric was dyed starting with the lighter color, which is blue, the blue dyed areas were further secured using cellophane bags to prevent an accident of being stained by the black dye solution being the last color to be used. The completed dyed fabric is then kept in another bath tub or rag to remove the excess dye before light rinsing is carried out before the exposure of the dyed fabric.

Stage 4: Oxidation Stage:

The oxidation stage is the stage of loosening the tied fabric and exposing it to the atmosphere for 10-15 minutes for fixation of the dyes. This activity is being carried out under a shaded to disallow the dyed fabric have direct contact with sunlight at that stage not to affect the dye fastness. After the fixation period, the fabric is well rinsed and spread on line for proper drying.

Stage 5: Finishing:

This the last stage of production, it involves sizing the fabric by adding starch to give it a firm texture and shining effect after which the ironing follows.

The theoretical framework for this paper are art-historical, ethnographic theory, socio-cultural (Identity Theory) and visual art theory.

4. Discussion

Tie and Dye Kanuri Cultural Attires

Tie and Dye is a textile resist technique that involves the act of tying, knotting, folding, hand or machine stitches, or binding fabrics before dyeing to resist the penetration of dye ink or solution in order to create patterns. It is one of the simplest methods of textile ink transfer practice but the end products are usually unique. According to Dharma in Changyadani & Gwari (2017), Tie and Dye long existed before the 1970s, early postcolonial, and was known as *shibori*, a Japanese term that encompasses a wide variety of resist –dyeing techniques.

Kanuri traditional tie and dye attires got their names from the style of dyeing, sewing in combination with the embroidery design on the garments. Below are some examples:

Kororopci: Dyed pure black garment designed with *kulwa*, which atimes is dyed pure navy blue and called Kalwu Nashibi. (Figure 3)

Kulwu Indi Dawu Tiloa: This is a combination of two dyed fabrics, dark blue and sky blue sown together and decorated with the *kulwu* (hand embroidery). (Figure 4)

Kulwu Dawungasho or Gongashou: This is gown made from fabric dyed in two colours, after the fabric is being constructed into a garment, it is being decorated with *Kulwu* for men’s attire. It got its name from the style of dyeing and embroidery according to Muhammad and Mohammed (2012). (Figs. 5, 6 and 7) However, Bulama (2022), revealed that the choice of the name for Kanuri traditional fabric “Dongashou” was adopted from the bald eagle bird with white and black colours known as “Damga”, meaning every Kanuri citizen has an excellent spirit like an eagle and also beautiful like the blue and black bird known as Asian Fairy Bluebird. Bulama further attest to the fact that though the blue and black Kanuri traditional attire is more popular, the Kanuri also have the white and black tie dyed fabrics used only for royal activities and coronation. Ogboli (2022) added that the introduction of blue and black colour for dyeing the Kanuri fabric was due to the availability of “indigo” blue colour as one of the earliest colour available before the advent of other colours. Kanuri are decedents of the Kanem Borno Empire which are known for royalty, it is believed that every Kanuri indigene has the royal blood running through their veins, and as such, are royalty, hence the general adaptation of blue as Kanuri colour of identity.



(4)
(5)
Figure 4:
Maiduguri,
Borno State
Dance Troops
by Abba



Kashim

Source:https://www.google.com/search?q=Kanuri+Traditional+dancers+men+in+Dangashou&tbm=isch&ved=2ahUKEwjSpruG4PP5AhUK4RoKHYKZCGUQ2cCegQIABAA&oeq=Kanuri+Traditional+dancers+men+in+Dangashou&gs_lcp=CgNpbWcQA1DfBFjAlgFgn5wBaABwAHgAgAHWAogB6CuSAQYyLTE4LjSYAQCgAQQGqAQtd3Mtd2l6LWltZ7gBA8ABAQ&scient=img&ei=b7oQY5KzOorCa4KzoqgG&bih=506&biw=1094&rlz=1C1WOHY_enNG1014NG1014#imgrc=VhSwlWP2qzkvTM&imgdii=wX4-GF8-oiwDdM

Figure 5: Typical Kanuri women attires. (Left-*gana kwuwa*, Middle-*gambara kaajiye*, Right *doughdongashe*)
Source:<https://www.uni-hildesheim.de/sustainability/index.php/2021/11/03/cultural-exhibition-by-the-students-of-the-sdg-graduate-school-performing-sustainability-maiduguri-borno-state-nigeria-26th-october-2021/>



Figure 6: Kororopci by Muhammad and Mohammed (2012).
Source: https://english.fullerton.edu/publications/clnArchives/pdf/muzau_fabnam-garments.pdf

Figure 7: Kulwu indi dawu tiloa by Muhammad and Mohammed (2012).
Source: https://english.fullerton.edu/publications/clnArchives/pdf/muzau_fabnam-garments.pdf



Figure 8: An Eagles by thedestinyformula.com
Source: <https://www.pinterest.com/pin/737464507709240072/>

Figure 9: Asian Fairy Bluebird by Rosamond Gifford Zoo
Source: <https://sites.google.com/site/rosamondgiffordzootour/birds/asian-fairy-bluebird>

Figure 10: Kulwu Dawungasho by Muhammad and Mohammed (2012).
Source: https://english.fullerton.edu/publications/clnArchives/pdf/muzau_fabnam-garments.pdf



(11)

Figure Typical

Kuluwu/Babban Riga (Gown) by Abubakar (2017).

Source: https://www.researchgate.net/figure/A-photo-of-a-typical-Kanuri-Kuluwu-Babban-Riga-Gown-and-the-president-of-the-federal_fig2_318215165



(12)

11: Kanuri

Figure 12: Gongashou Female Kanuri Attire

Source: <https://twitter.com/hashtag/WusheWushe?src=hash>

5. Dongashou Female Kanuri Attire

Dongashou is a special costume worn by bride’s maids during Kanuri wedding celebrations called *Wushe-Wushe*. According to Tudun (2021), dongashou kanuri traditional attire is usually worn on Friday by the friends of the bride. Generally, dongashou is blue and black from inception, however, due to the acceptability of tie and dye among the Kanuri indigenes, Dongashou, (Kanuri tie and dye fabrics) now comes in different colours like wine and ash, black and white, yellow and black as seen in figure 12 -15. Al-Gazali (2016) state that, to Kanuri indigenes, wushe-wushe is the most remarkable moment admired more than the formal wedding solemnization which take place eve to the wedding day and can last all night long.

Al-Gazali (2016) further revealed that the highlight of a Kanuri wedding is the Wushe - Wushe, it is accompanied by other activities like gunshots known as ‘durum kangeye’. The gun has a tub attachment made with clay called ‘ngaya ka’ajiye’. The tub is filled with incense called ‘malam bahausha’ or ‘tularen wuta’ in Hausa which is fired into the sky to create a smoky cloud like design, spice up with traditional music and instruments known as ganga-kura. All these items are brought by the groom’s contingent and showcase during a procession organised by the groom’s family. The procession is being led by the bride and groom supported by their family and friends showering them with praises (Wushe-Wushe) meaning (well done - well done), for taking the bold step of taking responsibility, graduating from singleness and starting a new home. It is also an admonition evening, where elders and parents of both the bride and groom’s family engage in giving them advices for the journey ahead.



(13)

Figure 13: Yan Matan



(14)

Borno (Calabar Girls of The North)

Source: <http://northernhibiscus.blogspot.com/2017/06/yan-matan-borno-calabar-girls-of-north.html>

Figure 14: Bride and Friends. Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ECbkjD8cluE>



(15)

Figure 15: Wushe –Wushe

Source: <https://www.wattpad.com/669440853-life-of-sumayya-wushe-wushe%E2%9D%A4/page/3>

6. Conclusion

The constant innovation and exploration taking place in the field of textile design in regards to tie and dye techniques has advanced the popularity of the Kanuri cultural attire especially in the northern region of Nigeria as the fabric is being accepted and used by non-indigenes of the ethnic group.

Reviews had shown that despite the fact that Kanuri people have several cultural attires, which have been generally accepted and used as everyday clothing especial by men in Nigeria, the tie and dye Kanuri attire (Gongashou, Kororopci, Kulwu indi dawu tiloa and Kulwu Dawungasho) which is the blue and black dyed fabrics still remain sacred and outstanding. It is purely associated with the Kanuri cultural activities. This is a distict element of cultural identification.

The use of tie and dye as a technique for the production of the Kanuri cultural attire, has helped in the promotion of the availability and acceptability of the traditional fabric because it is cost effective in comparison to other cultural attires which are produced by weaving. Weaving over the years as a technique has proven to be time consuming, demanding, and expensive.

The study had proven that the Kanuri Tie and Dye fabric is being appreciated and accepted more than other cultural attires due to its nature of being friendly to the body because of the cotton fabric being used. The cotton makes it comfortable to be worn at all times in comparison to other cultural attires which are weightier due to the thick yarns used in weaving the fabrics and can only be worn at special functions and for a short time.

The study proved that the tie and dye fabrics are largely appreciated and patronized by the Kanuri culture of Borno state, therefore it will be of utmost importance if textile designers will creatively expand the acceptability to further enhance the income of textile designers.



(16)



(17)



(18)

Figure 16: Wushe-Wushe: the climax of a Kanuri wedding by Al-Gazali (2016).

Source: <https://www.yenlive.com/news/index.php/news/85-wushe-wushe-the-climax-of-a-kanuri-wedding>

Figure 17: Wushe-Wushe: D&D Clothing

Source: <https://danddclothing.com/en-ng/blogs/african-fashion-blog/equatorial-guinean-traditional-wedding-styles>

Figure 18: Kanuri Kids <https://web.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100063569747633>



(19)

Figure 19: Male Model wearing Kulwu Dawungasho and Female Model wearing Gongashou
Source: Jonathan E. D. (2022)



(20)

Figure 20: First colour dyed fabric ready for second colour dyeing.
Source: Jonathan E.D. (2022)

7. Recommendations

The study proved that the survival and acceptability of the Kanuri traditional attires is as a result of the availability of material and cost-efficient nature of the fabric, simplicity of the production techniques. Also is the fact that tie and dye is a skill that can be taught both at formal and non-formal centres, and can be practiced by both the young and old with structure or no structure. Therefore, this study recommends that other textile designers should explore the introduction of tie and dye textile resist technique as one of the medium for producing their cultural attires for sustainability and acceptability by the old and young. And for few cultures that are now exploring other textile techniques for imitation of their cultural attires, more efforts should be geared towards the promotion of those techniques for better acceptability and patronage.

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