

DESIGN PROPERTIES AND COSTUMES AS IDENTIFIERS OF CULTURAL DIVERSIFICATION AMONG THE BURA AND TIV PEOPLE IN CLIMATE CHANGE

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Abstract

Climate change in Nigeria has created a substantial human population movement and expanding design concepts due to ecological effects. It has necessitated constant research on ways of solving human needs in order to survive. One of those needs is a cultural practice that has been diversified by industrial production, occasioning loss of some natural materials, to build properties and costumes that can meet a large population demand. Using the direct observation, interview, historical-analytic and investigative approaches, this article posits that given the circumstances of climate change, there are elements of cultural diversification between the Bura and Tiv people that can be identified using performance properties and costumes. The conclusion is that climate change has increased creativity, accessibility, saved time, energy, and cost of consumption as well as increased durability of stage design materials among the studied ethnicities.

Keywords: Climate change, Design properties and costumes, Cultural diversification.

Introduction

The study examines the correlation between design properties and the use of costumes among the Bura and Tiv people. This is informed from the background that life is theatre. The idea that life is theatre has been projected by many scholars such as Kenneth Burke from his work on *Dramatism* (Burke 20), Victor Turner's *From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play* (Turner 6), Gowon Ama Doki's *Everyday Life is Theatre: Appropriations and Canonization* (Doki 1-2), Joel Avaungwa Fanyam's "Contested Space and Culture Conflict: Issues in the Performances of Live in Nigeria" (Fanyam "Mask Design" 207) and "Mask Design with and without Content: The Social Implications of Pandemic Policy in Nigeria" (Fanyam "Contested Space" 1-2). These scholars have observed human activities from a sociological perspective as a way of acting. Under this ideation, design properties and use of costume among the mentioned ethnic groups are significant in performing domestic, religious, agricultural, and social activities. It is in the context placed on the use of these properties and costumes that enhance their relevance.

Design properties and costumes have been described by Parker, Wolf and Block in five categories as: (1) all objects carried or handled by the actors; (2) separate portions of the set on which the actors may stand or sit, such as rocks, stumps, or logs; (3) decorative features such as pictures and draperies; (4) the ground cloth and rugs;

and (5) all sound and visual effects that are not electrically powered, such as gunshot or snow (264-265). In other words, there are hand properties, set properties and dress properties. They emphasized that there are no hard and fast rules on the matter. For example, if the property (prop) is integral to the design of the clothing or is designed by the costume designer, it is usually considered a costume prop (Parker, Wolf and Block 264-265). It has been observed that a performance put on stage assumes its setting with the suitable properties and costumes put to use in characterization. What this means is that design properties and costumes that are peculiar to a given ethnicity or people could enhance a performer's action by defining their origin or locality. Consequently, this could apply to the same character applying the same properties and costumes outside the world of a human architectural stage. As a fact, familiarity with a cultural identity has an enormous role to play in creating a character's setting on stage. However, there are traditional variations and similarities in the use of design properties and costumes in contemporary times, due to climate change.

Climate change has necessitated human migration from one location to another with increased cultural changes and adoptions in search of survival without any negative effects. Scholars have described climate change as change in weather, vegetation, crops and animal production as well as human activities. According to Austin, Chinemeran, and Opara, "It is a known fact that climate change will have strong and significant negative impacts on development efforts and national plans in Nigeria as will be in most sub-Saharan African and developing countries" (40). One of the troubles of climate change has been the problem of population clusters and identity that is caused by migration and conflicts in human locations. Similarly, increased technological advancement has eased many challenges of the climate but it has also caused many problems. For instance, there are scientific discoveries about the depletion of the ozone layer that has caused intense heat and change in weather conditions and calendars. Jibrin, Adamu, and Abdulkadir claim that "the weight of scientific evidence indicates that climate change is occurring and is having biophysical, social and economic impacts at local, national, regional and global scales" (12), but the level of these impacts is determined by the adverse climatic condition of a peoples' location.

The foregoing has necessitated constant research on ways of solving human needs in order to survive. One of those needs is a cultural practice that has been diversified by industrial production, and the loss of some natural materials, to build properties and costumes that can meet a large population demand. In the process of human migration in search of better climatic zones, trade activities, and inter-ethnic relations, a lot of cultural mutations have taken place, leading to diversification and adoption. Even the act of changing location is a process of diversification. However, diversification is more manifest through cultural identifiers such as design properties, costumes, and language practices of a given people. The recent practices of the Bura and Tiv people are good examples of this development. These ethnicities are not only far apart from each other (Bura are in the north eastern axis of Nigeria while Tiv are around the north central part of Nigeria), the distance between them makes it interesting for one to consider the diversification in similarity of their design properties

and use of costumes. This article adopts direct observation, interview, historical-analytic and investigative approaches in correlating the facts between these areas. It considers climate change from the dimension of change in cultural appearance, specifically from the use of properties and costumes in environments occupied by the Bura and Tiv people. Moreover, it is important to look at their brief history, for there are important facts in the historical existence of these peoples, about their design properties and use of costumes.

Historical and Cultural Correlations between Bura and Tiv People in Nigeria

The origin of the Bura people is very interesting with some form of controversy as it is common with other indigenous groups in Nigeria. One of the controversies is whether the ethnic group belongs to or is associated with the Bantu division of the Niger-Congo. At least this view is asserted by Meek cited in Mshelia's *The Story of the Origins of the Bura/Pabir People of Northeast Nigeria* and Davies's *The Biu Book A Collection and Reference Book on Biu Division (Northern Nigeria)*. Davies observed that "they roamed from the Owenat Oasis as far as Fezzan and the Congo, and a group of them known as the Zaghawa, whose language and general affinities were the same as the Beli, inhabited Kordofan, Dafur and Borku (Wadai)" (22). This group of people, Davies referred to them simply as the Kushites.

Mshelia argues that "there's a consensus that the Afro-Asiatic Urheimat (homeland) originated somewhere in or near the region stretching from the levant/ near east to the area between the eastern Sahara and the horn of Africa, including Egypt, Ethiopia and Sudan" (64). He further states that "it has already been claimed that the dispersion of the Proto-Chadic languages from their Urheimat created a variety of distinct and separate language groups, amongst which are the Bura" (64). There is a significant correlation between the account given by Davies and Mshelia, both of them agree that the people were pushed from somewhere to the Lake Chad area. They were also affected by the Arabs and the Sudanese, long enough, to have changed their linguistic considerations and classification. Samaila, Saidu, and Shehu also contend that "they never suffered defeat at the warfront by the marauding Fulani people. They belong to the Chadic language group found in the local government of Biu, Hawul Kwaya, Kusar, and Shani. But it has also been stated that all these ethnicities came from Cameroon hills to the east of their present location" (210).

There is a similarity in the history of Bura and the Tiv people. Not only are there many versions about the origin and migration of the Tiv into the Benue valley; many of which also conflict with each other. There is a particular account that traces the origin and migration of the ethnic group from Congo and another from Cameroon hills much like the story of the Bura people. The information provided by Tesemci Makar in "History of Political Change Among the Tiv in the 19th and 20th Centuries," and Iyorwuese Hagher on *The Tiv Kwagh-Hir* give this inference. Others have also suggested that Tiv people migrated from East Africa. The latter idea is broader and may not necessarily exclude Congo, in so far as it is part of East Africa. However, Dzurgba alleges that "there had not been a written history at that time. Thus, the narrations or narratives lack factual, testable, and verifiable contents" (12). This view

agrees with that of Davies on the oral history of African indigenous peoples based on the Bura records that a vast number of statements conflict with each other and many of which are inaccurate and vague but contain a germ of truth (30).

It is the position of this article that African historical and cultural records are largely presumptuous, but a particular investigation of the common design properties and costumes of these two populations (Tiv and Bura), expresses a shared characteristic that may stem from the same origin. This will be treated in this text later. Be that as it may, oral tradition in African history has created a wide gap of facts that has continued to stir arguments. For instance, it is difficult to authenticate categorically who originated a particular art within the African culture. Only a few artworks in contemporary African society have this credibility, old traditional artworks lack these facts and have often been described based on identity. Coincidentally, cultural identity influences the use of design properties and costumes. Meanwhile, the signifiers of cultural identity have to do with climate, economy, religion, and social organizations/practices. The specific concern now is the climate of the area occupied by these two ethnic groups.

Climate Issues around Bura and Tiv People

Climate issues around the Bura and Tiv areas are responsible for their design properties. According to Samaila, Saidu, and Shehu, "Even when it is hot in Maiduguri, it is usually cold in the area and there is always a breeze which makes the weather bearable" (209). The fertility of the areas has helped the people to produce large crops and has constantly exposed them to conflicts and attacks from enemies. This can be explained as the area is analysed further. The Bura people are settlers within the southern area of Borno State, Nigeria. It is a Guinea savannah area that has coarse grasses and trees. Even in the absence of rainfall, this type of area can be remarkable when fired; the grasses quickly get green shoots again and grow without waiting for rain. The area is also occupied by some rocks. Davies observed that "these rocks are the oldest in Nigeria having been formed probably over 600 million years ago, and they form the foundation of, and cover about half of, Nigeria" (6). This climatic situation implies that the soil in this area is rich and heavily farmed. The soil is capable of storing large amounts of groundwater and the water table is high with streams and rivers around the area. The plateau nature of the area also retains rainfall faster than the northern part of Borno State.

However, much of this climatic record has to do with the past. In recent years, climate change and weather conditions have increased the population density of human beings and animals to clusters due to banditry activities; a large amount of water in the area has been reduced because of deforestation, production of charcoal, increased temperatures, and competition/demand for water. An interview held with Ntakwo revealed that there is a growing concern for farmland. Climate change has pushed people to this area in search of farmlands since most of the farm lands in other parts of the state have become depleted. For instance, there are people who have migrated from Zamfara and are now settlers within Buraland. Notwithstanding, industrialization has

introduced new techniques for water supply such as dam construction and motorized boreholes which have added to natural sources of water supply in the area.

According to information obtained from Davies and Dzurgba, some of what exists in the Bura area is similar to that of the Tiv people, but with significant differences in terms of vegetation and religion. The Tiv people are fondly called "the food basket of the nation" because of the large amount and variety of food produced within the area. They are also predominantly Christians. Apart from the land being surrounded by rocks, the soil is also very fertile for cereals, tuber crops, fruit trees, and vegetables. Scholars have often described the Tiv people as large farmers. This love for farming has in recent years pitched them at loggerheads with herders; as a result of climatic changes affecting vegetation from other areas, in Northern Nigeria. The loss of water and difficult climatic conditions affecting vegetation make things difficult for some human beings and animals to survive in other parts of Nigeria and the neighbouring countries. Therefore, they pushed to the Benue valley to forcefully occupy some farmlands which triggers violence, destruction, and displacement of communities. In defence of lives, some properties were designed for hunting of wide animals that are now used for war to combat territorial enemies. These weapons used for violence and attack against external aggression include daggi (javelin), avaan (arrows), sanker (sword), and shom (machet) in Tiv society. However, both Bura and Tiv people have these common design properties similar within their areas of existence with linguistic differences.

Design Properties and Costumes between Bura and Tiv People

There are traditional design properties used by the Bura and Tiv people for agricultural activities, domestic activities, war, and social activities. These kinds of items such as axe (khama) in Bura are referred to as 'native industries' (Mshelia 99). There are many properties made of brass in Bura culture. Again, due to the linguistic mix between the Bura, Kanuri, and Hausa in the area, some of the property names are the same. Most brass articles in Bura and Tiv are for domestic properties like cooking pots. Apart from brass works, there are also carved wooden properties like membrane drums, pestles, and mortars. Other design properties include metal works crafted by blacksmith who create two bellows made of hide with a pump. Usually, a man pumps air using the hide to light the charcoal into burning coals of fire while the blacksmith uses a very hard stone for an anvil and a wedge-shaped piece of iron for a hammer. Once a piece of iron is placed on the burning coals and it becomes reddish, soft, and hot, the blacksmith removes it using iron tongs and cleverly hits it into the desired shape or form. There are also leather-designed properties such as bags, and drum-heads. Properties made from pottery design include cooking pots, water pots and earthen wares beautifully decorated in different styles.



Images showing domestic properties and a hunter holding a pump action gun and a bow and arrow representing Bura people during a cultural exhibition held on 23 October, 2021 at University of Maiduguri, organized by the Centre for the Study of Cultural Sustainability. These same properties are also used by the Tiv people for domestic activities. (Plate 1)

The costume process is, however, made through the spinning of cotton, weaving, and dyeing of textile materials. In the past, cotton was picked and dried, seeded by hand, and then spun by whirling it between the thumb and the fingers. This way, the thread was developed and drawn in lengths of different yards. Mshelia observe that the thread was then drawn in lengths of about fifty yards until there were precisely thirty-two of them. These were then threaded into a loom and women, making strips of cloth (kuntu) in Bura (106) and (agbar a ikyondu) in Tiv. This was about two to three inches wide, which were then sewn together to make a wide piece. The strips of the finer thread were used for gowns (bul) danchiki (a small sleeveless shirt), loincloths, and female wrap-around. The term danchiki has also been adopted for use in Tiv culture, and its meaning remains the same as used by the Bura people. However, those strips made of coarse threads were fashioned into blankets. In describing this scenario, Mshelia put his words in present terms with a specific focus on the Bura and Pabir people, but this is more reflective of the past situation because the practice at the moment has greatly changed with a lot more reliance on the foreign thread. Most of the dye wells have been abandoned in the bush and some areas taken up by farming activities. There are very few spots where the costume production still exists in Bura environment, this may have affected its large production but within the Tiv environment, there are many spots where the practice still takes place (e.g., Tse-Zurgba, Ushongo, and other spots). Tse-Zurgba is robust in this art, but in contemporary times, the use of foreign thread has infiltrated the practice on a large scale.

Most locally produced cotton in indigenous communities has either ceased, abandoned or cannot meet up with the demand and supply for traditional fabrics. There has been a lot of dependence on foreign/industrial thread which comes already in prepared colours. The practice of dyeing weaved cloths in different patterns as it was in the past is now patterned with modern colour threads, obtained from the market shops. More developments in costume design have also shown that because of the resemblance of the Bura traditional cloth and the Tiv 'anger', the cloth has been adopted

for use by most Bura people in their traditional circles instead of navy blue (dark blue or indigo) and white stripes. Ntakwo explained this in an interview that the Bura men used plain knitted white material, for their traditional dress, while the women used the knitted textile with stripes of indigo and white colours for their traditional dress but these days, there is a mix-up by many people who are, not just unaware of the original tradition but also wrongly apply it. Men today use the costume with coloured strips, and even make shirts with it as traditional dress, and some tie a piece of it across the neck as representing the Bura culture, while the women use the black and white coloured stripes textile in place of indigo and white.

One other reason could be the time that was involved in making the old traditional costume. Compared to the moment, the old Bura cloth took longer and more tedious effort in making. It also involved some traditional rituals which modern religious practice like Christianity has prohibited, while adopting the Tiv 'anger' costume is faster, similar in traditional relevance and less tedious to use. As earlier noted, the local thread was weaved and used to sew blankets, wrappers, shirts (danchiki), and caps. Given the temperate weather of the Bura and Tiv areas, the thick nature of the cloth provided an enabling cover from cold during rainy and harmattan seasons.



Images showing Bura costumes during s cultural exhibition organized by centre for the study of Cultural Sustainability at University of Maduguri in October, 2021. (Plate 2)



Image showing the display of Bura costumes during Cultural Day Performance by Ruby Springfield College held on 14th June, 2021 in Maduguri. The costume with bolder stripes is the old costume design by Bura people, it has dark blue and white values. However, the Tiv “anger” is also designed with similar bolder stripes like that of the Bura people but in black and white tones.

Photo: Mrs Karimatu Gauda. (Plate 3)

The bright colours designed on the costumes, the pattern of lines, texture, repetition, and variation of the elements of design helped by projecting its dexterity, and rich and elegant value. Like the Bura costume design, the Tiv 'anger' costume is the most notable of these attributes and is widely produced. As noted elsewhere, 'anger' is weaved in black and white shades. The blackish and whitish saturated tones may vary per material depending on the creative formations of the thread adopted by the weaver. The repetition of the blackish and whitish lines on the material creates an aesthetic pattern that appeals to the eye. It expresses unity in the art form. The composition of the colour pattern creates a unity of design peculiar to itself and the culture of the people. It gives elegance to a personality who is dressed in it (Fanyam “Design Technologies” 28). This reason could have necessitated it to be adopted by the Bura ethnicity in contemporary times because of their close appearance in making and form, between the Bura and Tiv people.

More so, there is an aggressive market production of 'anger' currently in Tiv society, which could make any indigenous group seeking to use it, to adopt it easily. The aggressive market production may not be unconnected with the increase in demand by other ethnic groups. The attempt to share/adopt the Tiv costume as a cultural identity may also be interpreted as an attempt to re-unite origination ties that have been traced historically from the same location (Congo and Cameroon hills). This statement can stand, so long as there are historical traces of migration of Tiv and Bura people from Congo or/and Cameroon hill areas. It is important to emphasize that increase in technological materials is a catalyst to climate change. Industrialization has increased

new costume and property designs within Nigerian cultures. There are notable fabrics bearing traditional motifs that have been produced from China and imported into the Nigerian space for sale. Most domestic properties used by the Tiv and Bura people today are a shift from the traditional materials, formerly identified with the people to industrial technology like gas cylinders, electric yam pounding machines, grinding machines and the likes even in villages.

Conclusion

The article has demonstrated that climate change in Nigeria has effectively created a substantial and expanding human population movement, causing an expansion in design concepts due to ecological effects. What this means is that design properties and costumes that are peculiar to a given ethnicity could enhance an actor's action by defining their origin or locality. However, there are traditional variations and similarities in the use of design properties and costumes in contemporary times, due to climate change among the Tiv and Bura people arguably have common locational climatic conditions and design properties in their cultural diversity. In recent times, more developments in costume design have also shown that because of the resemblance of the Bura traditional cloth and the Tiv 'anger', the cloth has been adopted for use by most Bura people in their traditional circles instead of navy blue (dark blue or indigo) and white stripes. This correlation of design properties and costume between Bura and Tiv people makes only language and distance, a diversifying factor. Otherwise, their shared characteristics bonded by climate changes, have made both cultures united visually in the performance of life. In creating a performance setting for a Bura and Tiv people, the distinguishing lines in contemporary times will not be based on costumes and properties but linguistic language structures and names. By the commonality of shared design concepts, climate change has increased creativity, accessibility, saved time, energy, and cost of consumption as well as increased durability of stage design materials.

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